

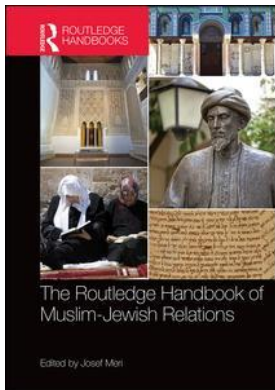
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The Holocaust

Narratives of complicity and victimhood

Peter Wien

In the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Holocaust plays a central role in a war of words and a competition over historical memory and a legacy of suffering. Often, the Holocaust and the Nakba are juxtaposed and intertwined in ways that cannot do justice to the relative paradigmatic importance of each event in a context of world history because they reflect deeply felt personal experiences of injustice. This chapter constitutes an attempt to disaggregate the various elements of the debate and its historical roots (see Chapter 20). It focuses on the relationship between Arabs and Jews in particular but will also extend the inquiry to Muslims more broadly.

The controversy

The Holocaust has been looming large in the relationship between Arabs and Jews since the end of World War II as a means of political rhetoric and mutual allegations. However, the confrontation between Zionists and Palestinians is older than the Holocaust and started as a conflict over land and a competition over political leverage with a colonial power. After World War II and the founding of the State of Israel in 1948, it became a conflict over historical memory and its justifying force in claims over statehood. A local conflict and regional processes of decolonization coincided with a change of paradigm in international relations and the emergence of an ethos of genocide prevention, international justice and prosecution. They provided a new context for the reception and dissemination of a particular Holocaust narrative in the Middle East, including Israel and the Arab lands but also, in a broader context, in Muslim societies.¹

The Middle Eastern Holocaust narrative is based on historical argumentation in a triangular relationship among Arabs, Jews, and Germans. Usually, Ḥajj Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, is presented as the triangle's side connecting Arabs with the Jewish Holocaust. In recent years, iconic images of his meetings with Nazi grandees in Berlin have been used in Islamophobic media campaigns displayed on public buses in American cities or by the public relations office of the Israeli Foreign Ministry.²

The actual historical record is far more complex than simplistic accusations of an alleged general affinity of Arabs and Muslims toward Nazism and Nazi anti-Semitism would suggest. It is also more complex than assertions that wartime interactions between Arabs and Germans merely followed the principle of “my enemy’s enemy is my friend.” Holocaust denial and the adoption of anti-Semitic stereotypes in political language and popular culture are omnipresent in the media of the Arab world today and among migrants in Western societies. However, they remain accidental to the core grievance growing out of anti-Zionism as a function of anti-imperialism.

The Holocaust in Arab lands

The Holocaust reached into Arab lands in various ways. The defeat of France in 1940 and the establishment of the Vichy regime resulted in the enactment of anti-Semitic legislation in French North Africa and deportations into concentration camps in the Algerian desert. The failure of the Axis advance on Egypt in the African campaign led, in its last stance, to the brutal period of Tunisia’s German occupation from 1942 to 1943. Luckily, the latter was too short-lived for a major deportation campaign overseas, but it nevertheless resulted in a significant number of deaths from abuse and violence in labor camps. In Libya, Jews were interned by Italian authorities in remote desert camps beginning in 1942. Many perished, while those who had British or French foreign citizenship were deported to Vichy-controlled territory or to camps on the Italian mainland, from where they were abducted further north after the German occupation of Northern Italy in 1943. The fact that they were British citizens saved the lives of many because the Germans kept them as so called “Austauschjuden” (“exchange Jews”) who they hoped could be useful in prisoner exchanges.³

In recent years, research in German archives has uncovered plans for an *SS Einsatzkommando* (task force) to follow Wehrmacht occupation forces to organize the deportation and extinction of Jewish communities in North Africa and, eventually, the Arab East, including Palestine, in a way comparable to the deployment of such units in Ukraine and Russia. Advance commandoes took part in the administration of occupied Tunisia. Owing to the Germans’ defeat in the North African theatre, those plans were never realized, but their discovery has led to much speculation about an alleged willingness of Arabs to serve as executors of Nazi plans. Such counterfactual debates remain futile, but the fact that they are occurring shows how highly politicized the discourse around the Middle Eastern Holocaust narrative has become.⁴

A specific controversy exists in a different location about a rare incident of collective Arab violence against Jews during World War II – the Farhūd pogrom in Baghdad on 1–2 June 1941. Over the course of two days, a mob looted, raped, and killed Jews in the poorer residential quarters of Baghdad in the aftermath of the defeat of the Iraqi army in a month-long war against Britain. Most Jews in wealthier neighborhoods were not affected. The fact that German and Italian airplanes were deployed during the war in a hastily constructed alliance between the Axis powers and the Iraqi government added to suspicions that the anti-Jewish violence might have been instigated by German agents and propaganda. The Farhūd was in parts a local pogrom, in the sense that people from the lower levels of Baghdad’s urban society, together with men streaming in from Baghdad’s hinterland, used the power vacuum between the departure of the Iraqi government and the arrival of the British occupation force to prey on the property of the vulnerable Jewish population. Yet much of the killing and physical abuse exceeded the range of mere looting, as up to 200 people were killed. Small factions of Baghdad’s male youth probably played a central role in the killings. They

were ideological hotheads after years of nationalist indoctrination and paramilitary training, as well as exposure to the influence of extremist sympathizers of Germany. The closed elite system of Iraqi politics and extended periods of political instability and military coups in the second half of the 1930s amplified the radicalization of youth, and the tense atmosphere of the month of war in May 1941 under a tight nationalist regime prepared the ground for an exceptional outbreak of violence.

