

European Muslim Antisemitism: Why Young Urban Males say They Don't Like Jews
by Gunther Jikeli
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Gunther Jikeli has been researching antisemitism for over ten years, but unlike many academics, his experience is also grounded in practice in his native Germany and elsewhere. Graduating from the Center for Research on Antisemitism at Berlin's Technical University, he was involved from the start with the Kreuzberg Initiative against Antisemitism, known in Germany as KIgA. This group of teachers, social workers, and academics had become concerned by young Muslims' antisemitism in the Berlin inner city neighborhoods of Kreuzberg and Neukölln, and volunteered to work in schools and youth centers to try to break down the growing prejudices they were encountering.

Among the training sessions they held to acquaint themselves with the issues was a four-day seminar in Kreuzberg, at which European experts were invited to guide them, this reviewer included. Sometime later, Jikeli jointly organized a conference in Paris, entitled "Perceptions of the Holocaust in Berlin, Paris, and London," again attended by this reviewer. In recent years, he worked as the adviser on antisemitism at the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in Warsaw, where his tasks included collecting and analyzing governmental and NGO data on antisemitic incidents and trends in order to formulate policy.

By the start of the millennium, it was becoming obvious to researchers of antisemitism in Europe that such antipathy emanated increasingly from Muslims and from the left. That is not to suggest that far-right antisemitism had declined; it hadn't, but it was being augmented by

the “new antisemitism” based on the left’s historical antipathy to Zionism; the spillover of the Middle East conflict onto Europe’s streets; Arab states’ adoption of traditional anti-Jewish tropes; and Islamic theology.

This change wasn’t obvious, however, or politically acceptable to those who managed the European agencies tasked with combating racism. Jikeli notes that his professors in Berlin were responsible for pointing this out in their research for the European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC). Their 2003 report only came to light after it was leaked to the media following a clumsy attempt by the EUMC to suppress their findings. A second attempt to examine the Muslim causes for European antisemitism was frustrated by European civil servants when their press briefings distorted the researchers’ findings. Subsequent research by the EUMC successor body, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), however, put the record straight, and Jikeli devotes a chapter in his book to examining this and other European polls and surveys. Of these, the most important was the 2013 large-scale survey by FRA, “Discrimination and hate crime against Jews in EU Member States: experiences and perceptions of antisemitism,” which found that among the 5,847 self-identified Jews interviewed in eight countries, one third had experienced antisemitic harassment in the five years prior to the survey; that seven per cent reported antisemitic violence or threats against them; and that the largest group of perpetrators was Muslim. Forty per cent of the victims of antisemitic violence or threats across the eight countries said that the perpetrators of the worst incidents in the previous five years had a Muslim background. Given the fact that there are only a few thousand Muslims in Hungary and Latvia, it can be assumed that the percentage is higher for Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. Respondents could give multiple answers,

and about one third used this in combination with “teenagers,” the second-largest group of perpetrators of violent incidents and threats.

Thus, acts of antisemitism are increasingly committed by Muslim youths in those European countries where they constitute the largest minorities.

The data published by FRA is augmented by that from other surveys including the French National Consultative Commission on Human Rights (CNCDH), the Berlin Social Science Research Center (WZB), Populus in the UK, and the US-based Pew Global Attitudes Project, among others. The latter research has found that 47 percent of Muslims in the UK stated that they hold “unfavorable” views of Jews compared with 7 percent of the population as a whole; that 28 per cent of Muslims in France hold unfavorable views of Jews compared with 13 per cent of the population generally; and that 44 percent of Muslims in Germany hold such views compared with 20 percent of the population generally. The differentials are even greater when asked if they hold “very unfavorable” views of Jews.

Approximately fifteen to twenty million Muslims now live in Europe, out of a total population of 500 million. Of these, three to just over four million are in Germany, approximately four and a half million in France, and just under three million live in the UK. The statistics are approximate because only the UK measures religion in its census. The majority came to Europe in the years after World War II as guest workers [*Gastarbeiter*] at the invitation of governments to fill positions as unskilled laborers, or are the descendants of those who did. In the case of Germany, they were not expected to stay and were thus not initially accorded citizenship or all the rights to which citizens are entitled. The migrants inevitably tended to cluster in working-class areas of major urban conurbations, maintaining

close links with their countries of origin. In order to address their concerns, the three governments have sought to establish umbrella representative bodies, none with any degree of success. While there are success stories in each country, the reality is that economic, social, and political integration has been slow and has been accompanied by many difficulties that affect young Muslims' perceptions about who is to blame for their inability to progress.

Jikeli states that the lack of research into Muslim antisemitism represents a substantial lacuna in the study of modern racism and he argues that a scholarly examination of this phenomenon and its sources is necessary. He adds that Islamic organizations in Europe are not representative of European Muslims, as they are heavily influenced by Islamist ideologies, and that therefore the best way to ascertain what they really think is by interviewing them in open-ended discussion about their experiences and views of Jews. This he did in London, Paris, and Berlin, the capital cities of those countries with the largest Muslim communities. The interviewees were male, and members of the largest Muslim communities in each city. Thus, he primarily interviewed Germans of Turkish origin in Berlin; Frenchmen of North African origin in Paris; and Brits of South Asian (i.e., Indian subcontinent) origins in London.

Jikeli grouped their responses into four main categories: classic antisemitic attitudes motivated by conspiracy theories, or a belief that all Jews are rich and stingy; antisemitism related to Israel, based on the conflation of Jews and Israelis and driven by a Manichean view of the Israel Palestine conflict; negative perceptions of Jews based on traditional Islamic teaching; and antisemitism for which the interviewees provided no rationale (they dislike Jews because they are Jews.) One important insight he gained is that attitudes toward Jews are fragmented and full of contradictions. Muslims' lack of knowledge of the Holocaust is to be expected, but he also found many interrelated and distorted views as well as inappropriate

comparisons with Muslims' experiences. Some of these, he believes, are based on negative views of Jews as much as lack of knowledge.

Using data published by the French Service for the Protection of French Jews (SPCJ) and Britain's Community Security Trust (CST), Jikeli demonstrates that Muslims represent a disproportionate number of attackers of Jews and Jewish communal property. Between 1997 and 2011, this amounted to 26 per cent in France, and 30 percent in Britain between 1994 and 2007. In Germany, far-right activists committed over 80 percent of antisemitic acts during the last decade, but Germany only records hate crime committed by the far right, the far left, and the unique and misleading category of "foreigners."

The essence and importance of the book, however, lies in the author's analysis of the questions. From these Jikeli concludes that the majority of interviewees display dislike of Jews in at least one way or another and that antisemitism has become the norm in some young Muslims' social circles. While these negative views are not consistent, and are fragmented and multifaceted, they make for depressing reading. Quoting from a range of interviewees in the chapter devoted to antisemitism related to Islam, it is apparent that many believe there is a natural enmity toward Jews that is unrelated to events in the Middle East and which is based on Muslim history. Finally, Jikeli suggests that open antisemitism can only be reduced when society at large takes a firm stance. In other words, anti-antisemites have to become more active.