



*Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe: Comparisons – Contrasts – Connections.*  
University College London: Edge Hill University Goldsmiths, University of London  
University College London, 22.06.2008-24.06.2008.

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**Published on** H-Soz-u-Kult (September, 2008)

## **Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe: Comparisons – Contrasts – Connections**

Antisemitism is known as the longest hatred and has deep roots in Christian Europe, while Islam too, at least since the time of the Crusades, has served as the constitutive other against which Europe has been defined. However, both anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim racisms have seen new configurations arise in the period of 9/11 and the Second Intifada.

Many commentators today write controversially about the emergence of a new antisemitism, qualitatively distinct from older Christian and scientific antisemitisms. Similarly, others point to a resurgence of anti-Islamic hatred associated with the war on terror. There are clear points of comparison between them – for example, in how they figure in crucial policy debates around religious hatred or community cohesion. But there has been little sustained comparative study of the two racisms side by side.

The *Antisemitism and Islamophobia* conference was held to address these issues. It was held on June 22-24, was jointly organised by James Renton of the History department at Edge Hill University and Ben Gidley of the Centre for Urban and Community Research (CUCR), Goldsmiths. It was funded by the British Academy, the Kessler Foundation, the Wingate Foundation, Edge Hill and, at Goldsmiths, the Sociology department, Unit for Global Justice and CUCR. It was hosted by the Hebrew and Jewish Studies department at University College London and dedicated to the memory of the late John Klier.

The conference took a comparative and interdisciplinary approach. By comparing antisemitism with Islamophobia, we attempted to gain an understanding of the connections and differences between them. By highlighting the European context, we worked towards an understanding of the national particularities and trans-European commonalities of these racisms. By bringing together scholars from different disciplines, both historical and social scientific, we produced insights into the newness or otherwise of contemporary formations of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim prejudice.

The conference was opened by François Guesnet (University College London), who framed the questions for debate and made a moving tribute to John Klier, who had both been crucial in the early stages of the conference organisation and whose engaged and rigorous scholarship provides a model for how to think through our issues.

The highlight of the conference was the opening keynote address by SANDER GILMAN (Atlanta), author of several dozen incredibly important books on race; Sander's work has a wide and interdisciplinary focus which made his talk a perfect opener for the debates. Drawing on a rich archive of visual culture, his talk discussed the Jewish template for Western multiculturalism, in its two versions: hybridity (Zangwill's melting pot) or pluralism (Horace Kallen's hyphenated culture). He then developed some of the ways Muslims have been inserted into this template – often in strikingly similar

ways to Jews.

The first panel session focused on the late medieval and early modern encounter between Christian Europe and its Jewish and Muslim others, with Andrew Jotischky, Lancaster University, describing ethnic and religious forms of categorisation of Jews and Muslims in travel writings from the Crusader States, showing the instability of these early theological and pre-racial ways of classing others. FRANÇOIS SOYER (Southampton), in 'Europe's Forgotten Expulsion', looked at the expulsion of the Muslim minority from Portugal (1496-7), which hardly registers in historical memory in comparison to the forced conversion of the Jews. François stressed the geopolitical contexts of the different persecutions, cautioning against overly abstracted general explanations. BENJAMIN KAPLAN (London) gave a paper on Muslims in the Dutch Republic, which contrasted the better known historiography on the place of the Jews in the Reformation Low Countries with the fascinating lesser known place of Muslim diplomats and pirates. This complicated our understanding of 'toleration', a core element in the modern state's encounter with religious others.

Our second keynote was 'Allah and Jehovah: The Theology, Politics, and Erotics of Christian Orientalism', by IVAN DAVIDSON KALMAR (Toronto) introduced and chaired by Michael Berkowitz, University College London. Kalmar's brilliant and entertaining lecture showed how the Christian imagination had constructed the Muslim and Jewish gods as oriental despots.

The second session, chaired by Cathie Carmichael (University of East Anglia), looked at two Eastern European case studies in the more recent past. ALEX DRACE-FRANCIS (Liverpool) brought together disparate material from the historiography on antisemitism and Islamophobia in Romanian Culture, exploring the myth of Romania's intrinsic and exceptional antisemitism and the scholarly neglect of Romanian Islamophobia. VLADIMIR LEVIN (Beersheba, Israel) explored Jewish and Muslim politics in the Russian Empire, 1905-1914, showing how the liberalisation of the political order created a space for communal representation for both communities, which increasingly closed down for the Jews especially as reaction set in. This session was followed BEN GIDLEY'S (London) on the emergence of xeno-racism in Edwardian England, which placed the racialisation of the alien during the 'first war on terror' and the First World War beside the racialisation of the figure of the migrant today.

The final day opened with the presentation on Ger-

man Islam Propaganda and Nazi Concepts of Islam during the Second World War by DAVID MOTADEL (Cambridge), which showed how the Nazis increasingly operationalised philo-Islamic discourse, while distinguishing between 'Semitic' Arabs and their Muslim faith.

A panel discussion, featuring Matti Bunzl, Bryan Cheyette, Andrew Jotischky and Ivan Kalmar, and chaired by David Cesarani (Royal Holloway), brilliantly acting as a kind of academic Jeremy Paxman, enabled us to pull out some of the learning from across the case studies presented in the conference. Matti Bunzl presented a case for thinking about contemporary anti-Muslim racism and earlier anti-Jewish racism in terms of a radical discontinuity, in which antisemitism played a defining role in the modern state-building project which Islamophobia has taken up in the age of supra-national Europe. Other panellists stressed commonalities, particularly in terms of a field of Orientalism which racialises both Jews and Muslims. The issue of philo-semitism and Islamophilia (both also framed by Orientalism) was also raised: racism's Manichean binary of good/bad Jews and good/bad Muslims.

