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Fascism—National Socialism—Arab "Fascism": Terminologies, Definitions and Distinctions

Joachim Scholtyseck
University of Bonn

Abstract

Because certain movements in the Arab world of the 1930s and 1940s showed similarities to Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes, historians have drawn comparisons with the fascist and National Socialist dictatorships. But not even those arguing for the concept of a "generic fascism" are able to wholeheartedly subsume these movements under their fascist rubric. Fascism and National Socialism evolved in Europe, were shaped by the mood at the *fin de siècle*, became effective after the First World War in a unique political, social, economic and cultural atmosphere, and only lost their appeal in 1945 at the conclusion of the Second World War. They flourished in industrialized societies and aimed—in novel and twisted ways—at reversing the liberalization of 19th-century Europe. They emphasized power, national rebirth, military order and efficiency; and they were, in the case of Germany, driven by anti-Semitism and racism, resulting in totalitarian rule with genocidal consequences. National-socialist and fascist movements and regimes required the atmosphere and culture of liberal democracy as a foil—and liberal democracy was virtually nonexistent in the Near and Middle East. The preconditions for fascism were thus lacking. Colonial rule was still in place, traditional culture still prevailed in these mainly rural societies, and their small bourgeois parties showed greater allegiance to their clans than to liberal and secular ideologies.

Keywords:

fascism, National Socialism, generic fascism, universal fascism, political religion, Arab nationalism

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I. The Problem of Definitions

The term fascism is generally used with a straightforwardness that is easy to understand and problematic at the same time. As one scholar recently put it:

> Everyone is sure they know what fascism is. The most self-consciously visual of all political forms, fascism presents itself to us in vivid primary images: a chauvinist demagogue haranguing an ecstatic crowd; disciplined ranks of marching youths; coloured-shirted militants beating up members of some demonized minority; surprise invasions at dawn; and fit soldiers parading through a captured city.[1]

The scholarly discussion about the definition of fascism is nearly as old as the phenomenon itself.[2] It had its origins in fascist Italy and then—at least in academic circles and albeit tentatively—the term was applied to German National Socialism. After the fall of Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes and parallel to the debates surrounding Marxist and totalitarian interpretations of fascism, the hope gradually faded that a sounder understanding and hence clearer definition of the phenomenon would emerge. During the Cold War, with ongoing disputes between Marxists and non-Marxists on the origins of Mussolini's and Hitler's regimes, the inaccurate labeling continued. Now, more accurate than ever seemed the pessimistic opinion of George Orwell, who just after the Second World War had written that "the word fascism has no meaning except so far as it signifies 'something not desirable'".[3]

Renewed discussion of the topic began in the early 1960s with publication of influential studies by Eugen Weber on *Varieties of Fascism*, George Mosse on European ideologies and the *Nationalization of the Masses* as well as Ernst Nolte's equally groundbreaking contributions in evaluating the epoch of fascism.[4] This novel approach led to a new

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1) Robert A. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, New York 2004, p. 9.

2) For a historiographical overview, see Peter Davies and Derek Lynch (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right*, London 2002, pp. 42-57.

3) George Orwell, *Politics and the English Language* (1946), reprinted in: *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature. Concise edition*, vol. B., London 2003, pp. 1366-1371, here p. 1369.

4) Cf. Eugen Weber, *Varieties of Fascism. Doctrines of Revolution in the Twentieth Century*, New York 1964; George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses. Political Symbolism*

understanding of fascism's scope and its roots in the intellectual climate of 19th-century Europe, and it laid the groundwork for interpretations of fascism that surpassed the Italian and German examples. These studies showed the disturbing alliances that sprang up between theories deriving from one or another type of socialism and nationalism, which were the driving ideological forces of the 19th century. The fascist doctrine could now be interpreted "as the immediate product of a crisis that had overtaken democracy and liberalism, and bourgeois society in all its fundamental values: the break-away was so disruptive as to take on the dimensions of a crisis in civilization itself".[5] Seen from this angle, fascism was the result of a European crisis and not a kind of "accident" restricted to individual countries. These vivid debates opened a whole new field of discussion, and it was no coincidence that the first issue (1966) of the now indispensable *Journal of Contemporary History* featured articles solely devoted to the problem of "International Fascism 1920-1945". The journal was established by the academics Walter Laqueur and George L. Mosse, who in the 1960s were already regarded as experts in the field of fascism. They nevertheless had to cope with the problem of defining a phenomenon of which there was no shared understanding. The inflated use of the term "as an all-purpose pejorative" and as an epithet for "any sort of authoritarianism that seems clearly not leftist in character"[6] continued. As even the scholarly efforts to define fascism had led to obvious confusion and contradictions, respected experts in the field considered whether it would perhaps not

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and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich, New York 1975; Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in seiner Epoche. Action française, italienischer Faschismus, Nationalsozialismus* (1963), München/Zürich 1990. It was first translated into English as *Three Faces of Fascism*, New York 1966.

5) Cf. Zeev Sternhell, "Fascist Ideology", in: Walter Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism. A Reader's Guide. Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography*, Berkeley/Los Angeles 1978, pp. 315-376, here p. 321; Zeev Sternhell, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology. From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution*, Princeton 1994.

6) Stanley G. Payne, "Commentary on Roger Griffin's 'Fascism's new faces'", in: Roger Griffin/Werner Loh/Andreas Umland (eds.), *Fascism Past and Present, West and East. An International Debate on Concepts and Cases in the Comparative Study of the Extreme Right*, Stuttgart 2006, pp. 175-178, here p. 175. For an overview of new tendencies cf. Sven Reichardt, "Was mit dem Faschismus passiert ist. Ein Literaturbericht zur internationalen Faschismusforschung seit 1990", in: *Neue Politische Literatur* 49 (2004), pp. 385-406.

be best to limit the damage and abandon the notion of finding a satisfying definition of fascism, since the term, as Gilbert Allardyce categorically stated in 1979, "virtually means nothing."[7]

Not very much has changed since then. The ongoing and somewhat elastic use of the term fascism today and the recourse to old and familiar terms is the result—as an article in the *New York Times* pointed out some time ago—

> of the failure to find the proper language for problems and phenomena that are bafflingly novel in an age in which religion and politics, modern technology and seemingly archaic beliefs are mixed together, in which media control and money have sometimes replaced force as a means of maintaining consensus.[8]

Unfortunately many of those who use the term "fascism" in a broader sense have only seldom done comparative work on those phenomena initially linked to the moniker during the interwar years; nor are they experts in terms of the movement's original impulse—namely Italian fascism. They have therefore only a limited insight into the politics and ideologies at work and are only rarely able to give a historiographic overview of the various concepts that go into defining "fascism". To give one recent example: A bestselling book on "liberal fascism" in the United States makes out fascism to be a phenomenon of the political Left and points out the revolutionary roots of the original Italian fascism (which of course is not totally wrong). It also draws strong connections between European fascism of the early 20th century and the Progressive Movement of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his New Deal.[9] This may be a provocative and even stimulating idea, but viewed historically it stretches the concept of fascism much too far. In the end it was the USA that saved Europe from fascism and showed

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[7] Gilbert Allardyce, "What Fascism Is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept", in: *American Historical Review* 84 (1979), pp. 367-388, here p. 388.

[8] Alexander Stille, "The Latest Obscenity Has Seven Letters", in: *The New York Times*, 13 September 2003.

[9] Jonah Goldberg, *Liberal Fascism. The Secret History of the American Left from Mussolini to the Politics of Meaning*, New York 2008. For an interesting and only rarely analysed view on commonalities cf. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Three New Deals. Reflexions on Roosevelt's America, Mussolini's Italy, and Hitler's Germany, 1933-1939*, New York 2010.

that it had no political future. The notion of "liberal fascism" has therefore—and rightly so—been harshly criticized by the overwhelming majority of historians.

Another misleading understanding and labeling of fascism can be seen in the political arena, especially since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and is directly related to the threats posed by al-Qaida and other radical Islamist movements. Interestingly, this claim of a historic bond between Islam and fascism has been voiced from the political Left as well as by neo-conservative groups in a bid to prop up what are seen as "Western values". The term fascism has been used, for instance, in widely publicized articles by Christopher Hitchens and Paul Berman, to link different forms of militant Islamic fundamentalism with the cult of violence, radical nationalism, and those anti-Jewish policies characteristic of a number of authoritarian movements in the early 20th century. This has led to the frequently voiced opinion that people in the Arab World and especially Muslims generally lack the positive effects of secularization, that they easily accommodate to anti-Semitism and are ideologically predisposed to thinking in terms of authoritarian and "fascist" rule. Certainly, some modern Islamist traditions[10]—for instance in the work of Sayyid Quṭb, the most influential leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood[11] resemble and have historical links to those movements in the first half of the 20th century that worshipped extreme nationalism, ethnocentrism, and anti-Semitism. Yet, even if one agrees that the Islamism of today is a post-Enlightenment and anti-modernist movement,[12] does its rejection of "Western values" make it "fascist"?

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[10] Cf. Hendrik Hansen, "Formen des Islamismus und ihre sicherheitspolitische Bedeutung. Al-Qaida, Hamas und das ideologische Erbe von Hassan al-Banna und Sayyid Qutb", in: Martin Möllers/Robert van Ooyen (eds.), *Jahrbuch für öffentliche Sicherheit 2008/2009*, Frankfurt 2008, pp. 295-313. For a discussion of the categories Michael Whine, "Islamism and Totalitarianism: Similarities and Differences", in: *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 2 (2001), pp. 54-72.

[11] Hendrik Hansen/Peter Kainz, "Radical Islamism and Totalitarian Ideology: A Comparison of Sayyid Qutb's Islamism with Marxism and National Socialism", in: *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 8 (2007), pp. 55-76.

[12] Jeffrey M. Bale, "Islamism and Totalitarianism", in: *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10 (2009), pp. 73-96, here p. 82.

The term "Islamofascism" has not been developed in full; it remains at the level of a declaration, and therefore, without a proper explanation, it is a mere stigmatization lacking in sufficient proof. It is used mainly as a propaganda term, and this mostly in shorter articles and it is never really treated extensively—obvious here is the curse of the "blogosphere" and journalists unheedingly adopting populist explanations. As difficult as the situation is for historians and Orientalists, they should not resign themselves to the present state of affairs. In the words of the 19th-century historian Jacob Burckhardt, the world has always been full of *terribles simplificateurs*, who create misunderstandings, and it is the task of the academic world to set things right.

II. An Italian or a German or a European or a Universal Phenomenon?

Fascism emerged in the rather ramshackle *fasci di combattimento*, formed at a meeting in the Piazza San Sepolcro in Milan in 1919. Mussolini's "March on Rome" in late 1922 immediately started a worldwide debate on the origins and deeper reasons for the rise of fascism.[13] Fascism, a term derived from *fascio*, meaning a "bundle", had not only its etymologic and political roots in 19th-century Italy but merged with syndicalist, futurist and nationalist ideas as well, some of them having their cradle in a left-wing anti-bourgeois setting. Because fascism changed its political and ideological course several times before it came to power, from the beginning it was difficult to determine what it basically represented. Unlike more dominant movements such as liberalism or socialism, it was not based upon nor did it develop an elaborate philosophical system but was rather founded on "popular feelings about master races, their unjust lot, and their rightful predominance over inferior peoples".[14] Although Mussolini himself gave a tentative definition of his "movimento" in the *Enciclopedia Italiana* in the 1930s (written largely by one of his intellectual collaborators), historic fascism lacked a cohesive and comprehensible doctrine; and it was not clear at

[13] For an overview cf. Wolfgang Wippermann, *Faschismustheorien. Zum Stand der gegenwärtigen Diskussion*, 6. ed., Darmstadt 1995.

[14] Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 16.

all that the movement might not be the offshoot of a purely Italian experience. When in 1934 the Italian regime organized a "Fascist International Congress" in Montreux on Lake Geneva, movements in 39 countries were judged to have attained to the label "fascist" and were thus allowed to participate. But from the outset the conference was hindered by serious quarrels between the various participants and the sections they represented. A follow-up meeting in Amsterdam in 1935 also failed to define what "fascism" should mean, nor was it able to bridge the gap between the goals and expectations of the various movements in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. In other words, the international fascist movement was ultimately unable to come to terms with what it was about. All participating movements insisted on and jealously guarded their own particular ideas as to the way to "national revival", and so a common understanding or united policy was lacking. Consequently, "international fascism" proved a failure, faded into oblivion, and was never revived.[15]

The disagreements and controversies among those who considered themselves as "fascists" partly explain why historians have found it so difficult to define the new political trends of the interwar period. In search of an adequate definition, they must first identify those countries which developed significant movements with shared features and thereby—because they would lead to unacceptable dilution and conflation of the concept—eliminating those more traditional movements that might be termed merely "populist" or "nationalist".

