

Racism, anti-Semitism, and the Holocaust

Norway has long been considered distinct from Continental Europe on the issue of racism and in particular anti-Semitism. While Jews experienced wide-scale persecution in Poland, Austria, France, Germany and Russia, it is traditionally argued that anti-Semitism was largely absent in Norway, as the small Jewish population living in the country did not constitute a threat to the culturally and ethnically homogeneous Norwegians. According to this reading, there was no basis for exclusionary social practices or policies – even during the Nazi occupation. As scholars such as Arne Hasting have argued, various domestic factors placed limits on the persecution of the Jews, including the Church of Norway, which was an undisputed moral authority that provided an important institutional and cultural framework for resistance to German occupation.

More recent studies – many of which were conducted here at UiO under the aegis of Einhart Lorenz – have questioned these assumptions. They show that from the early 1900s onward, resentments against the Jews were on the rise in Norway, as they were in many European countries. While it is true that Norwegian anti-Semitism did not find expression in social movements or formal organizations, a great many books, journal articles and pamphlets voicing anti-Jewish sentiments were published and were positively received by a broad audience. New findings concerning Norwegian collaboration in the confiscation of Jewish property during the Second World War further complicates traditional narratives. Following this strand of research, I will encourage students to have a closer look at the ways Norwegians dealt with race, religion, and the challenges posed by the Axis regimes and their ideologies in the 20th century. M.A. students might want to explore one of the following topics, but are also encouraged to develop their own research proposals.

Left-wing anti-Semitism? The Norwegian labor movement, capitalism, and the Jews in the inter-war period

Was there left-wing anti-Semitism in Norway? As more recent research suggests, xenophobic resentments, racism and anti-Semitism were not confined to the extreme political right in Norway. Rather, it appears that this kind of thinking permeated various segments of society, predominantly farmers and peasants, but also religious circles. However, little research has been conducted on the racial attitudes of the Norwegian working class. To address this lacuna, one could examine how the Norwegian labor movement dealt with issues often thought to be related to 'international Jewry', such as capitalism and financial speculation. More specifically, I envision focusing on the ways *Vort Arbeide/Arbeiderbladet*, *Bergens Arbeiderblad* and *Nordlys* covered the world economic crisis of 1929, including the specific interpretations they offered readers. Using approaches provided mainly by cultural history, the study will pay close attention to the language used to describe the assumed causes and effects of the economic crisis, as well as the 'code words' used in connection with Jews, such as 'international', 'cosmopolitan', 'Wall Street' and 'modern'. The study will thus aim to make a contribution to understanding historical patterns of prejudice.

Islam: Norwegian perceptions of a religion in the late 20th century

What happened to racist and anti-Semitic thinking after 1945? Did it dwindle into an ideological undercurrent of marginal size, or did it mutate into anti-Islamic thinking, thus becoming again acceptable to broad segments of society? This question represents the starting point for a very challenging and provocative study on the ways Norwegians have perceived Islam since the late 1970s, when the Iranian Revolution brought the Muslim religion to the forefront of public attention in many Western countries. The violent overthrow of the US-installed Shah of Iran led to the establishment of a radical Islamic republic that fundamentally rejected the 'Western' way of life.

The study may analyze various arenas of public debate in Norway since the late 1970s: it may look at issues such as religion and the problem of secularization; consumerism, collective values, and individualism; or the emancipation of women. Preliminary research on the West German case reveals a very mixed picture. On the one hand, Islam was depicted as a positive example for a secular and materialistic society such as West Germany, which, according to conservative critics, was losing its traditional Christian values. On the other hand, however, Islam became a negative foil for discussions on gender equality. Leading members of the second women's movement, for instance, used Islam as a focal point for their critique of 'male-controlled' society. One problem with this critique is that it 'externalized' patriarchal thinking by associating it with a 'foreign other'. As part of this research project, primary sources will be examined to see if similar discussions can be detected in Norway. In this context, one could expand the topic to ask if depictions of Islam as a counterfoil to 'Western society' shared commonalities with depictions of Jews in the first half of the 20th century. The study would therefore aim to make a contribution to current discussions on the social integration of Muslim immigrants in European society.

Introductory reading:

Einhart Lorenz, Trond Berg Eriksen and Håkon Harket (eds.), *Jødehat: Antisemittismens historie fra antikken til i dag* (Oslo: Damm, 2005).

Bjarte Bruland and Mats Tangestuen, 'The Norwegian Holocaust: changing views and representations,' *Scandinavian Journal of History* 36,5 (2011), pp. 587-604.