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K Street

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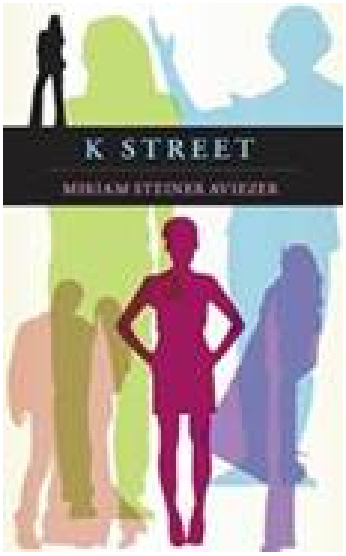
For my daughter,
Nogit.



AuthorHouse 2024

Chapter 1

As usual she wanted to avoid K Street, but then she stopped suddenly and asked herself why. Each time she reached the corner with the chipped brick, she hastened her step. She hurried on with a sense of dread and the wish to leave this place as quickly as possible. She had been doing this reflexively for so long that she no longer knew why.

This time she stopped and took a second a look at the chipped brick. It had probably been chipped for a long time. She couldn't imagine it whole. She tried to remember. Did she remember anything?

Ah yes. Why was she not allowed on this street?

No, nothing. Absolutely nothing jogged her memory.

There used to be a No Trespassing sign, but no matter how hard she looked, she couldn't find it. She thought it might have fallen down somehow, so she looked for it on the ground, but in vain. She sat down. She found herself in a familiar state once again, where her imagination fused with the past and fought with the present.

She had to focus.

This was a new exercise she had turned to so as not to be consumed by her vivid imagination. It helped her focus on certain facts with the help of analysis and elimination.

So this was the chipped corner. It represented the beginning of K Street, which she had not been on until today. Why? Because here, between two houses, a No Trespassing sign had once hung. But the sign was no longer there. It wasn't between the two houses; it wasn't on the side of the wall; it wasn't even on the stones on the ground. It was simply not there. Maybe it had never existed in the first place and she had imagined it as a reason to not to turn on to K Street. But why? Why didn't she want to step onto this street? There was no reason for her not to. Nothing stopped her. Yet there was some immense obstacle, a fear or uncertainty perhaps, an unnamed fear of punishment—of being blamed for something she didn't do or not being given the chance to prove her innocence.

But there was no one here who would punish her for something she didn't do. There were no guards, no police, no men in leather jackets. All the same, she felt something foreboding in the air, some law, some rule. But what kind of regulation could prevent her from entering K Street? There were no signs to be found. No fines. This meant that the way was open. Nothing prevented her from entering the street right now. This moment. She could simply walk down the street. She could walk past the chipped corner. She could walk past it as if it was the most obvious thing to do. She could walk without asking anyone anything, without looking both ways.

She stood facing the street in the precise spot where she imagined the sign had once been. She felt excited, as if she was before a great adventure

full of uncertain dangers and untouchable secrets. She closed her eyes and took a decisive step.

She found herself on a long, winding street paved with loose cobblestones. She took another step, and her courage began to fail her. She felt like someone crossing a border when the guard had fallen asleep, as if he could wake at any moment, flip a switch, and turn on all the searchlights one after another, starting with the small ones and progressing to the bigger ones, all aimed at her cowering in the distance. The guards would approach from every angle, their rifles aimed at her.

Cramping with fear, she held her breath, closed her eyes, and waited. A minute passed, then two, and then three. Nothing happened.

She opened her eyes. She looked around and checked that she wasn't being followed and then slowly continued. But the fear didn't leave her.

It seemed as if all the houses on the street had begun to bend over her, fusing into an arch, turning into a tunnel, destined to become an abyss, a terrifying darkness.

Nonsense! When would she stop being afraid of the dark like a little child? She had to refocus and see only what was in front of her.

She opened her eyes wide and looked around. What she saw was a perfectly ordinary street lined with houses pressed next to each other, doors closed, shutters lowered.

Perhaps no one lived here; perhaps this was a deserted street that had been uninhabited for a long time. All the residents had moved away because it wasn't safe. There was some kind of epicentre nearby that could rupture at any moment. The earth would open up and swallow K Street and its cobblestones whole, and her along with it.

She refocused again and continued slowly, staring intently at the houses on both sides of the street. It looked as though they were growing taller and thinner, recalling the curves of Gothic cathedrals. She found it hard to accept the fact that these were houses made of brick and stone. They seemed too small, part of an improvised street that the government had built with conspiratorial intentions, placed here to lure people in, to trap them, to punish them for daring to hope … for daring to think a state secret could be uncovered.

She stopped herself again. Enough!

This is all nonsense, she told herself. There's nothing here. No epicentre, no tunnel, no guards, no spotlights, no conspiracy. This is a typical street, just like all the others in the city.

She opened her eyes again. She noticed trashcans that were too full. Cats were climbing over them, stealing pieces of meat. A chained dog was charging towards the trash cans, and laundry was drying on a balcony. She heard the whispers of lovers between half-open Venetian blinds.

She walked on. Someone flushed a toilet, a mother fought with her daughter, a radio played a basketball game, and a group of people were cheering for their favourite team. An old man sat on a tiny balcony, smoked, and listened.… Something was happening behind a closed door: the rustle of silk, heavy breathing, a woman's wailing voice saying, "No, don't, please. Wait. No …" The sound of the voice was drowned out by a male moan that then merged into the passionate sighs of the man and woman together.

Everything was so nocturnal. This was a real street full of real people. The fear, the uncertainty, all of it disappeared as if someone had flipped a switch, and with it, all the hallucinations disappeared. She carried on with confidence. Everything was all right. This was the most ordinary street in the world. It was actually beautiful and interesting.

She came to a halt. She had been here before. Exactly here, in this spot. She looked around and tried to figure out why some force had stopped her in her tracks.

A cobbler shop.

She looked into the window at the edge of the pavement. A lamp illuminated the shop's sign along with a small decorative shoe that served as a vase for a luxurious fake flower. Gazing through the glass, she saw a figure of an old man, a cobbler with spectacles on his face and a cigarette glued to his bottom lip. He pulled the long, flimsy lamp pole closer, almost into his hands, and began hitting the heel of a shoe with self-assured, staccato movements. He didn't even lift his gaze when she entered. When she said hello, he only let out a grunt in response. He looked at the shoes she brought in, put them to the side, and told her to come back in a week.

"Can't you fix them now?" she pleaded. "I can be back in an hour or two. I would be so grateful if you could fix them."

"I can't," he replied tersely.

"How about tomorrow? I have a very important meeting."

"Fine, tomorrow," he said in a clear tone that indicated the conversation was over.

But she didn't come the next day, or the day after that. She didn't even come the next Sunday. Or the next year. When she remembered the shoes again, she ran towards K street but stopped at the corner. How could she show her face before the old cobbler again? What would she say?

He was ready to repair her shoes on short notice. He believed she had an important meeting.

But she hadn't come to collect them. She'd put it off each day. She always put if off until the next day when there would be fewer customers so others wouldn't hear him scolding her.

Each time she went to the corner with the chipped brick, she imagined the old cobbler getting angry with her, yelling at her, "So you finally decided to come and collect your shoes! Is this the tomorrow you spoke of? Since that

tomorrow, the snow fell, the almond trees sprouted fruit, and we fed ourselves watermelon and grapes. There have been countless tomorrows since the day I repaired your shoes."

No, she wouldn't listen to that. She was never good at taking a scolding, especially in public. So she put off her visit to the cobbler. Days passed and then weeks. Occasionally, she would remember the shoes and imagine all kinds of scenarios the cobbler would enact in front of her.

If he had customers in his shop, he would surely say, "Ah, the liar has arrived. Take a good look at her face and remember it. She begged me to repair her shoes in one day because she had an important meeting. And I, old fool, believed her. I worked all night and waited for her to pick them up. And when did she come? Not that day, not the next, not the next month or the next year. Two years passed, and now here she is. She finally saw fit to join us. But what if her shoes are no longer here? What if I threw them away or sold them? Who keeps shoes for two years?"

He would throw the shoes in her face and throw her out of his workshop, call her a thief. He would yell at her so loudly that the whole neighbourhood would gather round his shop. He would step onto the street, and people would see how big he really was. He would point a finger at her, accuse her of making him wait for two years. Two years, before this creature finally graced him with her presence.

How shameful. No, she could not go. Whenever she came to the corner of K Street, she put the scene off until the next day and finally decided not to go at all. Let him sell the shoes and pay for his work that way. Let him think that she had moved away.

