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## **Hitler's Legacy: Islamic Antisemitism and the impact of the Muslim Brotherhood**

by Matthias Küntzel

Today I will be laying special emphasis on the antisemitism of the ancestor of all forms of Islamism, the Muslim Brotherhood. Why? Because it seems to me that this organization has a particularly strong presence in Britain. Because – as far as I can tell - only in Britain has it succeeded in forging an alliance with certain sections of the left – the Socialist Workers Party and Ken Livingstone spring to mind here. This alliance might also partly explain why one hears proposals being voiced in Britain that leave us in Germany, mindful of what happened in 1933, simply stunned. I am referring here to proposals for a boycott of Israel and I appreciate the British government's response to the "Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism" which states that "such selective boycotts ... are anti-Jewish in practice" and are "an assault on academic freedom and intellectual exchange."<sup>1</sup>

Islamic antisemitism does not of course only affect Britain. In some circles in Germany too antisemitism has increasingly become a part of Muslim identity. We hear "Jew" being used as a term of abuse, we witness the adulation of rappers who call for attacks on Jews, and we hear the term "Nazi" used as a compliment.

In Berlin a Muslim schoolboy called for "all the Jews to be gassed". A gang of school students trapped one of their fellow pupils in a chemistry lab, telling him "now we will turn on the gas taps", while during a visit to the Museum of German History a group of Muslim students gathered round a replica of an Auschwitz gas chamber and applauded. You see, they did not view the Holocaust as a warning, nor were they denying that it happened; it was

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism: Government Response, 29<sup>th</sup> March 2007, p. 12

being taken as an inspiration, as proof that it is possible, that millions of Jews can be killed. But are things any better in Britain?

“In Hampstead Garden Suburb, swastikas and the words ‘Kill all Jews’ and ‘Allah’ were daubed on the house and car of Justin Stebbing” reports the *Times*. “Dr Stebbing, who works at a hospital, said: ‘I felt violated. It’s horrible.’”<sup>2</sup> Swastika, “kill all Jews” and “Allah” – the very topic of my talk today.

According to journalist Richard Littlejohn, “I met a Jack the Ripper tour guide in East London who was beaten up by a group of Muslim youths, who took one look at his period costume – long black coat and black hat – and assumed he was an Orthodox Jew and therefore deserving of a kicking. They didn’t want a ‘dirty Jew’ in ‘their’ neighbourhood”.

Finally an opinion poll of 2006 – according to the *Times* - “revealed that a horrifying 37 per cent of Muslims polled believed that the Jewish community in Britain was a legitimate target; ...and no fewer than 46 % thought the Jewish community was in league with Freemasons to control the media and politics.”<sup>3</sup>

This is not merely the ‘normal’ anti-Semitism of racial prejudice or religious and social discrimination. This is also not the kind of hostility to Jews found in the Koran. We are dealing here with a hardcore antisemitism which dehumanises and demonises Jews and which has a great deal in common with Nazi ideology. In Islamism this hatred of Jews is given a further radical edge by its association with the idea of religious war – with a global religious mission, a belief in Paradise and the rewards of martyrdom. This makes it at the same time suicidal and genocidal.<sup>4</sup>

Let’s take the example of Mohammed Sidique Khan, the ringleader of the London tube bombings, who lived in Leeds and had worked as a youth

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<sup>2</sup> Joanna Bale and Anthony Browne, Attacks on Jews soar since Lebanon, in: *The Times* (London), September 2, 2006

<sup>3</sup> Melanie Phillip’s Diary, On February 3, 2007. She is referring here to the *The Times* of February 7, 2006. See also the Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Antisemitism, September 2006, p. 30.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Wistrich, Facing the “New” Antisemitism, Keynote address at the Conference of the Global Forum against Antisemitism in Jerusalem on 12 February 2007.

worker in Beeston. What drove him to blow himself up amidst innocent people?

The testamentary video of Sidique Khan is very clear. It shows no sign of desperation but a soldier's determination. Let me quote Sidique Khan: "Our driving motivation doesn't come from tangible commodities that this world has to offer... We are at war, and I am an soldier."<sup>5</sup>

The testamentary video of Shehzad Tenweer, another 7/7 perpetrator who lived in Leeds and studied at Leeds Metropolitan University, is very clear as well. Let me quote him: "We are 100 % committed to the cause of Islam. We love death the way you love life."<sup>6</sup>

This culture of death which extinguishes the instinct that normally unites all human beings – the survival instinct – is something beyond imagination. It is something George Orwell was not able to write about. The shocking malice of such messages leads people who wish to keep a firm hold on normal patterns of reason to suppress them or block them out. "We instinctively look away, as we do whenever we are confronted with monstrous deformity," writes David Gelernter. "Nothing is harder or more frightening to look at than a fellow human who is bent out of shape."<sup>7</sup> But while this may to some extent excuse the attitude of the ordinary citizen, it cannot justify the way the media, the academia and the politicians have been behaving. Our task is to do the opposite. We must not look away, but instead look inside the fantasy world of the perpetrators and seek to grasp the immanent logic behind their actions. If one wants to combat and repel the Islamist ideology, one must first take it seriously as a specific outlook with its own principles and history.

