

## **"Jews and Muslims in Germany: Culture, Law and Politics from the Age of Emancipation to the Time of Multiculturalism"**

Report on an international conference, held at Tel Aviv University on April 6-8, 2008.

What contribution can the study of the modern history of the Jewish community in Germany, as well as its status today, offer to our understanding of the present condition of Muslims in the country? What analogies can be drawn between the assimilation and integration of Jews into German society in the early days of political emancipation and the current dilemmas facing the Muslims in an age of multiculturalism? What, despite noteworthy similarities, are the differences between the histories of Jews and Muslims in Germany and what can these differences reveal?

These questions formed the basis of the three-day international conference "Jews and Muslims in Germany: Culture, Law and Politics from the Age of Emancipation to the Time of Multiculturalism". The conference, held at Tel Aviv University, was co-organized by José Brunner, director of the Minerva Institute for German History, and Shai Lavi, director of the Taubenschlag Institute for Criminal Law at Tel Aviv University.

In his introductory remarks José Brunner (Tel Aviv University) argued that by according civil rights to the Jews, the German constitution of 1871 did not only emancipate an ethno-religious minority, but also brought about a reframing of the meaning of German citizenship, since at least formally this status was no longer tied to Christianity. Mostly, the Jews reacted to their legal equality by trust in the state and in the promise of freedom by liberation from traditional religious ties. The situation was entirely different in 1991, when a new foreigners' law allowed Turkish Muslims, who had been living in Germany as foreigners since the sixties, to apply for naturalization. Clearly, in the age of multiculturalism the German state has no the longer homogenizing and individualizing force that it possessed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A law enacted in the year 2000 further improved the legal status of Muslims in Germany by bestowing German citizenship upon many Muslim children born on German soil. Brunner wondered whether the year 2000 is to Muslims in Germany what the constitution of 1871 was to the Jews, namely the legal recognition that it is possible to be born in Germany and have full citizenship rights while belonging to an "oriental" faith.

Shai Lavi's (Tel Aviv University) introductory comment raised a number of questions that had to be confronted when comparing Jews and Muslims in the context of present-day Germany and German history. He pointed out that the categories "Jew" and "Muslim" were not self-evident. Thus, when constructing comparisons one may be putting side-by-side devout adherents of both religions, Judaism and Islam, or, more broadly, ethnic communities. Moreover, it is not unproblematic to decide who the "Jews" are in this comparison: are they the Jews of the nineteenth century or of today, are they German born, migrants from Poland in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, or from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s? Similarly, Lavi asked, one may wonder

who are meant by "Muslims". Since over 90% of the Muslims in Germany are Turks, is one in fact thinking of Turks when speaking of Muslims?

In his opening lecture, Shmuel Eisenstadt (Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Van Leer Jerusalem Institute) outlined a few of the basic questions that such a comparison should address. The study of Jews and Muslims in Germany, according to Eisenstadt, should be relational and should take into account the specificity of German history and the different internal challenges that Germany was facing side-by-side with the integration of Jews and Muslims into society. What, for example, were the interrelationships between the processes of nation-building in the 1870s and Jewish emancipation, and what effects did the processes of German reunification of the 1990s have on the integration of Muslims into German society. Eisenstadt noted additional differences between the presence of Jews and Muslims in Germany based on the relationship of the German Christian majority to its ethno-religious "others". The German-Jews, for both historical and socio-economic reasons, have been strangers from within. The Jews had a long history in Germany, and in the course of the nineteenth century underwent an enhanced process of acculturation. The Muslims, most of whom are labor migrants, have been facing a different set of challenges and have traditionally been considered as approaching Europe from outside.

The notion of Muslims and Jews as "others" of Europe in general and Germany in particular was further explored in a lecture by Yossef Schwartz (Tel Aviv University). Schwartz compared Franz Rosenzweig and Muhammad Asad (born Leopold Weiss) as two central-European Jews who explored Islam in their encounter with the crisis of European culture. Both did so while developing a systematic theology of conversion, but while Rosenzweig believed that Muslim dogmatism and materialism deprived it of any true religiosity, i.e. of the religious feelings common both to Judaism and Christianity, Asad described Islam in his autobiographic *Road to Mecca* as the only cultural power left in Europe that could still offer a genuine renewal of spiritual life.

The relationship of Jews and Muslims to modern Europe was further explored by Shai Lavi in a study of the controversy regarding the cruelty of ritual slaughter in Germany. Lavi argued that though the practice of Jews and Muslims is very similar, German courts and the general public have treated it in dramatically different ways. At stake in the debate is the self-image of Germany as a modern state and contrasting images of Jews and Muslims as the "others" of modernity.

A different line of inquiry was developed by Shulamit Volkov (Tel Aviv University). Returning to the nineteenth-century emancipation of the Jews in Germany, Volkov challenged the common assumption that the logic of the modern state led Germany to deny the Jews communal recognition and accept them into German society only as individuals. According to Volkov, the emerging German state continued to recognize collective bodies such as religious and professional corporations; only the Jews were required to abandon their collective affiliation. However, Volkov also stressed that German Jews nevertheless organized themselves to a greater extent in communal frameworks than is usually noted.