But maybe that's not what would happen. Maybe it would be completely different. Maybe the old cobbler forgot about her shoes altogether. Maybe he had never even repaired them and was feeling guilty himself, having not found the time to fix them in the past two years. If he had repaired them, she would pay him extra for the wait and he would be happy. Perhaps he wouldn't say anything to her at all. Perhaps he would just wipe the dust off the shoes and give them to her. How simple things could be. She would step into his small workshop, pick up the shoes, pay, and walk out, and expand her horizons on some other street where she could walk, shop, and enjoy herself without being afraid that something bad would happen.

She would go to the old cobbler's tomorrow and pick up her old shoes. She felt happy about making a decision. All that was left was the act that came with it.

The street was beautiful. There were so many trees and flowers. She remembered a playground and a small park at the end the street. But no, she didn't have the right to walk there yet. Tomorrow. Tomorrow she would collect her shoes. She would stand confidently in front of the old cobbler, pay him whatever he asked, and then walk out. She would walk the entire length of the street and take in every house, every part of it. She would sit down in the park and watch the children play. She would spend her whole day getting to know K Street.

She felt happy. Her heels clicked excitedly on the pavement to the rhythm of tomorrow, tomorrow. She began to walk faster and faster, realizing how simple life could be, how this was the most ordinary thing in the world: walking into a cobbler shop, collecting one's shoes, paying for them, and walking out feeling free.

She stepped onto the main street with a burning desire to talk to someone. To tell someone about this big event, about this newfound freedom, about how it used to be impossible for her to walk on K Street, about the old cobbler. This wish burned brightly inside of her, and she actually considered stopping a stranger on the street and asking him to share a bench with her and have a chat. She didn't urgently need to discuss K Street and the cobbler—perhaps that sort of thing wouldn't interest anyone but herself—she could talk about something else. Perhaps the stranger would be yearning for someone to talk with as well. People who walked around at this time of night were probably thinking about all different kinds of things: some might want to meditate, others to talk. Some might just need someone to listen to them. And she was ready to listen and respond. But what would she talk about? How could she get someone to sit next to her?

Should she just raise her hand and call out? "Hey, you there, wait, hold on. Are you in a hurry, or do you have a little time perhaps? Wait a minute. Let's have a chat. Tell me about yourself, what you think about, and I'll tell you my thoughts. I would just love to talk to someone."

"Am I unhappy?"

Unhappy. Unhappiness would be a good reason to stop someone in the middle of the night, in the middle of the street, and ask them to talk to her. There must be a reason for this kind of behaviour. And what could be a better reason, a more obvious reason, a simpler reason than that she was feeling unhappy? This would fill her confidante with a good feeling, that they were performing a good deed by allowing her to talk, numbing her pain.

"Why are you unhappy?"

"I just am. I'm just unhappy!"

"Did someone die?"

"Die?" Perhaps someone did, maybe recently, maybe somewhere close by, maybe in that house over there where she could hear someone crying, but she did not want to go any closer, knowing it would make her even more unhappy to hear the crying clearly.

"Was it love?"

"It was something. Just give me a moment to remember."

He loved her; she loved someone else. No, that never happened to her. It happened to a poet who liked to play such games. Or maybe it wasn't the poet who played games, though she remembered him to be pale and melancholy. But it had nothing to do with her.

"Something from your childhood?"

Yes, it must be that. Something from her childhood. All unhappy people were unhappy because of their past, and what could be more in the past than your childhood.

"Yes, it was probably my childhood."

"What?"

What could have happened when she was little to make her so unhappy as an adult? She had to remember. She knew there was something, if she could only remember what. She just needed another moment, and another, it was coming, closer and closer. And then it arrived.

The piano.

Of course, the piano!

She played the piano. She knew how to play. She played for hours, months, years, but she never got further than Beethoven's "Für Elise".

That was it. She remembered. What else could it possibly be? If she would have learned to play better, she would surely be giving concerts by now, standing on stage in a beautiful silk gown, a flower in her hair, a brilliant necklace adorning her deep cleavage, receiving a standing ovation. She would bow to the audience and then play an encore. She would certainly make a mistake during Chopin's Waltz No. 3 in G Minor, just as she did during her entrance exam to the music academy, but she would be forgiven because of her great fame. Perhaps she would even have become a composer. Her world would be made of ink and dissonant sounds. Just like the sounds that were now clashing through her mind.

It was a shame, a terrible shame, that she didn't get farther than "Für Elise". But at least now she knew why she was unhappy. Now she could stop someone and ask to talk.

She would start: "You know, when I was little …"

No, she should start with something more graphic, more dramatic and pathetic. She should start in the middle of a sentence, giving the stranger the impression that they had met at the height of a crisis in her mental health. She should start sadly, absentmindedly: "I wore long bright braids and sat in a high chair, my legs always dangling down. An old teacher sat beside me, his hand on my knees. Before me flashed a string of black and white signs that could surely be translated into wonderful music but all I knew was Für Elise".

Oh, yes!

The piano.

Chapter 2

The morning found her awake, her eyes wide open, her gaze empty. Her stare was an expression of the deep abyss that resided within her. She could not imagine getting out of bed. She could not tell if it was her lying in bed or a beast that she had turned into. That had happened to someone once. One day, he woke up and couldn't get up, because he wasn't himself anymore. He had turned into a giant cockroach.

Who was that?

Of course, Kafka's Gregor.

Was this happening to her now?

No, no, she couldn't allow herself to succumb to the thoughts that were plaguing her. She needed to be rational and cast them away. But they were with her again, laughing: Kafka, Sartre … others too. Ionesco, Beckett, Heine—what was Heine doing in this company? He didn't belong there. And Tennessee Williams, the one who turned his tears into ice and kept them in the freezer.

She needed to gather her strength, to open her eyes.

Oh my god, it's late. What time is it? Maybe it's already noon, afternoon, maybe a week has passed, a month, and I'm still lying in bed. I need to get up. I need to go to work.

But she couldn't move. It was as if she wasn't even there. She had to try. She rolled over onto her back and finally opened her eyes. She recognized her room. It was good. She was home.

She got up.

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She stepped onto the morning bus. It was a typical morning situation. She thought about all the people sitting on the bus. They all had somewhere to go. They all had opportunities and ways to take them.

She didn't know all of the passengers personally but she knew where they got on and off the bus. She recognized them by the way they walked. It was the only part of them she could really see. She could tell a lot about a person by the way they walked.

There was a little old woman who never sat down, not even if the bus was half empty or waiting at a stop. She was always walking, taking small steps, pacing nervously. She imagined the old lady liked to talk. That she talked a lot and talked quickly, almost without stopping. When she started talking, she didn't know how to stop. She was probably the same way with food. When she began to eat, she couldn't stop until the plate was wiped clean.

There was another woman who she ran into in the canteen occasionally. She walked slowly and deliberately. She sat down every chance she got, always sitting up straight and staring out the window, never looking to make conversation.

There was a man who always wore a suit and hat and moved just as slowly, confident and upright. He usually had an umbrella with him, which seemed to serve as a walking cane, though he didn't really need one. He had big feet and constantly looked down at them, as if he were checking if his shoes were clean.

Another man would always make sure to be the first to arrive at the station. He jumped out of the bus quickly, as if he was late for something she was sure he was early for. His steps were quick and uneven. He stopped abruptly at the traffic lights as if standing at attention.

There was a woman with a hat who was always well-dressed and impeccable. Her shoes matched her bag and gloves. She was wrapped in a coat adorned with a tight fur belt, her makeup perfect. She walked slowly, swaying slightly with each calm step she took. And not only her shoulders. She must have been an athlete in the past, or a ballet dancer. Her steps were calculated, as if she was exercising before leaving the house. She had the aura of someone who has a lot of time on her hands to plan out everything in life. She knew when the traffic light would turn green and prepared herself for that moment in advance.

Her gaze was not carefree but rather self-involved. When she got to work, she surely hung up her coat on a special hanger. Before she sat down, she wiped the chair. How she sat was important to her. She made sure her desk was never cluttered. She fixed her hair and blouse and greeted her colleagues, who all but ignored her, not paying her the slightest attention.

There was the young man who she recognized as the liftboy in the high-rise at the end of the street. He was very talkative. He was always looking for someone to have a discussion with, and he often found someone. He could always come up with a topic that interested the other person. When he moved, he didn't just walk but skipped. Sometimes he even ran a bit. Not because he was in a hurry but because walking bored him. He was looking for excitement at every turn. Because he didn't have the patience to wait for the traffic light to turn green, he would find a game to play. One time he kicked an empty can, another time a rock. One time she even saw him clutching a pole and spinning around like children do. He always found a way to entertain himself while he waited.