And indeed, contemporary Islamism can only be explained in the context of its 80-year old history.

This is shown by the example of Shehzad Tenweer. With his "We love death the way you love life" he was placing himself in the direct tradition of Hassan

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<sup>5</sup> New Al-Jazeera Videos: London Suicide Bomber Before 'Entering Gardens of Paradise' in: *MEMRI Special Dispatch Series*, No. 979, September 3, 2005.

<sup>6</sup> *MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series* No. 1201, July 11, 2006.

<sup>7</sup> David Gelernter, Beyond Barbarism in the Middle East, *Jewish World Review*, 19 March 2002.

al-Banna, who founded the Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. Ten years later, in 1938, Hassan al-Banna published his concept of jihad in an article entitled "The Industry of Death" which was to become famous. Here, the term "Industry of Death" denotes not something horrible but an ideal. Al-Banna wrote: "Only to a nation that perfects the industry of death and which knows how to die nobly, God gives proud life in this world and eternal grace in the life to come." This slogan was enthusiastically taken up by the "Troops of God," as the Muslim Brothers called themselves. As their battalions marched down Cairo's boulevards in semi-fascist formation they would burst into song: "We are not afraid of death, we desire it. . . . Let us die to redeem the Muslims!"

The approach I intend to take today is a historical one. My talk centres on three excursions into history. The first takes us in greater detail back to the roots of Islamism in the Muslim Brotherhood.

### **The roots of Islamism**

Despite common misconceptions, Islamism was born not during the 1960s but during the 1930s. Its rise was inspired not by the failure of Nasserism but by the rise of Fascism and of Nazism.

It was the Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928 in Egypt, that established Islamism as a mass movement. The significance of the Brotherhood to Islamism is comparable to that of the Bolshevik party to communism: It was and remains to this day the ideological reference point and organizational core for all later Islamist groups, including al-Qaeda and Hamas or the group around Sidique Khan.

It is true that British colonial policy produced Islamism, insofar as Islamism viewed itself as a resistance movement against "cultural modernity." Their "liberation struggle", however, had more in common with the "liberation struggle" of the Nazis than with any kind of progressive movement.

Thus, the Brotherhood advocated the replacement of Parliamentaryism by an "organic" state order based on the Caliphate. It demanded the abolition of

interest and profit in favour of a forcibly imposed community of interests between capital and labour.

At the forefront of the Brotherhood's efforts lay the struggle against all the sensual and "materialistic" temptations of the capitalist and communist world. At the tender age of 13, the pubescent al-Banna had founded a "Society for the Prevention of the Forbidden"<sup>8</sup> and this is in essence what the Brothers were and are - a community of male zealots, whose primary concern is to prevent all the sensual and sexual sins forbidden according to their interpretation of the Koran. Their signature was most clearly apparent when they periodically reduced their local night clubs, brothels and cinemas - constantly identified with Jewish influence - to ashes.

Gripped by this phobia, the Society of Muslim Brothers, from the day of its foundation, provided a haven for any man dedicated to the restoration of male supremacy. At the very time when the liberation of women from the inferiority decreed by Islam was gradually getting under way the Muslim Brotherhood set itself up as the rallying point for the restoration of patriarchal domination.

It was on the one hand a conservative religious movement: For al-Banna, only a return to orthodox Islam could pave the way for an end to the intolerable conditions and humiliations of Muslims and newly establish the righteous Islamic order.<sup>9</sup> It was at the same time a revolutionary political movement and as such in many respects a trailblazer. The Brotherhood was the first Islamic organization to put down roots in the cities and to organize a mass movement able in 1948 to muster one million people in Egypt alone. It was a populist and activist, not an elitist movement and it was the first movement that systematically set about building a kind of "Islamist international."

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<sup>8</sup> Abd Al-Fattah Muhammad El-Awaisi, *The Muslim Brothers and the Palesatine Question 1928-1947*, London 1998, p. 118.

<sup>9</sup> Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers*, London 1969, p. 203.

The Islamists' answer to everything was the call for a new order based on *sharia*. But the Brotherhood's jihad was not directed primarily against the British. Rather, it focused almost exclusively on Zionism and the Jews. Membership in the Brotherhood shot up from 800 to 200,000 between 1936 and 1938.<sup>10</sup> In those two years the Brotherhood conducted only one major campaign in Egypt, a campaign directed against Zionism and the Jews.

