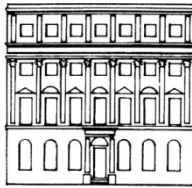


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National Socialism, Islam, and the Middle East: Questioning Intellectual Continuities, Conceptual Stakes, and Methodology

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REVIEW ARTICLE

NATIONAL SOCIALISM, ISLAM, AND THE MIDDLE EAST: QUESTIONING INTELLECTUAL CONTINUITIES, CONCEPTUAL STAKES, AND METHODOLOGY

NILS RIECKEN

STEFAN IHRIG, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 311 pp. ISBN 978 0 674 36837 8. £22.95. US\$29.95

DAVID MOTADEL, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), 500 pp. ISBN 978 0 674 72460 0. £25.00. US\$35.00

FRANCIS R. NICOSIA, *Nazi Germany and the Arab World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), xiv + 301 pp. ISBN 978 1 107 06712 7. £60.00. US\$95.00

BARRY RUBIN and WOLFGANG G. SCHWANITZ, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), xiii + 360 pp. ISBN 978 0 300 14090 3. US\$35.00

The historical relationship between National Socialism, the Middle East, North Africa, and Islam are currently a highly politicized issue. Shortly before a recent trip to Germany, Israel's Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, publicly ascribed a central role in the genesis of the Holocaust to Amin al-Husaini. Al-Husaini, a Palestinian politician and Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, is notorious for his cooperation with the National Socialist regime during the Second World War. Netanyahu claimed that al-Husaini had encouraged Hitler to take the final decision regarding the murder of the European Jews.¹ After

¹ Ronen Steinke, 'Judenvernichtung im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Netanjahus Großmufti-Theorie', *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (2015), published electronically 21 Oct. 2015 <<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/judenvernichtung-im-zweiten-weltkrieg-netanjahus-grossmufti-theorie-1.2702002>>, accessed 21

much controversy Netanyahu stated in a Facebook post that ‘the decision to move from a policy of deporting Jews to the Final Solution was made by the Nazis and was not dependent on outside influence’.² He elaborated on why he had made his initial statement: ‘It was important for me to point out that even before World War II it was the Mufti who propagated the big lie that the Jews intend to destroy the al-Aqsa mosque. This lie lives on and continues to exact a price in blood.’ He ended the post by saying: ‘The Mufti was a war criminal who collaborated with the Nazis and who opposed the creation of a Jewish state in any boundaries.’³ Thus Netanyahu presents the historical relations between al-Husaini and the National Socialist regime as eminently important to current political affairs between the Israeli and Palestinian administrations. Even though he no longer ascribes to al-Husaini a central role in the genesis of the Holocaust, he still views the figure of al-Husaini as having a violent impact on the present.

Netanyahu’s controversial statements and the reports about them in various media form part of a wider, global debate on the historical relations between Islam, anti-Semitism, and violence. Historical claims are crucial to this debate. Netanyahu advances claims about a transregional history of violence and religion. The controversy not only demonstrates the political stakes involved in this debate, but also points to the need to attend to the global dimension of the question at hand.⁴

Oct. 2015; Christian Wagner, ‘Vor Besuch in Berlin: Netanyahu empört mit Holocaust-Äußerung’, *Tagesschau* (2015), published electronically 21 Oct. 2015 <<http://www.tagesschau.de/ausland/israel-netanyahu-103.html>>, accessed 21 Oct. 2015.

² This and the following quotations can be found in <<https://www.facebook.com/Netanyahu/posts/10153262682842076>>, published electronically 30 Oct. 2015, accessed 18 Jan. 2016. See also ‘Judenvernichtung im Zweiten Weltkrieg: Netanjahu zieht Hitler-Großmufti-Theorie zurück’, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (2015), published electronically 31 Oct. 2015, <<http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/judenvernichtung-im-zweiten-weltkrieg-netanjahu-zieht-hitler-grossmufti-theorie-zurueck-1.2716942>>, accessed 18 Jan. 2016.

³ <<https://www.facebook.com/Netanyahu/posts/10153262682842076>>, published electronically 30 Oct. 2015, accessed 18 Jan. 2016.