The Jews were classic scapegoats but also victims of a region-wide deterioration of Arab-Jewish relations during the period between the two world wars. The Iraqi Jewish community showed little sympathy for Zionism at the time; its members were proud of their distinctive Iraqi identity and participated willingly in the building of the new state after its founding in 1921. However, they were caught in the crossfire of Arab conflicts with Zionism in Palestine and the consolidation of ethnic nationalism as an anti-imperialist ideology (see Chapter 17, this volume). In the course of the 1930s, and especially after the outbreak of the Palestine Revolt in 1936, radical opposition to Zionism became the most prominent expression of nationalist politics in the Arab lands, as people viewed it simply as British imperialism's most sinister manifestation in the region. Jews in Arab lands were increasingly identified with Zionism despite many efforts to dissociate themselves from Jewish expansion in Palestine. Jews began to suffer from discrimination in Iraqi public service and were subject to sporadic acts of violence. Comparable trends surfaced elsewhere, as, for example, in Egypt, where the nationalist movement Young Egypt started a vitriolic anti-Jewish campaign and the Muslim Brotherhood called for a boycott of Jewish businesses. The movement's leader, Hassan al-Banna, however, publicly condemned all forms of ethnic hatred, as it was raging in Nazi Germany.⁵

Historical literature does exist that postulates a line connecting the trends of the period before and during World War II to the vitriolic anti-Jewish stance that swept through the Arab world in the aftermath of the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. This is essentially a backward projection. After the events of the Farhūd and the re-establishment of a pro-British regime in Iraq, for instance, Jews entered into a period of unprecedented prosperity, even if the basic trust between Arabs and Jews in Iraq had been shattered. Most important, the confrontations of this period happened in a local and regional context, and it is therefore inappropriate to consider them as events that happened "in the fringes of the Shoah."⁶

Last but not least, awareness and rejection of German atrocities against Jews and occupied populations was high among educated Arabs before and during World War II. Magazines and newspapers reported on discriminatory laws and their execution, and they printed reports and pictures of deeds committed by German occupation forces and their allies. Leading intellectuals condemned Nazi racism, and reports about the 1941 events of the Farhūd abound in tales of Muslim neighbors risking their own safety and property to safeguard their Jewish brethren. In sum, Arab behavior and attitudes did not differ from those of other peoples that were directly or indirectly affected by World War II and the persecution of the Jews.⁷

Arabs, Muslims, and trajectories of collaboration

The Grand Mufti Ḥajj Amīn al-Ḥusaynī is the most commonly known example of an Arab collaborator with Nazi Germany, followed distantly by Rashīd 'Alī al-Kilānī, the head of the Iraqi Government of National Defense that entered into a short-lived alliance with Nazi Germany in 1941. Both sought refuge in Nazi Germany, but Kilānī was not drawn as deeply into the abyss of the Nazi propaganda apparatus as was the Mufti. The enthusiasm of most

Arab political exiles for the German cause was initially high after arrival in Berlin, but it declined in the later years of the war, partially owing to the Arab nationalists' disillusionment with the actual level of commitment that the Nazis invested in Arab affairs but also to the successful intrigues that the Mufti spun to outmaneuver his contenders for the sympathy of the Fascist mandarins.⁸

Working for the propaganda apparatus were the most prominent Arabs in German service in Berlin, such as the Mufti or Yūnus Baḥrī, a journalist of Iraqi origin and the original voice of German Arabic wireless propaganda to the Middle East during the war. Their cases are clear-cut, with the Mufti's enthusiastic support of the Nazi regime revealing a particularly vile opportunism. However, allegations that he played a significant role in the planning and organization of the Holocaust are overblown. Already in 1947, Simon Wiesenthal had published a book accusing Amīn al-Ḥusaynī of having had close knowledge of concentration camps from visits to Auschwitz and Majdanek and of having been an intimate of Adolf Eichmann.⁹ After the war, SS Hauptsturmführer Dieter Wisliceny, a confidant of Eichmann, confirmed in interrogations that several meetings between Eichmann and the Mufti had taken place, but both Eichmann and the Mufti denied this and no further evidence exists, neither for the meetings nor for the Mufti's visits to extermination camps. Instead, there are records of a guided tour in the summer of 1942 of the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Oranienburg, north of Berlin, by a number of representatives of the Mufti and al-Kilānī – not by the two Arab leaders themselves. The visitors spent two hours in the camp and were reportedly quite impressed by its educational facilities and the craftsmanship of inmates, among them Jews and Soviet prisoners of war (POWs). Such a visit was not unusual because sections of Sachsenhausen had been set aside by the Nazi authorities as a “model camp,” for presentation to domestic and foreign visitors. Terror, oppression, and annihilation were confined to less “presentable” parts of the camp. In any case, the German Foreign Office, which competed with Heinrich Himmler's Reichssicherheitshauptamt (Reich Main Security Office) over access and control of the Arab politicians in Berlin, had serious misgivings about the visit.¹⁰

There is no final verdict about the Mufti's direct involvement or immediate exposure to the Holocaust. According to his memoirs, he knew from Himmler that millions had been killed. In light of this knowledge, it is all the more upsetting that the Mufti tried to prevent the exchange of thousands of Jewish children and adults from Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary in 1943 for German nationals in Allied detainment camps. There was, moreover, no other voice in German radio propaganda in the Arabic language that adopted Nazi anti-Semitic language as clearly and unambiguously as did the Mufti.¹¹