Ever since the aforementioned research of Weber, Nolte and Mosse, movements have been regarded as fascist if they contained several key and clearly recognizable components: anti-Marxism, anti-liberalism, a partial anti-conservatism, the existence of a party army, and the leader-principle. These components are seen as the "fascist minimum".[16] Several key aspects must be added though. The Italian historian Emilio Gentile, who took a close look at the metaphysical aspects of Italian

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[15] Movements from the Arab world played only a minor part. Cf. Michael Ledeen, *Universal Fascism. The Theory and Practice of the Fascist International, 1928-1936*, New York 1972.

[16] Ernst Nolte, *Die Krise des liberalen Systems und die faschistischen Bewegungen*, München 1968, p. 385, fn. 64.

fascism, has emphasized a certain religious dimension that he labels the "sacralization of politics" and which is distinct from traditional religious institutions.[17] This definition also takes into account the ideological background in explaining the rise of fascism:

> A mass movement with multi-class membership in which prevail, among the leaders and militants, the middle sectors, in large part new to political activity, organized as a party militia, that bases its identity not on social hierarchy or class origin, but on the sense of comradeship, believes itself invested with a mission of national regeneration, considers itself in a state of war against political adversaries and aims at conquering a monopoly of political power by using terror, parliamentary tactics, and deals with leading groups, to create a new regime that destroys parliamentary democracy.[18]

A new set of movements, which can be partly regarded as fascist, strived for a *uomo nuovo*, a "new man", which in the German case was the "aryanized" man, and they were in revolt against modern secularized and democratic society. Even when their protagonists tried to roll back the Enlightenment and the "Ideas of 1789", their ideology was a "direct by-product of aspects of the Enlightenment, derived specifically from the modern, secular, Promethean concepts of the eighteenth century".[19] The extraordinary appeal and attraction to new forms of organization and political action have led Juan Linz to a multi-dimensional definition of fascism:

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17) Emilio Gentile, *The Sacralization of Politics in Fascist Italy*, Cambridge 1996.

18) Emilio Gentile's definition in the 1992 edition of the *Enciclopedia Italiana* is quoted from Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945*, Madison 1995, pp. 5f., fn. 6. A similar contribution by Emilio Gentile can be found in his essay "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections of an Interpretation", in: *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5 (2004), pp. 326-375, here p. 329: "Fascism is a modern political phenomenon, which is nationalistic and revolutionary, anti-liberal and anti-Marxist, organised in the form of a militia party, with a totalitarian conception of politics and the state, with an ideology based on myth; virile and antihedonistic, it is sacralised in a political religion affirming the absolute primacy of the nation understood as an ethnically homogeneous organic community, hierarchically organised into a corporative state, with a bellicose mission to achieve grandeur, power and conquest with the ultimate aim of creating a new order and a new civilisation."

19) Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p. 8. Still useful and thought-provoking Jacob Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, London 1952, reprint New York 1960.

> We define fascism as a hyper-nationalist, often pan-nationalist, anti-parliamentary, anti-liberal, anti-communist, populist and therefore anti-proletarian, partly anti-capitalist and anti-bourgeois, anti-clerical, or at least, non-clerical movement, with the aim of national-social integration through a single party and corporative representation not always equally emphasised; with a distinctive style and rhetoric, it relied on activist cadres ready for violent action combined with electoral participation to gain power with totalitarian goals by a combination of legal and violent tactics.[20]

Because fascism cannot be understood without examining its deep roots in the political thought of Western Europe, Renzo de Felice and A. James Gregor have pointed out the "modern" aspects of fascism;[21] and the relationship between the modernity of industrialized societies and fascism as the "offspring of modernism" has recently attracted renewed attention.[22] Fascism and National Socialism as "attitudes toward life" were revolutionary attempts to find a "Third Way" between capitalism and Marxism, and were therefore a fight against the existing European order.[23] Scholars have taken a closer look at the unintended consequences of the crisis of modernity.[24] Even when Italy continued on its path to a modern industrialized nation during Mussolini's rule "on terms somewhat different from those desired and planned by the fascists", the results would have been impossible without that varied intellectual climate which was a trademark of fascist culture.[25] It was a common trait of these novel European movements that they were uneasy with the way the world had been revolutionized in the last century[26] and they had a highly ambiguous understanding of the

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[20] Juan J. Linz, "Some Notes Toward a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective", in: Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism. A Reader*, pp. 3-121, here pp. 24f.

[21] A. James Gregor, *Italian Fascism and Developmental Dictatorship*, Princeton 1979.

[22] Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a Beginning under Mussolini and Hitler*, London 2007, p. 6.

[23] George L. Mosse, *The Fascist Revolution. Toward a General Theory of Fascism*, New York 1999, p. 42.

[24] Wolfgang Schieder, "Die Geburt des Faschismus aus der Krise der Moderne", in: id. (ed.), *Faschistische Diktaturen. Studien zu Italien und Deutschland*, Göttingen 2008, pp. 353-375.

[25] Ruth Ben-Ghiat, *Fascist Modernities. Italy, 1922-1945*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 2001, p. 210.

[26] Jürgen Osterhammel, *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*,

modern world.[27] Thomas Mann saw in this ambivalent outlook a characteristic scariness: "Die Mischung von robuster Zeitgemäßheit, leistungsfähiger Fortgeschrittenheit und Vergangenheitstraum, der hochtechnisierte Romantizismus."[28] This dynamic mix of modernity and backwardness, of an anti-modernist reaction and a modernizing drive, has been convincingly described by Jeffrey Herf as "reactionary modernism".[29] In other words: "Anti-modernizing resentments were channeled and neutralized, step by step, in specific legislation, by more powerful pragmatic and intellectual forces working in the service of an alternate modernity."[30]

A modern society in an already established nation-state was the precondition for this specific reversal of modernity. It is obvious that several European movements appealed to different traditions, national myths and prejudices; and then there was the seductive power of totalitarian regimes and their ability to manipulate the dynamics of "mass and power", the notion of the alienating effects of secularization, and the concomitant rise of political religions. On the other hand, it is equally evident that in its bid for total control and mass mobilization, fascism cannot be considered "simply a more muscular form of conservatism",[31] even if it maintained the existing economic and social order. But while trying to generalize, classify and taxonomize, categorization still remains difficult. Should various forms of religious fundamentalism, authoritarianism and racism be included? In the end there are still more questions than answers:

München 2008; Kevin H. O'Rourke/Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History. The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy*, Cambridge/London 2000.

27) The discussion can be followed in Riccardo Bavaj, *Die Ambivalenz der Moderne im Nationalsozialismus. Eine Bilanz der Forschung*, München 2004.

28) Thomas Mann, "Deutschland und die Deutschen", in: *Essays, Bd. 2: Politik*, Frankfurt am Main 1977, p. 295.

29) Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge 1984.

30) Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 13. Cf. Carl Levy, "From Fascism to post-Fascism: Italian Roads to Modernism", in: Richard Bessel (ed.), *Fascist Germany and Nazi Germany*, Cambridge 1996, pp. 165-196; Mark Roseman, "National Socialism and Modernization", in: ibid., pp. 197-229.

31) Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 11.

> How much mobilization must take place if a movement or regime is to qualify as "mass mobilizing"? Should that mobilization find expression in political party mobilization? What might qualify as a "formal ideology"? And how much intervention in the economy qualifies as "extensive"? How many of the traits must a regime display in order to qualify for entry?[32]

In the last decades the concept of fascism and National Socialism as "political religions" has gained ground. In this view, the quasi-religious impulses of some of the fascist movements and regimes are located within the context of totalitarian experiments of the 20th century and seen as a "political religion"—defined as something that "sacralizes an ideology, movement or a political regime through the deification of a secular entity transfigured into myth".[33] The anticlericalism of Mussolini's fascism and Hitler's National Socialism could count on established forms of antipathy against the Catholic church after the founding of the Italian and German nation-states in 1859/61 and 1871 respectively. Fascist regimes and movements were fundamentally hostile to traditional religion. This raised interesting questions, contemporary philosophers such as Eric Voegelin and Raymond Aron making references to Islam—with their messianic and sometimes clerical overtones—in their quest to understand the new radical movements of their century. The Catholic writer Edgar Alexander penned a book in Swiss exile called *Der Mythus Hitler*, where he compared Hitler's cult with "Mohammedanism"—though he mainly looked at external forms of organization, the Third Reich's mass psychology, and its churchlike followers.[34] In a lecture one year later, Karl Barth not only described National Socialism as a "proper church" but Hitler as "Allah's prophet": "It is impossible to understand National Socialism unless we see it in fact as a new Islam."[35] But this was a hysterical comment in a time of uncertainty and not a clear-headed political analysis. But the concept of a political religion, as useful as it is, has not gone unchallenged,[36] and

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[32] A. James Gregor, *The Faces of Janus. Marxism and Fascism in the Twentieth Century*, New Haven/London 2000, p. 183.

[33] Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religions", p. 328.

[34] Edgar Alexander, *Der Mythus Hitler*, Zürich 1937.

[35] Karl Barth, *Church and the Political Problem of our Day*, London 1939, p. 43.

[36] I have to limit myself to refer to the contributions in Hans Maier (ed.), *Totalitarismus*

questions remain as to whether it is necessary to speak of an "Ersatzreligion" in attempting to show that the fascist and National Socialist movements mobilized their believers with the help of "sacred rites and words".[37]

The disquieting and ultimately disruptive ideas of philosophers like Charles Maurras, Georges Sorel and Gustave Le Bon quickly found acceptance in intellectual circles in Germany, France and Italy, with their rich cultural heritages and the arrival of industrialization. Germany had practiced parliamentary democracy for some time, but the First World War changed the political culture of the continent for the worst. Fascism had its genesis in the trenches of the First World War, and the late-comer nations Italy and Germany particularly felt its effects: The war turned

> ethnocentric nationalism into mass pathology. It was war that made paranoid styles of reasoning seem cogent. It was war, and its devastating consequences, that raised the stakes of every domestic conflict beyond what any loser—however democratic his habits of mind—might peacefully be willing to pay. It was war that ended the authority and capacity of the state to insure that rules would be enforced, that contracts—explicit and implicit—would be honoured, that citizens would be protected from violence, and that violence would not go unpunished.[38]

Scholars therefore point to the ideological roots of the new phenomenon: "Early fascist movements were rooted in an exaltation of violence sharpened by World War I, and war-making proved essential to the cohesion, discipline, and explosive energy of fascist regimes."[39] Fascism turned its back on socialism as well as liberalism, which after World War I had shown itself unable to guarantee peace and progress. The promotion of individual freedom combined with eco-

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und Politische Religionen. Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs, Paderborn 1996. For the current discussions and the renewal of interest in political religions cf. the scholarly journal *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*.

37) Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 213.

38) Margaret L. Anderson, *Practising Democracy. Elections and Political Culture in Imperial Germany*, Princeton (NJ) 2000, p. 436.

39) Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 66.

nomic laissez-faire had lost its appeal[40]—even in those countries colonized by the winners of the global conflict, as "civilization" by the whites would seem to have failed.

Therefore, one of the most important preconditions for fascism was not only the fear of a Bolshevist revolution but also the phenomenon of a "faltering liberal order".[41] In the face of a difficult passage of the industrialized world to modernity, fascism in Europe meant giving up its free institutions and posited a largely new form of nationalism that could prosper in a continent deeply divided by the outcome of the war and its peace treaties, which disgusted most of the losers and hardly satisfied the winners. Fascism's response to this differed significantly from pre-democratic dictatorships. The search for a charismatic leader coincided with demonization of the enemies; the myth of a glorious renewal of the nation was exemplified in a new cult, which was already clearly visible in the adventure of Fiume in 1920, when Italian men who had not been able to shed the memories of a savage war now congregated in a military experiment that glorified violence, celebrated mass mobilization, was centered on public rallies, and established a unique and short-lived regime that had little in common with traditional and old-fashioned military juntas of the 19th century, which were based on police surveillance and public acquiescence. On the other hand, the proto-fascist regime waved flags, marched, and donned uniforms with black shirts, which became the sign of the times for most of those various movements after 1920 which considered themselves to be emulators. The novelty was, as Robert Paxton has said, "that, instead of simply clamping silence upon citizens as classical tyranny had done since earliest times, it found a technique to channel their passions into the construction of an obligatory domestic unity."[42]

Many scholars of Italian fascism and German National Socialism have reserved the term "fascism" for the cases of Italy and Germany

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40) Ivan T. Berend, *Markt und Wirtschaft. Ökonomische Ordnungen und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung in Europa seit dem 18. Jahrhundert*, Göttingen 2007.

41) Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 77. Cf. Juan Linz/Alfred Stepan (eds.), *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*, Baltimore/London 1978.

42) Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 216.

because these were the only countries in Europe where dictatorial movements finally came to power. After the fall of the original fascist regime it was at first not even clear if the term fascism could be applied to other forms of authoritarian rule outside of Italy.[43] Hannah Arendt was famously convinced that Stalinism and National Socialism, as totalitarian regimes, were something different from Mussolini's original fascism; and Italian experts on Mussolini, like his biographer Renzo de Felice, have always insisted that Italian fascism, with all of its incompleteness, cannot be placed in the same category as Hitler's racial state, which was responsible for the Holocaust.[44] In other words, there was nothing comparable perpetrated by other fascist regimes to qualify as "generic fascism".[45]

One of the major obstacles in finding a common denominator remains the case of National Socialism with its unique history of ever greater radicalization and the formerly unheard-of extermination policy. One important school of thought contests that the Third Reich and its genocidal tendencies can be labelled "fascist". Yet, even when concentrating on the evolution and development of the regimes in Rome and Berlin in the interwar years, there have always been caveats when it came to direct comparisons between fascism in Italy and National Socialism in Germany.[46] The consensus would seem to be that the radicalization which took place in Italy in the late 1930s—the country's anti-Semitic policies as well as its colonial racism—shows greater similarities than dissimilarities between the two regimes.[47] But as there are significant differences in the scope and style of the two regimes, further

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43) The best overview in this respect is still provided by Juan J. Linz, *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, Boulder (CO) 2000.

44) Renzo de Felice, *Interpretations of Fascism*, Cambridge 1977.

45) Klaus Hildebrand, "He Who Wants to Escape the Abyss", in: Ernst Piper (ed.), *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler?*, Atlantic Highlands 1993, pp. 188-195, here p. 193.

46) Karl Dietrich Bracher/Leo Valiani (eds.), *Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin 1991; Richard Bessel (ed.), *Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Comparisons and Contrasts*, Cambridge 1996; Aristotle A. Kallis, *Fascist Ideology. Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945*, London/New York 2000; MacGregor Knox, *To the Thresholds of Power, 1922/33. Origins and Dynamics of the Fascist and National Socialist Dictatorships*, Cambridge 2007.

47) For a recent historiographical survey of similarities cf. Sven Reichardt/Armin Nolzen, "Editorial", in: Sven Reichardt/Armin Nolzen (eds.), *Faschismus in Italien und Deutschland. Studien zu Transfer und Vergleich*, Göttingen 2005, pp. 9-27.

research would appear to be necessary—and this somewhat hapless conclusion can be found in the final pages of nearly every book and article on "fascism". Up until now it has been a vain hope that continuing research will provide that missing element which finally shows the essential nature of fascism—and there is no reason to assume that more research will in fact eventually reveal it. Any comparison must take into account the uniqueness of the road to Auschwitz, which was integral to National Socialism. This makes it difficult to lump the German case with minor "fascist" movements in Scandinavia, for instance, where even the ultra-right authoritarian movements were too religious and conservative to embrace the novel ideology. It is no coincidence that most scholars of National Socialism shy away from even using the term "German fascism" when they analyze events in Germany between 1933 and 1945, since this term is tainted by decades of misuse by Marxists, who simplistically explained the ascent of National Socialism by referring to the official theory of the Soviet-controlled Thirteenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International of 1933, according to which fascism was the open, terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital.

But if the fascist and National Socialist regimes cannot even be lumped together, what then is the sense in looking for similarities between various minor movements that had not even attained to the status of a regime? Does it make sense to apply the concept of fascism to other movements with entirely different origins, especially to smaller ones with different historical backgrounds and which had hardly any impact on the political landscape of their respective societies? Apart from Italy and Germany, only Austria, Hungary and Romania saw the emergence of movements that could claim more than 20 percent of the electorate and thereby qualify as being on a major scale. One might also add Spain—though the Falange only gained mass support after the end of the Spanish Civil War. In Croatia the fascist movement Ustascha was preeminent only in the Second World War when the Wehrmacht had conquered the country and the satellite-regime of Ante Pavelic was securely installed.[48] Despite certain common traits, the debate about

[48] Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p. 488.

which features are crucial to define a "fascist minimum" rages even today.

Although this controversy continues, Stanley Payne has developed a widely accepted typology of fascism. He identifies the creation of an authoritarian state, a regulated and state-integrated economic sector, fascist symbolism, and several "anti"-sentiments—anti-liberalism, anti-communism and anti-conservatism—not to mention the anti-capitalist contingents in Italian fascism and German National Socialism. It was a

> form of revolutionary ultra-nationalism for national rebirth that is based on a primarily vitalist philosophy, is structured on extreme elitism, mass mobilization, and the *Führerprinzip*, positively values violence as end as well as means and tends to normatize war and/or the military values.[49]

Payne characterizes fascism as a historical phenomenon that was limited to Europe and the interwar years, stressing that "the full characteristics of European fascism could not be reproduced on a significant scale outside Europe".[50]

In the 1980s academics remained skeptical about ever arriving at a theoretical definition of the nature of fascism and finding a consensual approach. This was mainly due to the uncritical proliferation of the term as well as its use in polemicist studies, where unempirical generalizations prevailed. Many scholars therefore concentrated on studying single movements and shied away from comparative work, which had indeed often proved unsatisfactory because of the many contradictions and exceptions necessary. Historians such as Roger Eatwell and Roger Griffin have lately tried to solve the problem by lowering "the threshold to the absolute minimum that suffices to distinguish fascism from its nationalist, authoritarian and populist siblings".[51]

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[49] Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p. 14.

[50] Stanley Payne, *Fascism. Definition and Comparison*, Madison 1980, pp. 175f.

[51] Aristotle A. Kallis, "To Expand or not to Expand? Territory, Generic Fascism and the Quest for an 'Ideal Fatherland'", in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 38 (2003), pp. 237-260, here p. 237.

Roger Griffin's 1991 groundbreaking book *The Nature of Fascism* provided a fresh new look at the phenomenon's theoretical aspects, describing fascism as "a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism".[52] As the preeminent scholar of the "generic" concept of fascism (meaning the transcending of place and time, in this case Europe and the interwar period), Griffin has subsequently refined an ideal type of "fascism" that defines its "mythic core" as "the vision of the (perceived) crisis of the nation as betokening the birth-pangs of a new order".[53] In stark contrast to scholars like Nolte and Payne, he also argues that the fascist epoch did not come to an end in 1945 but remains profoundly connected to modernization and modernity, although he basically reserves the term for European movements.[54] Griffin argues that a certain amount of secularization, a broadened suffrage, and a democratic setting were necessary prerequisites for the emergence of fascism, which used the attractions of traditional religion but distorted its values. In those countries where secularization and "nationalization" was minimal the conditions to create the necessary historical consciousness for emergence of fascism did not exist.[55]

It is easy to understand why Griffin's "generic" fascism has not found universal support. His declaration of a "new consensus"[56] regarding the acceptance of his concept has been vehemently contested. His singling out of the rebirth of a nation and its "mythic core" may be ingenious,

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52) Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, London/New York 1991, p. 26.

53) Roger Griffin, *Fascism*, Oxford 1995, p. 3.

54) He nevertheless also has pointed to an "Arab connection" when it comes to identifying post-war fascism: Roger Griffin, "Caught in its own Net: Post-war fascism outside Europe", in: Stein Ugelvik Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe. The European Impulse against Domestic Conditions in the Diffusion of Global Fascism*, New York 2001, pp. 46-68, here pp. 63f. For a recent overview of the comparative research on fascism cf. Sven Reichardt, "Neue Wege der vergleichenden Faschismusforschung", in: *Mittelweg* 16 (2007), pp. 9-24.

55) Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, p. 157. Cf. Juan J. Linz, "Political Space and Fascism as a Late-Comer: Conditions Conductive to the Successes or Failure of Fascism as a Mass Movement in Inter-War Europe", in: Stein Ugelvik Larsen/Bernt Hagtvet/Jan Petter Myklebust (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists? Social Roots of European Fascism*, Oslo/Tromsö 1980, pp. 153-189.

56) Roger Griffin, *International Fascism. Theories, Causes and the New Consensus*, London 1998.

but it remains far from clear why that particular low denominator is the most important one. MacGregor Knox's famous characterization after several decades of debate is as true as ever. Discussions on fascism provide a scene resembling "a deserted battlefield littered with the burnt-out, rusting hulls of failed theories".[57]

In his lucid book *Fascists*, Michael Mann de facto reserves the term fascism for European phenomena between the World Wars and concentrates on developments in Italy, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Romania and Spain.[58] It would therefore seem legitimate to use Robert Paxton's definition, which is much less controversial yet encompasses a wide range of fascist movements and regimes:

> Fascism may be defined as a political behaviour marked by obsessive preoccupation with community decline, humiliation, or victimhood and by compensatory cults of unity, energy, and purity, in which a mass-based party of committed national militants, working in uneasy but effective collaboration with traditional elites, abandons democratic liberties and pursues with redemptive violence and without ethical or legal restraint goals of internal cleansing and external expansion.[59]

To give just one more example of a current definition of fascism, which would incorporate several European phenomena and serve as a way of finally defining universal fascism:

> An ideology that strives to forge social rebirth based on a holistic-national radical third way, though in practice fascism has stressed style, especially action and the charismatic leader, more than detailed programme, and to engage in a Manichean demonisation of its enemies.[60]

In the 21st century, a hundred years since advent of the first fascist movement in Italy, it would seem hardly legitimate for historians to use a term which for good reason has been reserved to describe movements

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57) MacGregor Knox, *Common Destiny. Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany*, Cambridge 2000, p. 56.

58) Michael Mann, *Fascists*, Cambridge 2004.

59) Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 218.

60) Roger Eatwell, "Universal Fascism? Approaches and Definitions", in: Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe*, pp. 15-45, here p. 33. See also his important essay: "Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism", in: *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 4 (1992), pp. 1-68.

and ideologies in the European interwar period.[61] Fascism came from Europe and many of the ideas and organizational and political forms were diffused from European models and then "fused into movements and ideas that already existed, with their regional and local identities, but they never appeared as exact copies".[62] In view of the fact that scholars are not at all sure if it is an improvement to speak of "European fascism", it is even less helpful to talk about fascism outside of Europe.

The insecurity on the part of historians and political scientists and the lack of success in defining fascism becomes manifest when attempting to typologize certain movements outside of Europe. To give just one example: Can the party and movement of Subhas Chandra Bose in India, who allied himself with the regimes of Hitler and Mussolini (and with Japan), be described as "fascist"? In the Hindu fundamentalist movement of the 1930s, there were certainly those who admired Hitler's nationalist purges.[63] But the alliance was an affiliation between partners of totally different aspirations and can only be explained by the circumstances of the Second World War.[64] Some scholars have even tried to find fascism in Nasser's Egypt, Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana, Pinochet's Chile, Gaddhafi's Libya,[65] and Türkeş's Nationalist Action Party in Turkey, arguing that these regimes and movements—either by borrowing European fascist ideas or as syncretistic adaptations of those ideas to their own unique historical and cultural contexts—confirm the "'fascist (ideological) minimum'."[66] But does it really help to stretch "fascism" so far? Although it developed a *Führerprinzip*, controlled

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61) Mann, *Fascists*, pp. 373f.

62) Stein Ugelvik Larsen, "Was there Fascism outside Europe? Diffusion from Europe and Domestic Impulses", in: id. (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe*, pp. 739-792, here p. 717.

63) Tapan Raychaudhuri, "Shadows of the Swastika: Historical Perspectives on the Politics of Hindu Communalism", in: *Modern Asian Studies* 34 (2000), pp. 259-279.

64) Jan Kuhlmann, *Subhas Chandra Bose und die Indienpolitik der Achsenmächte*, Berlin 2003, p. 352; cf. Tobias Delfs, *Hindu-Nationalismus und europäischer Faschismus. Vergleich, Transfer- und Beziehungsgeschichte*, Hamburg 2008. On 'Ināyatullāh Khān al-Mashriqī's anti-colonial movement as a "camp-follower of fascism"" in interwar India cf. Markus Daechsel, "Scienticism and its Discontents: The Indo-Muslim 'Fascism' of Inayatullah Khan al-Mashriqi", in: *Modern Intellectual History* 3 (2006), pp. 443-472, here p. 443.

65) Anthony James Joes, *Fascism in the Contemporary World*, Boulder (CO) 1978. On Nasser's Egypt pp. 175-182.