⁴ E.g. in 2015 newspapers reported that an interest group in the United States had put advertisements on metro buses in Philadelphia. These depicted a meeting between Husaini and Hitler in 1941 with the text: ‘Islamic Jew-Hatred: It’s in the Quran.’ See <<http://www.welt.de/kultur/article>>

The four historical studies under review here — *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* by Stefan Ihrig; *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* by David Motadel; *Nazi Germany and the Arab World* by Francis Nicosia; and *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East* by Barry Rubin and Wolfgang Schwanitz — demonstrate that these issues have found great resonance in academia. To be sure, the authors themselves more or less explicitly acknowledge and respond to the political dimension of the object of their studies. What looms over all these books is the question of how historical ways of representing history in general, and Islam and the Middle East in particular, have a lasting impact on the present. In other words, these books are elements within the 'public life of history'.⁵ Accordingly, my overarching question regarding these four studies is: how do they enhance our understanding of this issue, in which politics and history are very much intertwined? In the conclusion, I will ask, in particular, what their renderings of this history can contribute to the present-day controversy.

In spatial terms, they all demonstrate the importance of acknowledging the transnational and global dimensions of the history of National Socialism by developing, in different ways, a transregional outlook. Motadel, Nicosia, and Rubin and Schwanitz also include North Africa. Ihrig focuses on views of Turkey in Germany and Motadel extends his analysis to the Balkans and the Eastern Front. Temporally, the four books are primarily centred on the Second World War. They all consider continuities with the Kaiserreich, the First World War, and the Weimar Republic. Rubin and Schwanitz extend the scope of their analysis to the second half of the twentieth century and the present, discussing the legacies of al-Husaini's cooperation with the National Socialist regime in Middle Eastern politics. Ihrig frames his analysis as a response to present perceptions of Turkey in Germany.

The four books differ in how they conceptually frame their analysis of the relationship between Germany and the Middle East. They all consider the role of ideology, yet their assessment of its effectiveness in policy varies. While both Nicosia and Motadel work on for-

139063786/Mit-Adolf-Hitler-gegen-die-Islamisierung-Amerikas.html>, published electronically 2 Apr. 2015, accessed 18 Jan. 2016.

⁵ Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'The Public Life of History: An Argument out of India', *Public Culture*, 20/1 (2008), 143–68.

eign policy, Nicosia primarily discusses National Socialist racialist worldviews, but not Islam. In contrast, Motadel focuses on Islam as a political field in National Socialist foreign policy ('Islampolitik'). Ihrig analyses right wing and National Socialist racialist perceptions of Atatürk and Turkey, while Islam and religion are not central issues in his study. Rubin and Schwanitz strongly emphasize the role and power of ideas and Islamism as an ideology.

In *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Rubin and Schwanitz aim to show that Nazi Germany and the 'radical forces' (p. ix) of Arab nationalism and Islamism were 'partners due to common interests and a set of parallel ideas' (ibid.). Thus they seek to reveal a 'secret' of Middle Eastern history, namely, that the 'same radical vision' (p. 254) embodied by al-Husaini and others has continually, profoundly, and pervasively shaped modern Middle Eastern history and its dominating political actors, such as Gamal Abd al-Nasser, Anwar al-Sadat, and Yasser Arafat. They state that they do not want to imply that by sharing this vision, these actors and groups were simply 'Nazis or fascists' (p. 86). Nevertheless, in their view it is not only al-Qaida, Iran's 'Islamist regime', the Ba'ath governments in Iraq and Syria, Hamas, the PLO, Hezbollah, and the Muslim Brotherhood who are shaped by this vision. 'The dominant exponents of the Arab world's mainstream discourse' (p. 254) also share this vision, according to Rubin and Schwanitz (who, however, do not define what they view as 'mainstream' in this regard). In any case, they see the radical nationalists and Islamists as having triumphed over their 'more moderate Arab and Muslim rivals' (p. x).

