Introduction

The German angle

The Germans are probably the last people in the world who should criticize other peoples for not having recognized early enough in Adolf Hitler's "National Socialism" the potential of a genocidal political ideology. A majority of Germans stood for a long time behind Adolf Hitler and his system. And it took nothing less than World War Two to rid Germany and the rest of the world of the "Führer", of his entourage and of his ideology. As we know, Germany had to be militarily crushed to be liberated. The Germans had been woefully unwilling or unable or both to liberate themselves. The most heinous crime of National Socialism was not even a war crime. It was the largely successful attempt to exterminate Jews in Germany and in all areas under German control in Europe. Germans murdered millions of men, women and children because they were considered to belong to a subhuman Jewish race. Genocidal racism has never before or after fallen to the abysmal depths of what later was called the Holocaust or the Shoah.

Many Western studies written after the end of World War Two on the influence of Nazi ideology on Arab political parties and Arab intellectuals in the pre-war era were prejudiced. There was a widespread preconceived idea that most Arab intellectuals in the 1930s subscribed to the slogan "The enemy of my enemy is my friend". On the strength of that slogan, many if not most Arab intellectuals were believed to consider German National Socialism a "friendly", because anti-colonial movement. The underlying hypothesis was that a majority of Arabs between North Africa and Iraq saw in Adolf Hitler a great statesman and an ally whose example the Arab governments should follow. There has been a distinct progress in the field thanks to a more method-oriented approach that replaced the often haphazard piling up of quotes and the drawing of swift conclusions from scant evidence.\(^2\) I have probably been guilty to a certain extent of some of this non-

\(^1\) I would like to thank Mitch Cohen (Berlin) for his help with my English.
\(^2\) Ulrike Freitag / Israel Gershoni: The Politics of Memory. The Necessity for Historical Investigation into Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism, in: Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Zeitschrift für historische Sozialwissenschaft 37 (2011) Heft 3 "Arab Encounters with Fascist Propaganda 1933-
I am also aware of the fact that Germans, at least Germans of my generation, face a particular challenge in dealing with highly sensitive issues under the long shadow of the past.\(^3\)

These sensitive issues are not confined to the questions of Zionism, Israeli and Palestinian statehood, the Palestinian refugee problem, Israeli occupation and annexation of Arab territory, anti-Semitism, terrorism, and resistance in other words to the whole Near Eastern problem. They also include the lumping together of Nazism, Fascism, state-socialism, and Communism under the generic term of "European totalitarianism". In our Beirut conference, there was at least one German colleague, who preferred not to participate because of what he considered a gross lack of method and an unfair conjunction of Nazism and Socialism/Communism. And there was at least one Arab colleague, who did join the conference, but in his contribution clearly protested against what he saw as an inadmissible attempt to put these two ideologies on an equal footing. There is, of course, a long history of heated scholarly and political discussions especially inside Germany on this subject. The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union provided an unfortunate background to this inner-German debate.

It was exacerbated by the fact that on German soil there were two German states. One was unofficially called "East Germany"; it was "socialist" in its ideology and "democratic" in its name "German Democratic Republic". For a long time it remained a Communist non-state in the eyes of the West. The other part of Germany, unofficially "West Germany", was "democratic" in its ideology and self-image (but not in its name "Federal Republic of Germany") and "Capitalist" or even "Fascist" in the eyes of its Eastern counterpart and far beyond. The question of how and to what extent Fascism and Socialism/Communism should be compared, distinguished, or lumped together and whether and how one was dependent on the other and why eventually both reshaped German historical identity, was debated in a long and furious "Historikerstreit" (historians' quarrel). To complicate matters even further, after the demise of Fascist totalitarianism, after the end of the Cold War and the concomitant demise of socialist totalitarianism, a third variety of totalitarianism was said to have entered the political arena: Islamo-Fascism. The title of this conference is therefore more a minefield than anything else.


Fascism and Fascisms

It is not easy to find one's way through the maze of theories about Fascist ideology. George Orwell's well known statement "The word 'Fascism' is almost entirely meaningless" may be closer to the truth than many would like to think. Some authors maintain: "The concept of fascism does not include the authoritarian rule, which some rulers exercised in Asian and African states - such as Muammar al-Gaddafi in Libya and Saddam Hussein in Iraq - nor does it include Islamic or Hindu fundamentalism." Others, e.g. Wolfgang Wippermann, do not hesitate to apply the term "fascism" to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the term "fundamentalist fascism" to the Hamas movement. This seems very problematic to me. While it does not make sense to label colonialism and imperialism eo ipso "fascist", it seems to be at least equally farfetched to classify resistance of the colonized to the colonial ruler as "fascist". When Mossadegh in Iran wanted to nationalize Iranian oil in 1953 or when Gamal Abdelnasser nationalized the British-controlled Suez Canal in 1956, senior US and British politicians promptly likened each to Adolf Hitler. Wippermann does, however, reject the term "Islamofascism": "Catholic fundamentalist movements and regimes have been called 'clericofascist', for Islamic-fundamentalist movements the term 'Islamofascism' seems to be more and more accepted. Both terms are problematic, because they put whole religious communities and not only their fundamentalist manifestations close to fascism." In the course of this paper I use the word "Fascism" as a generic term that covers German National Socialism and Italian fascismo. The latter was unacceptable to most Arab intellectuals at an early date anyway, because of the Italian colonial scramble for Libya and Ethiopia.