Some trajectories of collaboration are more complex, however. There were, for instance, long-term Arab residents of Germany who became entangled in the Nazi apparatus. One example is Zakī Kirām, born 1886 in Damascus. A captain in the Ottoman Army, he was wounded during World War I and arrived in Berlin in 1916 for medical treatment, which cost him one of his legs. Once there, Kirām married a German woman, founded an Arab bookstore and publishing house, and finished a doctorate in dentistry. In the 1920s, he became a successful businessman and arms trader, active in Berlin's Arab community, and a journalist who published articles about life in Germany in magazines in the Arab world. After the Nazi takeover in 1933, he wrote articles to defend Nazi policies. German archives contain a letter he wrote to Hitler in May 1936 from a business trip to Sana'a, Yemen – probably to sell firearms – announcing that he would send 200 kilos of original Yemenite coffee beans as a present to express his reverence for the “Führer und Reichskanzler.” The Reich's Chancery turned him down politely. Kirām, who was a speaker of both Turkish

and Arabic, received another chance to prove his reverence when he started to work as a translator for German radio propaganda.¹²

Does work for German broadcasting services, with their vitriolic anti-Semitic propaganda, constitute collaboration in the Holocaust? Is culpability mitigated by the fact that employment was a way to guarantee continuing residency for those who had family or professional interests in Germany or who would have faced political persecution in their countries of origin?

Arabs and Muslims were directly involved in acts of violence, too. In Tunisia, there were Muslim guards in labor camps during the period of German occupation and informants who told the Germans where Jews lived or had taken refuge. There were also guards in the Vichy French internment camps in Algeria and Morocco. Yet there were also those who protected and took in their Jewish neighbors. Exact numbers are not available. Most non-Jewish people remained indifferent and thus fell in line with the majority of the population in Nazi-occupied territories. In general, it should be acknowledged that people at the time lived under a violent colonial regime.¹³

Many tens of thousands of Muslims served in SS and Wehrmacht contingents of varying sizes deployed primarily at the Eastern Front during the war. They participated in Nazi Germany's last stance in Berlin in April and May of 1945. Tens of thousands died in the service of the Wehrmacht and SS. Arabs were, in fact, the smallest cohort among them, with fewer than 1,000 soldiers in the German-Arab training detachment (*Deutsch-Arabische Lehrabteilung*) established in occupied Greece in 1941. It recruited its members from POW camps and Arab students in Germany, while other Arab volunteers were denied passage through Turkey. In 1942, approximately 800 Arabs were deployed to the Caucasus but did not see battle then or a few months later when they were sent to Tunisia to join local Vichy French volunteer units. In general, they were considered too unreliable for deployment. In contrast, the bulk of Muslim soldiers originated from Tatar and Turkic peoples of the Caucasus and served in fighting units at the Eastern Front. Germans, who were responsible for their recruitment, had an eerily Orientalist perception of their fighting prowess and uncompromising loyalty. As frontline soldiers, it is not likely that many of them were immediately involved in the crimes of the Holocaust. The latter were perpetrated primarily by units of Wehrmacht, SS, and police combing through the hinterland of the fighting zones. However, Muslims participated in the cruelty of anti-partisan combat. Soldiers were also recruited among Bosnian Muslims in the Balkans into special SS units of the so-called Handjar Division, which participated with notorious brutality in the infighting between the various Yugoslav ethnic and religious communities. Their victims included Jews but, first of all, they carried out retribution against partisan forces, who in turn had committed atrocities in Muslim villages. To facilitate the recruitment of Bosnian Muslims and further Muslim sympathy for Germany, Amīn al-Ḥusaynī undertook an extended tour in Bosnia in the spring of 1943. In general, Wehrmacht and SS military planners fantasized about a worldwide Muslim uprising against the colonial powers of France and Britain, partly motivated by an identification of imperialism with Zionism and what the Nazis perceived as "world Jewry." Little is known about the reception of German propaganda among Muslim soldiers and their motives for enlisting, but it is most likely that they differed widely. There was strong anti-Soviet resentment but also the desire to escape the fate of fellow, non-Muslim POWs from the Red Army. Though some units of Muslim legionnaires fought until Germany's final capitulation, many deserted in the last months of the war.¹⁴

Muslims among the righteous

In all countries that were subject to Nazi occupation, stories of collaborators and perpetrators stand against those of helpers and resisters. Yad Vashem, the central Israeli memorial site for victims of the Holocaust, in a memorial garden remembers non-Jewish rescuers as the “Righteous Among the Nations.” A significant number of Muslims are among them, mostly from Albania and Bosnia, but as of today there is only one Arab: Mohamed Helmy, an Egyptian medical doctor who was a resident of Berlin during the war and who was introduced into the memorial in 2013. Helmy sheltered and protected members of a Jewish family, who were his friends and patients.¹⁵

In general, few Arabs had occasion to become protectors and rescuers because of the short time and limited extent of German occupation in their lands. Yet there are various examples of Muslim Arabs taking in their Jewish neighbors for protection. High profile cases exist, too. Well-known is the example of Sultan Mohammed V of Morocco, who exacted modifications to anti-Semitic legislation imposed by the Vichy French colonial authorities to maintain his protective role of the country’s Jewish population.¹⁶

Another, more complex example is that of Si Kaddour Benghabrit, the rector of the Mosque of Paris. His efforts to safeguard Jews received a lot of media attention in France in the wake of 11 September 2001 and renewed controversy about the place of Muslim migrants in Western societies. Debates about the veracity of the story – the number of Jews saved ranges from about 100 to more than 1,000 in various counts – are situated not only in complex French memory politics about resistance and collaboration during the period of German occupation and the Vichy regime, but also in the crucible of French colonialism and its discourses of victimhood. Whereas some non-Muslim French have difficulties accepting Muslims as members of the Résistance, French Muslims themselves have tried to emphasize the accounts as an avenue toward inclusion into one of the constituting myths of the post-war French nation. For Algerians and French of North African descent, the complex overlap between anti-colonial and anti-Zionist discourse makes it difficult to accept Muslims as protectors of Jews because of a reluctance to acknowledge a discourse of Jewish victimhood. For them, an anti-Israel stance demands a denunciation of this victimhood as a Zionist tool diminishing Palestinian suffering.