66) Jeffrey M. Bale, "(Still) more on fascist and neo-fascist ideology and 'groupuscularity'", in: Griffin/Loh/Umland (eds.), *Fascism Past and Present*, pp. 292-299, here p. 296.

large parts of the economy and was hostile to Israel, Egypt under Nasser failed to establish a national philosophy and lacked other characteristics of fascism. In short, fascism was "more likely to be found under a Balkan monarchy of the 1930s than the Arrow Cross or the Legion of the Archangel Michael".[67] The overwhelming majority of scholars maintain that not even Atatürk's regime can be labeled as fascist because Kemalism, although an authoritarian dictatorship, clearly wished to create a Westernized civil society.[68]

III. Arab Sympathies for and Fascination with Fascism and National Socialism: Background Research on Mutual Misunderstandings

Unfortunately, writing about and analyzing the various schools of thought of fascism is a complex endeavor. When it comes to the politics of the Arab world in the 1930s and 1940s, the scholarship has been almost exclusively the reserve of Orientalists, Arabists, scholars of Islam and the odd political scientist—but not of historians. This has led to distortions, misunderstandings, and misleading use of the term "fascism". On the other hand, most of the experts on fascism and the political ideas and ideologies of 19th- and 20th-century Europe usually know little about political parties and movements in the Arab world after the First World War. This has of course much to do with the language barrier. Hardly any of the experts with impressive track records on fascism are able to read the primary sources; they are required to make due with the contemporary literature on political phenomena and ideas in the Arab world. When one adds to this the appertaining cultural difficulties and misunderstandings, it is understandable that our knowledge of the intercultural relations between the Arab World and the European West in the interwar period is spotty at best.

The early 1930s were a time of crisis not only for Europe but also for the Middle East. After the First World War, with its bloodshed on

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[67] Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p. 515.

[68] For a recent update on research Fikret Adanır, "Kemalist Authoritarianism and Fascist Trends in Turkey during the Inter-War Period", in: Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe*, pp. 313-361.

unprecedented levels, the West's assumption of perpetual progress toward a more liberal world lay in ruin. The colonial powers, those "civilizing" agents, had shown themselves capable of perpetrating a barbaric war, and disillusionment coupled with outright cynicism was the result.[69] In the Middle East the liberal order and its proponents had lost most of their appeal, and with demise of the Ottoman Empire there were new questions of nationhood being asked.

The Near and Middle East still more closely approximated feudalism than capitalism, against which fascist movements in Europe partly rebelled. But even while the region lacked the essential conditions for fascism as they existed in the industrialized world, it was not surprising that several nationalist Arab "shirt movements" emerged, the Near and Middle East now entering "the magnetic field of fascism".[70] But this Arab fascination with fascism had reasons that were distinct from those of Europeans. At the core of fascism's attraction to the Near and Middle East was these regions' "striking disenchantment" with liberalism and middle-class modernity. Liberalism was regarded as "impotent and fragile" and Western-style modernity as "frail and inauthentic". Fascist aesthetics and styles of organization, on the other hand, seemed useful "for the purpose of nationalist, anti-colonial mass mobilization and social control".[71] In Syria, the shirts were white, gray and steel-colored,[72] in Egypt they were blue and green,[73] in Lebanon tan, and in Iraq white.[74]

These "shirt movements" adapted the authoritarian trends characterizing the "Zeitgeist" of the interwar years, for instance incorporating certain biological interpretations regarding the rise and fall of nations.

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69) As a contemporary account of the war experience on the Western front and the de facto British colonial service in Egypt after 1918 cf. Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, London 1929.

70) Philippe Burrin, "La France dans le champ magnétique des fascismes", in: *Le Débat* 32 (November 1984), pp. 52-72.

71) Keith David Watenpaugh, *Being Modern in the Middle East. Revolution, Nationalism, Colonialism, and the Arab Middle Class*, Princeton 2006, p. 256.

72) Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, p. 255.

73) James P. Jankowski, *Egypt's Young Rebels. "Young Egypt": 1933-1952*, Stanford 1975.

74) This section follows the description and analysis of Payne, *A History of Fascism*, pp. 352f.; Itamar Rabinovich, "Germany and the Syrian Political Scene in the late 1930s", in: Jehuda L. Wallach (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East, 1835-1939*, Tel Aviv 1975, pp. 191-198.

Henri Bergson's ideas on the "élan vital", although not expressly mentioned, certainly also played a role when politicians and self-proclaimed Arab leaders would rather crudely explain the necessity of "vitality" in a nation's renaissance. Most of these movements in Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq, inspired and augmented by developments in Europe, can be classified as non-rationalist, anti-intellectual, highly emotional and territorially expansionist. They stressed self-sacrifice, praised—to a certain point—Mussolini and Hitler, and showed considerable admiration for their achievements in restoring their nations to past glory. Mimicking Germany and Italy in terms of paramilitary organizations, the Arab movements hoped to promote physical education, discipline, and creation of a national army.[75] Emphasizing the success of Mussolini, and later Hitler, was a method of instilling national consciousness in the younger generation and offering an escape hatch from a rural world to "modernity".

The decline of the colonial powers was coupled with a growing national awareness in the Near and Middle East, which led to increasing antagonism toward Britain and France as the primary de facto rulers. This development was accompanied by growing frustration and disgust with existing political practice. The aversion was particularly acute among young people, who were deprived of adequate education as well as a satisfying political life and cultural atmosphere under colonial tutelage. The growing political self-consciousness, on the other hand, left no doubt that the challenges for the societies in the Near and Middle East were manifold. Questions emerged regarding how to cope with modernization and changing moral attitudes in a part of the world accustomed to authoritarian rule and allegiance to a clan or a particular religious and ethnic community.[76]

This becomes obvious when looking at Egypt: Many of its educated students (whose numbers in comparison to the general population tri-

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[75] Fritz Steppat, "Das Jahr 1933 und seine Folgen für die arabischen Länder des Vorderen Orient", in: Gerhard Schulz (ed.), *Die Große Krise der dreißiger Jahre*, Göttingen 1985, pp. 261-278, here p. 273.

[76] Elsa Marston, "Fascist Tendencies in Pre-War Arab Politics. A Study of Three Arab Political Movements", in: *Middle East Forum* 35 (May 1959), pp. 19-35, here p. 19; Milo Mendel/Zdenek Müller, "Fascist Tendencies in the Levant in the 1930s and 1940s", in: *Archiv Orientální* 55 (1987), pp. 1-17, esp. pp. 1f.

pled between 1925 and 1935) as well as the expanding professional middle class were frustrated and susceptible to any radical and ultra-national idea that proposed to offer a better future free from colonial rule—and even free from the small Westernized elite at home, which had lost most of their appeal.[77] Britain and France had promised eventual self-determination and even independence, but because they were mainly interested in protecting their own vital interests in the Middle East, they did not ultimately deliver on their promises.[78] Nationalists in the Arab world tried to rid themselves of their rulers in London and Paris, who still controlled most of the territories, even if a country like Iraq had been formally independent since 1932. It was no surprise that during this general "crisis of orientation",[79] Germany and Italy—both of whom had achieved unity through force of arms just a half-century before—now offered a "seductive alternative" to the Western powers.[80]

The events of 1933 led to a heightened curiosity in the Arab world and sympathy for Germany,[81] who after the Versailles treaty was still regarded as an outlaw among the great powers. One of the young followers of Arab nationalism, ʿAbd al-Amīr ʿAlawī, described the mood in Iraq after Hitler had taken power in 1933. Iraqi public opinion, he was sure, favored Nazism "not at all because of love for it but because of hate for imperialism".[82] Ḥasan al-Bannā, a young Egyptian teacher

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77) Cf. Haggai Erlich, *Students and University in Twentieth Century Egyptian Politics*, London 1989, p. 98; Israel Gershoni/Götz Nordbruch, *Sympathie und Schrecken. Begegnungen mit Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus in Ägypten, 1922-1937*, Berlin 2011, esp. pp. 25-28.

78) For a recent overview cf. James Barr, *A Line in the Sand. The Anglo-French Struggle for the Middle East, 1914-1948*, New York/London 2011.

79) Charles D. Smith, "The 'Crisis of Orientation'. The Shift of Egyptian Intellectuals to Islamic Subjects in the 1930's", in: *IJMES* 4 (1973), pp. 382-410; Israel Gershoni, "Egyptian Liberalism in an Age of 'Crisis of Orientation': *Al-Risāla*'s Reaction to Fascism and Nazism, 1933-39", in: *IJMES* 31 (1999), pp. 551-576.

80) Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East. A Brief History of the Last 2000 Years*, New York 1995, p. 348.

81) Stefan Wild, "Adolf Hitler: Enemy of the Arab's Enemies? Myth and Propaganda", in: *Orient-Institut Studies* 1 (2012), *http://www.perspectivia.net/content/publikationen/orient-institut-studies/1-2012/wild_adolf-hitler*. Early studies are id., "National Socialism in the Arab Near East between 1933 and 1939", in: *WI* 25 (1985), pp. 126-173; Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot, *Egypt's Liberal Experiment, 1922-1936*, Berkeley 1977, esp. p. 229.

82) Quoted in Peter Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism. Authoritarian, totalitarian, and pro-fascist inclinations, 1932-1941*, Milton Park/New York 2006, p. 33.

and founder of the Muslim Brotherhood, regarded Germany as a victim of the Versailles treaty (which to him seemed as unjust and imperialistic as the Balfour Declaration, the League of Nations mandate system, and the Sèvres Treaty). In the minds of many intellectual leaders of the Arab movements (and against the will of the Allies), the German nation had the right to be restored as a great power. It was in this context that some Arab nationalists saw German revisionism—which, like many other contemporaries, they could not distinguish from Hitler's expansionist policy—as a road to success. Hitler served as a kind of role model for overturning the unjust postwar settlement and for the emancipation from colonial rule. As al-Bannā declared: "And who would have believed that that German workingman, Hitler, would ever attain such immense influence and as successful a realization of his aims as he has?"[83]

Some liberal intellectuals in the Arab world favored a genuine Westernization, but many others—if they were Marxists, nationalists or hoped for some sort of pan-Islamism[84]—detested Western civilization and its ideas, which were identified mainly with the British and French. Some Arab nationalists were drawn to Germany because of the long-standing close relations and cooperation between Germany and the Ottoman Empire (and afterward with Turkey), which resulted in remarkable military and cultural ties.[85] Many were also fascinated with

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[83] Wendell (ed.), *Five Tracts*, pp. 96f. A recent rather sympathetic view: Gudrun Krämer, *Hasan al-Banna*, London 2010.

[84] For the different intellectual currents cf. Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust. The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives*, London 2010.

[85] Wild, "National Socialism", pp. 126-138. Cf. Wolfgang G. Schwanitz (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East, 1871-1945*, Princeton 2004. There are several useful older studies taking a closer look at the efforts of the "Third Reich" to gain support in the Near East: Early studies already pointed out that Hitler had no interest in the Arab freedom movement but sought strategical support against Great Britain. Cf. Mohamed-Kamal El-Dessouki, *Hitler und der Nahe Osten*, Berlin 1963, esp. pp. 140f.; Lukasz Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, London 1966, p. 315; Bernd Philipp Schröder, *Deutschland und der Mittlere Osten im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Göttingen 1975, pp. 268f.; Andreas Hillgruber, "The Third Reich and the Near and Middle East", in: Uriel Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers in the Middle East, 1919-1939*, New York 1988, pp. 274-282; Josef Schröder, "Die Beziehung der Achsenmächte zur arabischen Welt", in: Manfred Funke (ed.), *Hitler, Deutschland und die Mächte*, Düsseldorf 1976, pp. 365-382; Francis R. Nicosia, *The Third Reich and the Palestinian Question*, London 1985.

German "order",[86] which of course had its roots in Western thought and modernization but which under Hitler received an anti-Western twist, directed not only against the Versailles treaty but against what National Socialism regarded as untrammeled liberalism and its degenerative and alienating effects in modern "mass society". For some in the Arab world, this seemed compatible with their own rejection of the Anglo-Saxon concept of parliamentary democracy and liberal economic doctrines, which for them had not brought liberation but continuing submission.

Hitler's method of regaining respectability, which obviously proved to be successful with his compatriots as well as in the European political sphere, attracted attention as a novel way of achieving nationhood, especially as it was not averse to celebrating martyrdom and was linked to an organizational form which excluded parliamentary debates and the chaotic discussions which were associated with democracy. The founder of the Lebanese Christian Phalange Party, Pierre Gemayel, himself not a fascist, later remembered the time he had spent in Berlin during the 1936 Olympic Games: "We Orientals are by nature an unruly and individualistic people. In Germany, I witnessed the perfect conduct of a whole, unified nation."[87]

Seeing how Rome and Berlin coped with their nation's respective challenges—and the especially amazing recovery of Germany under Nazi rule—indicated to these leaders that the same techniques would foster the emergence of truly independent nations in the Arab world—even when statehood was still without any real foundations.[88] Being pro-fascist after 1933 therefore became a "fashion", even when the ideological commitment presumably remained superficial.[89]

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86) "Ordnung ist im ganzen deutschen Leben und Streben evident. Deutsche Fabrikanten sind für ihre Präzision und Akkuratesse berühmt. Ordnung ist also ein Ideal, und dieses Ideal muß einen Platz im Koran finden." The broadcast of "Berlin in Arabic" from 22 May 1943, is quoted in Jeffrey Herf, "Hitlers Dschihad. Nationalsozialistische Rundfunkpropaganda für Nordafrika und den Nahen Osten", in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 56 (2010), pp. 259-286, here p. 278.

