



Gunther Jikeli. *Antisemitismus und Diskriminierungswahrnehmungen junger Muslime in Europa: Ergebnisse einer Studie unter jungen muslimischen Männern.* Essen: Klartext-Verlagsges, 2012. 342 pp. EUR 29.90 (paper), ISBN 978-3-8375-0165-0.



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Antisemitism among Young Male Muslims in France, England, and Germany

Over the past ten to fifteen years, Europe has seen a rise in xenophobic and particularly antisemitic violence and attacks. These incidents, which in the United States would most likely fall under the category of hate crimes, have been perpetrated against immigrants and ethnic and religious minorities throughout Europe. Gunther Jikeli's new study, volume 7 in Klartext's series *Antisemitismus: Geschichte und Strukturen*, focuses on the outbreak of antisemitism and discrimination among European Muslims. Jikeli, an antisemitism researcher who publishes widely on the topic, acknowledges that such incidents are frequent throughout Europe, individuals with a Muslim background are statistically more likely to commit violent acts of antisemitism. Moreover, given that 70 percent of all Muslims in Europe live in England, France, and Germany, his study focuses on attitudes and perceptions among young male Muslims in those three countries.

In his informative introductory chapter, Jikeli states that there is a lack of research about antisemitism and discriminatory attitudes among young Muslims, but he

ironically cites a wide range of studies in England, France, and Germany on this topic. One of the greatest strengths of this volume is, in fact, the introductory overview of existing research on the topic and a discussion of the problems and the nature of such antisemitic attitudes. Previous research as well as the current study conclude what most people who are even somewhat familiar with the topic would suspect: Muslim youth exhibit a higher rate of antisemitic sentiments and they tend to base these opinions on long-standing stereotypes about Jews, learned from friends, family, and in religious organizations or places of worship.

To be sure, there are differences among the groups studied, both in ethnic background and in attitudes towards Jews and Jikeli is careful to acknowledge and outline these differences. Nevertheless, among the 117 interviewees, ranging in age from 14 to 27, there were several things they had in common: they all came from working-class backgrounds; they spent the largest amount of their time in school, which Jikeli notes served as their primary source of knowledge; they all came from (im)migrant

backgrounds; and they were all self-professed Muslims. Additionally, they were all male, a decision made “aus Kapazitätsgründen” (p. 60) but also because culturally, it is easier to approach and interview young men than young women. However, this raises questions as to whether there are gender differences in perception and whether some of the pent-up anger that these young men have towards Jews can be attributed to other cultural factors.

Additionally, all of the interviewees experienced some sort of discrimination of their own in Europe. This fact serves as an additional point of investigation for Jikeli and is the topic of two of the ten chapters, which explore the degree and type of anti-Muslim or anti-immigrant discrimination they encountered. The perceptions of discrimination mentioned in the title of the book (*Diskriminierungswahrnehmungen*) actually refer here to the interviewees’ own perceptions of xenophobia that they have encountered and not to any sort of perceptions of actual discrimination towards Jews. Toward the end of the book, Jikeli reports that there is no direct link between the discrimination that the participants of the study experienced and their expressions of antisemitism. However, one cannot again help but wonder whether it is also possible that young males experience more overt incidents of discrimination than young women, which could potentially lead to stronger feelings of antisemitism in men than in women. Even though Jikeli finds no direct connection, he interestingly devotes lengthy discussions to the problems that these young men nevertheless faced.

Chapters 7 and 8 (“Antisemitische Denkmuster” and “Quellen antisemitischer Einstellungen”) form the heart of the study and present the results of the interviews Jikeli and his team conducted. Jikeli identifies what he calls four basic patterns (*Grundmuster*) and manifestations of antisemitic argumentation: 1) “classic” antisemitic views, including stereotypes and conspiracy theories; 2) anti-Jewish attitudes in connection to Israel; 3) anti-Jewish attitudes in conjunction with Islam or a Muslim identity; and 4) antisemitic attitudes without any real logic or explanation. Immediately after this, however, Jikeli writes that antisemitic argumentation among Europeans with a Muslim background cannot be reduced simply to a hatred toward Israel or to connections to Islamism, Islam, or a Muslim identity. This statement seems to contradict the basic patterns that he established at the outset of the chapter, leaving the reader a bit puzzled. Such contradictions appear at other points in the book as well, as for instance, when he states that schools

are the primary source of information for the interviewees and then a few pages later relates that many of the participants say that what they learn in the mosque and from their imam is very important for them and their thinking. Such confusion and contradictions arise, I would argue, primarily because, in trying to be thorough and complete, Jikeli sometimes offers us too much information and winds up presenting all possible scenarios and all variations in thought and opinion.

But Jikeli’s findings reveal that these young men tend to perpetuate the stereotypes that Jews are wealthy and that they exert an inordinate influence on governments and politics. Additionally, they tend to conflate Jews with Israel and Israeli politics, leading to their assigning blame to European Jews for the suffering of Palestinians. The Israel-Palestine conflict and its effects on intolerance and antisemitic mindsets raise the question as to how we are to understand antisemitism to begin with. In an appendix to the study, Jikeli offers his working definition of antisemitism: “Der Antisemitismus ist eine bestimmte Wahrnehmung von Juden, die sich als Hass gegenüber Juden ausdrücken kann. Der Antisemitismus richtet sich in Wort oder Tat gegen jüdische oder nicht-jüdische Einzelpersonen und/oder deren Eigentum, sowie gegen jüdische Gemeindeinstitutionen oder religiöse Einrichtungen” (p. 335).

He goes on to state that Israel, understood as a “jüdisches Kollektiv,” can also be the object of antisemitic attacks, and often his subjects conflate racial and political hate speech. The sources of the antisemitism, Jikeli finds, are manifold: family and relatives, religious organizations, media, the Internet, but also schools. Several of the interviewees maintained that they had witnessed Jewish peers being harassed by non-Muslims and also that their teachers had made antisemitic remarks or suggested certain conspiracy theories involving Jews. It becomes clear, then, that European antisemitism in many ways supports and feeds these perceptions among groups of susceptible young immigrants and only makes matters worse.

To be sure, Jikeli also cites five positive examples of subjects who either harbor no such feelings or reject antisemitism and discriminatory behavior altogether. As might be expected, reasons for this vary, ranging from positive role models at school or at home, to some seeking privacy or their own sense of individuality whereby they tend not to associate with those who hold such views.

In sum, Jikeli offers a portrait of a growing problem across Europe that is quite complex, and presents no simple explanation or solution. While the types of antisemitic expressions and behaviors may be similar, the causes and roots of the problem are quite varied. Jikeli does find that education levels affect the degree of discriminatory feelings—those with a higher level of education exhibit a lesser degree of such sentiments, suggesting that education and a critical examination of broader European views toward Jews might help to lessen the prevalence of antisemitism. Jikeli’s study offers important empirical evidence for those interested in the topic.

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