Egypt and Fascism up to the end of World War Two

An Arab predisposition towards Nazism and Fascism?

This view of a prevalent predisposition towards Nazism and a sort of proto-Nazi sympathy on the part of Arab intellectuals in the period before and during World War Two has to be abandoned. With regard to Egypt, the culturally leading Arab country, this hypothesis was

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7 Wippermann: Faschismus (see FN 5), 271.
8 Wippermann: Faschismus (see FN 5), 14.

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In this perspective, the first master narrative saw in Egyptian culture in the 1930s a regressive decade, a crisis of orientation, leaning toward political authoritarianism and most immediately toward the Fascist model flourishing in much of Europe. Egyptians are presented as having looked upon Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany as successful alternatives to a failing parliamentarian regime. With both states striving to overturn the post-World-War One international order, dominated by Great Britain and France, the two fascist powers are assumed to have been seen by Egyptians as the natural allies of an Egypt struggling against Western European imperialism. In this narrative, the axiom 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' was applied to Egypt.  

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There was, secondly, a corroborating inner-Egyptian version of this master narrative: "The military men who seized power in Egypt in 1952 were vehemently anti-imperialist... To legitimize their stature as fervid Egyptian nationalists, the early self-narrative of the Revolution's leaders projected their anti-imperialist stance of the 1950s back into the 1940s .... By the 1970s, the narrative of Egyptian sympathy for the Axis powers during World War Two was accepted wisdom."  

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The third master narrative supporting the axiom "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" went back to the first works on the intellectual history of modern Egypt, written in Europe and the US in the 1960s. Influential books such as Nadav Safran's *Egypt in Search of a Political Community* (Cambridge 1961), P. J. Vatikiotis' survey *The Modern History of Egypt* (New York 1969) and Baber Johansen's study *Muhammad Husain Haikal, Europa und der Orient im Weltbild eines ägyptischen Liberalen* (Beirut 1967) pointed to a "crisis of liberalism", which was alleged to have become a "crisis of orientation". This crisis was

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11 Gershoni / Jankowski: Confronting Fascism (see FN 10), 5-6.
said to have caused a transition from a "progressive" to a "reactionary" phase in Egyptian intellectual life in the Thirties. Liberalism, it was claimed, had failed in Egypt, and a new era of authoritarianism dawned. Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot wrote in this vein in her *Egypt's Liberal Experiment 1922-1936* (Berkeley 1977): "the crisis of democracies in the West had shaken the faith of many in the value of democracy. Admiration for Fascism grew when Mussolini made the trains run on time and forced the slackers to swallow castor oil. Some Egyptians believed that these methods might have more success in Egypt than those of the democracies." Hence, the door was said to be wide open to an authoritarianism of the Fascist or National-socialist kind.

In reality, as made abundantly clear by the studies of Gershoni, Jankowski and Nordbruch most Egyptian intellectuals drew a clear line between an authoritarianism that could be combined with a marked return to Islamic values on the one hand and Fascism or National Socialism on the other. There were exceptions: some intellectuals distrusted democracy as such, and some were even allured by Fascist ideologies. But they were clearly a minority.

There is no doubt that the majority of the European states after the First World War had shown strongly authoritarian traits whether they were monarchies or republics. But it is important to distinguish between authoritarianism and fascism. Fascism always implies authoritarianism, but not every authoritarian regime is Fascist. As the colonized and marginalized peoples of the Middle East between the two world wars looked mainly to Europe for political models it can be considered a miracle that the Arab speaking countries and other countries under colonial rule in their majority did not more enthusiastically and wholeheartedly embrace the Falangist-Fascist-National Socialist ideas of such great and advanced European countries as Spain, Italy, Portugal, and Germany. This is even more extraordinary in view of the fact that the genocidal ideology of German National Socialism was seriously underestimated by many if not most political observers inside and outside Germany - including the Jews who lived in Germany. Most European statesmen and most European newspapers did not foresee before 1938 that Hitler did indeed plan the extermination of European Jewry.

The extensive studies done by Gershoni, Jankowski and Nordbruch have definitely undermined the long-standing interpretation of Egyptian intellectual history in the 1930s as having been mainly inspired by pro-Nazi inclinations. Their detailed studies of Egyptian newspapers, periodicals and books of this era show that those who shaped Egyptian public opinion were unreceptive or more often hostile to Fascism and National Socialism.

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12 Gershoni / Jankowski: Confronting Fascism (see FN 10), 6-8.