The starting shot for this campaign, which established the Brotherhood as an antisemitic mass movement, was fired by a rebellion in Palestine directed against Jewish immigration and initiated by the notorious Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Amin al-Husseini. The Brotherhood organized mass demonstrations in Egyptian cities under the slogans "Down With the Jews!" and "Jews Get Out of Egypt and Palestine!" Their Jew-hatred drew on the one hand on Islamic sources. First, Islamists considered, and still consider, Palestine an Islamic territory, *Dar al-Islam*, where Jews must not run a single village, let alone a state. Second, Islamists justify their aspiration to eliminate the Jews of Palestine by invoking the example of Muhammad, who in the 7th century not only expelled two Jewish tribes from Medina, but also beheaded the entire male population of a third Jewish tribe, before proceeding to sell all the women and children into slavery. Third, they find support and encouragement for their actions and plans in the Koranic dictum that Jews are to be considered the worst enemy of the believers.

Their Jew-hatred was also inspired by Nazi influences: Leaflets called for a boycott of Jewish goods and Jewish shops, and the Brotherhood's newspaper, *al-Nadhir*, carried a regular column on "The Danger of the Jews of Egypt," which published the names and addresses of Jewish businessmen and allegedly Jewish newspaper publishers all over the world, attributing every evil, from communism to brothels, to the "Jewish danger."

The Brotherhood's campaign used not only Nazi-like patterns of action and slogans but also German funding. As the historian Brynjar Lia recounts in his monograph on the Brotherhood, "Documents seized in the flat of Wilhelm

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<sup>10</sup> El-Awaisi, op. cit., p. 98.

Stellbogen, the Director of the German News Agency affiliated to the German Legation in Cairo, show that prior to October 1939 the Muslim Brothers received subsidies from this organization. Stellbogen was instrumental in transferring these funds to the Brothers, which were considerably larger than the subsidies offered to other anti-British activists. These transfers appear to have been coordinated by Hajj Amin al-Husseini and some of his Palestinian contacts in Cairo.”<sup>11</sup>

To summarize our first trip into history: We saw that the rise of Nazism and Islamism took place in the same period. This was no accident, for both movements represented attempts to answer the world economic crisis of 1929 and the crisis of liberal capitalism. However different their answers may have been, they shared a crucial central feature: in both cases the sense of belonging to a homogeneous community was created through mobilizing against the Jews.

Initially, however, European anti-Semitism had proved to be an ineffective tool in the Arab world. Why? Because the European fantasy of the Jewish world conspiracy was foreign to the original Islamic view of the Jews. Only in the legend of Jesus Christ did the Jews appear as a deadly and powerful force who allegedly went so far as to kill God's only son. Islam was quite a different story. Here it was not the Jews who murdered the Prophet, but the Prophet who in Medina murdered the Jews. As a result, the characteristic features of Christian antisemitism did not develop in the Muslim world. There were no fears of Jewish conspiracy and domination, no charges of diabolic evil. Instead, the Jews were treated with contempt or condescending tolerance. This cultural inheritance made the idea that the Jews of all people could represent a permanent danger for the Muslims and might control the media and politics in league with Freemasons seem absurd. This brings us to our second point: The transfer of European anti-Semitism to the Muslim world between 1937 and 1945 under the impact of Nazi Propaganda.

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<sup>11</sup> Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt*, Reading (Ithaca Press 1998), p. 179.

## Islamism and National Socialism

Amin al-Husseini, the infamous Mufti of Jerusalem, who was closely connected to the Muslim Brotherhood, was already seeking an alliance with Nazi Germany as early as spring 1933. At first, however, Berlin was dismissive. On the one hand, Hitler had already stated his belief in the "racial inferiority" of the Arabs in *Mein Kampf* while, on the other, the Nazis were extremely anxious not to jeopardise British appeasement.

In June 1937, however, the Nazis changed course. The trigger was the Peel Plan's two-state solution. Berlin wanted at all costs to prevent the birth of a Jewish state and thus welcomed the Mufti's advances. Arab antisemitism would now get a powerful new promoter.