A key element in Rubin's and Schwanitz's understanding of this radical vision is their view of al-Husaini's role in the genesis of the Holocaust. They argue that al-Husaini played a key part in the genesis of the Holocaust. The caption they give to a picture of the meeting between al-Husaini and Hitler on 28 November 1941 sums up the point they want to make: 'Hitler in conversation with Grand Mufti al-Hajj Amin al-Husaini, November 28, 1941. At their meeting they concluded the pact of Jewish genocide in Europe and the Middle East, and immediately afterward, Hitler gave the order to prepare for the Holocaust. The next day invitations went out to thirteen Nazis for the Wannsee Conference to begin organizing the logistics of this mass murder' (p. 6). They thus read the temporal proximity between al-Husaini's meeting with Hitler and the sending of the invitations to

the Wannsee Conference as proof that al-Husaini was instrumental in the genesis of the Holocaust.

Unfortunately, they do not situate their argument within the wider academic debates that extensively discuss the multiple factors in the genesis of the Holocaust even before November 1941. In this way, temporal proximity remains their only argument. They go as far as to view Hitler's eliminatory anti-Semitism as 'Middle East-influenced': 'While Germany had its own long history of anti-Semitism, Hitler developed the Middle East-influenced idea of staging a systematic jihad-style struggle against the Jews' (p. 59). When they assert that Hitler first 'merely' wanted to deport the Jews to Palestine and that it was al-Husaini who pushed for their systematic murder (pp. 93-4) and thus 'contributed to the Holocaust doubly, directly, and from the start' (p. 94), they ignore decades of research on the genesis of the Holocaust which has widely discussed the dynamics of this process.⁶ Rubin's and Schwanitz's approach is a form of intentionalism, but they do not engage with the now already historical debate between functionalist and intentionalist approaches. While it is true that the Holocaust as such was not a ready-made plan from the start, it is clear that many dynamics played into its eventual deadly implementation. Besides, National Socialist ideas about deporting German Jews had had deadly implications from the start. To explain this implementation by referring to a meeting between two men relies on a somewhat problematic model of the history of ideas.

In my view Rubin and Schwanitz paint an all too homogenous picture of the effects of al-Husaini's actions then, afterwards, and until today.⁷ They detect his influence everywhere within the 'modern Middle East'. Methodologically, they conceptualize ideas and political and cultural spaces as homogenous units. They view ideas

⁶ See e.g. Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews*, vol. ii: *The Years of Extermination, 1939-1945* (London, 2007); Ulrich Herbert and Götz Aly (eds.), *Nationalsozialistische Vernichtungspolitik 1939-1945: Neue Forschungen und Kontroversen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1998); Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992); Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, 1989).

⁷ Marc Baer has recently described Rubin's and Schwanitz's approach as a 'conspiracy theory': Marc David Baer, 'Muslim Encounters with Nazism and the Holocaust: The Ahmadi of Berlin and Jewish Convert to Islam Hugo Marcus', *American Historical Review*, 120/1 (2015), 140-71, at 143, n. 7.

themselves as effective causes. Thus they tend to short-circuit ideas and actions and situate ideas as stable units within mere duration and within a homogenous space called the 'modern Middle East'. For instance, they assert the basic continuity of 'Islamism' as an ideology from the Kaiserreich to the present day. Another example is how the Muslim Brotherhood appears as one and the same and in ideological congruence with al-Qaida, the PLO, Nazi Germany and al-Husaini in the Second World War, Iran and Hezbollah (p. 250). Of course, it is possible to ask about such connections within the framework of a history of ideas or intellectual history. But if everything seems seamlessly connected to everything else, one has to question to what extent this approach contributes to greater analytical clarity. Such unstated assumptions about continuities and homogeneity are deeply problematic, as practitioners of intellectual history and global history have pointed out.⁸ As Ihrig emphasizes in his conclusion, 'we must always be wary of alleged traditions and continuities' (p. 230).

It is one of the great achievements of the books by Ihrig, Motadel, and Nicosia that they puncture such assumptions about alleged continuities and ideological homogeneity, while not giving up on the question of continuities and the life of ideologies altogether. As mentioned before, they address the question of continuities from the Kaiserreich to the Weimar Republic and the Third Reich. Moreover, they point to the relative consistency of the regime's policies towards and imaginations of Islam, and its view of the New Turkey.