13 Cf. also Gershoni / Freitag: The Politics of Memory (see FN 2), 318 FN 19.
In their great majority, they opposed the Fascist concept of racial superiority. They criticized Italy’s and Germany’s expansionist military programs, and rejected many totalitarian ideas and practices. Taha Husayn (d. 1973), possibly the most important Egyptian public intellectual and liberal humanist at the time, strongly and continuously opposed not only Fascist but all totalitarian ideas. There were, of course, other voices that supported totalitarian and others who even supported Fascist ideas. In the pre-war period, not all Egyptian intellectuals saw in Adolf Hitler a serious threat to civilization and in this they were no different from numerous other intellectuals in the world including Europe.

A public figure like Rashid Rida (1865-1935) assumed a whole gamut of different positions toward "the Jews" in general and the Zionist project in particular, from a fairly benevolent appraisal of Zionism to the more outrageous slogans of European anti-Semitism. In 1934, he considered Nazi doctrine bad, but feared even more secularist Kemalists and Soviet Communists as the more outright enemies of Islam. Rashid Rida "could not endorse Nazi doctrine, because it was obviously incompatible with his own ideology from a religious Muslim standpoint", but he showed "sympathy for Nazism by treating it as the instrument of God's will" and saw "Kemalism and Russian Communism as outright enemies of Islam..." The most notorious Egyptian pro-Nazi voices among the Egyptian intellectuals may have been for a time that of Ahmad Husayn (d. 1982) and his organization Miṣr al-Fatāt, and that of Salama Musa (d. 1958), the latter only for a few years. But the vast majority of the Egyptian intellectuals fought National Socialism. Many were leftists, some followed a strictly Socialist line, far fewer Communism. Just as in Europe, those to the left and the Communists usually were the most vociferous and most implacable enemies of National Socialism and Fascism.

The picture in other Arab countries differed, but not markedly. Götz Nordbruch in his analysis *Nazism in Syria and Lebanon* highlights the ambivalence of many local voices. While "unreserved or almost unconditional approvals of Nazism were rare", he writes, "ambivalent allusions were much more common that included the appraisal of certain aspects and the rejection of others". For instance, "(t)he virtually unanimous rejection of the National Socialist concept of 'race' did not imply a rejection of hermetic, pseudo-biologic conceptualizations of the Arab nation". René Wildangel in his study on

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15 al-Manar nr. 1, May 1934, 73-78, according to Achcar: The Arabs (see FN 14), 119.
17 Nordbruch: Nazism (see FN 16), 136.
Palestine and National Socialism, comes to the conclusion: "Fascist or respectively NS-ideology remained alien to Arabs in Palestine".\(^{18}\) Even in Iraq, often considered as the most pro-Fascist platform of all Arab countries, the "single-thread-narrative of Iraqi pro-Nazi tendencies" cannot be upheld as Peter Wien has shown. He summarizes: "Between 1931 and the British occupation in 1941, Iraq was not headed toward a totalitarian state as it is often assumed", but while "flirting with Fascist imagery" is undeniable,\(^{19}\) extreme nationalist tendencies were only one facet of a broad range of opinions.

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Götz Nordbruch, Peter Wien and René Wildangel have reached nuanced evaluations of the reception of National Socialist and Fascist ideals and ideas in Syria/Lebanon, Palestine under the British Mandate and Iraq. Egypt, at the time, was the intellectually leading Arab country. The voice of its intellectual elite was the most vociferous among the Arab countries. It was also the most vociferous in its opposition to Fascism and National Socialism. The Arab country in which there was at the time more sympathy for National Socialism than in all other Arab countries may have been Iraq. After 9/11, the idea of an "Arab" predisposition to Nazism and Fascism has been gradually replaced by the widely accepted concept of "Islamo-Fascism." The idea that Islam is a Fascist religion, that the Prophet Muhammad is a sort of Adolf Hitler and that the Qur'an resembles "Mein Kampf" slowly superseded the idea of an Arab predisposition to Nazism and Fascism. It is to be feared that this dangerous idea will spread.

\textbf{The genesis of a Hitler-myth}

\(\text{\textlangle 15} \text{\textrangle}\)

It is true that for many Arab observers Adolf Hitler was until the beginning of World War 2 nothing more than a strong leader like Bismarck or Atatürk. The Palestinian paper \textit{al-Difāʿ} wrote in March 1936: "Turkey has a Mustafa Kemal, Egypt has a Mustafa Kamil, Germany has an Adolf Hitler - and Palestine has whom?"\(^{20}\) Similarly, in another Palestinian paper, \textit{al-Kirmil} (March 17 1933 and Nov. 18 1934) we read "Greetings to Mussolini, greetings to Hitler, greetings to Mustafa Kemal … When will we be able to welcome the Arab leader? … How happy are Germany and Italy with their leaders. And how unhappy and miserable are the Arabs of Syria, Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq, Egypt … with their


\(^{19}\) Peter Wien: Iraqi Arab Nationalism. Authoritarian, totalitarian, and pro-fascist inclinations, 1932-1941, London 2006, 115; cf. also Peter Wien: Coming to Terms with the Past: German Academia and Historical Relations between the Arab Lands and Nazi Germany, in: JMES 42 (2010), 311-321.

leaders!" This is one of the rare instances, by the way, where even Mussolini is still hailed by Arabs as a "leader".