A central role in the propaganda offensive was played by a Nazi wireless station, now almost totally forgotten. Since the 1936 Berlin Olympics a village called Zeesen, located to the south of Berlin, had been home to what was at the time the world's most powerful short-wave radio transmitter. Between April 1939 and April 1945, Radio Zeesen reached out to the illiterate Muslim masses through daily Arabic programmes, which also went out in Persian and Turkish. At that time listening to the radio in the Arab world took place primarily in public squares or bazaars and coffee houses. No other station was more popular than this Nazi Zeesen service, which skilfully mingled antisemitic propaganda with quotations from the Koran and Arabic music. The Second World War allies were presented as lackeys of the Jews and the picture of the "United Jewish Nations" drummed into the audience. At the same time, the Jews were attacked as the worst enemies of Islam: "The Jew since the time of Muhammad has never been a friend of the Muslim, the Jew is the enemy and it pleases Allah to kill him".<sup>12</sup>

Since 1941, Zeesen's Arabic programming had been directed by the Mufti of Jerusalem who had emigrated to Berlin. The Mufti's aim was to "unite all the Arab lands in a common hatred of the British and Jews", as he wrote in a letter to Adolf Hitler. Antisemitism, based on the notion of a Jewish world

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<sup>12</sup> Seth Arsenian, 'Wartime Propaganda in the Middle East', *The Middle East Journal*, October 1948, Vol. II, no. 4, p. 421; Robert Melka, *East The Axis and the Arab Middle 1930-1945* (University of Minnesota, 1966), pp 47ff; Heinz Tillmann, *Deutschlands Araberpolitik im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (East Berlin, 1965), pp. 83ff. (German)



conspiracy, however, was not rooted in Islamic tradition but, rather, in European ideological models.

The Mufti therefore seized on the only instrument that really moved the Arab masses: Islam. He invented a new form of Jew-hatred by recasting it in an Islamic mould. He was the first to translate Christian antisemitism into Islamic language, thus creating an “Islamic antisemitism”. His first major manifesto bore the title “Islam-Judaism. Appeal of the Grand Mufti to the Islamic World in the Year 1937”. This 31-page pamphlet reached the entire Arab world and there are indications that Nazi agents helped draw it up. Let me quote at least a short passage from it:

“The struggle between the Jews and Islam began when Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina... The Jewish methods were, even in those days, the same as now. As always, their weapon was slander... They said that Muhammad was a swindler... they began to ask Muhammad senseless and insoluble questions... and they endeavoured to destroy the Muslims... If the Jews could betray Muhammad in this way, how will they betray Muslims today? The verses from the Koran and *hadith* prove to you that the Jews were the fiercest opponents of Islam and are still trying to destroy it.”

What we have here is a new popularized form of Jew-hatred, based on the oriental folk tale tradition, which moves constantly back and forth between the seventh and twentieth centuries. This kind of Jew-hatred is used today by the British group Hizb ut-Tahir. In 2002 this organization reproduced a leaflet in its website saying: “The Jews are a people of slander ...a treacherous people ...they fabricate lies and twist words from their right context...Kill them wherever you find them.”<sup>13</sup>

Classical Islamic literature had as a rule treated Muhammad’s clash with the Jews of Medina as a minor episode in the Prophet’s life. The anti-Jewish passages in the Koran and *hadith* had lain dormant or were considered of little significance during previous centuries.

These elements were now invested with new life and vigour. Now the Mufti began to ascribe a truly cosmic significance to the allegedly hostile attitude

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<sup>13</sup> Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry, op. cit., p. 28.

of the Jewish tribes of Medina to the Prophet. Now he picked out the occasional outbursts of hatred found in the Koran and *hadith* and drummed them relentlessly into the minds of Muslims at every available opportunity – including via the Arabic short-wave radio station in Berlin.

Radio Zeesen was a success not only in Cairo; it made an impact in Tehran as well. One of its regular listeners was a certain Ruhollah Khomeini. When in the winter of 1938 the 36-year-old Khomeini returned to the Iranian city of Qom from Iraq he “had brought with him a radio receiver set made by the British company Pye ... The radio proved a good buy... Many mullahs would gather at his home, often on the terrace, in the evenings to listen to Radio Berlin and the BBC”, writes his biographer Amir Taheri. Even the German consulate in Tehran was surprised by the success of this propaganda.

“Throughout the country spiritual leaders are coming out and saying ‘that the twelfth Imam has been sent into the world by God in the form of Adolf Hitler’” we learn from a report to Berlin in February 1941.

So, “without any legation involvement, an increasingly effective form of propaganda has arisen, which sees the Führer and Germany as the answer to every prayer... One way to promote this trend is sharply to emphasize Muhammad’s struggle against the Jews in the olden days and that of the Führer today.”<sup>14</sup> While Khomeini was not a follower of Hitler, those years may well have shaped his anti-Jewish attitudes which in turn would later shape the attitudes of his most ardent follower Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

To summarize: The historical record gives the lie to the assumption that Islamic anti-Semitism was triggered by Zionist or Israeli policies. In 1937 – eleven years before the founding of Israel! – Germany began to disseminate an Islamic antisemitism that fuses together the traditional Islamic view that the Jews are inferior with the European notion that they are deviously powerful. At one and the same time we find the Jews being derided as “pigs” and “apes”, while simultaneously being demonised as the puppet masters of world politics. This specific form of antisemitism was broadcast to the Islamic world by Radio Zeesen. At the same time the Egyptian Muslim