Ihrig's, Motadel's, and Nicosia's approach challenges that of Rubin and Schwanitz on multiple levels. Based on meticulous archival studies and careful reasoning, their works demonstrate the differences between the regime's images of Muslims and Islam, images produced in propaganda campaigns, policies actually implemented in different war zones, and the reception of National Socialist propaganda in North Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, the Crimea, and the Caucasus. In *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, the differences between these fields are not always entirely clear, but the analysis in the books by Ihrig, Motadel,

⁸ See e.g. Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris, 1969); Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, 'Einleitung: Geteilte Geschichten – Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt', in Sebastian Conrad, Shalini Randeria, and Regina Römheld, *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt am Main, 2013), 32–70.

and Nicosia renders these differentiations visible. In particular, Nicosia and Motadel draw attention to the power asymmetries dividing the German regime as an imperial power. They persuasively argue that the German regime sought to conserve or widen not only its own imperial power, but also valued French, Italian, and, for a while, British imperial interests in the Middle East and North Africa much more highly than the desire of Arab politicians for independence and sovereignty. Thus Motadel and Nicosia argue that al-Husaini was not as important for the regime as Rubin and Schwanitz claim when they state that the 'Nazis were eager for this partnership' (p. 4). Moreover, Motadel and Nicosia make clear that in the meeting between Hitler and al-Husaini in 1941, Hitler and the German regime did not, on several occasions, grant al-Husaini's wish for an official declaration of Arab independence, although, as Rubin and Schwanitz suggest, they might have done so in secret (p. 6).

In his *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*, Ihrig indirectly relativizes al-Husaini's role by showing that Mustafa Kemal Pasha, that is, Atatürk, was far more important ideologically for Hitler and the far right than al-Husaini. Ihrig argues that perceptions of the 'New Turkey' played an important and hitherto overlooked part in Hitler's and National Socialist imaginations as well as in media debates in Germany before and during the Third Reich. By looking at the 'entangled, transnational aspects of that history' (p. 9), Ihrig seeks to change 'our' perception of National Socialism itself (p. 6) and the history of Germany and National Socialism more generally (p. 9). In the six chapters of his book he aims to show that 'a remarkable unity and conformity of discourse existed from the earliest Nazi, far-right and nationalist deliberations about Turkey in the early 1920s until the end of the Third Reich' (p. 7).

To prove his point Ihrig uses a particularly fascinating type of source that gives access to more widely shared discourses: newspapers. Through extensive research on print media Ihrig provides us with valuable insights into public debates in newspapers from the 1920s to 1945. Given the scope of his reading of a vast quantity of documents, it is understandable that he limits his analysis to newspapers of the right and the National Socialist party, and explicitly excludes newspapers of other ideological orientations, such as Communist or Social Democratic ones (pp. 6–7), even though such a comparative perspective would have been highly interesting.

According to Ihrig, we should view Atatürk as ‘an important, if not paramount, influence on Hitler’ (p. 105) in the 1920s and ‘a key influence in the evolution of Hitler’s ideas about the modern *Führer* and about himself as a political leader’ (ibid). He explains that, in fact, ‘Atatürk’s story was *the* perfect *Führer* story for Third Reich authors’ (p. 148). With his successful revolution, Atatürk seemed to embody a real *Führer* figure for them, displaying a ‘no compromise’ attitude and a soldierly spirit. Moreover, New Turkey represented a victory over the church (pp. 184–7, p. 225). Ihrig emphasizes the central role of Atatürk’s successful establishment of Turkey on 29 October 1923 rather than Mussolini’s march on Rome in October 1922 as a model for the Hitler Putsch of 8 and 9 November 1923. Besides, Ihrig explains, the fascination with Atatürk had already begun in 1919 with the outbreak of the Turkish War of Independence. Importantly, he stresses that the genocide against the Armenians constituted another model for the National Socialists: ‘The Armenian Genocide, as perceived by the Third Reich, must have been a tempting precedent indeed.’ The temporal and geographical proximity, the identification with New Turkey and its policies along with the perception of a *völkisch* rebirth through genocide and lack of international repercussions—all these factors, in Ihrig’s view, support his argument and call for a ‘reevaluation of the role of the Armenian genocide in the genesis of the Holocaust’ (p. 207).⁹ He is, however, careful to point out that this argument about models does not imply a ‘Noltean’ view—referring to Ernst Nolte and the *Historikerstreit*—that would relieve the National Socialists of their responsibility. Even though his use of the term ‘origins’ (p. 228) in this regard might evoke, against his intentions, the notion of a direct and determining influence from outside, he generally calls for an entangled view of the history of National Socialism beyond a nationally conceived framework of analysis.