When Wilhelm II had visited Sultan Abdülhamit in Istanbul in 1889 and Damascus and Jerusalem (at the time, both still part of the Ottoman Empire) in 1898, some Ottomans celebrated him as "Hajji Wilhelm", the mythical Muslim Emperor of Germany. The idea that the German Kaiser was somehow a Muslim was reinforced when, while visiting Saladin's grave in Damascus in November 1898, Wilhelm II exclaimed: "May His Majesty the Sultan and the three hundred million Mohammedans that live dispersed over the earth be assured that the German Kaiser will be their friend at all times".

Racism in Germany before Adolf Hitler

Racism in Germany had been rampant long before the advent of the "Third Reich". German propaganda in the World War One accused France and Great Britain of undermining the solidarity and authority of the white race versus the colonized peoples by their massive reliance on "colored" troops. Even the liberal Prussian Minister of Culture and respected historian of Islam Carl Heinrich Becker (1876-1933) thought he could distinguish between "culture Islam" and "Negro Islam". German jurists discussed whether "colored" soldiers, because of their race and color, should be denied their legal status of "combatant" in war time. In the reality of World War Two there were from the beginning until June 1940 around 67,400 North-African prisoners of war in German "stalags" ("Stammlager"), most of them Arab Muslims.

In the face of the military chances that Jihad seemed to open for German policy during World War One such racisms were for a short time suppressed. When Sultan Mehmet in 1914 called the Muslims under British, French and Russian rule to join the Ottoman war effort against the infidels, the British feared for their role in Egypt and India, the Russians for their rule in the Caucasus and the French for their colonies in North Africa. The "brotherhood of weapons" ("Waffenbrüderschaft") between the Germans and the

21 Wildangel: Zwischen Achse und Mandatsmacht (see FN 18), 159.
22 Text according to Gregor Schöllgen: Imperialismus und Gleichgewicht. Deutschland, England und die orientalische Frage, 1871-1914, 111.
24 Höpp: Muslime in der Mark (see FN 23), 20.
25 Höpp: Muslime in der Mark (see FN 23), 20.
Ottomans made strange bedfellows. Gottfried Galli (1850-1917), Vice Consul in Smyrna between 1895 and 1902, waxed lyrical when he wrote: "Taken out of degenerate hands, the salvation of Christianity in the realm of Islam has become the holy duty of Germany and Austria! Jihad has created a new and secure basis for this enormous task and for our vastly increasing relations to Islam".  

In the interwar period, there was still considerable confusion about political orientations in general. The Organization of Arab Students in Europe in December 1938 held a congress in Brussels Mu’tamar al-ṭullāb al-ʿarab fi Īrubba and issued a manifesto "Arab Nationalism: its Truth, its Aims, its Means" (Beirut n. d.) in which they noted on the aims of the "Arab Movement": "They will be realized without subscribing to any particular creed of the modern Western ones such as Fascism, Communism, or Democracy."  

Sometimes there appeared a tendency to consider Communism and National Socialism as more or less interchangeable. Badr Shakir al-Sayyab (1926-1964), the famous Iraqi poet, wrote in what was probably self-deprecating irony about his youthful political outlook as a teenager in the Baghdad of the Thirties: "We began to spread propaganda for Russia, for communism and for the Nazis at the same time. The Axis powers would defeat the Allies and, together with the Axis, Russia would triumph. Then communism would spread all over Iraq - bringing happiness to the poor and to the starving peasants...". Others, on the contrary, saw in Nazism an antidote to Communism. Rashid Rida was already mentioned in this context, and Gershoni and Jankowski deal with this whole question in detail (fn. 8, 121ff.).

The illiterate masses and the popular level

The work of Gershoni, Jankowski, and Nordbruch persuade me that a majority of Egyptian intellectuals found Nazi racism repugnant in and after the inter-war period. It is also true that "(i)ncluded in this rejection was the condemnation of Nazi anti-Semitism and of the persecution of Jews in Germany...". However: "Egyptians often found themselves with conflicting sentiments: while sympathizing with the dire fate of Jews in Germany and Europe, they nonetheless opposed the Zionist solution of the colonization of Palestine as..."

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28 Wild: National Socialism (see FN 3), 28.
the answer to the Jewish problem."

This was a feeling that also existed in Arab countries other than Egypt and that would become a major issue after the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. Already in his first major study on the reception of Fascism in Egypt, Israel Gershoni pointed out, that there were counter-currents. In Gershoni/Nordbruch there is a final chapter, "Jenseits der Eindeutigkeiten: Begegnungen mit Faschismus und Nationalsozialismus zwischen Krise und Aufbruch" ("Beyond unambiguous clarities: encounters with Fascism and National Socialism between crisis and awakening", p. 281ff.) In this chapter, the authors alert the reader to the fact that there were also pro-Fascist and pro-National-socialist voices and trends among Egyptian intellectuals. But these were definitely in the minority.