The record of Benghabrit’s actions during the period of occupation is mixed. Benghabrit came from a Algerian family of Muslim notables but was also a French-trained diplomat. Preservation of status and influence and the importance of maintaining personal contacts for the protection of his community determined his stance. The ensuing conflicts were typical for broad sections of French society under occupation. Racial categories under Vichy and Nazi rule afforded Muslims a protected legal status while stripping Jews of theirs. Postwar reports by former members of the Résistance recounted that the Mosque, with Benghabrit’s knowledge and support, had served as a temporary shelter for Jews, resistance fighters, and downed Allied pilots. Disguising Jews as Muslims was one way of protecting them. Numerous accounts of this kind exist, but finding supporting archival evidence is difficult. German reports mentioning suspicions about Benghabrit’s activities in the Mosque seem to vindicate anecdotal information, despite a photographic record showing Benghabrit in friendly exchanges with German officials visiting the Mosque. The relationship with the authorities remained polite at first, but Benghabrit refused to be integrated further into the German propaganda apparatus in order to maintain neutrality. Other reports, however, interpret these exchanges with the Nazis as collaboration. There is also evidence that Benghabrit assisted Vichy authorities, at least in some cases, to identify Jews who were

trying to pass as Muslims. In a balancing act, Benghabrit appears to have moved between collaboration, accommodation, and resistance to the Vichy and Nazi regimes – like many other community leaders during the occupation who relied on a privileged relationship with the authorities to protect their own friends and family and sometimes others, but who also went to great lengths to safeguard their influence.¹⁷

Muslim victims

Muslims of Arab and other descent were involved in the Holocaust as victims, too, mostly via entanglement in the penal systems of Nazi occupation in France as POWs or forced laborers. In 1941, soon after the attack on the Soviet Union, killing squads mistook several hundred Muslim Tatar POWs for Jews and murdered them. However, Arabs and Muslims usually did not wind up in the Nazi machinery of death because of their racial background, but it did not protect them against mistreatment either. Despite the efforts to recruit Muslims into fighting units, racial prejudice shaped day-to-day interactions between German soldiers and Muslims. Dark skin and certain features of physiognomy certainly exacerbated camp inmates' situations, but the number of this victim group is comparatively small, probably a few thousand. The system of oppressive jurisdiction and abuse in the wartime prison regime and in camps absorbed them because they had refused to perform forced labor duties, had tried to escape, or had been involved in forgery, trafficking, or rape. After their convictions, they made their way from jail to jail, being finally, and sometimes terminally, relocated to a concentration camp. Members of the French Résistance and Republican veterans of the Spanish Civil War were among the Arab victims of Nazi terror as well. Some participated in the inmates' uprising that prepared the liberation of Buchenwald in April 1945. Last but not least, there were women among the Arab inmates. Finally, there is one record of a Moroccan gassed in Mauthausen.¹⁸

The records of the German state of Brandenburg contain an example of an inmate's itinerary that ended in the crematorium of the jail of Brandenburg. Ali Gui Touré was a Muslim born in 1910 in Mopti in the French Sudan, today's Mali. He was drafted when the war broke out and ended up as a French POW in 1940. In the summer of 1944, he was in Stalag (*Stamm lager*) 221, in St. Médard-en-Jalles, near Bordeaux.¹⁹ By the time of his conviction for theft and assault, he had been away from his family for almost five years. According to military court records, he stole a chicken from a farmer and almost stabbed him to death when confronted. Touré was sentenced to two years in jail (*Zuchthaus*). The verdict held up in his favor that he was of primitive nature and motivated by drive rather than reason.²⁰ First, Touré was transferred from Bordeaux to Freiburg/Breisgau and then on to the Rheinbach jail near Bonn. It is not clear how and why he was transferred again to the Brandenburg jail, where he arrived in early October 1944. Brandenburg was one of the most notorious prisons of the Third Reich, where large numbers of political prisoners were detained and several thousand executions took place up to the end of the war. Entry examinations in both Rheinbach and Brandenburg recorded his health as good and his physical condition as strong. It is therefore quite conspicuous that Touré died less than three months after his arrival in Brandenburg. His death certificate gave lung tuberculosis and "acute cardiovascular insufficiency" as the cause of death.²¹ Tuberculosis was indeed a widespread illness in German POW camps, but one is still left to wonder whether the diagnosis conceals extreme physical abuse rather than a sudden deterioration of health.

In similar cases, the Moroccan *Fremdarbeiter* Abdallah ben Ahmed and Salem Ammamouche were convicted of forgery and trafficking with food stamps. The former died of tuberculosis

in the Brandenburg jail in March 1944, and the latter was executed in Berlin-Plötzensee in mid-April 1945.²²

War atrocities affected Muslims in whichever combat zone they lived – in the Caucasus as much as in the Balkans. In Libya, both Jewish and tribal Muslim populations experienced systematic persecution and violent oppression by Italian military authorities and civilian settlers in 1941 and 1942 when frontlines moved back and forth between British and Axis territory. The Italians retaliated against rural people who had cooperated with the British army. Impressions of Italian weakness were to be avoided, and the Germans gave the Italians free rein. However, wartime persecution in Libya followed a particular Italian racist logic and was not primarily attributable to German instigation. Local, dark-skinned Jews suffered more under an Italian forced labor regime than did Jewish Italian immigrants, for example.²³

It would be far-fetched, though, to subsume all of these violent experiences under the historical category Holocaust or to compare these fates to the extermination of European Jews, but they put discussions about Arab-Jewish relations into perspective.