There was a man who always clutched the handrail on the bus and wore his raincoat open so everyone could see the shirt under his sweater vest. Dishevelled and scruffy, he stared straight ahead, as if reading something or listening to someone. Sometimes he would even place his fingers on his lips and raise his eyebrows in a concerned manner, as if he had forgotten something important. He would get off the bus quickly, leaning in towards the exit, and rushing towards the traffic light with sweeping motions, swinging his bag around as if he didn't realize he would have to stop at the light. When he stopped, he became lost in thought, his eyes fixed on the ground. When the light turned green, others told him he could go ahead. He nodded at them absentmindedly even after they were gone.

The young man wearing headphones didn't care about other people. Dressed casually, wearing rollerblades, he had to take care not to fall over. Onlookers held their breath as he always crossed the street, headphones on his ears, just before the light turned red. After a few long strides, he was already on the other side, looking over his shoulder triumphantly at those who had doubted him. Sometimes a friend would join him, and they would give each other a high five, and continue defying the traffic rules.

Her neighbour, who was usually late, always looked for a seat at the back of the bus where she could finish her morning makeup. She took a small vanity bag from her handbag, extracted a compact mirror, and placed it on her handbag. She hunched over in her seat so she could see her face in the small mirror. She first put on her cream, followed by concealer, eyeshadow, and eyeliner. When she took out her mascara, all the passengers watched intently to see whether she would succeed in applying her makeup without getting mascara on her checks. But she was careful. She waited until the bus stopped at one of its stops and began applying her lipstick, and then paused again when the bus drove off, waiting, lipstick in hand, for the next stop. This could sometimes be a funny sight, since the bus occasionally didn't stop if there was no one waiting and no one had rung to get off. So she sat there, her bottom lip red and her top lip bare, lipstick in hand. But in the end, she always succeeded in applying her lipstick.

Then she waited another two minutes and dabbed her mouth with a small paper tissue, added gloss, and squeezed her lips together, wiping them one against the other. Then she put everything back into the vanity bag, combed her hair with her fingers, checked her nail polish, and closed her handbag, satisfied with her appearance. She always tried to be discreet, choosing the last window seat, which was considered undesirable because the wheel of the bus was beneath it. But for her, it was helpful because she could prop her feet up on the wheel and have a firm grip on her cosmetics. She didn't notice that she was putting on a show for the rest of the passengers on the bus who secretly watched her.

She got off the bus with short, confident steps, flirtatiously accepting the helping hand offered by a gentleman who she thanked as she got off, hips swaying. If she had been aware of the looks she was getting, she would have swayed her hips even more. She stood up straight at the traffic light, head held high. When she sensed a man watching her, she gave him an obvious look, her head titled in his

direction, smiling with part of her mouth, stroking her chin and neck. The man tipped his hat and walked towards her as she disappeared into a nearby building without looking back, hips still swaying.

Even though flirting didn't interest her, she was pleased that men liked her. Sometimes, when she stood in front of a crosswalk, a car would pass by with its roof or windows open, and a car full of young men would send her kisses through the air and honk the horn. She responded with a smile, sometimes raising her hand and waving hello. She thought she was having a good day when it started this way—with the knowledge that she was beautiful, liked, that people noticed her.

Surprisingly she didn't know most of the people on the bus even though they had been taking the same route together for years, getting on at the same stop. Some of them were her neighbours. She ran into others while shopping. She sat with some of them during apartment building meetings and said hello to others who greeted her back. She always took the seat on the bus by the exit doors where there was only one seat. She always took out a book to read. She never talked to anyone, even though it was customary to chat with the other passengers and even the driver. She sat close enough to everyone so that she could hear their conversations. She knew what everyone did for a living even though the information was of little interest to her.

Everyone had their designated seats on the bus, which generally carried the same passengers. One day a young man sitting in her seat got up and found another place to sit even though she had said nothing to him. This was proof that people noticed her, that people knew she existed, that she too was a part of the morning bus commute even though she didn't want to be. She was like all of the others who quickly found their seats and began reading in order to avoid conversation, or those who just wanted to catch up on their sleep. They all rushed even though they didn't need to. Everyone had their usual spot on the bus, which all the others knew and respected. This was why no one expected a person whom they had never seen before to board the bus and sit down in a regular passenger's place. The driver was aware of this more than anyone else.

He was both driver and conductor and greeted each regular passenger with a few words: "Good morning, Janez; how are you? Did you sleep well?"

or

"What's new, Mojca? How is your mother? Are you going to visit her? How nice."

or

"Good morning, Milka. I see you haven't slept well. Exam stress? Good luck."

The driver liked to talk to the passengers. He knew exactly where they got on and off.

One time he even stood up to wake up a soldier who had fallen asleep. "Hey, Miha, wake up. It's your stop, soldier."

Sometimes he would help an old woman with her bags. "Why are you carrying all this around by yourself, Ančka? Where are the young people who should be helping you? Do they just come over for dinner? Come, sit next to me and tell me what you're cooking tonight."

The old woman sat down, pulled a small package wrapped in white paper out of her bag, and said, "It's the kind you like."

The driver took the package, opened it, and exclaimed happily, "A cheese dumpling. Thank you, Ančka, for always thinking of me."

Sometimes, especially in the mornings, he would slow down even after leaving the bus stop if he saw someone running for the bus. "You slept in late again! Tie your shoes so you don't fall. Were you studying all night or partying? You can tell me the truth. You're older now and can do what you want. I'm sure you have a boyfriend. Come closer and whisper his name into my ear."

The girl leaned over and whispered a name.

The driver looked satisfied and said, "I know him and his father too. Good people. Have a seat, my dear, so you don't fall."

At traffic lights, the driver would occasionally converse with a driver in another bus. He was always in a good mood. He knew all the passengers, and all the passengers knew him. They all knew the story of how he met his wife, Vida, on this very bus. She was a regular. They had been married for fifteen years and had three children. Vida would go to the bus drivers' canteen to bring her husband his lunch. She would invite his co-workers to have a bite with them.

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This was the scene that unfolded on the morning bus, everyone hurrying to start their day. She as well. She liked the fact that the bus always took her where she needed to go. But what would happen after that? What came next?

She needed to fill the time until three in the afternoon when she went to the café. She would go for lunch and to the library where she read the newspaper, enjoying the light commentary on current events. But she constantly checked her watch so as not to miss her meeting with Elza. She sometimes played word association games while waiting for her three o'clock meeting with Elza. She thought of a word—for example, apple—and then added associated words: apple strudel, fruit vendor, summer, the town, Snow White.

Sometimes the associations continued. For example, Napoleon, the French Revolution, Waterloo, Trafalgar, and Joséphine, who once said, "Bonaparte est bon a rien," meaning Bonaparte is good for nothing. She accompanied Napoleon on his quests, and her lovers

accompanied her and helped her resell stolen objects from Italy. Marie Louise, and the lovers, such as Marie Walenska and the beautiful Désirée, who later married into the Bernadotte family and became the queen of Sweden. And Pauline Fourès, whom he met in Egypt. Napoleon was therefore not only a great general but whatever people wanted him to be. He could be seen as the winner of many battles or as a failure because he was defeated in the Battle of Waterloo. Some people thought of him as a great lover and talked about all his admirers. Which meant that Napoleon was not just what was written about him in books. Everyone could see what they wanted in him, his virtues and flaws, and thus everyone had their own Napoleon.

If she chose the word Paris, she immediately thought fashion, Dior, beautiful dresses, Lafayette, Eiffel Tower, Notre Dame, Champs-Élysées, the Quartier Latin, and Pigalle. Paris was also what you saw in it, or, then again, perhaps it wasn't.

Associations were a productive game. They proved her brain was working. That it was thinking. But what did it mean, to think? It was a word, a verb, but what was a verb? A inflectional word, which could express a happening in time, and the tone and manner in which the action was carried out. If she thought about this word only in relation to an individual, it meant that thinking was the same as doing. And if she was that individual, this meant that if she thought, she acted, and if she acted, she lived, which meant that she existed. She even had two names, as if trying to prove to herself that she was truly alive. But this was merely proof of her coming into this world, of her having parents, of her living in some place, on some street, in a house with a number on it, of her having an identification card with a number and a photograph. What did this prove? Fifteen million other people had an identity card, and they all lived in some place on some street in a house with a number on it.