In the context of this lack of "unambiguous clarities", I would like to add one caveat to Gershoni and Jankowski's important contribution on the situation in Egypt. In their "Conclusion" the authors say: "By the eve of World War II, the bulk of informed Egyptian opinion had come to the consensus that fascist totalitarianism, racism, and imperialism represented a manifest threat to Egypt, the Middle East, and the rest of the world" (268). In this statement, the words "informed opinion" and "by the eve of World War II" deserve emphasis. While on the intellectual level and from those with an "informed opinion" there was a strong and sustained current of criticism of Fascism, National Socialism, and Adolf Hitler, on the more popular level things could be different. If we look at the popular mood in Egypt and other Arab countries before the war and even during the war the picture changes. Among the largely illiterate or semi-literate poor in the cities and in the countryside neither National Socialism nor Fascism was even remotely understood let alone applauded. But the figure of Adolf Hitler sometimes took on mythical qualities.

I will exemplify this popular mood with three strands of sources. The first one goes back to two of Naguib Mahfouz's realistic novels set in Cairo during World War Two. The second strand is a hitherto neglected autobiographical passage by Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd. And the third one is an Egyptian movie.

During the War, after the successes of the German army in North Africa that led the Germans into Egypt and almost to Alexandria some Egyptians were jubilant. This is scarcely anywhere expressed more subtly than in two of Naguib Mahfouz's novels, Khân

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29 Gershoni /Jankowski: Confronting Fascism (see FN 10), 12.
30 Gershoni /Jankowski: Confronting Fascism (see FN 10), 268.
al-Khalīlī and Al-Sukkariyya, the latter being the third volume of Mahfouz's well-known trilogy. In these two novels, the Egyptian master of dialogue lets the various protagonists discuss the political situation in 1942/43. There are the voices of the communist, the socialist, the liberal, the Muslim Brother, and also the one who hopes for Hitler's success - and people in between. I will try to summarize the relevant passages.

Naguib Mahfouz, Khān al-Khalīlī and Al-Sukkariyya

Naguib Mahfouz's novel Khān al-Khalīlī is the first of his novels that is set in contemporary Cairo and not in Pharaonic Egypt anymore. The novel's title refers to an old neglected quarter: it was written before 1945 and first published in 1945 or 1946. Naguib Mahfouz takes the reader to war-stricken Cairo between 1941 and 1942 after the Axis' first air-raids on Cairo. There is severe inflation and a sharp shortage of elementary daily supplies. The novel, like most of these realistic novels, is mainly a Mahfouzian story of the breakdown of family-structures.

The most interesting passage for our purpose is one short tableau of a Cairene family that has to seek shelter from German bombing in an underground basement. In the dimly lit darkness of the shelter, several voices are heard:

"Everything is bound by God's will."
"Hitler shows deep respect for Islamic countries."
"It is even said that he believes in Islam, but conceals his faith."
"That is not far-fetched. Did not the righteous and pure Shaykh Labib say that he saw in a dream the Imam Ali Ibn Abi Talib investing Hitler with the sword of Islam?"
"How then was Cairo bombed in the middle of this month (Ramadan)?"
"The Sakakini quarter most of whose inhabitants are Jews is the one that was bombed."
"What do you think the Muslim nations expect of Hitler?"
"When he is through with the war, he will restore Islam to its past glory, create a union of Muslim nations and strengthen its ties with Germany through friendship and alliance."
"That is why God supports him in his wars."
"God could not have made him victorious if it were not for his good intentions."

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Elsewhere in the novel, people talk about the landing of Rudolf Hess in Britain and the British bombing of Tripoli. Some of the protagonists support the Germans, some the Allies and some the Russians. Supporters of the Germans say: "Radio Berlin apologized for the bombardment in the middle of September." This is apparently a widespread anecdote, which still seems to be alive in Egypt even today. According to this anecdote, the Germans bombed a mosque in Cairo during the Friday prayer, leaving many of the praying faithful dead. A short time later, the Germans apologized, claiming that the bombing of the mosque was unintentional and that they regretted their mistake. Another version said that the Germans could not be guilty of bombing the mosque, because: "The Germans are too intelligent to bomb the heart of Islam at a time they are competing for the love of the Muslims." To the best of my knowledge, there is no corroboration for this event in the German sources. The subtext is that the Egyptians did not expect the Germans to be their enemies and they were relieved that the bombing was a "mistake". There is also a third version. Some said: "The bombardment must have been an Italian raid, because the Germans do not make mistakes". The Germans are in any case considered to be unbeatable: "The Germans are devils. If they attack a city, they spread in every direction and hide in all kinds of apparels. It is not unlikely that tomorrow you will see Germans wearing a turban or wrapped in a sheet.. I am really afraid that I will open the water tap tomorrow to do my ablutions and there will be a German diver in it."