Muslims and Fascism

In recent years, the term *Islamofascism* has gained currency in some media and among self-declared “Islam critics.” It contains allegations about Islam as religion and ideology with an aggressive, expansionist, anti-pluralist, and anti-Semitic inclination rooted in its origins and scripture and about resulting affinities to Nazism. According to this reading of Islamic history, Amīn al-Ḥusaynī interacted with the Nazis because of an essential Muslim predisposition to Fascism and Jew-hatred representative of the Arab-Muslim mind.²⁴

The scholarly expertise in this volume reveals the ideological bias of this argument. It is nevertheless worthwhile to deconstruct further the stereotype of a general Arab pro-Nazi and pro-Fascist leaning during the 1930s and World War II. The rise of Fascism and Nazism in Europe at the time coincided with the formative period of Arab nationalism as a political ideology, when anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism as lead topics cast challenges by the Fascist and Nazi regimes to the colonial powers in Britain and France into a particular light. Arab publicists and politicians, as well as leaders of nascent political movements across the spectrum, admired the political and economic strengths of the new European powers. Topics such as strong leadership and a youth cult became a part of the Arab nationalist repertoire when publicists tried to define the way forward for the Arab nation toward independence and self-reliance. Many prominent nationalist authors adopted a chauvinist vision of the historical trajectory of Arab superiority, often connected with an imagery of strength embodied by early Islamic warriors. There was, however, insecurity about the role of religion and ethnicity in Arab nationalism. A secular consensus put emphasis on language and culture as the unifying element, but the role of Jews in Arab lands remained unclear even if Jews in Iraq and elsewhere promoted political and cultural loyalty to Arabism. Still, Arab nationalists remained skeptical about the goals of any European power. While admiring Hitler and Mussolini, many preached caution because of the distance between strong Western nations and weak Eastern nations. Fascist Italy had a bad name because of cruel and oppressive colonialism in Libya and Abyssinia. The leading Arabic intellectual magazines coming out of Cairo, such as *al-Hilāl* or *al-Risāla*, which were read all over the Arab world, displayed a keen awareness of the dangers of Nazi and Fascist politics and reported diligently about politics of oppression. They, as well as left-wing and communist movements throughout the Arab world, promoted liberal and socialist anti-Fascist views of geopolitics, openly criticizing Nazi anti-Semitism.²⁵

Many arguments about an alleged Arab affinity to Nazism and Fascism revolve around the presence of paramilitary youth movements in Arab countries. Such movements – their uniformed appearance and shows of discipline in street parades, as well as their use of street violence in a competition over control of public space – were characteristic for urban life during that time all over the world, including Zionist groups in Palestine. In Egypt, Syria, and other places, they functioned as strike forces of nationalist parties, stemming from the respectable bourgeoisie, as in the Syrian National Bloc, or from radical nationalist parties such as Young Egypt. The Egyptian Muslim Brothers had a strike force, too, but the movement's leader, Hasan al-Bannā, distanced himself from the nationalist and racist chauvinism of the Nazis. The Syrian Socialist Nationalist Party of the Christian Anṭūn Sa'āda came closest in its mimicry of Fascist models, using a symbol reminiscent of a swastika and a very rigid leadership structure, but Sa'āda rejected ethnic exclusivity as a basis of nationalism. The copying of slogans and the usage of symbols and gestures – all movements used the Fascist salute – should be considered a matter of fashion, as a part of a widely adopted Fascist imagery, but not as an all-out endorsement of ideology. The various fascistic youth movements were deeply involved in local politics and shared very little with the class struggle and mass politics of European Fascist youth movements. The al-Futuwwa youth movement in Iraq was state mandated but for students of secondary education only, who were a small group in the 1930s and 1940s. Participation in al-Futuwwa activities was mandatory also for Jewish students of public high schools. In memory, they looked back fondly to the outdoorsy community activities it offered. Only the most radicalized parts of al-Futuwwa were mobilized in May 1941 to maintain order in the streets and, in the culmination of events, they participated in the Farhūd.²⁶

Ultimately, Arab political movements and their agendas and activities remained too fractured, community driven, and inconsequential to be easily subsumed under an ideological label. After World War II, the clique interests of military elites or clans trumped agendas of a political transformation of societies. Fascism therefore remained a distant mirror for Middle Eastern parties and leaders, reflecting little more than appearances and bits of political language.²⁷

After the Holocaust

Mohamed Helmy's induction as a "Righteous Among the Nations" stirred up a great deal of media attention in 2013, especially in the West and in Israel. Family members in Egypt – Helmy himself had died in 1982 in Berlin – felt quite uneasy about this unexpected involvement in a story that foregrounds empathy with Jews according to rules of historical commemoration defined by the Zionist arch-enemy, as popular culture in the Arab world perceives it. In the eyes of many Arabs and Muslims, the commemoration represented Israeli rhetorical grandstanding and diversion in the Middle East conflict, as opposed to Israeli and Western considerations that Holocaust narratives constitute a shared heritage of victimhood and historical responsibility. In this context, Helmy's Egyptian family probably did not perceive the induction of their forebear as an honor but as a threat to their standing in society.²⁸

The deterioration of Muslim-Jewish relations in the twentieth century in the Arab world and beyond is a tragic consequence of the conflict over Palestine, which has triggered violence and ethnic hatred on both sides. The Holocaust accelerated the founding of the State of Israel in the face of an unprecedented refugee crisis among Jewish displaced persons in Europe and under the impression of the unspeakable crimes of annihilation. The Zionist

project, though, had been predicated on the constant threat of anti-Semitic persecution in Europe long before the Holocaust. Imperialism and the regional upheaval of World War I provided the conditions for implementation of the project's plans.