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<sup>14</sup> Communication of the German Consulate in Teheran to the Auswärtige Amt on 2 February 1941; cited in Klaus-Michael Mallmann und Martin Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz. Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina*, Darmstadt (Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft) 2006, p. 42. (German)

Brotherhood was being subsidized by Nazi Germany and its anti-Jewish agitation promoted. Radio Zeesen ceased operation in April 1945. But why, sixty-two years later, do we find the combination of the swastika and the words “Kill all Jews” and “Allah” in Hampstead and elsewhere? This brings me on to my third and final point.

### **The Second Division of the World**

After May 8, 1945, National Socialism was banned virtually throughout the world. In the Arab world, however, Nazi ideology continued to reverberate. In her report on the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann, Hannah Arendt discussed the reactions to the trial in the Arab media:

“...newspapers in Damascus and Beirut, in Cairo and Jordan did not hide their sympathy for Eichmann or their regret that he ‘had not finished the job’; a broadcast from Cairo on the day the trial opened even injected a slightly anti-German note into its comments, complaining that there was not ‘a single incident in which one German plane flew over one Jewish settlement and dropped one bomb on it throughout the last war.’”<sup>15</sup>

The heartfelt wish to see all Jews eliminated was also expressed in April 2001 by the columnist Ahmad Ragab of Egypt's second largest daily, the state-controlled Al-Akhbar: “[Give] thanks to Hitler. He took revenge on the Israelis in advance, on behalf of the Palestinians. Our one complaint against him was that his revenge was not complete enough.”<sup>16</sup>

Manifestly, following 8 May 1945, there occurred a twofold division of the world. The division in the political and economic system is well known as the Cold War. The second split – which was obscured by the Cold War – concerned the acceptance and continuing influence of National Socialist forms of thought.

<sup>15</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), p. 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Al-Akhbar*, 20 April 2001. Ragab reiterated this thoughts in the editions of 25 April 2001 and 27 May 2001. See Anti-Defamation League, *Holocaust Denial in the Middle East: The Latest Anti-Israel, Anti-Semitic Propaganda Theme*, (New York, 2001), p. 2 ([http://www.adl.org/holocaust/Denial\\_ME/hdme\\_genocide\\_denial.asp#1](http://www.adl.org/holocaust/Denial_ME/hdme_genocide_denial.asp#1)).

In November 1945, just half a year after the end of the Third Reich, the Muslim Brothers carried out the worst anti-Jewish pogroms in Egypt's history, when demonstrators penetrated the Jewish quarters of Cairo on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. They ransacked houses and shops, attacked non-Muslims, and torched the synagogues. Six people were killed, and some hundred more injured. A few weeks later the Islamists' newspapers "turned to a frontal attack against the Egyptian Jews, slandering them as Zionists, Communists, capitalists and bloodsuckers, as pimps and merchants of war, or in general, as subversive elements within all states and societies," as Gudrun Krämer wrote in her study *The Jews in Egypt 1914-1952*.

In 1946, the Brotherhood made sure that Amin al-Husseini, the former grand mufti was granted asylum and a new lease on political life in Egypt. At that time, al-Husseini was being sought on war crime charges by, among others, Britain and the United States. Between 1941 to 1945, he had directed Muslim SS divisions in the Balkans and had been personally responsible for the fact that thousands of Jewish children, who might otherwise have been saved, got killed in the gas chambers. All this was known in 1946. Nonetheless, Britain and the United States chose to forgo criminal prosecution of al-Husseini in order to avoid spoiling their relations with the Arab world. France, which was holding al-Husseini, deliberately let him get away.

The years of Nazi Arabic language propaganda had made the Mufti by far the best-known political figure in the Arab and Islamic world. But the 1946 *de facto* amnesty by the Western powers enhanced the Mufti's prestige even more. The Arabs saw in this impunity, wrote Simon Wiesenthal in 1946, "not only a weakness of the Europeans, but also absolution for past and future occurrences. A man who is enemy no. 1 of a powerful empire – and this empire cannot fend him off – seems to the Arabs to be a suitable leader."<sup>17</sup> Now, the pro-Nazi past began to become a source of pride, not of shame and Nazi criminals on the wanted list in Europe now flooded into the Arab world. When on 10 June 1946 the headlines of the world press announced the

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<sup>17</sup> Simon Wiesenthal, *Großmufti – Großagent der Achse*, Salzburg (Ried-Verlag) 1947, p.2. (German)

Mufti's "escape" from France "...the Arab quarters of Jerusalem and all the Arab towns and villages were garlanded and beflagged, and the great man's portrait was to be seen everywhere", reported a contemporary observer.<sup>18</sup> But the biggest cheerleaders for the Mufti were the Muslim Brothers, who at that time could mobilise a million people in Egypt alone.<sup>19</sup> It was they, indeed, who had organized the Mufti's return and from the start defended his Nazi activities from any criticism.