Even I am someone else to others. My parents call me "our soul." Some friends call me Mirjam, others Mira. My schoolfriends: Mirjana. My relatives: Bibika. My parents' friends: Zora's daughter. Some neighbours: neighbour. At work: comrade. In school: teacher. If a waiter addresses me, I am miss.

This meant she was a daughter to her parents and a friend to her friends, while her relatives saw her as a young girl and called her Biba or Bibika. Those acquaintances who didn't know her by name called her Zora's daughter. She was Mirjana to her classmates, comrade to those who addressed her formally, and teacher to her students.

She was something different for each person. She was her parents' daughter, a friend, a colleague, a teacher, and a neighbour. This meant that she existed in many ways, and each person could choose in which way she existed for them. She could change her personality and adapt it based on the expectations of particular people, based on the particular image they had of her.

For the vegetable vendor, she was miss, which meant she could only be a miss in front of her and had to behave like one. She needed to pick the right vegetables so that she could strike up a conversation with the vendor about the different types of vegetables, which vegetables were in season, and which dishes she could make with them. She did the same with all the others.

Sometimes she would spend an hour or so in the park, watching people walking past her, entertaining herself by looking at how people were dressed, especially the women. She used their clothes to decipher their social status, where they belonged, whether they were workers, students, or hippies, whether they had good taste and wore the latest trends.

One young woman wore a Scottish kilt miniskirt that barely covered her bottom, black tights, high heels, an angora sweater, a short leather jacket, sunglasses that concealed nearly half of her face, and a beret over her light hair that swayed with the wind like a curtain in an open window. Her hair was still wet. She had most likely just washed it before leaving the house, and the sweet smell of her perfume spread with each of her movements. Her makeup was minimal. She wasn't pretty but was interesting. Her look seemed to be the result of the great attention she brought to the details: her stylistic combinations, her shoes and sunglasses. It felt like she had gotten the ideas from a magazine.

The young woman stopped suddenly at the bench and began looking through her handbag. When she couldn't find what she was looking for, the young woman came closer to the bench where she was sitting and watching her.

"Is this seat taken?"

"Not at all, go ahead."

She made room, but the young woman did not sit down. She turned her handbag over and tipped its contents onto the bench. A bunch of keys, powder, lipstick, black eyeliner, red lipliner, a wide-tooth comb (the kind you see at the hairdresser's), a small children's wallet, a small nylon purse with the letters OB on it, credit cards in a transparent sleeve. It was a small handbag. She opened her wallet carefully, without letting her nails touch the zipper. Her nails were black with white dots. It must have taken her a long time to paint them so nicely and evenly. Her nails looked utterly beautiful at the end of her long fingers. The young woman straightened up and took a good look at everything laid out on the bench. She looked into her handbag again.

Then, either angry or worried, she hissed through her teeth: "Shit."

She sat on the bench and watched the whole scene, not even trying to avert her gaze from the exhibition on the bench. Everything was out in the

open, and the young woman didn't seem to care who saw the contents of her bag.

The young woman looked over everything again, shaking her head in a worried manner, waving her arms like someone in a crisis.

She did this so openly that it couldn't help but spark her observer's interest, and so she asked without hesitation, "Is something wrong?"

"I can't believe I'm so forgetful. I didn't bring my monthly pass or my money. I don't really need the money, but how will I get to Šiska?"

The young woman looked in her direction, as if she were thinking about the answer to the question.

"Can you lend me some dinars so I can get to my friend? I didn't bring my wallet, and I need it for the tram. I'll pay you back. You come here often. I've seen you here before."

She reached into her pocket and gave the girl twenty dinars. "So you won't be completely without money," she added.

The young woman accepted the money, thanked her, and hurried off. But then she turned and came back again, kissed her on the cheek, and whispered, "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

The sweet smell of her hair undulated through the space and lingered long after the girl had gone to her tram stop. She gazed after her. The girl knew how to live and was completely focused on herself. She probably spent hours looking for something to wear. Or maybe not. She probably thought about it for a few days in advance and spent a long time washing her hair once everything was laid out. Before she did this, she probably read an article that said that if you want your hair to keep smelling good throughout the day, it's advisable not to dry it with a towel but with a blow-dryer, leaving the ends just a little bit wet. The girl surely read such magazines and took her ideas from them. Just doing her nails alone must take at least an hour. Maybe they weren't even her own nails but the glue-on kind. Otherwise she wouldn't be have been so careful when she opened her wallet. And when she realized she had forgotten her money, the thought of going back home didn't even cross her mind. She knew immediately she needed to find a solution here and now. She wasn't the least bit uncomfortable asking a complete stranger for money. She made it seem like the obvious thing to do. The only people who behave like this are those who have money and assume that others have enough of it to lend out. She was convinced that she would return the money, though of course she would probably get too caught up in herself and forget. This young woman wasn't hiding anything. Everyone could see what she had in her bag, including a nylon bag full of tampons, which meant that everyone would know she was having her period—and why shouldn't they know, since it was something so absolutely ordinary?

*

She couldn't wait for the workday to end so she could go to the café. If she hurried, she might even get there before Elza and take their favourite spot on an upholstered bench at the far end of the room by the wall. All the other tables had wooden chairs. Theirs was the only table that had remained the same for the past fifty years since the café had opened, even though it had been redecorated during that time. They chose this table out of a fondness for their history together, not out of their desire for comfort, though Elza did like to lean back on the upholstered bench. The table afforded her a good view of the entrance and was far from the central part of the café where it was much more chaotic. What's more, the table was situated right next to a big window that looked onto the street. This was important since their friends could immediately see if they were in the café, and they, in turn, could see their friends and prepare for their arrival.

The two waited excitedly for certain friends and longed to be rid of others. The window was important for another reason as well: They could observe a beautiful, baby-blue secession building through it. The façade was adorned with golden frames, and there was a small protruding balcony covered with a beautiful antique pergola. They loved to admire this building and to imagine who used to live there and what had happened in the house. Sometimes this turned into a game of deduction, full of imagination, the attempt to figure out the secret behind those baby-blue walls. Through the window, they also observed who was passing by and commented on them as they nonchalantly moved past, as if the café opposite didn't even exist. People from other walks of life, so different from them and everyone else sitting in the café. People to whom they had no connection. They were outside, while she and Elza were inside.

The waiters didn't mind the two women sitting at the table even though it was actually the largest and most popular table in the café. They took over the entire six-person table and sat there for hours and hours, drinking chamomile tea and a glass or two of liqueur.

She checked the time. She had to hurry. If she wasn't there in time, the table would be taken, and they would be forced to sit at one of the tables in the middle of the café. Then they would wait on the edges of their chairs, ready to jump up as soon as their table became free. They would sit in their coats and drink mineral water, just to order something, while the waiter would keep letting them know which tables would soon be free. He would do this out of habit, even though he knew exactly what table they were waiting for.

Sitting at a transitory table was tiring. They didn't speak to each other, feeling too distracted in their hot coats. They surveyed each movement of the young couple sitting in their spot. When they saw them paying, she and Elza stood up and

hovered near the table even before the couple had finished. They had to be careful to not be overtaken by anyone else. Once they sat down at their table, they felt as if they had finally arrived.

The café filled up quickly during the evenings. People took all the free seats, with six or seven people crowded around tables for four. Since the tables weren't big enough, some guests held their plates in their laps, while others ate and drank standing up. And she and Elza sat at a table for six to eight people. People wanted to join them, but they always insisted that they were waiting for friends. Dušan and his friends would often show up as their saviours. They were filming a movie in town, a French coproduction. There were four of them, just enough to fill their table. She looked at all the customers waiting for a table and gestured at the friends now sitting with her, as if to say, "You see? I told you we were waiting for people."

Chapter 3

It was raining. Everyone was coming in wet, taking off their galoshes, shaking off their umbrellas and raincoats, trying to get the last few drops off them. They hung up their belongings in the small hallway by the entrance and entered the café clean and dry, unburdened by wetness. Some went to the washroom straightaway, while others found their seats and ordered a tea with rum, a drink, or a soup. The café filled up to the point where it seemed there was no more room at all.

"We won't let anyone sit with us; we'll tell them we're waiting for someone."

"All right."