Another dialogue follows. "The Germans will take the opportunity of the deep autumnal fogs in London, then they will land on the British coast." Somebody asks ironically: "Like Hess landed"? And another argues: "And arrogant Britain will be shattered before it recovers from this terrible blow and will end the war." But: "How can Germany raid England while its armies are engaged in this terrible fight in Russia?" On the other hand: "The Fuehrer prepared a special army to raid England. Probably England will fall before Russia falls - if they do not fall together..."

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33 Mahfouz: Khān al-Khalîlî (see FN 31), 53.
35 Mahfouz: Khān al-Khalîlî (see FN 31), 11.
36 Mahfouz: Khān al-Khalîlî (see FN 31), 75.
37 Mahfouz: Khān al-Khalîlî (see FN 31), 268.
38 Mahfouz: Khān al-Khalîlî (see FN 31), 97.
These snippets and fragments reflect the small talk of terrified Egyptians. Naguib Mahfouz masterfully catches the moods and ideals of small people. In these dialogues in shelters and coffeehouses, Naguib Mahfouz lets us see how credulous the simple Egyptians people were and how easily they could be influenced by rumors and propaganda. We are also shown how peripheral and marginal National Socialism and Fascism, as ideologies, were for the common Egyptian.

The second example is *Al-Sukkariyya* ("Sugar Street"). This is the last volume of the Trilogy, one of Naguib Mahfouz's most famous works. The novel covers the timespan between 1935 and 1944. Here, in contrast to the excerpts of *Khān al-Khalīlī*, the conversations are more strictly political. The figure of Adolf Hitler is less dominant than on the mass level. In Chapter 8, there are two more illuminating conversations, confirming this:

Two protagonists argue: "With the enemy of Italy into the war, Egypt's situation has become extremely grave."
"Perhaps these mock raids will turn into real ones."
"But are the English strong enough to turn back the expected Italian advance? No doubt Hitler will leave the task of taking Suez Canal to Mussolini"
A third person asks "Will America just stand by and watch?"
The answer is "Russia holds the true key to the situation."
"But she is allied with Hitler."
"Communism is the enemy of the Nazis, and the evil threatening the world from a German victory is greater than that from a victory by the democracies".

The seemingly imminent occupation of Alexandria by German troops raises other questions:

"But Alexandria is no longer a summer resort. Before the war it was, but today rumors of a German invasion have left it deserted."
"Professor Adli Karim reports that most of its inhabitants have fled and that its streets are filled with cats roaming about freely."
"That's what it is like. Soon Rommel will enter with his troops." Then after a short silence the speaker adds: "At Suez, he'll join forces with Japanese armies, which will have completed their march through Asia. Then the Fascism of the Stone Age..."

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Sawsan (a communist, SW) responds: "Russia will never be defeated. Mankind's hopes are still secure behind the Ural mountains."
"Yes, but the Germans are at the gates of Alexandria."
She inquired with a snort "Why do the Egyptians love the Germans?"
The answer: "Out of hatred for the English. It won't be long before we loathe the Germans. The king seems a captive of the British today, but he will break free from them to receive Rommel. Then those two leaders will drink a toast to the interment of our fledgling democracy. Ridiculously enough, the masses of farm laborers expect that Rommel will distribute land to them." And: "We have many enemies. Outside of Egypt, the Germans and inside it the Muslim Brethren and the reactionaries who hardly differ from each other." In this last sentence, Naguib Mahfouz himself might be heard speaking.

There is everything in these fragments of conversation: the Egyptian hatred of British rule, the vague hope for a German victory, the devout Muslim's reliance on God's decree, the dismay of the Egyptian socialist and communists after the Hitler-Stalin agreement and their undying hope for a final Soviet Communist victory, the fear of the intellectuals for the survival of Egyptian "fledgling democracy", and the fantastic idea that Japan would march through Asia to join forces with German and Italian troops. Considering the setting and the scope of Naguib Mahfouz's novels, there is all in all surprisingly little on Adolf Hitler, the Germans, and the war in North Africa, and almost nothing on Fascism and National Socialism. But Mahfouz in these few and short scenes vividly depicts and exposes the fears and hopes of average Egyptians as well as their credulous nature. The Egyptians were victims of the war, but they did not have any part in it. Mahfouz himself, of course, had socialist leanings and was absolutely immune against Fascist ideas.

It is astonishing that one of the best experts on Naguib Mahfouz's work summarizes the situation in Egypt during the war as reflected in the mirror of Naguib Mahfouz's writings in the following words:

"The events of World War II in Egypt and in the world deeply affected Mahfuz's attitudes to life. His outlook became more and more pessimistic and the works which he produced during these years are among the most fatalistic and gloomy. The social polarization of Egyptian society; the decline of political parties; the raids on Cairo; the danger of Nazi invasion (and still worse the sympathy for the Nazis among many Egyptians who thought of Hitler as a redeemer from the British yoke) - all of these filled him with horror and

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41 Mahfouz: Al-Sukkariyya, 210; Sugar Street, 241.
dismay." I think that as a summary this it not fair. Mahfouz has been rightly called the "Balzac of the Egyptian middle and lower class" and he shows mainly how little most Egyptians cared about foreign policy and how deeply they were engrossed in the fight for survival and in their everyday problems, at the time aggravated by war-related inflation.