In the following decades, large print-runs of the most infamous libel of the Jews, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, were published at the behest of two well-known former members of the Muslim Brotherhood, Gamal Abdel Nasser and Anwar Sadat. Both the Muslim Brothers' unconditional solidarity with al-Husseini and their anti-Jewish riots mere months after Auschwitz show that the Brotherhood did not object, to say the least, to Hitler's attempt to exterminate the Jews of Europe

The consequences of this attitude, this blindness to the international impact of the Holocaust, continue to affect the course of the Arab-Jewish conflict today. We see an expression of this in the continuing refusal of the Muslim Council of Britain, a British offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, to recognise the specific nature of the Holocaust and attend Holocaust Memorial Day events.<sup>20</sup> How do Islamists explain international support for Israel in 1947? Ignoring the actual fate of the Jews during World War II, they revert to conspiracy theories, viewing the creation of the Jewish state as a Jewish-inspired attack by the United States and the Soviet Union on the Arab world. Accordingly, the Brotherhood "considered the whole United Nations intervention to be an international plot carried out by the Americans, the Russians and the British, under the influence of Zionism." The mad notion of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy, suppressed in Germany since May 8, 1945, survived and flourished in the political culture of the Arab world.

An especially striking example is the charter adopted in 1988 by the Muslim Brotherhood in Palestine, better known as Hamas. In this charter--which

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<sup>18</sup> Daphne Trevor, *Under the White Paper* (Jerusalem, 1948), pp. 206ff.

<sup>19</sup> Mitchell, op. cit, p. 328.

<sup>20</sup> Daniella Peled, As British remember the Holocaust, Muslim group blasts commemoration, in: *JTA*, January 25, 2005.

"sounds as if it were copied from the pages of *Der Stürmer*," as Sari Nusseibeh, former PLO representative in Jerusalem, has written - Hamas defines itself as "the spearhead and the avant-garde" of the struggle against "world Zionism."

In the Charter, the Jews are accused of being behind all the shocks of modernity: "They aim at undermining societies, destroying values, corrupting consciences, deteriorating character and annihilating Islam. (They are) behind the drug trade and alcoholism in all its kinds so as to facilitate its control and expansion." In addition, they are held responsible for every major catastrophic event in modern history: The Jews "were behind the French Revolution [and] the Communist Revolution. . . . They were behind World War I . . . they were behind World War II, through which they made huge financial gains by trading in armaments, and paved the way for the establishment of their state. . . . There is no war going on anywhere, without having their finger in it. . . . Their plan," states Article 32 of the charter, "is embodied in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and their present conduct is the best proof of what we are saying." How can it be that ardent supporters of Hamas such as Azzam Tamini, who is a regular guest of the BBC and Channel 4, is never seriously challenged about the antisemitic content of the charter?

As in the 1930s and 1940s, the sheer absurdity of such claims makes it difficult for educated people to believe that anyone could take them seriously. Such claims, nonetheless, triggered Pogroms in Russia, were used as the textbook for the Holocaust in Germany and motivated the perpetrators of 9/11. Islamic antisemitism is the reason why Hamas prioritise weapons and war rather than peace and welfare. Islamic antisemitism is the reason why Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah recently warned Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries "not to normalize relations with Israel". Islamic Antisemitism is the only reason why Iran – a county that has neither a territorial dispute with Israel nor a Palestinian refugee problem – calls for the destruction of Israel again and again.

Some observers claim that political concessions by Israel would be enough to stop anti-Jewish hatemongering within the Arab-Islamic world. They are

wrong. For Islamists, the issue at stake is not the welfare of individual Palestinians but the abolition of enlightenment, reason, and individual freedom – achievements whose spread is attributed primarily to the Jews. When even today Germans in Beirut, Damascus, and Amman are greeted with compliments for Adolf Hitler, this can hardly be Israel's doing. When graffiti in Hampstead Garden Suburb combine swastikas with the words “kill all Jews” and “Allah” – what on earth has this to do with Zionism? Our historical excursion has, however, revealed that this combination is in no way accidental. The linkage of “kill all Jews”, “Allah” and the swastika indicates a specific ideology, one that is connected both historically and ideologically with Nazism and needs to be opposed with equal determination.