In *Islam and Nazi Germany’s War* David Motadel examines how ‘German authorities conceptualized and instrumentalized religion for political strategic ends’ (p. 10). Drawing on an extraordinarily wide range of archival materials in several countries he analyses how

⁹ Ihrig’s most recent book, *Justifying Genocide: Germany and the Armenians from Bismarck to Hitler* (Cambridge, Mass., 2016) deals more extensively with this issue but is not reviewed here.

German authorities—the *Wehrmacht*, the SS, the Foreign Office, the Propaganda Ministry, and the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories—‘engaged with Islam in an attempt to build an alliance with Muslims in Germany’s occupied territories and in the wider world’ (p. 4). Moreover, by looking at German policies towards Muslims (p. 3) and ‘Germany’s engagement with Islam during the Second World War’ (p. 313), Motadel seeks to contribute to a history of ‘Berlin’s religious policies in the Second World War’ (p. 5). Situating his book within international history, he aims to further ‘our understanding of religion as an instrument in world political and military conflict more generally’ (p. 10) through the study of ‘politics of religion in conflict and war’ (ibid.). After briefly outlining Germany’s imperial policies towards Islam before and during the First World War, Motadel, in three parts titled ‘Foundations’, ‘Muslims in the War Zones’, and ‘Muslims in the Army’, painstakingly traces the German authorities’ efforts to mobilize and recruit Muslims for their aims (p. 12). He proves his overall point that Islam played a ‘significant role’ (p. 244) in German policies by tracing these policies in detail, not only in one area, but also in North Africa, the Middle East, the Balkans, and the Eastern Front.

Motadel demonstrates how the German regime attempted to recruit Muslims by using propaganda and pamphlets, and to involve them in their war efforts by forming Muslim *Wehrmacht* and SS units. His comprehensive approach allows Motadel to contextualize policies towards Muslims within a wider interpretative framework. He is thus able to situate al-Husaini’s notorious Muslim *Waffen-SS* (‘Handžar’) division, his cooperation with the SS, and the creation of imam institutes in Göttingen, Dresden, and Guben within the National Socialist regime’s wider attempts to recruit Muslims by virtue of a certain image of Islam. He shows in detail how the *Wehrmacht* and the SS tried to cater to what they perceived as the needs of Muslim military divisions, such as specific dietary, prayer, and burial practices. Notably, they also employed military imams whose assigned task was to ‘maintain discipline and fighting morale’ (p. 264). While pointing out that thousands of Muslims fought on the German side, he qualifies this observation by highlighting that thousands of Muslims fought for the British Empire (p. 114). Moreover, he makes clear that individual motives for joining German troops were diverse: captured soldiers from the Red Army tried to escape from

prisoner of war camps, recruits in the Balkans and the Crimea sought arms to protect their families, and others were motivated by nationalism, religious hatred, or anti-Bolshevism (pp. 221, 251). In this way, Motadel supports his argument that Muslims followed their own agenda while involved in German policies toward Islam (p. 5). Likewise, in his view German propaganda was far less effective than the German authorities had hoped (p. 114), and German broadcasts had little impact at the time (pp. 107–13).

