

Ernst Furlinger

Moscheebaukonflikte in Österreich. Nationale Politik des religiösen Raums im globalen Zeitalter. Vienna: V&R Unipress (Wiener Forum für Theologie und Wissenschaft Vol. 7), 2013. Pp. 580. ISBN 9 783847 101536. 69,99€.

On the night of 14 November 2013 the Leipzig Fire brigade was routinely called to a fire in the suburb of Gholis. Upon arriving, they made a scary discovery. Next to a burning waste bin stood five wooden stakes, each crowned with a pig's head and sloshed with red paint. The site on which the offence was enacted belongs to the *Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat*, which plans to erect a small mosque with 12 meters high minarets on the property. At the end of September of 2013, when the building plan became public, the neighbourhood had protested and collected thousands of signatures ("Gholis Says No!"). Seeing its chance, the far right extremist NPD party organised a demonstration in support, but in turn was stopped by hundreds of students. The pig-head incident that followed lent the conflict national visibility. It puts Leipzig, a city with 500,000 inhabitants of whom 200 are Muslims, on a quickly filling map that marks the explosion of mosque conflicts across Western Europe.

Ernst Furlinger's study (in translation: "Mosque Conflicts in Austria: National Policy of Religious Space in a Global Framework") offers voluminous instruments for the study and understanding of such conflicts. A historian and scientist of religion who is presently affiliated with the Centre for Religion and Globalisation at the Danube University Krems in Austria, the author takes his time to unroll the narrative and discuss different aspects of the conflict at hand. After an informative introduction, in which the available literature in Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Holland, UK and Austria, plus case studies from Spain, Slovenia, France, Greece, and Finland are discussed, the author focuses in the first step on the historical-political context in which the conflicts over mosque building have come about (pp. 45-113). The chapter offers an overview of right-wing radicalism with a view to migration and religious pluralisation since 1945, recounts the shift from migrants to Muslims, and revisits the radicalisation of the 'Islam' topic in Western Europe. Amongst others, the reader meets with the *Front National*, the *Vlaams Blok*, the *Schweizerische Volkspartei*, and the *Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs*, right-wing extremist political parties that particularly thrive on it.

In the second step the author clarifies the basic concepts of "mosque" and "minaret" which he places in historical, migration, and religious contexts (pp. 113-135). The third step offers an overview of mosque building in Austria since the 1960s. It is narrated as part of the institutionalisation of Islam in Austria, a well-known story leading from one migrant community to a wide diversity

along national, political, and theological lines, and from a few small backyard prayer rooms to a range of visible prayer halls. It is the growing visibility that particularly interests the author, who adds five case studies to stress his point (pp. 136-195).

After these preliminaries, we near the centre of the book: mosque conflicts in Austria (pp. 195-404). A thick description of the recent conflict in Bad Vöslau offers a helpful blueprint of the way such conflicts are at present being argued out. Bad Vöslau is a 11,000 strong community south of Vienna, that makes a living from thermal bath tourism. It also counts 8% or 877 Muslims, descendants of Turkish 'guest workers' who arrived in the 1960s. In 2006, one of the two local Muslim organisations announced the plan to build a representative mosque with a dome and four 15 meters high minarets.

With the help of 42 interviews, Furlinger unravels the structure of the conflict that followed, portraying the different players and their opposing positions in an exemplary manner. The reader meets with Muslim community members, the imam, the architect, the local political parties (liberal and far right), the Churches, a weirdo Christian sect, a women's initiative that cuts across religions, and the town's Burgomaster. We learn about the phases of the conflict, why mediation became an option, and in which manner participants finally changed (some of) their position. In the end, the mosque was built, not with a dome but with a 'modern' glass front; not with 15 meters high minarets but with short glass stumps. The narrative continues through the opening ceremony and what happened once the mosque was in functioning order.

The account is set against the history of Bad Vöslau. Another worthwhile feature of this book, it tells this city's history of discrimination against Jews. For 300 years, Jews visited the baths, managed the main factory, built synagogues, hotels, houses and new thermal baths, all of which forcibly changed hands or were demolished in the November pogrom of 1938. When 30 years later cheap labour from Turkey filled up the places in the factory again, memory of this past had been annihilated as well. Only the word "ghetto" persisted. Furlinger is careful enough not to make a direct connection between the Jewish annihilation and the present conflict, but he draws the historical context in which both were made to happen. At the end of the study, he also inserts an excursus on past disputes around the building of synagogues, which offers some striking examples for comparison.

After the thick description of the conflict, the author offers some elements for theory building in which European conflicts over mosque building may be placed in the future. Again, he carefully approaches his object, this time from four different angles (pp. 409-487). First of all, the author considers the global dimension, which crystallises in the transnational aspect of religions, religious

freedom and human rights. Secondly, there is the question of European identity vis-à-vis the religious norms of Islam, giving rise to the question of 'who are we?' Thirdly, the author considers European national policies with a view to this central question. Several comparisons serve to clarify how at present, in Austria and elsewhere in Western Europe, 'Islam' is operated upon to draw boundaries, create community feeling and a new understanding of identity. Finally, the author considers mosques in space: socio-political considerations of space, space and power, space and visibility, space and belonging.

Despite the many conflicts which (visible) Muslim presence currently provokes, the study does not end on a pessimistic note. Rather, the author trusts the, admittedly long-winding, complicated, but in the end also flexible mode of democratic decision-making to find novel ways of co-habitation in Europe.

If I have any critique of this publication, it is the choice of language, i.e. German. Sure enough, Furlinger is an Austrian and his study first of all touches upon an Austrian set of related conflicts. At times long-winded and entangled in the Austrian discussion, the author nonetheless undertakes many attempts to connect to the European level. Especially the case study plus the manner in which the author discusses its particularities as part of a phenomenon with European and global dimensions, deserves to be read by a wider public. An English version that settles on the core of this study would therefore be helpful and a very laudable step.

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