Apart from the passages quoted above from the novels Khān al-Khalīlī and al-Sukkariyya, to the best of my knowledge Naguib Mahfouz's oeuvre contains very few allusions that so much as mention Germany and the Fuehrer, let alone National Socialism or Fascism. Therefore, Sasson Somekhs's judgment about the "sympathy for the Nazis among many Egyptians who thought of Hitler as a redeemer from the British yoke" seems to me to be too generalized and does not do justice to the subtle fictional reality of Naguib Mahfouz's novels.

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd (d. 2010), the Egyptian dissenter and Qurʾan specialist who was exiled from Egypt because of his liberal views on the Qurʾan, opens his autobiographical recollections with the following instructive paragraph:

"My father called me Nasr, because he was an optimist. He had taken bets with his friends that the Allied forces would win World War Two. His friends, like most Egyptians (my italics, SW), hoped for a victory of the Axis powers, or rather they hoped that England would lose the war, because in Egypt England was an occupying power. Should Germany win the war, they thought, Egypt would be liberated. At the time, there was a rumor that Hitler had converted to Islam and that his real name was Muhammad. This rumor spread like wildfire in our village and my father's friends enthusiastically imagined that the Muslim Muhammad Hitler would liberate Egypt from the hands of the colonialists. Only my father bet on an English victory and this is why he called me Nasr. Nasr means victory in Arabic." 

Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd was born in 1943 in a small Egyptian village, Quhafa. He says in an aside that at the time of his birth, most adult males and practically all females in his village were illiterate, his father being an exception. And he underlines that this was the first time that schools in the Egyptian countryside were open to all children, so that many of the villagers had their children read them the news in the papers. In view of such a state of affairs, Israel Gershoni's judgment "In pre-World War II Egyptian public discourse,

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42 Sasson Somekh: Changing Rhythm (see FN 31), 48.
the axiom 'the enemy of my enemy is my friend' did not apply"^^44 may, therefore, be too sweeping. For the educated and in the cities, for the newspapers, the books and the periodicals it certainly did apply. But just as in Nasr Abu Zayd’s village and in Naguib Mahfouz’s novels, the largely illiterate Egyptian masses in the countryside could hold different views as late as in 1943. Their voices and their strange myths about the "Führer" echoed Arab myths about the German Kaiser Wilhelm II. These rumors and ideas were rarely deemed to be important; they were often not even documented. Still, they were influential even if they did not belong to the more intellectual public discourse of al-Hilāl and other Egyptian media.

"Unwritten sources"

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One might dismiss Nasr Abu Zayd’s recollection or Naguib Mahfouz’s fictional scenes as completely marginal, but they are confirmed by other examples. The Egyptian bookseller Lutfallah Soliman recalls a demonstration in Cairo in 1942: "Those, who in Cairo demonstrated to cries of 'Go, Rommel!' saw in the German Field Marshal nothing more than 'the enemy of their enemy'". And he goes on: "Nazi Germany represented 'absolute evil' only for the tiny cosmopolitan, internationalist minority, to which we belonged."^^45 This statement certainly underestimates the weight of the Egyptian intelligentsia. But, in a way, such slogans in street demonstrations and rumors that spread under the illiterate fellahs also echoed the voices of a minority of intellectuals such as Salama Musa and Ahmad Husayn, who at least for some time saw in Adolf Hitler the harbinger of a road to radical political change and rapid social transformation. Popular myths around the figure of Adolf Hitler - such as his conversion to Islam - did abound in the Arab world. When Hitler started World War Two, in 1939, Syrian slogans in the Syrian dialect cropped up in the markets of Damascus and Aleppo saying: "No more 'Monsieur', no more 'Mister' / God in heaven - on earth Hitler" (ba-la misju ba-la mister / fī l-samā Allāh, 'al-ard Hitler).^^46 This was, of course, not a general feeling, but only some people’s voice. It was, moreover, not an "informed opinion" but a popular feeling with unmistakable apocalyptic overtones. But it did exist. In the rhymed example, the anti-colonial subtext is clear. And in Europe at this time, millions of Europeans - and not only Germans and Austrians, the Portuguese, Spaniards and Italians, i.e. those who were under Fascist or National Socialist rule anyway - would have gladly agreed. The 20th century has been rightly called the totalitarian century, and important and powerful European states were not merely authoritarian but Fascist. Modern totalitarianism was after all a European invention. So were Fascism and National Socialism.