As usual, she agreed with whatever Elza suggested. Arguing with her was useless. Everything had to be just the way she said. As a response, as if they had sensed Elza's decision and were the testing the validity of her words, a young couple appeared before them and fixated on their table. The table in their corner, with its upholstered bench and high chair, while the other tables were small, covered in glass, and surrounded by regular chairs. The couple beamed at the two women sitting in their favourite spot. A table for six, where two people should only be using the bench and leaving the rest of the table for other customers when the café was this full. Of course, Elza couldn't imagine anyone taking their spot and interrupting their silence with chatter. Especially not a young couple, who would probably curl up in the corner to kiss and hug without noticing anyone else as young people often did.

"We're waiting for our friends," Elza said quickly.

"They should be here any minute," her friend added.

The couple looked at the two women, disappointed and doubtful. A waiter walked up to them and told them a table was free on the other side of the room. The free table wasn't like this one, with its upholstered bench and elegant wooden chair. It was just a regular table where they wouldn't be able to sit next to each other. They could only hold hands across the table. But that would be enough for them. The important thing was that they had escaped the rain and were warm together.

People kept coming in. It began to look like someone else would come to their table any minute and ask to join them. There would be no way to say no this time. They would have to give up their table. But how would that look to the young couple, who had gone to sit in their corner table after being told that the two women were waiting for someone?

"If only some of our friends would show up," Elza said, feeling embarrassed because of the young couple. While everyone was crowding around tables too small for them, she and Elza sat by themselves at a table for six.

"There. Dušan and Vlado are looking for a table."

"Are they alone?" Elza asked.

"No, a woman is with them."

"Call them over," Elza said with authority, as if she were the one giving orders and controlling the situation. She waved her hand. She looked over to the young couple to indicate to them that their friends had finally arrived.

Dušan waved back right away, elated, and hurried to their table. "Hello, girls. Thank God you're here. We thought we would have to go somewhere else."

"Is there somewhere else to go?" Elza asked.

Dušan sat down as if he didn't hear Elza's question and began introducing the others. He introduced Vlado, who they already knew, and little Andi, a Frenchwoman who was trying her best to speak Slovenian with the help of a Dictionnaire de Poche. Despite her best efforts, every word she said still sounded French.

"Andi is the cinematographer in the movie we're filming."

"It's a French coproduction," Vlado added as Dušan desperately looked for a waiter.

"I was thinking of you recently, Elza. I have a small role for you. Waiter, waiter!"

It wasn't clear whether he had a role for Elza or the waiter since he was mostly focused on getting the waiter's attention. But each time he raised his hand, the waiter was looking somewhere else. Only two waiters and a young assistant were working. They were being called to all the tables: "Waiter, waiter!" You could hear the customers' calls all around. One group of young people was trying to get one of the waiter's attention by singing a riff from the popular song 'Marina, Marina.' They sang in two-part harmony, standing up from their chairs: "Mister Ive, oh Ive, we would

like a drink too …" They knew the waiter, knew his name was Ive, and that he came from Croatia.

The song lifted the spirits of the whole café, thick with cigarette smoke. But Dušan still did not succeed in getting the waiter's attention. Elza took a whistle out of her bag and blew it. The café fell quiet, and an awkward silence filled the room. This was not a sound that people liked to hear. It usually meant the police were coming. Everyone looked towards their table.

Elza spoke in a calm tone through the silence: "Waiter."

It was only then that the other customers understood that the whistle was for the waiter. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief and began laughing at Elza's idea.

Someone even came up to their table to shake Elza's hand. "How original, truly original."

Of course, the waiter hurried over too. "That was you, Miss Elza. Now I understand the whistle. At first, I thought the police were coming to get me. I've been scared of the police since the war. What can I get for you?"

Duško ordered a plate of kebab, Vlado chose soup, and Andi ordered a whole lunch. Why not? It went into the film's budget anyway. Elza drank chamomile tea and wormwood liqueur. The two women both ordered more of the same.

Only then could Dušan finally relax. His face looked tired. He stroked his chin and suddenly realized his hands were dirty. He looked towards the distant washroom and the long line in front of it.

Elza watched him. "Wait," she said.

Elza opened her magic bag and produced a packet of scented wet wipes.

"What don't you have in your bag? Why do you carry around a whistle? Didn't you know everyone would freeze when you blew it?" Dušan burst into laughter and the others followed suit.

"Everyone seems to be afraid of the police. But seriously: Why do you have a whistle in your bag?"

"I use it to scare people. Especially those with bad intentions. You have no idea how scared people get when you blow a whistle in the middle of the night. Even the most dangerous people run off in an instant."

"Do you often go home by yourself in the middle of the night?" Vlado asked.

"Very often, almost every night. I take the last bus home."

"Ah, yes," Dušan said, as if remembering something mesmerizing and beautiful, something that deserved a second thought.

"Yes, I remember now. You two sit here until closing time. You're still here after everyone is gone because you wait for the last bus."

"Yes, you need a reason to sit in a café for so many hours."

Dušan stared at Elza with longing, as if he wanted her to know how much he liked her. Elza didn't care for such glances, even though she liked Dušan and could talk to him about anything. They would often sit together and make fun of people, the way Elza liked to do. Sometimes they even flirted a little at a party here or there, but nothing ever came of it. Elza didn't have intimate relations with anyone and always went home alone. Everyone knew this about her. Perhaps it was this that made the beautiful, smart, and sarcastic girl so desirable, drinking her chamomile tea and making fun of everyone. Those in her company felt a need to prove themselves to her, to show that they were witty and intelligent enough for her. Every man secretly hoped he would be the one to walk her home, maybe even … but it never happened.

Dušan knew this. He had always liked her but felt uneasy in her company, as a conversationalist and as a man. Elza was mostly quiet, smiling ironically every now and then, tilting her head or moving her hands in response to what people said, signaling to them that what they said was foolish or irrelevant. Only when people like Gregor, Dane, Slana, Dušan, or crazy Baltan showed up did she come to life and begin talking and flashing her beautiful white teeth.

"How are you, darling?" Dušan asked her, stroking her hair as if he was seeing her for the very first time. As if the curtains had been pulled closed and they were all alone.

Reclining on the upholstered bench, her head propped up on the headrest, she turned in his direction. She looked into his eyes, smiled slightly, and said, "I'm well, Dušan. And how are you? Tired?"

"Yes, I'm feeling tired."

Elza placed the palm of her hand on his back. Dušan took this to be an invitation and moved in closer, resting his head on her shoulder.

It was clear he was enjoying this and maybe even needed it. "We're working hard. Yesterday we started filming at four in the morning and finished at midnight."

"What's the production like? Who does what?"

All this time, little Andi was glued to Vlado, which made him look quite uncomfortable. It would be hard for him to explain his new romance with this woman. They both knew he was married and were friends with his wife. If she were to walk in now, they could tell her everything. And this girl, Andi, was always searching for something in her pocketbook, and she was so ugly, pale, and pointy with her sharp nose, small eyes, thin lips, and yellow teeth. She was skin and bones, her clothes hanging from her frame, but when she looked at Vlado, her friend's muse, she glowed with a special beauty and charm. What did he see in her? They must have been making love during every break. Maybe she had mastered every position, was an expert in the games of love.

Maybe that was what he saw in her. Vlado shared anecdotes from the set, spoke of the filming and the coproduction, until at last the food arrived.

Andi dug into her food as if she hadn't had a bite to eat in days. It was difficult to understand where all the food went in her tiny body. Dušan's meat sausages arrived. He didn't seem very hungry. He offered the first bite to Elza, who evaded his fork. She didn't eat that sort of thing. A mischievous smile crept across her lips as if she were thinking of saying something sarcastic, doing something wrong that would make them uncomfortable. She knew this look to be the look of a killer. She knew Dušan liked the kebab and came to the café because of them, because of the onions and the red pepper chutney. He could go anywhere, someplace closer to the set, but no, but he came here because of the kebab. Only because of them. He didn't come because he thought he would run into Elza. He wasn't here for her. He didn't intend to give her a small part in his film.

He had stopped talking about it altogether, even though Elza knew about the part and wanted to play it. Not because of the acting itself—she had finished the acting academy but never really considered an acting career—but simply because it would be an interesting thing to do. It would be a change of scenery. She would get to wear beautiful clothes and makeup, and people would take her picture. A good photograph would be great for her portfolio. But he had only mentioned the part once and wasn't talking about it anymore. He must be punished. Yes, he must be punished for not coming here for her and for not giving her the part and for generally being selfish and inattentive.

The kebabs were on the table. Since Elza didn't want a bite, Dušan leaned in closer and got to work. He spooned some red pepper chutney onto the edge of the plate, grabbed a slice of freshly baked bread, and began to eat.