Immediately after the World War II, the Holocaust became a primary focal point in a competition of self-justification and denunciation of the opponent in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Some Zionist historians and publicists projected the Holocaust back on violent Jewish-Arab clashes and Arab assaults of the interwar period and emphasized occasions of Arab-Nazi collaboration as representative of a general meeting of the minds. The Mufti's contacts with Hitler and his alleged collaboration with Eichmann received widespread media attention during the Eichmann trial in the early 1960s, but the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, an observer of the trial, wrote that she considered the accusation rumor rather than fact.²⁹

A major shortcoming of Palestinian and Arab leaders, intellectuals, and educators has been the failure to resist easy explanations and the adoption of imagery from European anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial. Immediately after the war of 1948, Arabic translations of the classic European anti-Semitic text "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a turn-of-the-century Russian forgery, began to give anti-Zionist activist literature an anti-Semitic bent. It has become a mainstay of anti-Jewish polemics in Arab states, culminating in the absorption of some of its racially motivated conspiracy theories into the Hamas Charter in the late 1980s. Holocaust references were restricted, at first, to accusations that Israel was abusing the past to gain political leverage internationally but moved to outright Holocaust denial starting in the 1970s. Respective Arab literature is strongly influenced by such European authors as David Irving or Roger Garaudy. The denial trend, however, coincided in a contradictory way with allegations that Israeli occupation troops behaved in ways comparable to the SS and that Zionist authorities had cooperated with the Nazis in the so called Haavara Agreement that facilitated Jewish immigration to Palestine from Germany through the transfer of assets to help Jews fulfill the quota of available currency necessary to obtain a visa.³⁰

A critical engagement with the disconnect of collective historical consciousness and instrumentalization of memory occurring between the Arab and Jewish communities has been difficult over the last decade and continues to involve personal risks. Discursive limitations led the Palestinian public to shun Professor Mohammed Dajani of al-Quds University after he led a group of his students on a visit to Auschwitz as part of an educational and reconciliation tour sponsored by a German university. Such a public stance underlines the fact that the Israeli occupation dominates the Palestinian political sphere to such an extent that any attempt to shift and adjust perspectives is considered a questionable diversion rather than productive empathy.³¹

On a larger stage, former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Holocaust denial is a targeted provocation at a national and international level. The back and forth between Ahmadinejad and the international media illustrates the acute dynamics of a verbal altercation in which the originator of the insults is all too aware of the sensitivities of a Western audience and its predictable outcry. In an international discursive context of Muslim anti-Zionism, which is accepting of Holocaust denial, he could exploit Western accusations to score points with the political public of his own national and regional sphere of influence.

Attempts to disrupt the exclusive logic of these separate Arab and Israeli discourses of injustice and suffering remain rare. They emerge out of contexts of local Palestinian-Israeli initiatives that are trying to transcend the silence between the two communities of collective memory and to move toward establishing space for empathy, acting in realms of art and literature. Thus far, only few regional voices of the Arab world have overcome the discursive

limitations. In 2015, the Egyptian TV series *The Jewish Quarter* was broadcast during Ramadan to a large audience. Its nostalgic references to a cosmopolitan Cairo of the past might be signs of a change in the discourse.³²