^^44 Jankowski / Gershoni: Confronting Fascism (see FN 10), 13.
^^45 Quoted after Achcar: Arabs (see FN 14), 84.
^^46 Wild: National Socialism (see FN 3), 128.
Edmond Cao-Van-Hoa attempted to collect some of this kind of elusive material under the heading "The unwritten image of National Socialist Germany" ("Das nicht schriftlich fixierte Bild vom national-sozialistischen Deutschland"). An interesting document that he briefly discusses is the film *Iskandariyya leh?* ("Alexandria why?"), shot in 1978 and directed by the already famous Yussef Chahine (d. 2008). It starts with the situation in Alexandria in 1942 shortly before the expected German invasion of Alexandria. Is Egypt being liberated from the British or will it only be a change of one occupier for another? The film is partly autobiographical and shows that the Alexandrian Jews begin to emigrate because they do not want to fall into the hands of the Germans; it furthermore suggests that the German invasion threatens the peaceful coexistence of Muslims, Christians and Jews in Egypt. The film also shows an Egyptian officer who strives for independence and wants to collaborate with the Germans. The film makes fun of the naivety of these Egyptian officers who try in vain to make the Germans believe that Churchill is somewhere in Egypt. This is most probably an ironical stab at the "Free Officers" who came to power in 1954, the most famous of whom was later Gamal Abdel Nasser. In one of the love stories of the film, Ibrahim, a young militant Muslim student who works with the nationalist officers falls in love with Sarah, a young Jewess. She and her father as well as Ibrahim are communists.

Yusuf Chahine told a reporter in this context: "The best critique of 'Alexandria why?' I ever read was in the *New York Times*. The reviewer hated the film and luckily explained why. He could not understand why the Jewish girl preferred loving the dark Egyptian to emigrating to Israel. But that was exactly what I had in mind. The relations between Jews and Arabs that we had in Alexandria were the best imaginable. We loved each other while the West massacred the Jews." In the film, this love ends tragically. Ibrahim is convicted to fifteen years of hard labor for his communist activities. Sarah and her father flee from the Nazis and go to South Africa and finally move to Palestine. There is a good deal of idealization in Chahine's comment. For the real situation of the Jews in Egypt and Alexandria at the time see Gudrun Krämer's study. But Chahine's film may serve as a reminder that if Egypt and other Arab countries had been serious about their proclaimed aim to weaken the attraction of Arab Jews to Zionism in Palestine and Israel, their first act after the war would have been to reassure these Arab Jews between Morocco and Iraq that they were welcome in their countries. This, as we know, did not happen.

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47 Cao-Van-Hoa: "Der Feind “ (see FN 34), 127-133.
48 See also Kristina Bergmann: Filmkultur und Filmindustrie in Ägypten, Darmstadt 1993, 144ff.
49 Cao-Van-Hoa: "Der Feind” (see FN 34), 131.
Conclusion

Finally, it must be kept in mind that it was not only some Arabs who were fascinated by Hitler and his ideology. I will only mention India. Subhash Chandra Bose (1897- ca. 1945), a Bengali Hindu, offered to fight for Adolf Hitler, and Inayatullah Khan al-Mashriqi (1888-1963), an Indian Muslim, claimed as his aim: "to reinterpret Islam in such a way that it became acceptable to the likes of Adolf Hitler."

"By the 1930s the ideological pull of fascism - and of 'great dictators' more generally - was so strong that people like Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Pilsudski received more attention in Urdu glossy magazines than the British functionaries who actually wielded power over India."

Not only did Al-Mashriqi translate the standard abridged version of “Mein Kampf”, then commonly available in English, into Urdu, he also travelled to Germany where he claimed to have met the Führer in person. Al-Mashriqi even deluded himself into believing that he had inspired Hitler's program. He argued "that Islam, if only properly understood from a social Darwinist framework would reveal itself to be identical to the most successful national self-strengthening program of the inter-war era: Nazism. The Nazis had to be regarded as the true Muslims, while the real-existing Muslims had in fact ceased to be the carriers of truth altogether."

But one should not overlook that all this was on the fringes of public opinion. In India as well as in Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq the majority of the reactions in the local press were dismissive or hostile toward Fascism and National Socialism. I think it was Francis Nicosia who first coined the sentence that rising Arab nationalism and German National Socialism were "ideologically and strategically incompatible". It is still true. The idea that Arab countries under colonial rule, such as Egypt, Lebanon/Syria, Iraq and Palestine before and during the World War Two contributed to the rise and military successes of Hitler's war machine cannot be upheld. Ideologically, the Arab intellectuals who dominated public discourse were at this time in their majority unimpressed by Nazi ideology. The only significant and scandalous exception was Hajj Amin al-Husayni, who acted from his exile in Berlin as a mouthpiece for Nazi propaganda.

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52 Daechsel: Scientism (see FN 51).
53 Daechsel: Scientism (see FN 51), 453, 456.
Author:
Stefan Wild was from 1968 to 1973 director of the German Orient-Institut in Beirut, from 1974-1977 Professor at the University of Amsterdam, from 1977 until his retirement in 2002 Professor of Semitic Languages and Islamic Studies at the University of Bonn. He has worked on the reception of National Socialist ideas in the Arab world between 1933 and 1939, on Arabic translations of Adolf Hitler's "Mein Kampf" and on the reception of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" in the Arab world. He was editor and co-editor of "Die Welt des Islams. International Journal for the Study of Modern Islam" (Leiden) from 1982 to 2009.
s.wild@uni-bonn.de