87) Quoted in John P. Entelis, *Pluralism and Party Transformation in Lebanon. Al-Kata'ib 1936-1970*, Leiden 1974, p. 46.

88) Abbas Kelidar, "'States without Foundations': The Political Evolution of State and Society in the Arab East", in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 28 (1993), pp. 315-339.

89) Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, p. 6.

However, like in most European countries, these novel groups in the Arab world also failed to gain broad support and remained an ephemeral phenomenon on the political scene. Compared to their European models, these were hardly "movements" at all and only very limited structures for mobilizing a constituency.[90] For instance, in Palestine the paramilitary organizations, which sometimes were dubbed "Nazi Scouts", never really got off the ground. At their founding meeting, clad in black trousers and red shirts, they numbered merely seventy "storm troopers".[91] Due to the lack of reliable data, it is difficult to measure precisely how much popular support the movements enjoyed in the Near and Middle East.

Several rather inept and distorted translations of *Mein Kampf* went into print between 1933 and 1939.[92] But it is not at all clear how many people in the Arab world actually read the book—even in Germany, where it was an official bestseller, hardly anyone took the time to take a closer look at the turgid musings of Hitler. The knowledge of what was going on in Germany seems to have been rather limited. To give just one example, when a German officer traveled to northern Iraq in 1935 he noted huge portraits of Hitler in Kurdish tea-houses and inquired as to the opinion of the guests:

> Sie erzählten begeistert von dem freiheitsliebenden Deutschland und von ihrem Nationalhelden, dem Führer, von dem sie jedoch nicht viel mehr wussten, als daß er Deutschland wieder gross machen werde und die gleichen Feinde habe wie sie selbst: Engländer und Juden. Diese Tatsachen genügten den Kurden, um ihnen Deutschland sehr nahe zu bringen.[93]

Sāmī al-Jundī, one of the Syrian leaders, who was fascinated by the rather strange ideological flights of Alfred Rosenberg's *Mythus des 20. Jahrhunderts*,[94] later described the mood of the 1930s: "We were fasci-

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[90] Jankowski, *Egypt's Young Rebels*, pp. 59f. Payne, *A History of Fascism*, pp. 352f.

[91] René Wildangel, *Zwischen Achse und Mandatsmacht. Palästina und der Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin 2007, p. 199.

[92] Wild, "National Socialism", pp. 147-170.

[93] Cited in Klaus-Michael Mallmann/Martin Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz. Das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina*, Darmstadt 2006, p. 48.

[94] Wild, "National Socialism", p. 131.

nated by Nazism, reading its books and the sources of its thinking and particularly Nietzsche, Fichte and Chamberlain."[95] But again: Who in the Middle East actually read such authors as Rosenberg, an overtaxed ideologue whose strange notions of a mythical paradise were even ridiculed by Hitler himself?[96]

Illiteracy was rampant and not confined to rural areas. Political participation in the colonized world was still restricted to an urbanized and heterogeneous elite brought up in the tradition of either the colonial service or the Ottoman reformers. Even with the expansion of education that had taken place, in 1931 less than 20 percent of Palestinian Arabs reported being able to read and write. Nearly two-thirds of Christians were capable of reading and writing, but only 14 percent of Muslims. The circulation of papers in Arabic was even less than those of Paris in 1790.[97] We are not much helped by knowing that translations of books by Gustave Le Bon, for instance, went into print in the Arab countries—it would be far more interesting to know precisely who his readership was. The fact that we do not know speaks volumes. And literacy alone does not make a reader. Who was able to understand and interpret the changes taking place in Europe by just picking up a newspaper in the local coffeehouse? But without access to even newspapers, knowledge of political developments must have been far less than in the Western world. In Palestine, for instance, the two largest Arabic newspapers sold only 4,000 to 6,000 copies daily.[98] The percentage of those who actively read these newspapers in Palestine has been estimated as less than 10 percent.[99] Therefore it remains difficult to fathom what

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[95] Quoted in Rabinovich, "Germany", in: Wallach (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East*, p. 197.

[96] Claus-Ekkehard Bärtsch, "Die Bedeutung der Mystik in der politischen Religion Alfred Rosenbergs. Die 'Gottgleichheit' der 'nordischen Seele' als Grund der völkisch-rassischen Identität der Deutschen", in: Petra Huse/Ingmar Dette (eds.), *Abenteuer des Geistes-Dimensionen des Politischen. Festschrift für Walter Rothholz*, Baden-Baden 2008, pp. 193-212.

[97] Weldon C. Matthews, *Confronting an Empire, Constructing a Nation. Arab Nationalism and Popular Politics in Mandate Palestine*, London 2006, p. 144.

[98] Mustafa Kabha, "The Palestinian National Movements and its Attitude toward the Fascist and Nazi Movements 1925-1945", in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37 (2011), pp. 437-450, here p. 439; Wildangel, *Zwischen Achse und Mandatsmacht*, pp. 108-111.

[99] Wildangel, *Zwischen Achse und Mandatsmacht*, p. 111.

the average Egyptian or Lebanese or Iraqi thought about Mussolini and Hitler.

Lending moral support to Hitler and Mussolini thus seemed a kind of prelude to in fact ridding the Arab world of its colonial rulers. But apart from the flags, slogans, parades, uniforms, paramilitary discipline and the creation of youth organizations, these movements—nearly all of them without a charismatic leader and without an experience of democracy and liberalism against which they could revolt—had not much in common with the European movements. They were, for the most part, an effective means of the educated youth to penetrate the thin layer of parliamentarian politics and become leading, rather than muted, members of the political elite.[100]

The intellectual landscape of the Arab world was certainly influenced by events in Europe in the 1930s and informed by various delusions of grandeur—in the shape of either Mediterraneaism, Phoenicianism, Pharaonism, Fascism or National Socialism.[101] But one should keep in mind that knowledge of what was happening in Europe stayed limited. What had begun with "enthusiasm and admiration for fascist and Nazi ideologies ended in deep disappointment and even animosity and complete rejection".[102] Beside these deep misunderstandings, the movements themselves never bridged the gap between the higher educated classes and the mainly peasant working classes, always staying—as compared to Italy's PNF and Germany's NSDAP with their million party members—an elite group "composed of dedicated persons, who would work through education, local organization, and, if necessary, underground political planning, until they could eventually emerge as leaders of their society [...] The party rested on initiates and believers, not masses."[103]

Few in the Arab world traveled and brought back news of the events and developments in Europe. With the exception of Syria's Nationalist

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[100] Cf. Haggai Erlich, "Periphery and Youth: Fascist Italy and the Middle East", in: Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe*, pp. 393-423, here p. 415.

[101] Cf. Nordbruch, "'Cultural Fusion' of Thought and Ambitions? Memory, Politics and the History of Arab-Nazi German Encounters", in: *MES* 47 (2011), pp. 183-194, here p. 190.

[102] Kabha, "The Palestinian National Movements", p. 438.

[103] Marston, "Fascist Tendencies", p. 22.

Party, none of the movements found it necessary to develop a political theory. Therefore the main reason for labeling oneself fascist

> does not seem to have been based on any clear understanding of Nazi or fascist ideology, nor was there much attempt to study it carefully. For one thing, the two societies and civilizations were poles apart in their histories and in their social and intellectual development; in particular the Middle East had nothing like the tradition of modern rational philosophy upon which European political thinking rests. The superficial similarities in situation, however, were sufficiently compelling to persuade many of the nationalists in the Middle East that Germany and Italy were closer to them in spirit than were any of the Western democracies.[104]

But even in view of those striking examples of the mimicking of what was regarded by contemporaries as "fascism" by the emerging youth movements, "these slices of historical reality amount to considerably less than half the loaf", especially if one considers the vigorous anti-fascist polemics in Egyptian public discourse.[105] Historians therefore should not be misguided by "superficial attention to external symbols" such as shirts, organizational patterns, mechanisms of rule and techniques of propaganda.[106]

IV. Anti-Zionism or Anti-Semitism?

In the 1930s and 1940s most Muslim intellectuals did not support the notion that Italian fascism or National Socialism could serve as models for societies in the Islamic world. After the colonial and racial war that Mussolini undertook in Ethiopia, it had become even more obvious that Italy and Germany were no less imperialistic than the detested French and British. In Egypt, which historically enjoyed more autonomy

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[104] Marston, "Fascist Tendencies", p. 19.

[105] Israel Gershoni/James Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism in Egypt. Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s*, Stanford 2010, p. 278; Edmond Cao-van-Hoa, *"Der Feind meines Feindes..." Darstellungen des nationalsozialistischen Deutschlands in ägyptischen Schriften*, Frankfurt am Main 1990; Israel Gershoni, *Light in the Shade. Egypt and Fascism, 1922-1937*, Tel Aviv 1999; Ami Ayalon, "Egyptian Intellectuals versus Fascism and Nazism in the 1930s", in: Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers in the Middle East*, pp. 391-404.

[106] Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, pp. 175, 196.

than the French-occupied territories, a large part of the public opinion became unreceptive to fascism and opposed fascist and National Socialist ideologies.[107] In a world where Arab intellectuals—whether they liked it or not—had already been exposed to Franco-British culture and Western political thought,[108] it was difficult to keep such values and ideas at arm's length. If the Syrians, Arabs or Egyptians "felt to be somehow 'superior' peoples", these peoples were "not strictly defined or really exclusive on racial or religious grounds; and the 'superiority', it was assumed, would show itself through leadership rather than through conquest and domination".[109]

Racial superiority or the dream of a "master race" was not on the agenda of even the most radical of the nationalist youth movements. They lacked the radical racial ideology of Hitler's Germany and its long history of Christian anti-Semitism, which was a specific European phenomenon also detectable in France and Poland. The literature and other contemporary sources of information contain little that is comparable to the "deep-seated and comprehensive" anti-Semitism of the Third Reich,[110] thus showing that the absorption of radical anti-Semitism into Arab culture was part of the "wider process of Westernization. It appears that the major factor nourishing this anti-Semitic feeling was not hatred of the Jews as such but opposition to Jewish settlement in Palestine."[111] In Palestine, the growing aversion to influx of the Jews, first emigrating and later fleeing, helps to largely explain the anti-Jewish and anti-Zionist feelings that were mainly imports from the West and became a predominant force in the late 1930s.[112]

Scholars tend to focus on the Arab world's distancing of itself from democracy and Western values, its rejection of not only parliamentarianism but the rule of law, pluralism, human rights and the secular foundations of the state—not to mention its embrace of a rabid anti-

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[107] Erlich, "Periphery and Youth", in: Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe*, p. 417.

[108] Basheer M. Nafi, "The Arabs and the Axis: 1933-1940", in: *Arab Studies Quarterly* 19, Number 2 (Spring 1997), pp. 1-24, here p. 3.

[109] Marston, "Fascist Tencencies", p. 21.

[110] Gershoni/Jankowski, *Confronting Fascism*, p. 323, fn. 27.

[111] Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestinian-Arab National Movement, vol. I: 1918-1929*, London 1974, p. 59.

[112] Wildangel, *Zwischen Achse und Mandatsmacht*, pp. 50f.

Zionism that was coupled with the distasteful rise of anti-Semitism.[113] But this is difficult to verify, for the ideological links between Arabs and Nazi Germany were generally marginal and close cooperation was rare.

In the beginning only those junior members involved in Nazi politics supported the Arab movements. It was for a variety of reasons that the Nazis in general showed little interest in official contacts with emerging Arab nationalists—for example, not wishing to anger Italy, Great Britain, and Vichy France—but some Arabs still hoped to gain support from National Socialism. They admired the egalitarian aspect of Nazi ideology, the Nazis' ability to end Germany's widespread unemployment during the Great Depression, to get the country back on its feet economically, and some were impressed by Nazi opposition to Stalin's communism. As these Arab nationalists aspired to become an Arab nation even before having become an Arab state, Germany served as the model of a powerful united nation—and mainly for anti-imperialist reasons.