Motadel provides overwhelming evidence for his argument that the regime's motives in employing Islam for its own ends were 'material interests and strategic concerns' (p. 56). At several stages he highlights the regime's pragmatic stance in this regard. He argues that its policies towards Islam were the result of 'short-time planning' (p. 315). Moreover, he plausibly suggests that while 'religion seemed to be a useful policy and propaganda tool to address ethnically, linguistically, and social heterogeneous populations' (p. 55), the focus on religion allowed the regime to avoid any nationalistic language. In this way, he points out, the regime could distance itself from Arab nationalists' claims to national independence. At the same time, he makes clear that al-Husaini, in fact, had little influence on Berlin's policies (p. 281), thus effectively dispelling ideas about al-Husaini's central role and a 'fusion of horizons'¹⁰ between Arab politicians in Berlin and the National Socialist regime. Islam itself seemed to fascinate Hitler and Himmler in so far as, for them, it embodied a soldierly and military spirit (pp. 60–3).

Motadel's emphasis on the pragmatic character of the regime's policies regarding Islam and Muslims parallels Francis Nicosia's argument in his *Nazi Germany and the Arab World*. Nicosia similarly concludes that there was 'no "synthesis" or "fusion" of German interests and those of Arab nationalists, Islamic fundamentalists, or the political and intellectual elites in the European-controlled Arab states in the Middle East and North Africa' (p. 13). Nicosia, who has published widely on this topic, in this book re-examines the National Socialist regime's intentions and foreign policy towards the Middle East and North Africa. He focuses on two issues he regards as inter-

¹⁰ For this notion see Jeffrey Herf, *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* (New Haven, 2009); and, critically, Götz Nordbruch, "'Cultural Fusion" of Thought and Ambitions? Memory, Politics and the History of Arab-Nazi German Encounters', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 47/1 (2011), 183–94.

connected: 'the geopolitical interests and ambitions of Hitler's National Socialist regime and its racial ideology and "world view"' (p. 1). He situates both issues within the framework of German ambitions and German foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa. Based primarily on research in German archives, Nicosia's work provides valuable insights into interactions between the members of the German regime, especially the Foreign Office and the SS, and Arab politicians in Berlin and beyond.

Taking up his own argument about the 'ideological and strategic incompatibility' of the National Socialists and Arab nationalists,¹¹ Nicosia shows time and again that the German regime never intended to grant independence to Arab countries, but wanted to preserve the status quo of imperial rule (pp. 13, 140–1, 162, 222, 257, 270). Nicosia's description of Germany's lack of military support for Rashid al-Kilani's *coup d'état* in Iraq exemplifies this general position on the part of the National Socialist regime. On the contrary, writes Nicosia, the regime was very careful not to disrupt what it viewed as the claims of France and Italy as imperial powers (e.g. pp. 141, 194, 271, 277). Like *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, *Nazi Germany and the Arab World* argues, in my view convincingly, that the regime's foreign policies were shaped by a fundamental asymmetry of power. Nicosia positions himself against recent literature that portrays al-Husaini as 'the Arab equivalent to Hitler or to other top Nazi party officials' (p. 180). He points to the lack of a common horizon of interests in various respects, and explains that the governments of the Kaiserreich, the Weimar Republic, and National Socialist Germany oscillated between indifference and rejection regarding the Arab world (p. 276). He also shows that al-Husaini at first seemed to be of strategic use to the German Foreign Office and then, after it had lost interest in him, to the SS. But, as Nicosia emphasizes, al-Husaini came to realize that the German regime would not agree to Arab independence and sovereignty (p. 262). Nicosia interprets the Muslim *Waffen-SS* division mentioned above as 'a German idea, a European creation, meant for the support of Germany's war in Europe' (p. 263). As such, he points out, it had nothing to do with the

¹¹ Francis Nicosia, 'Arab Nationalism and National Socialist Germany, 1933–1939: Ideological and Strategic Incompatibility', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 12/3 (1980), 351–72.

National Socialist regime's policies in the Middle East and North Africa (p. 263). He makes clear that the regime's policies in the region were characterized by a 'degree of aloofness and improvisation' (p. 18, see also p. 22).