Elza leaned into plate, looked at it, and spoke with disgust.

"How can you eat that? It looks like fresh shit with smoke steaming off of it, as if a dog had just done his business on your plate."

Dušan stopped and stared into his plate. He could really imagine it, dog shit, the ground meat shaped into the little sausage shapes that a dog had just left on his plate seconds ago. Even Vlado paused as if he, too, had lost his appetite. It was an agonizing moment. Dušan was familiar with Elza's tricks, her sarcasm with which she always aimed to kill. To kill the small-town passions of the people she was close to, to kill what people loved in that moment, their desire, their will, their appetite.

Dušan knew Elza well and knew that this meant war. It was only a question of who would win. If he stopped eating, she would have won. If he managed to keep his appetite, he would have won. He didn't want to give her the satisfaction.

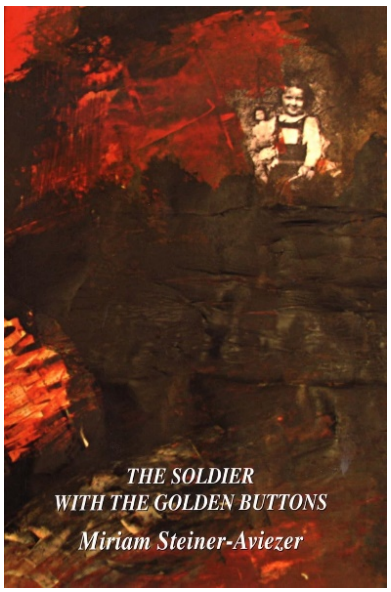
"I see what you're doing, Elza, but it won't work this time." He continued eating.

"You keep eating, my hungry friend, but now you know you're eating dog shit instead of kebab.

She was right. Dušan kept eating on principle, not because the food was actually good. If he wouldn't be so embarrassed, he would leave it all and run off. But he ate on, tortured by Elza's sarcastic smirk.

Israeli writer Miriam Steiner-Aviezer was born in 1935 in Yugoslavia to Jewish parents. In 1941, Nazi Germany and its Axis partners invaded and dismantled Yugoslavia. Eventually, Miriam and her parents were arrested. Miriam and her mother, Zora, were forced onto trains bound for Stara Gradiška concentration camp in the Independent State of Croatia, a Nazi ally.

Some Books by Miriam Steiner Aviezer:
***K Street**, Sep 29, 2024*
***Dear Mary**, Jan 18, 2023*
***The soldier with the golden buttons**, Jan 1, 1987*



Nazi Antisemitism & Islamist Hate

By Jeffrey Herf

A review of recent scholarship on the shaping of the modern Middle East in the aftermath of the Holocaust, and how Islamist hate has roots in Nazi antisemitism.

In early June 1946, Haj Amin el-Husseini, also known as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, escaped from a year of pleasant house arrest in France and flew to Cairo. Husseini, by then often referred to in Egypt simply as "the Mufti," was internationally renowned as a collaborator with Nazi Germany as a result of his meeting with Adolf Hitler in Berlin in November 1941, and his Arabic language tirades to "kill the Jews" broadcast to the Middle East on the Third Reich's shortwave radio transmitters. Husseini was a key figure in an ideological and political fusion between Nazism and Islamism that achieved critical mass between 1941 and 1945 in Nazi Germany, and whose adherents sought to block the United Nations Partition Plan to establish an Arab and a Jewish state in former British Mandate Palestine, helping to define the boundaries of Arab politics for decades thereafter.

On June 11, 1946, Hassan al-Banna, the leader of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, penned the following welcome home to Husseini:

Al-Ikhwan Al-Muslimin and all Arabs request the Arab League on which Arab hopes are pinned, to declare that the Mufti is welcome to stay in any Arab country he may choose, and that great welcome should be extended to him wherever he goes, as a sign of appreciation for his great services for the glory of Islam and the Arabs. The hearts of the Arabs palpitated with joy at hearing that the Mufti has succeeded in reaching an Arab country. The news sounded like thunder to the ears of some American, British, and Jewish tyrants. The lion is at last free, and he will roam the Arabian jungle to clear it of wolves.

The great leader is back after many years of suffering in exile. Some Zionist papers in Egypt printed by *La Societé de Publicité* shout and cry because the Mufti is back. We cannot blame them for they realize the importance of the role played by the Mufti in the Arab struggle against the crime about to be committed by the Americans and the English …The Mufti is worth the people of a whole nation put together. The Mufti is Palestine and Palestine is the Mufti. Oh Amin! What a great, stubborn, terrific, wonderful man you are! All these years of exile did not affect your fighting spirit.

Hitler's and Mussolini's defeat did not frighten you. Your hair did not turn grey of fright, and you are still full of life and fight. What a hero, what a miracle of a man. We wish to know what the Arab youth, Cabinet Ministers, rich men, and princes of Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Tunis, Morocco, and Tripoli are going to do to be worthy of this hero. Yes, this hero who challenged an empire and fought Zionism, with the help of Hitler and Germany. Germany and Hitler are gone, but Amin Al-Husseini will continue the struggle.

Al-Banna, himself an ardent admirer of Hitler since he first read *Mein Kampf*, then compared Husseini to Muhammad and Christ.

When al-Banna wrote his panegyric to Husseini, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt had a membership approaching 500,000 sympathizers and was the world's leading Islamist organization. The Brotherhood sought to establish a state based on Shariah. It proposed to abolish political parties and parliamentary democracy. It called for nationalization of industry, banks, and land. It proposed an Islamist version of national socialism and anti-communism, and waged cultural war for male supremacy against sexual freedom and equality for women. It led the cry of opposition to the Zionist project in Palestine with language that made no distinction between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. It was recognized at the time by the Egyptian left as a reactionary if not fascist organization. Hence, al-Banna's praise for the Nazi collaborator Husseini was not at all surprising for his liberal and left-leaning contemporaries.

After four decades of Soviet and PLO propaganda during the Cold War, then another four decades of Islamist propaganda from the government of

Iran and organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah, the reactionary and antisemitic core of the Muslim Brotherhood and the ideas of al-Banna and Haj Amin el-Husseini have, for many, been lost from view, were never known in the first place, or are dismissed as musty historical details. Yet al-Banna's statement that Husseini would "continue the struggle" that Hitler had waged against the Jews and Zionism proved correct. As leader of the Arab Higher Committee in Palestine, Husseini did "continue the struggle" against the Jews by insisting on war in 1947 and 1948 in order to prevent Israel's establishment, and by fueling the fusion of Islamism and Palestinian nationalism that would make rejecting the fact of Israel's existence a core principle of Arab politics for the next half-century.

In the past 30 years, historical scholarship has confirmed what American liberals and leftists, French socialists, communists, and Gaullists, and communists in the Soviet Union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia understood at the time. The realities of Palestinian nationalist collaboration with the Nazis were a matter of public knowledge and opprobrium around the world in the immediate postwar years, when American liberals in Congress, such as Sen. Robert F. Wagner and Congressman Emanuel Celler, the editors of *The Nation* magazine, the leftist dailies *PM* and the *New York Post,* and leaders of the American Zionist Emergency Council, as well as Simon Wiesenthal in Vienna, published documents from German government files offering compelling evidence of Amin el-Husseini's enthusiasm for the Nazis and his visceral hatred of Judaism, Jews, and the Zionist project. These leaders and publications urged Britain, France, and the United States to indict "the Mufti" for war crimes, but the three governments, with Arab sensibilities in mind, refused to hold a trial that might have ended his political career. His "escape" from a year of house arrest by the French government in June 1946 and return to a hero's welcome in Cairo and Beirut was part of a larger loss of memory in the West about the crimes of Nazism that accompanied the early years of the Cold War.

The realities of Palestinian nationalist collaboration with the Nazis were a matter of public knowledge and opprobrium around the world in the immediate postwar years.

In recent decades, the views of journalists and political figures in the New York of the 1940s have found confirmation in scholarship by historians in Britain, Germany, Israel, and the United States. Working in American, British, French, and German government archives, and with Arabic-language texts, they have produced further evidence of the significant role collaboration with the Nazis played in shaping the founding ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood and of Palestinian Arab rejectionism.