Yet, Arab sympathy for National Socialism was merely a "label for anti-British sentiments in the rising confrontation of pro- and anti-British forces. It had little to do with ideology."[114] In other words, Arab nationalists felt that the best way to rid themselves of colonial rule was by casting their lot with the enemies of Britain and France. Many Arabs mistakenly interpreted Hitler's anti-Semitism as sympathy for their cause, and they also held the false hope of becoming allies in the common struggle against a Jewish state in the Middle East. Their hatred of the Zionist build-up of territorial claims and their fear of an eventual Jewish state—a fear justified by increased Jewish emigration to Palestine—was incited and fanned by the Hitler regime.

The Syrian Anṭūn Saʿāda's racist concept for his nation, coupled with his "non-historically conceived territorial claims proceeding from German geopolitical theories", certainly constituted the most prominent common denominators of his movement and National Socialism.[115] But even his expansionist views did not evolve into delusions of *Lebensraum*, and his ideas on race, which evolved from the biological premises of a

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[113] Mallmann/Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, pp. 41-56, 253-258.

[114] Wien, *Iraqi Arab Nationalism*, p. 34.

[115] Mendel/Müller, "Fascist Tendencies", p. 10; Marston, "Fascist Tendencies", p. 21.

rather vulgar social Darwinism, differed fundamentally from Hitler's dogma of a "master race". There were no statements about "lower" races who were to be weeded out and exterminated. Moderates like Muḥammed al-Ghazālī (d. 1996) had no sympathy for the political systems in Rome and Berlin, which tried to classify mankind into different races. When the Egyptian-Lebanese intellectual Muḥammad Najātī Ṣidqī published his book in 1940, it was a clear refutation of any similarities between Islam and Nazism.[116] Others like Rashīd Riḍā and Ḥasan al-Bannā, in their anti-Western attitude, saw fascism and National Socialism as foreign ideologies which in the end would threaten Islamic traditions.[117]

Al-Bannā, the founder of the Muslim Brothers and their "Yellow Shirts"—successful competitors to "Young Egypt"—rejected Hitler's racial policies, since they were regarded as incompatible with the religious concept of the *umma*. He wrote:

> If what is meant by "nationalism" is racial self-aggrandizement to a degree which leads to the disparagement of other races, aggression against them and their victimization for the sake of the nation's glory and its continuing existence, as preached for example by Germany and Italy; nay more, as claimed by every nation which preaches its superiority over all others—then this is a reprehensible idea.[118]

One of the most obvious reasons for the popularity of the notion of close similarities between Italian fascism, National Socialism and movements in the Middle East is the well-documented political flirtation of

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[116] Cf. Gershoni/Nordbruch, *Sympathie und Schrecken*, esp. pp. 81-164; Götz Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon. The Ambivalence of the German Option, 1933-1945*, London 2009. Cf. Israel Gershoni's detailed article in this issue.

[117] Israel Gershoni, "The Muslim Brothers and the Arab Revolution in Palestine, 1936-1939", in: *MES* 22 (1986), pp. 367-397; id., "Rejecting the West: The Image of the West in the Teachings of the Muslim Brotherhood", in: Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers in the Middle East*, pp. 270-290; Brynjar Lia, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. The Rise of an Islamic Mass Movement, 1928-1942*, Reading 1998.

[118] Charles Wendell (ed.), *Five Tracts of Ḥasan al-Bannā' (1906-1949). A Selection from the Majmu'āt rasā'il al-Imām al-Shahīd Ḥasan al-Bannā'*, Berkeley 1978, p. 113. Cf. Ana Belén Soage, "Hasan al Banna or the Politicisation of Islam", in: *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 9 (2008), pp. 21-42.

the Grand-Mufti of Palestine, Amīn al-Ḥusaynī, with Hitler, the former being an "unhappy symbol of close collaboration between National Socialism and the Arabs".[119] The question how to categorize the extreme anti-Semitism of the Grand-Mufti, and how to qualify his opinions in the wider context of Arab nationalism and "fascism", has been a topic of constant debate.[120] While some scholars of the Arab world have been accused of neglecting, downplaying and belittling the significance of Arab anti-Semitism,[121] others have maintained that its role should not be exaggerated.[122] Amīn al-Ḥusaynī's relations with Hitler became more intimate over time, culminating in several visits and a period of exile in Berlin from 1942 to 1945. In October 1944, in a speech to the Imams of the Bosnian SS-Division, he outlined the most important parallels between Islam and National Socialism: the leadership principle, the readiness to obey, the fighting spirit, the sense of community, and last but not least the fight against Jews.[123] In a now well-known conversation of 28 November 1941, it was to the Grand-Mufti's delight

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[119] Wild, "National Socialism", p. 145. Cf. Gerhard Höpp, "Der Gefangene im Dreieck. Zum Bild Amin al-Husseinis in Wissenschaft und Publizistik seit 1941. Ein bio-bibliographischer Abriß", in: Rainer Zimmer-Winkel (ed.), *Die Araber und die Shoah. Über die Schwierigkeiten dieser Konjunktion*, Trier 2000, pp. 5-16; Rainer Zimmer-Winkel (ed.), *Eine umstrittene Figur: Hadj Amin al-Husseini, Mufti von Jerusalem*, Trier 1999.

[120] Nordbruch, "Cultural Fusion", p. 183; Götz Nordbruch, "Kontroversen der Forschung. Die Beziehungen zwischen Nationalsozialismus und arabischer Welt", in: Wolfgang Benz/Mona Körte (eds.), *Antisemitismus und radikaler Islamismus*, Essen 2007, pp. 23-42; Matthias Küntzel, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred. Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11*, New York 2007; Matthias Küntzel, "Von Zeesen bis Beirut. Der Nationalsozialismus und der Antisemitismus in der arabischen Welt", in: Doron Rabinovici/Ulrich Speck/Nathan Sznaider (eds.), *Neuer Antisemitismus? Eine globale Debatte*, Frankfurt am Main 2004, pp. 271-293; Peter Wien, "Coming to Terms with the Past: German Academia and Historical Relations between the Arab Lands and Nazi Germany", in: *IJMES* 42 (2010), pp. 311-321.

[121] For the criticism on the biography of the Grand-Mufti by Philip Mattar, *The Mufti of Jerusalem. Al Hajj Amin al-Husayni and the Palestinian National Movement*, New York 1988, cf. Mallmann/Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, pp. 253-258.

[122] Gerhard Höpp, "Araber im Zweiten Weltkrieg – Kollaboration oder Patriotismus?", in: Wolfgang G. Schwanitz (ed.), *Jenseits der legenden. Araber, Juden, Deutsche*, Berlin 1994. Cf. Alexander Flore's article in this issue.

[123] Cited in Gerhard Höpp (ed.), *Mufti-Papiere. Briefe, Memoranden, Reden und Aufrufe Amin al-Husainis aus dem Exil, 1940-1945*, Berlin 2001, pp. 219ff.

that he learned of Hitler's hopes that military victory in Africa and the Middle East would bring destruction to the Jews in the Arab World.[124]

The establishment of the *Islamisches Zentral-Institut* in Berlin in December 1942[125] falls into the same pattern, whereas the treatment of mainly French slave labor of Arab origin was much more ambiguous and did not exactly point to a joint ideological brotherhood.[126] When the Wehrmacht's fortunes began to change, it was mainly the military assistance of Arab soldiers which was desperately sought. These activities, supported by Heinrich Himmler and his cronies in the *SS-Hauptamt* and *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, became increasingly absurd as Nazi Germany's defeat loomed inevitable.

These facts and the undeniable close encounters with representatives of the Third Reich after the Second World War gave occasion for a barrage of harsh criticism. It began in 1947 with an influential and well-informed book by Simon Wiesenthal about the Grand-Mufti and his "mercenaries of fascism", which Wiesenthal characterized not as freedom fighters but as "political gangsters".[127] This has led to a never-ending series of publications pointing out certain political as well as ideological parallels between Arab nationalism and the Nazis,[128] culminating in the question as to whether Islam itself was a factor in the Holocaust and whether Islam is a barbaric or civilizing force.[129] Several

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[124] Akten zur Deutschen Auswärtigen Politik, Serie D, vol. XIII/2, No. 515, p. 720 (Aufzeichnung vom 30. 11. 1941 über die Unterredung zwischen dem Führer und dem Großmufti von Jerusalem in Anwesenheit des Reichsaußenministers und des Gesandten Grobba in Berlin am 28. November 1941). For the context Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Allies and the Holocaust. The Known, the Unknown, the Disputed and the Reexamined*, Bloomington/Indianapolis 1998, p. 484.

[125] Gerhard Höpp, *Muslime unterm Hakenkreuz. Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des Islamischen Zentralinstituts zu Berlin e.V.*, in: *Moslemische Revue* 14 (1994), pp. 16-27.

[126] Gerhard Höpp, "Der verdrängte Diskurs. Arabische Opfer des Nationalsozialismus", in: Gerhard Höpp/Peter Wien/René Wildangel (eds.), *Blind für die Geschichte? Arabische Begegnungen mit dem Nationalsozialismus*, Berlin 2004, pp. 215-268.

[127] Simon Wiesenthal, *Großmufti-Großagent der Achse. Tatsachenbericht mit 24 Photographien*, Salzburg/Wien 1947, p. 61.

[128] For an overview Klaus Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem und die Nationalsozialisten. Eine politische Biographie Amin el-Husseinis*, Darmstadt 2007, esp. pp. 11-16; cf. already Klaus Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini, und die Nationalsozialisten*, Frankfurt am Main 1988.

[129] Alexander Flores, *Zivilisation oder Barbarei? Der Islam im historischen Kontext*, Berlin 2011; for an account of this discourse after 1945 cf. Meir Litvak/Esther Webman, *From*

more recent German studies quite openly attack the "apologetical" works of some Orientalists, accusing them of overlooking the manifest sympathies of men like al-Ḥusaynī and al-Kaylānī—and some American scholars call the Grand-Mufti an "Icon of Evil".[130] They also emphasize similarities and "brown affinities" between National Socialism and several movements in the Arab world in the interwar years. For these critics, National Socialism was an "export article" that the Arabs happily accepted.[131] For some scholars the Grand-Mufti's striking collaboration with Hitler's regime is just the tip of the iceberg. Jeffrey Herf has imputed a "conjecture of passion and interest" between the Nazis and their Arab collaborators, engaged "in the work of selective tradition, drawing on and accentuating the most despicable and hate-filled aspects of the cultures of Europe and of Islam".[132]

At first sight it would seem obvious to compare the anti-Jewish diatribes of some radical leaders of Islam in the 1930s and 1940s with Hitler's attitude and his genocidal policies. But one should keep in mind that, as Bernard Lewis maintains, opposition to Zionism was not always an expression of anti-Semitic prejudice.[133] If one can indicate disturbing "points of commonality with fascism and Nazism",[134] there was also considerable antipathy to Nazi racism in the Arab world. One cannot reduce the Arab world to just willing followers of Hitler and his world views.[135] The situation was far more complex. The main difficulty is in ascertaining the degree of support or refusal of fascist tendencies.

Empathy to Denial. Arab Responses to the Holocaust, New York 2009; Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust*.

130) David G. Dalin/John F. Rothmann, *Icon of Evil. Hitler's Mufti and the Rise of Radical Islam*, New York 2008.

131) Mallmann/Cüppers, *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz*, p. 43.

132) Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, New Haven/London 2009, pp. 261, 266.

133) Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites. An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice*, New York 1999, p. 20.

134) Jeffrey Herf, "Foreword", in: Küntzel, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred*, pp. vii-xv, here p. x.

135) Götz Nordbruch, "Bread, Freedom, Independence: Opposition to Nazi Germany in Lebanon and Syria and the Struggle for a Just Order", in: Amy Singer/Israel Gershoni (eds.), *Intellectual History in Middle Eastern Studies. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 28 (2008), pp. 416-422.

V. The Cases of Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq: Traces of Fascism?

In Egypt, Italian efforts to build a fascist movement emulating the youth organization Balilla and supplying support to several shirt movements proved to be fruitless in many respects. In 1934-35 even Egyptian proponents of fascism, who had hoped to gain major political support by traveling to Italy, returned disillusioned. In 1935-36, in the aftermath of riots occasioned by the Abyssinian crisis and a renewal of public pan-Arabism, the Egyptian Green Shirts made a comeback and another youth organization called The Squadrons of the Blue Shirts emerged, imitating fascist ceremonies, salutes and organization.[136] These organizations were certainly expansionist, and after the British had been ousted, the plan was to incorporate Sudan and finally become both the regional leader and the core of an ever-widening "nation".[137] But its leader Aḥmad Ḥusayn failed to explain how this was to be defined and the movements never gained substantial support in Egyptian society and subsequently declined. The Blue and Green Shirts spent the next two years neutralizing one another in constant clashes, until both were declared illegal in 1938.[138] Certainly Egypt under British control did not become an entity with democratic institutions and was plagued by many problems which came with modernization,[139] but fascism as it existed in the failed liberal states of Europe could not be numbered among these problems.