### **Islamism and the political left**

Why- however – is it proving so difficult to mount such an effort – especially, but not only, here in Britain? Three suggestions as to why this might be: firstly, this struggle – at least for the time being – has to be waged in opposition to a political left which has totally lost its moral compass and political bearings. It is, true that Osama bin Laden has embedded his strategic goal of talibanizing America and the world in a language that seeks to connect with Western protest movements and, beyond that, put Islam in the place of the former Communist system. Thus, in Bin Laden's latest message of September 11, 2007, the fight against global warming is emphasized in order to attract the support of environmentalists, the anti-capitalist drum is banged (“You should liberate yourselves from the deception, shackles and attrition of the capitalist system”) and, lastly, Noam Chomsky, the guru of the leftist anti-globalization struggle, is applauded.

On the other hand, Osama bin Laden and every other Islamist entity such as Hamas, Hezbollah and the Iranian regime do not hide their goal –the destruction of democratic societies and their replacement by a sharia-based dictatorship. The American way of life, constitutes, according to bin Laden's latest message “the greatest form of polytheism and is rebellion against obedience to Allah.” It has to be replaced instead by Allah's rule: “Total obedience must be to the orders and prohibitions of Allah Alone in all

aspects of life.”<sup>21</sup> And this is indeed the heart of the Islamist programme: the accusation that granting people political and personal freedom amounts to heresy.

The naivety or malice with which the political left has nevertheless yielded to the siren songs of Islamism is therefore frightening. Thus, in May 2006 Noam Chomsky met the leader of Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, and defended and praised Hezbollah’s insistence on keeping its arms, in defiance of United Nations decisions;<sup>22</sup> Tariq Ramadan, an eloquent Islamist, has been given star treatment at European anti-globalization events; the Muslim Brotherhood’s TV preacher, Sheikh Qaradawi gets invitations from the left-wing Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone; while the Socialist Workers Party have made the strategic decision to ally with a British offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood – the Muslim Association of Britain – in building the Stop the War Coalition. Last summer thousands of people were mobilised by this alliance to march through central London chanting “we are all Hezbollah now”.<sup>23</sup>

Of course, a left which brands Israel as abstractly “evil” is not going to take Islamic antisemitism seriously. Demonising Israel entails becoming deaf to antisemitism. Or, as Sigmund Freud put it, “a participant in a delusion will not of course recognise it as such”.

2. Many Europeans assume that to draw attention to Islamic antisemitism is to play into the hands of racists. In Britain, multiculturalism has been the official civic religion for so long that any criticism of any minority group seems to have become the equivalent of profanity. Obviously, racism, discriminating against people on the grounds of their origin or skin colour, must be combated. You can’t be, however, multicultural and preach murderous loathing of Jews.<sup>24</sup> In my opinion, we mustn’t defend Jew-hatred

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<sup>21</sup> See: [http://www.nydailynews.com/news/wn\\_report/2007/09/12/2007-09-12\\_translation\\_of\\_osama\\_bin\\_laden\\_video-1.html](http://www.nydailynews.com/news/wn_report/2007/09/12/2007-09-12_translation_of_osama_bin_laden_video-1.html)

<sup>22</sup> ‘US Linguist Noam Chomsky Meets With Hizbullah Leaders in Lebanon’, *MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series*, No. 1165, May 16, 2006.

<sup>23</sup> Udo Wolter, Rote Fatwa, in: *Jungle World*, 4. August 2004. Philip Spencer, The Left and Anti-Semitism today, in: Engage online journal Issue 5, September 2007.

<sup>24</sup> Christopher Hitchens, Londonistan Calling, in: *Vanity Fair*, June 2007.



on spurious “anti-racist” grounds; we should rather distinguish between antisemites and non-antisemites within the Muslim communities. We mustn’t advocate a crude “top” and “bottom” dichotomy, in which the antisemitism of people from Muslim countries is excused as a kind of “anti-imperialism of fools”.<sup>25</sup> We should rather insist that the struggle against discrimination is a universal one.

3. Islamic antisemitism is a taboo subject even in some parts of academia: a story of intellectual betrayal and the corrupting influence of political commitment. Professor Pieter von der Horst from the University of Utrecht in the Netherlands found this out when he proposed to give a lecture on the topic of the anti-Jewish blood libel. The head of the university asked him to excise the section of his lecture dealing with Islamic antisemitism. When he refused to do so, he was invited to appear before a panel of four professors who insisted he remove these passages. A lecture on Islamic antisemitism, so the argument went, might lead to violent reactions from well-organized Muslim student groups.