The four books make abundantly clear that the history of the Second World War cannot be told without taking account of the trans-regional entanglements of the National Socialist regime. They all tell a story about relations between National Socialist Germany, North Africa, and the Middle East. As already mentioned, however, they conceptualize these connections along different lines. Whereas Rubin and Schwanitz frame them in terms of parallels and direct influences, Ihrig, Motadel, and Nicosia make clear why we have to distinguish clearly between the position and interests of the National Socialist regime on the one hand, and the position and interests of actors in the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans, and the Caucasus on the other.

Ihrig, Motadel, and Nicosia look at their subject mainly from the perspective of German authorities and documents and call for further research on Arab responses to National Socialist propaganda during the Second World War.¹² I very much agree with their plea for greater attention to be paid to Arab perceptions and responses. However, and this leads me to my conceptual point of critique, I think that a study that acknowledges the entangled history of these responses could benefit from a stronger engagement with, first, conceptual discussions of religion and, secondly, with the history of Orientalism and racism within imperial formations.

All four books show clearly how deeply embedded German officials' images of Islam were in what we have come to call Orientalism, that is, a certain discourse about the imagined entity 'Orient'. Ihrig interestingly describes, with reference to Edward Said, how German newspapers used a 'de-Orientalized' language to describe the 'New Turkey' (p. 27). Motadel points out that the German authorities conceptualized Islam and the Muslim world as a homogenous unit (p. 4). Rubin and Schwanitz explain that German officials erroneously believed that 'Islam's doctrines would be implemented by its adherents' (p. 43). One might have wished for a broader discussion of these

¹² Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination*, 7; Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, 114; Nicosia, *Nazi Germany and the Arab World*, 5-7.

issues, for while these historical studies show that German officials ascribed ‘fanaticism’¹³ and ‘passiveness’¹⁴ to Muslims, they do not situate these images within the wider history of Orientalism. This history is integral to contemporary, globally disseminated discourses that link Islam, Arabs, and violence with each other – which leads us back to Netanyahu’s statements.

All four books demonstrate the importance of imperial and Orientalist imaginations in the historical entanglements between National Socialist Germany, policies for Islam, and Germany’s war zones. But my point is that the crucial issue for understanding these connections and their impact on the present is a conceptual one. If the discussion about the historical use of religion in National Socialist policies towards Islam, the Middle East, and North Africa is detached from the conceptual question about the foundational concepts of our analysis – such as Islam, religion, and history – as well as the imperial history of these concepts, it becomes difficult to address the question of how these concepts themselves are part of history and power relations.¹⁵ But to speak of religion today while analysing the entangled history of National Socialism, the Middle East, and Islam implies being involved in conceptual legacies within and outside academia. To debate Islam, religion, and history as concepts implicated in an imperial history might help us to address the role of conceptual frameworks in representations of the past.

My point is that in order further to enhance our understanding of the relationships between National Socialism, the Middle East, North Africa, and Islam, we have to work through concepts used now and then, such as Islam, religion, and history. Moreover, these conceptual issues point to the problem of positionality, that is, of situated knowledge. All four books address the problem of the producers of representations of Islam, religion, and history – ideologues and especially Orientalists. Implicitly, all four books thus touch upon the problem of positionality. To think about concepts and positionality

¹³ See e.g. Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany’s War*, 18–19, 51, 105, 134; Nicosia, *Nazi Germany and the Arab World*, 4; Rubin and Schwantz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, 19, 78.

¹⁴ Motadel, *Islam and Nazi Germany’s War*, 28.

¹⁵ On the need to historicize foundational concepts, see Joan W. Scott, ‘The Evidence of Experience’, *Critical Inquiry*, 17/4 (1991), 773–97, esp. 796–7.

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implies understanding individual recourse to concepts, first, as situated within wider discursive practices which themselves have a history and, secondly, as enmeshed in epistemological, historical, and political claims. Pondering the conceptual stakes and legacies of the concepts that we use to analyse the entangled history of National Socialism, the Middle East, and Islam may help us to further a methodological discussion about transregional perspectives on the relations between National Socialism, the Middle East, and Islam as well as about the repercussions of these relations in the present.

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