The Iraqi *futuwwa* youth movement envisioned an "Arab nation" spanning half the globe and probably most closely resembled their idols in Italy and Germany, fascinated as they were with military power. Its members—they claimed 63,000, mostly comprising students—were organized in official paramilitary units under the leadership of Sāmī

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136) Ehrlich, "Periphery and Youth", in: Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe*, pp. 410f.; James Jankowski, "The Egyptian Blue Shirts and the Egyptian Wafd, 1935-1938", in: *MES* 6 (1970), pp. 77-95.

137) Marston, "Fascist Tendencies", p. 21; Simon Shamir, "The Influence of German National-Socialism on Radical Movements in Egypt", in: Wallach (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East*, pp. 200-208, here p. 206.

138) Erlich, "Periphery and Youth", in: Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe*, p. 412.

139) Abdeslam M. Maghraoui, *Liberalism without Democracy. Nationhood and Citizenship in Egypt, 1922-1936*, Durham 2006.

Shawkat, director of the Ministry of Education. The Iraqi movement was easily the most militant in the Middle East and its appearance was consistent with its cherished image of Iraq as the "Prussia of the Arabs".[140] Shawkat embraced the patterns of the Hitler Youth, whose *Reichsjugendführer* Baldur von Schirach paid a visit in late 1937 not only to Damascus and Tehran but also to Baghdad. The *futuwwa* movement in 1936 saw itself as a "modern military organization based on the most modern system, which imbues youth with military spirit and the spirit of sacrifice, love of discipline and obedience to orders".[141] Its members were subjected to a barrage of appeals. There were frequent references to Hitler and Mussolini, and the "Art of Death" and sacrifice was constantly evoked. This hinted at a general mood which had pervaded in Europe since before the First World War, when Futurists had seen war and bloodshed as a way of neutralizing the boredom generated by bourgeois society. In Iraq it was adapted to foster the idea of the awakening Arab nation—in Shawkat's view the only practicable method of succeeding in the fight against the Great Powers was by instilling firmness and toughness. Although Shawkat developed the idea of a superior Arab national character, he felt that other nations should not be forced into the Arab fold but would willingly join it by virtue of its attractiveness.

The preconditions in the Levant were different from those in Europe, and the youth movements catered to different needs than the regimes in Rome and Berlin. In Syria "the social pressures generated by an impoverished middle class were almost absent", while the overriding issue was the "quest for a satisfactory definition of the political community in a fragmented society".[142] The Syrian Social Nationalist Party was headed by Anṭūn Saʿāda, a well-educated intellectual who consciously glorified Syrian history, and one of the few charismatic (and unquestioned) leaders in the region. He believed in the superiority of his own peoples and in military values. His movement was secular and extremely nationalistic. Still, as it remains unclear if he wholeheartedly

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140) Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, p. 185.

141) Quoted in Wild, "National Socialism", p. 136. For a general overview Reeva S. Simon, *Iraq Between the Two World Wars. The Creation and Implementation of a Nationalist Ideology*, New York 1986.

142) Rabinovich, "Germany and the Syrian Political Scene", in: Wallach (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East*, pp. 197f.

adopted fascist ideas,[143] it would be going too far in calling his party a "Levantine clone of the Nazi party in almost every respect".[144] Sa'āda envisioned a reawakening of the Syrian nation and was opposed to Islamic feudalism, since this seemed to hamper the progress and development of society. He therefore rejected pan-Arabism as well as communist internationalism and Western-style individualism. The Syrian Social Nationalist Party did not develop a detailed program, and it is unclear to what extent Sa'āda came into contact with European fascism. He spoke German, was influenced by German culture and history, traveled to Germany during the war, but it is uncertain how deeply this self-proclaimed "*Führer* of the Syrian nation" (whose movement was already disintegrating during the Second World War) was involved with the National Socialist leadership and ideology. His germanophilia was probably more influenced by the German *Jugendbewegung* of the early 20th century than by Hitler's movement, and critical followers of his party always denied any close collaboration between his party and Nazi Germany or fascist Italy.[145] This alone is an indication that the commitment to the European radical movement cannot have been very strong; Sa'āda never mentioned the ideological sources of his teachings.[146] The ideas, revolutionary as they seemed, were an amalgam which gave the appearance of a kind of homegrown national socialism, but the pro-German sentiment and the interaction between Nazi ideology and the local Arab political scene had only a limited impact on the actual course of events.[147]

The radical movements in Damascus certainly appreciated the fascist inclinations of certain German emissaries, and they flirted with and were influenced by Hitler's and Mussolini's ideas. The outward appeal, the militant nationalism, the *Führerprinzip*, the emphasis on youth and dynamism and the anti-Western approach became even more important

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143) Labib Zuwiyya Yamak, *The Syrian Social Nationalist Party. An Ideological Analysis*, Cambridge 1966.

144) Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust*, p. 77.

145) Bassam Tibi, *Arab Nationalism. A Critical Enquiry*, New York 1981, pp. 165-172, here p. 167.

146) Mendel/Müller, "Fascist Tendencies", pp. 2-10, esp. pp. 7f.

147) Rabinovich, "Germany and the Syrian Political Scene", in: Wallach (ed.), *Germany and the Middle East*, p. 191.

after the Third Reich defeated France in 1940 and appeared to be the coming world power which could serve as the champion of Arab liberation.

Never really gaining mass support in Damascus was the rather elite group of "Steel Shirts", with their modernist ideas, dressed in steel-gray tunics with matching pants and hats, and led by a German-educated engineer. Once the traditional Syrian nationalists embraced the more radical slogans of pan-Arabism, they were able to preserve their supremacy, and by 1937 all that was left of the "Steel Shirts" in Aleppo, at that time under French control, was the soccer team.[148] All in all the picture in Syria and Lebanon remains checkered. While unconditional approvals of National Socialism were rare, "ambivalent allusions were much more common."[149]

It is of course legitimate to trace fascist and totalitarian elements in precursors of modern Islamist movements and to take a closer look at secular ideologies such as that of the Baʿth party in both Syria and Iraq. The Baʿth party's principal ideologue, Mīshīl ʿAflaq, later brought these radical, romantic, national and pan-Arabic ideas back from France where he had been studying;[150] but this does not mean that they were essentially fascist. ʿAflaq's partly secular movement was undoubtedly influenced by the mood in Vichy France—he framed his political agenda into an ideology which was simultaneously secular, anti-liberal, anti-Western and anti-communist.

In Palestine the situation was even more complex and dynamic.[151] Individuals such as Avraham Stern, a Jew, were supporters of Hitler not because of his anti-Semitic diatribes but because his visions of statehood seemed to be a model on which an anti-Western nationalist and totalitarian Jewish state could be built.[152] Saʿāda's concentration on Syrian nationalism alienated prospective followers in Palestine and Lebanon, who found greater appeal in the approach of Pierre Gemayel and his

148) Watenpaugh, *Being Modern*, pp. 266, 277.

149) Nordbruch, *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon*, p. 136.

150) Jeffrey M. Bale, "Islamism and Totalitarianism", in: *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 10 (2009), pp. 73-96, here p. 81.

151) Kabha, "The Palestinian National Movements", pp. 440ff.

152) Joseph Heller, "The Failure of Fascism in Jewish Palestine, 1925-1948", in: Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe*, pp. 362-392.

Lebanese Phalange. Gemayel, although himself not a fascist, is said to have founded his movement after returning from one of the Nuremberg Rallies.[153] But his main interest was not party programs but a stabilization of the situation in Lebanon and the protection of Christian interests, even when his autocratic movement became a paramilitary organization with weekly training sessions. Certainly the mandate system and the growing influx of Jewish refugees from Europe led to a situation in which support for extremist groups was to be expected.[154] But in order to gain support in the broader society and be able to form a specific Lebanese nationalism—in line with Arab nationalism—these military exercises were soon cut back, and there is little evidence that the movement, which had no clear-cut racist or expansionist program, was substantially influenced by European fascism.[155]

VI. Hitler and "Fascism" in the Arab World in the 1930s: A Sphere of Mutual Instrumentalization

Hitler never even conceived of a universal fascism and would have rejected any notion that his movement and regime were comparable to that of Mussolini, with whom he shared a "brutal friendship".[156] He had already made clear in *Mein Kampf* that although opposed to British rule in India and in Egypt, he did not intend this to mean solidarity with the oppressed, being convinced of their racial "Minderwertigkeit".[157] Outside of Europe, Hitler saw his major areas of focus not in the Middle East but in East Asia and the United States.[158] It speaks for itself that

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153) David Pryce-Jones, *The Closed Circle. An Interpretation of the Arabs*, London 1991, pp. 188-201.

154) Matthews, *Confronting an Empire*, pp. 198-232; Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage. The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood*, Boston 2006.

155) Mendel/Müller, "Fascist Tendencies", pp. 12-15.

156) Frederick W. Deakin, *Die brutale Freundschaft. Hitler, Mussolini und der Untergang des italienischen Faschismus*, Köln 1964. For Germany's foreign policy in this period the best overview is Klaus Hildebrand, *Das vergangene Reich. Deutsche Außenpolitik von Bismarck bis Hitler*, München 2008.

157) Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, München 1934, p. 747.

158) Gerhard L. Weinberg, "The World through Hitler's Eyes", in: Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Germany, Hitler, and World War II. Essays in Modern German and World History*, Cambridge 1995, pp. 30-53, here p. 49.

he seldom mentioned the Arabs, and when he did it was in a contemptuous and derogatory way. In one of his notorious monologues, Hitler tried to teach Mussolini about the peoples of the Mediterranean, which he felt were tainted with "Negerblut"—"nigger blood".[159] His army command was informed that he was interested in Arabs only as a means of inciting disturbances—he labeled Arabs "lackierte Halbaffen" ("varnished prosimians") who were eager to feel the whip.[160] His opinions differed little from those of his opponent Winston Churchill, who in 1951, annoyed by Egyptian aspirations for the Suez Canal, instructed one of his diplomats: "Tell them that if they have any more of their cheek we will set the Jews on them and drive them into the gutter, from which they should never have emerged."[161] At a time when support from the Middle East had become useful, some of Hitler's diplomats tried to squelch rumors that the Arabs were ranked fourteenth on an official race-scale, but it is probable that many Germans, even those with experience of the Arab world, saw Orientals as lazy and in need of hard rule. When not even the Italians were accepted as racial equals with their German allies,[162] then what chance did the Arabs have?

Hitler's policy in the Middle East was adamantly opposed to French and British colonial rule, but it was not a policy of liberation. Mussolini and Hitler, both

> latecomers to the imperial banquet [...] did not want to end empire but to redistribute it. They believed that the liberal imperialists in France and Britain, as with their domestic policies, lacked the necessary ruthlessness and vigor to govern their vast empires. They had either to make way or shape up,

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159) Jens Petersen, *Hitler-Mussolini. Die Entstehung der Achse Berlin-Rom 1933-1936*, Tübingen 1973, pp. 344-361; Max Domarus, *Mussolini und Hitler. Zwei Wege – Gleiches Ende*, Würzburg 1977, pp. 184f.

160) Akten zur auswärtigen Politik, Serie D, Bd. 7, S. 172.

161) Cited in William Roger Louis, "Prelude to Suez: Churchill and Egypt", in: id., *Ends of British Imperialism. The Scramble for Empire, Suez and Decolonization*, London/New York 2006, pp. 609-626, here p. 612.

162) There is no need to discuss this perceived "inferiority", which was later for instance bitterly deplord by the Italian fascist ambassodor in Germany. Cf. Dino Alfieri, *Due dittatori di fronte*, Mailand 1948. Cf. also Cesare Bermani, *Al lavoro nella germania di Hitler. Racconti e memorie dell'emigrazione italiana 1937-1945*, Turin 1998.

becoming fascist themselves, and in either case the "young nations" could not be denied their share.[163]

Neither Italy nor Germany wasted any opportunities to exploit Arab sympathies. What followed was geopolitics. Both sides, certain Italian and German officials, and certain Arab leaders, tried to outmaneuver one another, and what followed was less an expression of mutual understanding and ideological conviction than a mere reflection of the old game of Realpolitik.[164]

Mussolini had always hoped to elevate Italy to the status of an international player and to shake off the stigma of "the Least of the Great Powers".[165] After the humiliating military disaster at Caporetto during the First World War and the notion of a "vittoria mutilata" following the Paris treaties, Mussolini shed his socialist past but clung to his own version of a social revolution. In his hopes for a national rebirth and territorial expansion, his search for a "mare nostro" quite naturally became a serious obstacle to French and British ambitions in the Mediterranean. He tried to exploit the emerging militant mood in the Arab world and especially the growing national pride among the educated youth and emerging middle classes. They proved to be fertile ground for fascist propaganda, although the scope of these efforts, as interesting they may be, should not be exaggerated.[166] As already mentioned, the idea of "international fascism" had found resonance in certain Italian government circles, resulting in conferences on the subject. When Mus-

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163) Adrian Lyttleton, "What Was Fascism", in: *The New York Review of Books*, 21 October 2004, pp. 33-36, here p. 36.