Similar things have happened to me. When in April 2003 I was invited by Yale University as keynote speaker on the topic of “Islamic Terrorism and Antisemitism: The Mission against Modernity”, there was such an outpouring of protest that the organizers changed the programme. The original title of one of the panels - “Islamic Jihad. A Case of Global Non-State Terrorism” - was changed to “Global, Non-State Terrorism”. In addition a speaker was added to the podium whose sole qualification was that of being President of the local “Palestine Right to Return Coalition”. At least I was able to give my talk. Not so in March 2007 at this University. Here too the term “Islamic antisemitism” stymied what should have been a lively debate already in March. Following e-mail protests by some Muslim students, my lecture title “Hitler’s Legacy: Islamic antisemitism in the Middle East” was changed to “The Nazi Legacy: Export of Antisemitism into the Middle East”. This proved to be a futile semantic gesture: On the day of my

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<sup>25</sup> A century ago, August Bebel, the German Social Democratic leader, characterized antisemitism - because of its apparently antihegemonic character - as the “socialism of fools”.

arrival in Leeds, the University administration cancelled my talk “on security grounds”. No one, including the Muslim students, had threatened violence. As before in Utrecht, freedom of speech was suspended – in my opinion - by an act of pre-emptive self-censorship.<sup>26</sup> Both university administrations probably believed they were meeting the wishes of their numerous Muslim students in suspending a lecture about Islamic antisemitism.

The erroneousness of this approach becomes clear when we realize that Muslims are criticizing Islamic antisemitism as well. “Why do we hate the Jews?” asked Saudi columnist Hussein Shubakshi in a London-based Arabic daily in May 2005. “The extent of the tremendous hatred of the Jews is baffling. If we know ... the true reason why the Jews have become the reason for every catastrophe, then we will be able to understand the idea of dividing [human beings] into groups...”

In January 2006, Tunisian Philosopher Mezri Haddad complained that Arab public opinion “has found in antisemitism the perfect catalyst for all its narcissistic wounds and social, economic, and political frustrations.” The fundamentalists had, he continued, “reduced the Koran to a case of nauseating antisemitism,” but it must be admitted, “that some Koranic verses, intentionally isolated from their historical context, have contributed even more to the anchoring of antisemitic stereotypes in Arab-Muslim mentalities”. This “petrification” of the Arab-Muslim mentality can be reversed, so Haddad, but this would require “intellectual audacity” on the part of Islamic scholars. “Since they cannot purge the Koran of its potentially antisemitic dross, they must closely examine this corpus with hermeneutical reasoning.”<sup>27</sup>

So while some Muslims support the universal struggle against antisemitism, other Muslims want to prevent any mention, let alone any public discussion, of Islamic antisemitism. It is the latter group that has profited – at least in the beginning - from the actions of Utrecht and Leeds Universities.

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<sup>26</sup> Matthias Küntzel, ‘Is there no longer room for debate?’, *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, March 23, 2007.

<sup>27</sup> On the Saudi columnist in *Al-Sharq Al-Awsat*, see ‘We Must Discuss Why We Hate The Jews’, *MEMRI, Special Dispatch* No. 913, 27 May 2005. On Haddad: ‘Tunisian Philosopher Mezri Haddad: Islamists have reduced the Koran to a Nauseating Antisemitic Lampoon’, *MEMRI, Special Dispatch Series* No. 1362, 21 November 2006.

The British historian Elie Kedourie whom I admire a lot stated that “moral integrity and scholarly rigor were always complementary”<sup>28</sup> and I subscribe to this point of view. Today an increasing number of anti-Islamist Muslims are complaining about the “well-meaning” behaviour of Western academics which lacks moral integrity and scholarly rigour. “When Westerners make politically-correct excuses for Islamism”, states, for example, Tawfik Hamid, a former member of the Egyptian Islamist organization Gama’a al-Islamiyya, “it actually endangers the lives of reformers and in many cases has the effect of suppressing their voices”. And he warns that, “without confronting the ideological roots of Islamism, it will be impossible to combat it”<sup>29</sup> – a reality that not only governments need to get into their heads.

Islamism is not motivated by a concept of reason but by a cult of death. It does not strive for emancipation but for oppression. It uses the flag of anti-colonialism to promote antisemitism. It is true that today there is no other anti-capitalist or anti-Western movement that is able to mobilise and influence so many people. Bin Laden’s latest message builds on this reality. But it is for this very reason all the more essential for every responsible person to draw an inseparable line between a concept of change that is rooted in the traditions of the Enlightenment and emancipation, and a concept of change that is aimed in a fascist way at destroying the development of societies and the freedom of the individual. You can be in favor of or against Islamism and Fascism but you cannot be anti-Fascist and pro-Islamist at the same time.

<sup>28</sup> Alain Silvera, Elie Kedourie, politique et moraliste, in: Sylvia Kedourie, ed. Elie Kedourie 1926-1992. History, Philosophy, Politics, London: Frank Cass, 1998, p. 101.

<sup>29</sup> Tawfik Hamid, ‘The Trouble With Islam’ *Wall Street Journal*, 3 April 2007.