Notes

- 1 Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), pp. 5–29; and Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Cambridge Middle East Studies 21 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), passim.
- 2 “Muslim and anti-Muslim groups go to war in bus, print ads,” *The Washington Post*, 21 May 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/muslim-and-anti-muslim-groups-go-to-war-in-bus-print-ads/2014/05/21/ad062448-e114-11e3-9442-54189bf1a809_story.html; “Anti-Muslim ads on Washington buses feature Hitler, Mufti of Jerusalem,” *Haaretz.com*, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/world/.premium-1.591451>; and “Israel circulates photo of Hitler greeting late Palestinian Mufti,” *Haaretz.com*, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/israel-circulates-photo-of-hitler-greeting-late-palestinian-mufti-1.280531> (All accessed: 12 June 2015).
- 3 Patrick Bernhard, “Behind the battle lines: Italian atrocities and the persecution of Arabs, Berbers, and Jews in North Africa during World War II,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 26 (2012): 433–435; Rachel Simon, “It could have happened there: the Jews of Libya during the Second World War,” *Africana Journal* 16 (1994): 391–422; Robert B. Satloff, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006), pp. 28–97; Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz: Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006), pp. 199–208; Klaus-Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers, *Nazi Palestine: The Plans for the Extermination of the Jews in Palestine* [English version], trans. Krista Smith (New York: Enigma Books, 2011).
- 4 Mallmann and Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, pp. 137–147, and passim; a critical assessment: Peter Wien, “Coming to terms with the past: German academia and historical relations between the Arab lands and Nazi Germany,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (2010): 311–321.
- 5 Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012), pp. 100–140, and passim; Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism: Authoritarian, Totalitarian and Pro-Fascist Inclinations, 1932–1941* (London: Routledge, 2006), 88–112; and Israel Gershoni and James P. Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 210–265.
- 6 Daphne Tsimhoni, “The Pogrom (Farhud) Against the Jews of Baghdad in 1941: Jewish and Arab Approaches,” in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide*, eds. John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2001), p. 570.
- 7 Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, part II; and Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, pp. 122–125.
- 8 Renate Dieterich, “Rashid ‘Ali al-Kailani in Berlin – ein irakischer Nationalist in NS-Deutschland,” *Al-Rafidayn: Jahrbuch zur Geschichte und Kultur des modernen Iraq*, 3 (1995): 47–79. Amin al-Husayni’s Berlin years are covered in Klaus Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini, und die Nationalsozialisten: Ethnien, Regionen, Konflikte* (New York: P. Lang, 1988), passim; René Wildangel, *Zwischen Achse und Mandatsmacht: Palästina und der Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Zentrum Moderner Orient, ZMO-Studien 24 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2007), pp. 327–368.
- 9 Simon Wiesenthal, *Grossmufti – Grossagent der Achse: Tatsachenbericht* (Salzburg: Ried-Verlag, 1947).
- 10 Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, pp. 164–167; and Astrid Ley and Günter Morsch, *Medizin und Verbrechen: Das Krankenrevier des KZ Sachsenhausen 1936–1945* (Berlin: Metropol, 2007), pp. 379–393. An internal discussion about the visit to Sachsenhausen is recorded in the archives of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, Kempner Materials, RG-71.005.06, Box 235 (Auswärtiges Amt, Section/Abteilung PolVII, 6447g and gII).
- 11 Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, *Mudhakkirāt al-Ḥajj Muḥammad Amīn al-Ḥusaynī* [The Memoirs of Hajj Muhammad Amin al-Husayni], ed. ‘Ab al-Karīm ‘Umar (Damascus: Ahālī), 1999, p. 126 f; Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem*, pp. 149–164; see several speeches in Gerhard Höpp, *Mufti-Papiere: Briefe, Memoranden, Reden und Aufrufe Amin al-Husainis aus dem Exil, 1940–1945*, ZMO-Studien 16 (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2001). Compare Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), passim.

- 12 Umar Ryad, "From an officer in the Ottoman army to a Muslim publicist and armament agent in Berlin: Zekî Hishmat Kirâm (1886–1946)," *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 63:3–4 (2006), pp. 235–268. The letter is in the archives of Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin, Gerhard Höpp papers, 1.21.13: BArch [?], R43II/142ia, RK7599B: Dr. Zeki H. Kiram, [an den] Führer und Reichskanzler, Herrn Adolf Hitler, Berlin, Sanaa, Yemen, May 19, 1936; Berlin, 27 June 1936, An Herrn Dr. Zeki H. Kiram-Bey, Berlin Tempelhof, Zum Schreiben vom 19. Mai d.J., gez. N.d.H.Min.Dirig. Dr. Meerwald.
- 13 Satloff, *Among the Righteous*, pp. 73–137.
- 14 David Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, 2014, passim; on the Arab contingent see pp. 226–228.
- 15 "Yad Vashem Names Egyptian First Arab Righteous Among the Nations," Haaretz.com, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/.premium-1.549718> (Accessed: 4 June 2015). On Albanian Muslims among the righteous, see Norman H. Gershman, *Besa: Muslims Who Saved Jews in World War II* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2008), passim.
- 16 Satloff, *Among the Righteous*, pp. 99–137.
- 17 Ethan Katz, "Did the Paris Mosque save Jews? A mystery and its memory," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 102 (2012): 256–287; Satloff, *Among the Righteous*, pp. 139–158.
- 18 Gerhard Höpp, "Der verdrängte Diskurs: Arabische Opfer des Nationalsozialismus," in *Blind für die Geschichte? Arabische Begegnungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus*, eds. Gerhard Höpp, Peter Wien, and René Wildangel (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2004), pp. 238–252. Höpp was able to identify approximately 450 Arab concentration camp (KZ) inmates by name but maintains that there were probably many more. Among those identified, 34 were in Auschwitz, 148 in Buchenwald, 84 in Dachau, 62 in Mauthausen, 42 in Sachsenhausen, and 4 in Lublin-Majdanek. Most were North Africans, only few from Egypt and the Middle East. See also Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, pp. 170f, 242–244, 307–309. On p. 243, Motadel presents a list of Muslim KZ inmates from the Eastern Front and the Balkans, prepared for Himmler in 1944 to identify possible recruits.
- 19 St. Médard was one of the camps where the Wehrmacht preferably interned "Black and Colored" POWs. See *ibid.*, p. 224.
- 20 ZMO Höpp, 1.15.44: Brandenburgisches Lha, Zuchthaus Brandenburg, file Ali Touré: Abschrift, Gericht der Feldkommandantur 529, RHL. Nr. 62/1944/Pro., Gericht des Befehlshabers Südwestfrankreich St.L. 115/44, Feldurteil, 7 Juli 1944.
- 21 ZMO Höpp, 1.15.44: Brandenburgisches Lha, Zuchthaus Brandenburg, file Ali Touré: Brandenburg/Havel-Görden, A, Gefangenenbuchnummer 2280/44; Zuchthaus Rheinbach, A1, Gefangenenbuchnummer F499/44.
- 22 Höpp, "Der verdrängte Diskurs," pp. 229, 239f.
- 23 Bernhard, "Behind the battle lines."
- 24 A foundational text is Matthias Küntzel, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11* (New York: Telos Press, 2007).
- 25 Orit Bashkin, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008); Gershoni and Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*; I. Gershoni (ed.), *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014); Götz Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon: The Ambivalence of the German Option, 1933–1945* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*; René Wildangel, *Zwischen Achse und Mandatsmacht*.
- 26 Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, p. 79; James P. Jankowski, *Egypt's Young Rebels: "Young Egypt": 1933–1952* (Palo Alto, CA: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1975), passim; Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920–1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), pp. 471–476; Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East: Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 255–278; Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, pp. 88–112; Labib Zuwiyya Yamak, *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party: An Ideological Analysis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Centre for Middle Eastern Studies, 1966), pp. 77–88.
- 27 Peter Wien, "Arabs and Fascism: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives," *Die Welt des Islams* 52 (2012): 331–350.
- 28 "Family of First Arab Righteous Among the Nations Rejects Israeli Recognition," Haaretz.com, <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/1.553413>. (Accessed: 4 June 2015).