Yet following the Soviet turn against Israel during the antisemitic "anti-cosmopolitan" purges of 1949-56, the Soviet bloc and then the Palestine Liberation Organization succeeded in convincing much of international leftist opinion that these connections never existed or were insignificant. Hence the PLO, having obscured the Nazi connections of its founding father, was able to reinvent itself as an icon of leftist anti-imperialism. While some Arab states have themselves moved away from the toxic mixture of Islamism, anti-Jewish hatred, and Palestinian nationalist rejectionism that al-Banna and Husseini implanted, their campaigns have had a continuing impact in Western universities, where they serve as the ideological foundation of academic anti-Zionism and the resulting BDS campaigns of recent decades, which have aligned the Western left with the afterlife of Hitler's Nazi Party and its larger designs for the Middle East.

The refusal to indict Amin el-Husseini and put him on trial for the war crimes he committed through his rigid allegiance to the Nazi state constituted an enormous, missed opportunity to draw public attention to the ideological sources of Arab rejection of the Zionist project. This formative history was not entirely neglected. In 1965, Joseph Schechtman, who had worked in New York with the American Zionist Emergency Council in the immediate postwar years, published *The Mufti and the Führer: The Rise and Fall of Haj Amin el-Husseini,* a work that exposed the Nazi collaboration of the leaders of the Palestinian Arabs. In 1986, historian Bernard Lewis focused scholarly attention on this issue in *Semites and Antisemites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice*. Despite the quality of their research, these works received only minimal attention from historians of the Nazi regime. Far more influential was *Orientalism,* the work of Columbia professor of literature Edward Said,

which succeeded in pushing aside the evidence of the historians and presenting the Palestinian Arabs as innocent victims of Western imperialism and colonialism.

In 1988, with the publication of Klaus Gensicke's *Der Mufti von Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini, und die Nationalsozialisten* by Peter Lang Publishers in West Germany, scholarship on Husseini's collaboration with the Nazi regime took a significant step forward. The book was originally Gensicke's 1987 doctoral dissertation, completed at the Free University in West Berlin, which unfortunately did not lead to an academic career at one of Germany's universities. It was published again in 2007 in Germany, and in English in 2011 by Vallentine Mitchell in London.

Gensicke's pioneering research offered the first exploration of Husseini's role based on the declassified archives of the German Foreign Office, the headquarters of the SS, the Reich Security Main Office, and the Nazi Propaganda Ministry. As a result, he was able to offer far more detail about the depth of Husseini's enthusiasm for Hitler and the Nazis, including his close working relationships with officials in the German Foreign Office; contributions to Nazi propaganda; collaboration with Heinrich Himmler and the SS, especially in Yugoslavia; details about monthly financial support he received from the Nazi regime; and textual evidence of the depths of his hatred of Judaism and Jews, which underlay his hatred of the Zionist project.

Der Mufti von Jerusalem revealed that Husseini told German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop that the Arabs were "natural friends of Germany because both are engaged in the struggle against their three common enemies: the English, the Jews and Bolshevism." Husseini offered to assist the Nazi war effort with intelligence cooperation and sabotage operations in North Africa. Gensicke included details of Husseini's famous meeting with Hitler of Nov. 28, 1941, during which Hitler promised that when the German armies reached the southern edge of the Caucasus, he would aim at the destruction of the Jews of North Africa and the Middle East, and he would appoint the Mufti to be spokesperson of the Arab world. Gensicke revealed Husseini's cooperation with German intelligence officials, his enthusiasm for General Erwin Rommel's military victories in spring and summer 1941 in North Africa, and his efforts to establish a German-Arab legion, as well as a Bosnian Muslim SS Division in Yugoslavia. In 1988, his German language audience could read that on Dec. 11, 1942, Husseini wrote to Hitler to praise "close cooperation between the millions of Muslims in the world and Germany with its Allies in the Tripartite Pact, that is directed against the common enemies, Jews, Bolsheviks and Anglo-Saxons, will with God's help lead to a victorious outcome of this war for the Axis Powers."

Der Mufti von Jerusalem included key passages of Husseini's speech at the opening ceremony of the Islamic Institute in Berlin on Dec. 18, 1942. In it, as reported by the Arabic-language radio and in the German-language press, he declared that the Jews had been enemies of Islam since the days of Muhammad and asserted that they ruled the United States as well as godless communism in the Soviet Union. World War II, he said, had "been unleashed by World Jewry." At the Islamic Institute on Nov. 2, 1943, Husseini cited passages in the Koran to assert that divine anger was aimed at the Jews. Gensicke revealed that Husseini had urged governments in Eastern Europe not to allow Jews to leave Europe for Palestine. Instead, Husseini suggested that they be "relocated" to Poland and placed under what he called "active surveillance." In so doing, Gensicke brought the attention of his German readers to the findings of a 1947 report by the Nation Associates on the Arab Higher Committee, as well as to Schechtman's *The Mufti and the Führer*. He cited evidence that Husseini had worked closely with Heinrich Himmler in training imams who would work with the Bosnian SS division and with Muslim soldiers fighting with the Nazis on the eastern front, and that the Nazi regime paid Husseini 90,000 marks a month from 1942 to 1945.

After the publication of *Der Mufti von Jerusalem und die Nationalsozialisten,* scholars, journalists, writers, and an interested public in Germany had abundant evidence to confirm the links between the founding leader of the national movement of the Palestine Arabs and the Nazi regime during the years of World War II and the Holocaust, and of the central role that Husseini's interpretation of

Islam played in his politics. Yet Gensicke's pathbreaking work was published at a time when the romance surrounding the Palestinian movement and views of Israel as a recurrence of fascism still found advocates on the West German left. It had modest if any impact on scholarship in Germany or elsewhere.

Al-Qaida's attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, sparked renewed interest in continuities and breaks between Nazism and Islamism. Osama bin Laden's hatred of Jews, Judaism, and Israel was unambiguous and, for his associates and followers, a source of pride. The month after the attacks, I wrote an article describing al-Qaida as a phenomenon of the extreme right, an example of "reactionary modernism," a term I had found useful in describing the German right and the Nazis. Yet al-Qaida's blend of modern conspiracy theory and religious citations of Islamic texts remained to be explored. In 2003, two of the West's finest intellectuals, Paul Berman in Brooklyn and Matthias Küntzel, living north of Hamburg, published pathbreaking books that connected fascism and Nazism in Europe's past with the Islamist terrorists of the turn of the century.

In 2003, Ca Ira, a small left-liberal press in Freiburg, published Küntzel's *Djihad und Judenhass: Über die neuen antijüdischen Krieg* (Jihad and Jew-Hatred: On the New Anti-Jewish War). It was a second turning point in this discussion, combining new research as well as a synthesis of previous scholarship. Küntzel brought Gensicke's findings to the attention of Ca Ira's liberal and left-liberal readership. In his epilogue, Küntzel noted that none of the scholarly journals of history and politics in Germany had reviewed Gensicke's work. Though it addressed issues central to a topic of great public interest—the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs—the German press and media ignored it as well. So did many scholars of the Middle East. Or, if they did discuss the book, they refused to face the full implications of the evidence Gensicke had presented.

Küntzel attributed this neglect to "the fact that it is Israel, more than any other country, which provokes the German left as reflexively to make comparisons with National Socialism," a habit that had "to do with the specific needs of Germans for identification and projection." First the radical left of the 1970s, then increasingly mainstream politicians, made the Nazi analogy to fulfill an "unconscious wish for unburdening" of the German past. Küntzel wrote that "knowledge of the connection, embodied in the Mufti, between the Palestinian national movement and National Socialism would complicate the [German left's] identification with the Palestinians as well as the projection of the German policy of extermination onto Israel." The result was denial or minimization of the connection between the Palestinian national movement and National Socialism.

The publication of Küntzel's *Djihad und Judenhass* in 2003 succeeded in making Gensicke's findings meaningful to a broader audience by connecting historical scholarship on Husseini and other Arab Nazi collaborators to the "aftershock" of the political consequences of their wartime collaboration in the Middle East after 1945. He did so in the spirit of the liberal tradition of *Aufarbeitung der Nazivergangenheit,* "coming to terms with the Nazi past." Küntzel argued that examination of the connection between the Nazis and Arab collaborators and its post-World War II aftereffects was a central demand of an honest reckoning with the crimes of the Nazi regime, and of an effective fight against contemporary antisemitism. The work gave considerable attention to the role of the Muslim Brotherhood as the organizational weapon that transformed Islamist ideology into political action.