The implications of these tensions to current day legal discourse were pointed out in Nikola Tietze's (Hamburger Institut for Sozialforschung) lecture on the "semantics of religion". Tietze demonstrated how German courts use the concept "religion" in a variety of ways ranging from the profession of personal belief to an expression of cultural identity. Dividing these semantics into two groups – individual-based and collective-based – Tietze suggested that the only way to avoid the essentialization of religion and the external enforcement of collective identities on minority groups is to base religious recognition on notions of individual self-expression.

A different approach on a related question was presented by Gila Stopler (Ramat Gan Law School), who discussed the controversy concerning women's headscarves. Stopler argued that the ban on wearing a headscarf in the German public education system cannot be understood as a protection of women from male domination. Pointing out the prevalence of discrimination against women in German society at large, Stopler argued that the banning of the headscarf was concerned less with women's rights and more with Islamophobia.

Indeed, a persistent theme in the conference was the comparison between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. In her presentation on the topic, Sabine Schiffer (Media Responsibility Institute, Erlangen) demonstrated how the media uses a variety of visual techniques to create similar and equally degrading stereotypes of Jews and Muslims. Similarly, in a reading of visual presentations of Jewish and Muslim bodies, Jeffrey Peck (Humboldt University, Berlin) pointed to the different ways in which the male body of Jews and Muslims, its masculinity and femininity, are constructed by the media. In a wide-ranging and vivid survey Amikam Nachmani (Bar-Ilan University) also drew attention to the highly intolerant and prejudiced way in which Muslims are depicted in the European electronic and printed media as "others", emphasizing difference and portraying them as strangers.

Complementing and transcending the historical comparison between the Jews in earlier times and current-day Muslims, several papers were devoted to understanding the presence of Jews in Germany today. In his paper, "The Jewish Community in Germany: No More a Family, Not Yet a Community" Sergey Lagodinsky (Global Public Policy Institute) offered three possible models of Jewish community life in Germany: the status-based tribal model, the interest-based contractual model and the collective-based communal model. His paper explored the main features of these models and demonstrated each model's benefits and risks. Using the analytic framework as a background, he then moved to analyze the tensions that the Jewish community in Germany is experiencing today.

A different take on the tensions was offered by Karen Körber (Philipps University of Marburg). Her paper, "Pushkin or Torah?: The New Jewish Community in Germany" focused on the collision between two central narratives of identity and memory within contemporary Jewish communities. For the old members of the Jewish communities the focal point of reference is the experience of victims of the Holocaust, which also mainly structured their relationship with postwar Germany. For the Jews of Russian origin, who

immigrated to Germany in recent years, the centre of remembrance is the "Great Patriotic War". Thus the image of the Jewish victim is joined by the "fighting Jewish soldier" who was part of the army that contributed to the victory over Nazi dictatorship, and who thereby freed his own people. The paper reconstructed these conflicts and considered their consequences for the Jewish self-conception in current-day Germany.

Interestingly, the construction of contemporary identity on the basis of the Holocaust characterizes not only the Jewish community but is also relevant to Muslims in Germany. In his paper on German Turks and the Holocaust, Gilad Margalit (University of Haifa) explored the different ways in which Turks in Germany conceive the Holocaust. For some, the fate of Jews in Germany serves as a continuous warning about the dialectics of integration, for others, the Holocaust is a problem of Jews and Christians with little relevance for Muslims living in Germany.

A different perspective on contemporary Muslim society in Germany was provided by Uriya Shavit's (Tel Aviv University) lecture "Sheikh Google: Advanced Media Technologies and the Construction of Muslim-Arab Identity in Germany". On the basis of interviews conducted with German Muslims, Shavit recorded the tension between the growing influence of global media and the multiple interpretations and strategies of resistance that the local concerning the media produced image of the Muslim *Umma*.

Elimelech Westreich (Tel Aviv University) explored the tension between religion and modern science and technology from a different angle. Focusing on encounters of orthodox Rabbis with the challenges of modernization, and specifically with modern state and science, Westreich complicated prevalent notions of German Jewish orthodoxy on the eve of emancipation and refuted the common image of Jewish orthodoxy as a conservative movement opposed to all change.

Finally, it was pointed out that a historical account of Jews and Muslims in Germany must take note of the fact that a Muslim community emerged in Germany long before the 1960s. In a paper dedicated to this topic, Ursula Wokoeck (Ben Gurion University of the Negev) offered an overview of the presence of Muslims in Germany. Central to Wokoeck's argument is the claim that although Muslims constituted a visible minority in Germany already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the nature of the Muslim community of the time was radically different from that of today.

The papers presented in the conference including a number of additional contributions will be published in the forthcoming *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte/Tel Aviv Yearbook for German History*, scheduled to appear in spring 2009.