- 29 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), p. 13,19 (first published in 1963).
- 30 Meir Litvak and Esther Webman, *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), passim; Stefan Wild, "Die arabische Rezeption der 'Protokolle der Weisen von Zion'," in *Islamstudien ohne Ende*, eds. Rainer Brunner et al., *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 54,1 (Würzburg: Harrassowitz, 2002), pp. 517–528; Götz Nordbruch, "Geschichte im Konflikt. Der Nationalsozialismus als Thema aktueller Debatten in der ägyptischen Öffentlichkeit," in *Blind für die Geschichte? Arabische Begegnungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus*, eds. Gerhard Höpp, Peter Wien, and René Wildangel, (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz Verlag, 2004), pp. 269–294.
- 31 William Booth, "Palestinian university students' trip to Auschwitz causes uproar," *The Washington Post*, 12 April 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/middle_east/palestinian-university-students-trip-to-auschwitz-causes-uproar/2014/04/12/c162ba42-c27d-11e3-9ee7-02c1e10a03f0_story.html (Accessed: 4 June 2015); William Booth, "Auschwitz trip: 'I have no regrets,' says Palestinian professor," *The Independent*, 13 April 2014 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/auschwitz-trip-i-have-no-regrets-says-palestinian-professor-9257609.html> (Accessed: 4 June 2015). The discursive limitations are analyzed in Omar Kamil, *Der Holocaust im arabischen Gedächtnis: Eine Diskursgeschichte 1945–1967*, Schriften des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), passim.
- 32 Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, "Deliberating the Holocaust and the Nakba: disruptive empathy and binationalism in Israel/Palestine," *Journal of Genocide Research* 16 (2014): 77–99; and "Ramadan: Historical TV dramas break with past in Muslim world," <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-33167218> (Accessed: 22 June 2015).

Further reading

- Achcar, Gilbert, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010). Achcar's book has been a ground-breaking study. It was the first book-length publication explaining in great detail the discursive ruptures between Arabs and Jews with regard to the Holocaust, based on the historical record of Arab-German relations and Arab perceptions of Nazism, and on an assessment of Arab ways to deal with post-Holocaust and post-Nakba memory culture.
- Bashkin, Orit, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).
- Bashkin, Orit, *The Other Iraq: Pluralism and Culture in Hashemite Iraq* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008). Bashkin's two books highlight the pluralism of opinions and social positions in Iraqi society during the crucial interwar period and before the Iraqi revolution, and the position of Jews within this setup.
- Gensicke, Klaus, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini, und die Nationalsozialisten: Ethnien, Regionen, Konflikte* (New York: P. Lang, 1988). Gensicke offers the most detailed assessment available of the interactions between the Mufti and the Germans during the Nazi period. The 1988 edition is preferable to the 2007 revised edition.
- Gershoni, Israel (ed.), *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014). The edited volume presents the latest in international scholarship on the topic of Arab-Nazi and Arab-Fascist relations.
- Gershoni, Israel, and Jankowski, James P., *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship Versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010). Gershoni and Jankowski co-author the most detailed country-specific study about the topic of an Arab-Nazi nexus that is available. They focus on Egypt as the crucial cultural hub of the Arab world of the period.
- Kamil, Omar, *Der Holocaust im arabischen Gedächtnis: Eine Diskursgeschichte 1945–1967*, Schriften des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts 15 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012). Kamil's book contains a sophisticated assessment of Arab intellectual engagements with the post-war shaping of the Holocaust as a paradigm of ultimate violence in an international humanistic discourse. He presents a number of case studies of interaction with eminent Western thinkers.

- Katz, Ethan, "Did the Paris Mosque save Jews? A mystery and its memory," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 102 (2012): 256–287. The article presents the historical record and the contemporary debate about the World War II record of the Paris Mosque and its activities to protect French Jews from deportation.
- Litvak, Meir, and Webman, Esther, *From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). Litvak and Webman's detailed study inquires into the evolution of an internal Arab Holocaust discourse from the end of World War II until the present day.
- Motadel, David, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2014). Motadel offers a detailed account of Nazi-German politics vis-à-vis Islam and Muslims in terms of both propaganda and the recruitment of legionnaires for the German forces during the war.
- Satloff, Robert B., *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006). Satloff presents a popular account of his investigations to find Arabs and Berbers in North Africa who protected Jews in the face of the threats of Vichy-French rule and German occupation during the World War II.
- Wien, Peter, "Arabs and Fascism: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives," *Die Welt des Islams*, 52 (2012): 331–350. Wien's article is a detailed assessment of the state of the art in scholarship about Arab engagement with Fascist politics and ideology.
- Zertal, Idith, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, Cambridge Middle East Studies 21 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Zertal provides an analysis of the role the Holocaust played in the establishment and maintenance of a citizenship and nationhood discourse in Israeli society.