164) Nafi, "The Arabs and the Axis", p. 1.

165) R. J. B. Bosworth, *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers. Italian Foreign Policy Before the First World War*, Cambridge 2005.

166) Erlich, "Periphery and Youth", in: Larsen (ed.), *Fascism outside Europe*, p. 407. For the Italian efforts cf. Manuela A. Williams, *Mussolini's Propaganda Abroad. Subversion in the Mediterranean and the Middle East, 1935-1940*, London 2006; Nir Arielli, *Fascist Italy and the Middle East, 1933-1940*, Basingstoke 2011; Callum MacDonald, "Radio Bari: Italian Wireless Propaganda in the Middle East and British Countermeasures", in: *MES* 13 (1977), pp. 195-207; Claudio G. Segrè, "Liberal and Fascist Italy in the Middle East, 1919-1939: The Elusive White Stallion", in: Dann (ed.), *The Great Powers and the Middle East*, pp. 199-212.

solini laid claim to a share of Libya, still a colony in 1934,[167] he praised himself as a supporter of Arab nationalism and a "defender of Islam". The Libyan Gioventù Araba del Littorio, founded in 1935 under Italian tutelage, even tried to promote its own expansionist goals; however, the much more powerful local fascist party was convinced of the superiority of the West and was not interested in the local Arab population but in bringing Italian colonists to Libya.[168] In 1935, Mussolini fought a colonial and racial[169] war in Ethiopia and declared himself Emperor of Abyssinia, but for certain Arab national movements it nevertheless made sense to continue their support of Italian fascism. Although Rome nervously tried to preserve its preponderance, in the 1930s Nazi Germany sought to gain support in the Arab world without having to necessarily commit itself;[170] and after the outbreak of the Second World War, Italy was no longer an independent factor in the power game, even if it stubbornly tried to maintain its military and ideological role in the Mediterranean.[171]

Germany—much less so Italy—had no direct territorial ambitions in the Middle East, and its foreign policy objectives in this region basically followed those of the previous Weimar government. Before 1939 both Hitler and the German Foreign Office wished to come to terms with London and eventually secure an Anglo-German alliance, and so Germany accepted both British ascendancy in the Middle East and the

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[167] Cf. for Angelo del Boca, *Gli italiani in Africa Orientale. La conquista dell'Impero*, Roma/Bari 1979; id. (ed.), *Le guerre coloniali del fascismo*, Roma/Bari 1991; cf. Claudio Segrè, *Forth Shore. The Italian Colonization of Libya*, Chicago 1974; Nicola Labanca, Oltremare, *Storia dell'espansione coloniale italiana*, Bologna 2002.

[168] François Dumasy, "Le fascisme est-il un 'article d'exportation'? Idéologie et enjeux sociaux du Parti National Fasciste en Libye pendant la colonisation italienne", in: *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemoraine* 55 (2008), pp. 85-115, esp. pp. 106-110.

[169] Aram Mattioli, *Experimentierfeld der Gewalt. Der Abessinienkrieg und seine internationale Bedeutung 1935-1941*, Zürich 2005. For a recent account of Mussolini's approach to "jewish questions" cf. Thomas Schlemmer/Hans Woller, "Der italienische Faschismus und die Juden 1922-1945", in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 53 (2005), pp. 165-201.

[170] Steppat, "Das Jahr 1933", in: Schulz (ed.), *Die Große Krise*, p. 269.

[171] Davide Rodogno, *Il nuove ordine mediterraneo. Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940-1943)*, Turin 2003; MacGregor Knox, "Das faschistische Italien und die 'Endlösung' 1942/43", in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 55 (2007), pp. 53-92; id., *Hitler's Italian Allies. Royal Armed Forces, Fascist Regime, and the War of 1940-1943*, Cambridge 2000.

idea of a Jewish national homeland in Palestine under British authority and greeted the Arab revolt of 1936 with almost total indifference.[172] Hitler's search for *Lebensraum* was focused on Soviet territory rather than on the Arab East (although Iraq, rich in resources, became more important during the Second World War). Even when the Peel Partition Plan of 1937 generated a debate about German policy in the Middle East—and strict opposition in Germany to creation of an independent Jewish state coincided with Arab opposition as well—it still did not result in any active involvement, and when the partition scheme died, very little changed.[173]

VII. The Radicalization of World War II: Realpolitik at its Worst

It was the Second World War which forced a change in German politics with respect to the Middle East. Hitler continued to hope for an understanding with Britain, which was not forthcoming even after the defeat of France.[174] A victory of the Axis powers over the Allies seemed imminent in the early stages of the Second World War. In 1940 many of the Arab emissaries were convinced that Germany would be the future ruler of Europe, and as Hitler's plan to form an alliance with Britain had come to nought, it was a fair bet that aligning with the Third Reich would result in the end of British (and French) oppression and ultimately in independence. When al-Ḥusaynī sent his private secretary ʿUthmān Kamāl Ḥaddād to Berlin in 1940 in an effort to restore diplomatic relations between Germany and Iraq, these negotiations resulted in a joint declaration which championed Arab nationalism but mentioned neither a common cause between the two nations nor referred to a special bond between National Socialism and Arab ideas. "Fascist" movements in the Middle East were still of no importance. Hitler paid but faint lip-service to them; the declaration, as with

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[172] Nicosia, *The Third Reich*, pp. 85-108. Cf. Francis Nicosia, "Arab Nationalism and National Socialist Germany, 1933-1939: Ideological and Strategic Incompatibility", in: *IJMES* 12 (1980), pp. 351-372.

[173] Nicosia, *The Third Reich*, pp. 109-144. Cf. Nafi, "The Arabs and the Axis" pp. 1, 4.

[174] The best overview and analysis still is Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie. Politik und Kriegführung 1940-1941*, Frankfurt am Main 1965.

other similar lukewarm statements of support, was essentially another illustration of the fact that politics often make strange bedfellows.

Nazi Germany had little to lose in intensifying its contacts with the Middle East after the outbreak of the Second World War. Certain political figures such as Fritz Grobba, one of the German experts with knowledge of and familiarity with the area, were gaining political influence,[175] but he and others were nevertheless frustrated because Hitler showed no sustained interest in the Arab world. While German diplomats, members of the NSDAP and the SS and several other Nazi organizations as well as Orientalists and businessmen continued to seek backing, their emissaries, as hard as they tried, never got more than half-hearted support for Arab self-determination.[176] In any event, even when it tried to mobilize the masses, 'Aflaq's movement lacked the necessary public support and, especially in Iraq, it was maintained "basically as a conspiratorial elite rather than as a true fascist-style mass movement".[177]

The army officers who came to power in Iraq in 1938 certainly looked to Nazi Germany for their cues, but the career of these young putschist colonels came to an end in 1941 when the British quickly quelled another coup d'etat under Rashīd 'Ālī al-Kaylānī, who had also secured the support of nationalists and tribal chiefs. The rather short-lived collaboration between the Nazis and Iraq resulted only in limited German air support. Hitler, the German Foreign Office, the general staff, and the Abwehr had several plans for paralyzing Britain's forces in the Middle East,[178] but these were strategic decisions in a crucial phase of the

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175) "Francis Nicosia, Fritz Grobba and the Middle East Policy of the Third Reich", in: Edward Ingram (ed.), *National and International Policies in the Middle East. Essays in Honour of Elie Kedourie*, London 1986, pp. 206-228, here p. 208. Cf. Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, "'Der Geist aus der Lampe'. Fritz Grobba und Berlins Politik im Nahen und Mittleren Osten", in: id. (ed.), *Deutschland und der Mittlere Osten*, Leipzig 2004. For Grobba's own account cf. Fritz Grobba, *Männer und Mächte im Orient*, Göttingen 1967.

176) For an overview of contemporary opinions of German soldiers and travelers to Iraq in the interwar period cf. Bernd Lemke, *Der Irak und Arabien aus der Sicht deutscher Kriegsteilnehmer und Orientreisender 1918 bis 1945*, Frankfurt am Main 2012, esp. pp. 99-216.; Cf. Also Renate Dietrich, "Germany's Relations with Iraq and Transjordan from the Weimar Republic to the End of the Second World War", in: *MES* 41 (2005), pp. 463-479.

177) Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p. 516.

178) Still useful for an analysis of events: Hirszowicz, *The Third Reich and the Arab East*, pp. 112-172, here esp. p. 151. Cf. also Nafi, "The Arabs and the Axis", pp. 9-18.

war and had little to do with supporting a common cause. Al-Kaylānī's hopes were crushed. But Berlin finally did set up an Arabic-language radio program, which broadcasted anti-British propaganda to the Near and Far East in such broadcasts as "Voice of the Free Arabs" and "Berlin in Arabic".[179] With the defeat of Germany in 1945 this token support became a footnote of history.

VIII. Conclusion

In looking at certain Middle Eastern movements from the 1930s and 1940s and comparing them with the fascist and National Socialist regimes and their underlying ideologies, we can perceive "striking similarities, and also striking differences".[180] These Arab movements emphasized power, national rebirth, military order and efficiency and therefore have been called "semifascist".[181] But Hitler achieved totalitarian rule with genocidal consequences by constructing a highly centralized state and using those bureaucratic institutions which were the backbone of modern German society. Those centralized and bureaucratic conditions were nonexistent in the Middle East. Among scholars, not even the most fervent proponents of the concept of "generic fascism" wholeheartedly apply this term to the Arab interwar movements. Griffin states:

> It is significant that the only proto-fascist movement in the Middle East that did emerge was the Lebanese Phalange, founded in 1936 by Arab nationalists who were not Muslim but Maronite Christians and who thus found it more natural to imitate the paramilitary fascism of contemporary Europe.[182]

Arab and Islamic dictatorships in the Middle East share major fascist traits such as collectivist persuasion, a nationalist sense of mission and

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179) Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, pp. 261, 266; Herf, "Hitlers Dschihad", in: *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 56 (2010), pp. 259-286, esp. p. 263; Horst J. P. Bergmeister/Rainer E. Lotz, *Hitler's Airwaves. The Inside Story of Nazi Radio Broadcasting and Propaganda Swing*, New Haven/London 1997, p. 197.

180) Marston, "Fascist Tendencies", p. 33.

181) Ibid.

182) Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, p. 157.

militarism, but only "in truncated forms".[183] In short, with colonial rule prevailing and traditional culture still having a firm grip on these mainly rural societies, the peoples of the Near and Middle East showed greater allegiance to their clans than to ideologies such as *Blut und Boden*. Fascist movements required the "kind of cultural space opened by a process of secularization",[184] and this prerequiste did not exist in the Arab world between the two World Wars—nor, incidentally, for modern radical Islamist movements in countries that still have scant experience of democracy and secularization and that harbor homegrown militarist-nationalist regimes. Even if one is prone to be accused of falling into the traps of Western-style and Eurocentric "Orientalism", it seems reasonable here to cite Robert Paxton:

> The principal objection to succumbing to the temptation to call fundamentalist movements like al-Qaeda and the Taliban fascist is that they are not reactions against a malfunctioning democracy. Arising in traditional hierarchical societies, their unity is, in terms of Emile Durkheim's famous distinction, more organic than mechanical. Above all, they have not 'given up free institutions,' since they never had any.[185]

Since the influence of fascism in the Arab world was mainly superficial—owing to the fundamentally different political and cultural environment—we should heed the conclusion of Stanley Payne that the

> full characteristics of European fascism could not be reproduced on a significant scale outside Europe, as these movements lacked the experience and culture of liberal and democratic systems of the nineteenth century and the cultural reorientation, which took place between 1890 and 1914.[186]

It is consequently doubtful that a typology derived from European fascism can be applied to non-European movements or regimes with full accuracy or specificity. Fascism evolved in Europe, preconditioned by the mood at the *fin de siècle*, and became effective after the First World War in a unique political, social, economic and cultural setting.

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183) Gregor, *The Faces of Janus*, p. 175.
184) Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p. 490.
185) Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 204.
186) Payne, *A History of Fascism*, pp. 353f.

Its era came to an end in 1945. Of course there are still barbarous regimes in the world today, and their aggressiveness and populism as well as their anti-Jewish and anti-Western attitudes certainly recall that darkest period of European history, but for these modern dictatorships we must find other labels.