The next session, chaired by Robert Fine (University of Warwick) focused on modern France. MAX SILVERMAN (Leeds) gave a paper on the way in which, at a deep and not necessarily conscious level, cultural memories of the trauma of Holocaust are buried within cultural memories of the trauma of colonialism, and vice versa. This was demonstrated through readings of Georges Perec's *W, or, the Memory of Childhood* and Michael Haneke's *Caché* (*Hidden*). Part of the argument was to retrieve the insights of thinkers like Hannah Arendt, Aimé Césaire, or more recently Paul Gilroy, who have theorised antisemitism and imperial racism together. DANIEL GORDON (Lancashire) presented a historical analysis of the putative conflict in the French anti-racist movement between those groups which highlight antisemitism and downplay anti-black, anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism, and those which take the opposite strategy, focusing on the high profile May 2004 split in the movement. The paper argued that the reality was less one of competing racisms or competing victimologies, but rather 'echoing François Soyer's analysis of early modern Portugal' that the issues were conjunctural, and overdetermined by the shifting exigencies of party politics.

The next session, chaired by Ruth Mandel (University College London) sustained the focus on the present moment, with DAVID WERTHEIM (Amsterdam) on 'The

Price of an Entrance Ticket into Western Society: Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Heinrich Heine and the Double Standard of Emancipation', and SAM JOHNSON (Manchester) on 'Recent Transgressions: The Far Right in the Czech Republic.' David Wertheim discussed the *cause célèbre* of Dutch secularism, Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and her fall from grace in the Dutch public sphere, a fall David analysed in terms of her inability to measure up to the impossible double standards set by European liberalism for Jewish and now Muslim people who seek to enter its space (a trap earlier experienced, and reflected on, by Heine in the nineteenth century). Sam discussed the muted presence of antisemitism in Czech discourse, in contrast to virulent anti-Roma racism, and how these, as well as anti-Muslim racism, have been deployed in the recent attempted rebranding of the Czech far right.

The final, lively, session, chaired by David Hirsh, Goldsmiths, featured MARKO ATTILA HOARE (London) with a subtle case study of Islamophobia and antisemitism in the Balkans, showing how both racisms have been mobilised in the state-building project as religious identity became an anchor for emerging nationalisms in the shadow of the Ottoman empire, and thus the religious other became a focus for expulsionist and even exterminatory racisms. Matti Bunzl gave a vigorous defence of the structuralist narrative he had outlined in the panel discussion: a shift from the 'modern' age of the nation state (for which Jews were the constitutive other) to the 'post-modern' age of supra-national Europe (in which Jews become the ideal Europeans and Muslims become the new constitutive other). He argued his case by describing the anti-Muslim but post-antisemitic discourse of the emerging populist or Euronationalist far right.

We are planning to build on the conference to develop a research network on these themes, to organise a follow-up conference in 2009 focusing on the post-imperial dimensions of our questions, and to publish the proceedings of this conference. In Autumn 2008, we hope to organise a round-table session on combating antisemitism and Islamophobia together. Please get in touch if you are interested in being involved in any of these projects.

On a personal note, I want to thank my colleagues at Goldsmiths who helped make the day run smoothly: Ofra Koffman, Madli Maruste, Dafna Steinberg, Gil Toffell and Mira Vogel and my co-organiser, James Renton, who conceived of the conference and shaped it.

#### **Sunday, 22 June 2008**

'The Jewish Temple: Antisemitism and Islamopho-

bia in the Western Diaspora'.

Sander Gilman, Emory University

#### **Monday, 23 June 2008**

'Ethnic and Religious Categories in the Treatment of Jews and Muslims in the Crusader States'.

Andrew Jotischky, Lancaster University

'Europe's Forgotten Expulsion: The Expulsion of the Muslim Minority from Portugal (1496-7)'.

Francois Soyer, University of Southampton

'Muslims in the Dutch Republic'.

Ben Kaplan, University College London

'Allah and Jehovah: Variants of Christian Orientalism'.

Ivan Davidson Kalmar, University of Toronto

'Romanian Culture, Antisemitism, and Islamophobia: interpretations and research directions'.

Alex Drace-Francis, University of Liverpool

'Muslim and Jewish Politics in the Russian Empire, 1905-1914'.

Vladimir Levin, Ben-Gurion University, Israel

'War, Terror and the Emergence of Xeno-Racism in Edwardian England'.

Ben Gidley, Goldsmiths College, University of London

'The British Empire and the Semites' in the Middle East'.

James Renton, Edge Hill University

#### **Tuesday, 24 June 2008**

'Islam in Nazi Thought and Policy during the Second World War'.

David Motadel, University of Cambridge

'Intersecting Racisms in France'.

Max Silverman, University of Leeds

'Is there a split in the anti-racist movement in France? An Historical Analysis'.

Daniel Gordon, Edge Hill University

'Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Heinrich Heine and the Double Standard of Emancipation'.

David Wertheim, Menasseh Ben Israel Institute, Amsterdam

'Recent Transgressions: The Far Right in the Czech Republic, 2007-8'.

Sam Johnson, Manchester Metropolitan University  
âIs Islamophobia equivalent to racism or anti-Semitism? The View from the Balkansâ.  
Marko Attila Hoare, Kingston University

âFrom Modern to Postmodern Exclusions: Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in Austria and Beyond'.  
Matti Bunzl, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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**Citation:** Ben Gidley. Review of , *Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe: Comparisons – Contrasts – Connections*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. September, 2008.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=28394>

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