Küntzel's book burst into the consciousness of a broader liberal public in 2003 in part because it helped explain the ideological origins of the attacks on the United States on 9/11. Teaching at a vocational college in Hamburg, Küntzel followed the investigations and trial of those who assisted "the Hamburg cell" of Islamist terrorists that had conducted the attacks. As the 9/11 murderers denounced Jews, the United States, and Israel, it became obvious that they were repeating conspiracy theories blending the anti-Jewish hatreds that had abounded in the ideology and propaganda of the Nazi regime with the anti-Jewish hatreds expressed by Husseini and the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1930s and 1940s, and by later Islamist offshoots from Hamas to al-Qaida. *Djihad und Judenhass* brought to the fore,

in public as well as scholarly discussion, the link between Nazism and Islamism which had been forgotten, repressed, or never known in West German leftist discourse. It restored the phrase "anti-fascism" to its original meaning and shattered efforts of the radical left to tar the Jewish state with the "fascist" label.

In addition to bringing Gensicke's findings to a broader audience, Küntzel drew further attention to the Nazis' shortwave Arabic-language radio broadcasts, the echoes of their themes in the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, and their role in justifying the Palestinian Arabs' rejection of any compromise with the Zionist project. He traced the ideological lineages of Nazism and the Muslim Brotherhood to the Hamas Charter of 1988, and then to the founding of al-Qaida. Küntzel wrote that 9/11 was a chapter of "the new anti-Jewish war"—a profoundly reactionary phenomenon whose predecessors were the ideologies of fascism and Nazism.

Al-Qaida's Nazi lineage through the Muslim Brotherhood showed that the 9/11 attackers were not leftist anti-imperialists. Rather, they were a product, in part, of the continuing aftershock of Nazism in the Middle East. Nazism, which ended as a major political factor in Europe with defeat in 1945, had enjoyed a robust afterlife in the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots, such as Hamas and al-Qaida, which had culminated on 9/11 in an attack on the West, motivated in large part by antisemitic conspiracy theories.

But the post-World War II tradition of Islamist antisemitism that inspired first the civil war started by the Arab Higher Committee in Palestine in December 1947, and then the Arab state invasion of Israel in May 1948, was *not* only or even primarily the result of the impact of Nazism, of course; it had deep indigenous cultural, religious, and political roots as well. Nazi Germany's Arabic-language broadcasts in North Africa and the Middle East during the war fused antisemitism and opposition to the Zionist project with Nazi ideology and Islamist themes. Yet Husseini's texts, some of which were available in German-language publications and in Gensicke's work, indicated that the embrace of Nazism was neither a coincidence of timing nor only an alliance of convenience. Rather, Husseini's hatred of Judaism and the Jews was the source of his attraction to Nazism, and then of his rejection of the Zionist project. This "Jew-hatred"—*Judenhass*—was the *ideological* passion that Husseini shared with Hitler and Himmler. Husseini and other Arab exiles brought their hatred of the Jews and Judaism with them when they came to Berlin in 1941, and they brought those same hatreds—now fused with the additional element of Nazism—back to the Middle East after World War II.

In 2007, Russell Berman, professor of comparative literature at Stanford and editor of *Telos,* a quarterly journal of social theory, published an English edition of Küntzel's book with the title *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism, and the Roots of 9/11*. Now, the English-speaking world had at its disposal a succinct account of the continuities from the Nazis' "anti-Jewish war" to the decisions of the Arab Higher Committee. Küntzel argued that it was the ideological mixture of Nazism and Islamism that was the most important causal factor which led leaders of the Palestinian Arabs to reject the United Nations partition resolution of Nov. 29, 1947. He noted that Western governments, including the United States, had refused to bring this issue to the fore, primarily in order not to antagonize the Arab states during the early months and years of the Cold War.

In the United States in 2003, Paul Berman published *Terror and Liberalism,* an equally important book about Europe's totalitarian past and Islamism. Berman did not focus on the leaders of the Palestinian Arabs or on Haj Amin el-Husseini's Nazi collaboration, but rather on the writings of the leading ideologue of the Muslim Brotherhood, Sayyid Qutb. Berman grasped with clarity and eloquence the parallels between Nazi and fascist totalitarianism in Europe's mid-20th century and Qutb's reactionary attack on liberalism, the Jews, the United States, and Israel in his commentaries on the Koran and Islamic commentaries about the Koran. Qutb shared with Husseini the conviction that the religion of Islam was in its essence hostile to Judaism and the Jews, and therefore to a Jewish state in Palestine.

Qutb, like Husseini, offered a paranoid construct of an Islam under attack by Jews, Christians and modern culture, and a resulting program of counterattack that celebrated death and martyrdom in an effort to create a pristine Islamic state in which state and religion would be fused

and liberal modernity banished. In Qutb's justification, and then in bin Laden's practice of terror, Berman saw a reproduction in Islamic terms of the totalitarian aspirations that fueled Nazism and fascism in 20th-century Europe. "Not every exotic thing," he wrote—such as suicide bombers, visions of utopia achieved through terror, and of a fractured world made whole and good through apocalyptic violence—was "a foreign thing." *Terror and Liberalism*, like *Djihad und Judenhass,* made the case that the intellectual explication and denunciation of Islamist antisemitism should be a distinctively, if not exclusively, liberal endeavor. In 2006, Walter Laqueur's synthetic study, *The Changing Face of Antisemitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day*, discussed the shift of the center of global antisemitism from Europe to the Middle East.

Knowledge of Nazi policy toward the Muslim world took another step forward in 2006 when professors Klaus Michael Mallmann and Martin Cüppers published *Halbmond und Hakenkreuz: das Dritte Reich, die Araber und Palästina* (Crescent and Swastika: The Third Reich, the Arabs and Palestine). The English edition was published in 2010 as *Nazi Palestine: The Plans for the Extermination of the Jews*. Mallmann was the director and Cüppers an associate of the University of Stuttgart's Center for Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Ludwigsburg, Germany. Their research in the archives of the Nazi regime revealed for the first time that Hitler and Himmler had created an SS "action group" (*Einsatzgruppe*) that was prepared to go to North Africa in 1942 in the event of German military victory there in order to extend the Final Solution to the approximately 1 million Jews living in North Africa and the Middle East. Mallmann and Cüppers demonstrated that the propagandistic threats to "kill the Jews" broadcast on Nazi radio in the region were, in fact, the public face of these decisions, which had been secret and previously undisclosed. The Nazis anticipated that they would be able to count on collaboration from the Muslim Brotherhood, but the defeat of Rommel's forces at el-Alamein by the fall of 1942 prevented the implementation of those plans for mass murder, which revealed that Hitler intended the Final Solution to be a global policy, implemented wherever his armies met with success and working through local allies like Husseini, with whom the Nazi leadership had cultivated intimate political relations based on a shared passion for Jew-hatred.

Nazism, which ended as a major political factor in Europe with defeat in 1945, had enjoyed a robust afterlife in the Muslim Brotherhood and its offshoots

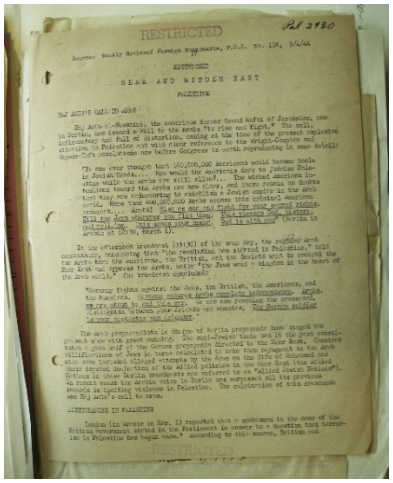
While working on my 2006 book about Nazi propaganda, I examined several of Husseini's speeches which had been published by the German scholar Gerhard Höpp. With the works of Küntzel, Mallmann, Cüppers, and Gensicke in mind, I turned to a study of Nazi Germany's propaganda aimed at the Arab world. I also wondered what American and British diplomatic and military intelligence records might contain in this area.

In fact, the British, and to an even greater extent the United States, knew a great deal more than Washington and London had been willing to make public in the postwar decades. In 1977, the State Department declassified "Axis Broadcast in Arabic," several thousand pages of verbatim translations into English of Nazi Germany's Arabic language broadcast from 1939 to 1945, which had been sent every week to the office of the secretary of state in Washington. They were compiled under the direction of U.S. Ambassadors Alexander Kirk and then Pinckney Tuck in the American Embassy in Cairo. The files covering 1941 to 1945 were especially extensive. Though declassified they remained unexamined, or at least were not evident in published scholarship when I found them in the summer of 2007 in the U.S. National Archives at College Park, Maryland.

The "Axis Broadcast in Arabic" translations constitute the most complete documentation in any language of the Nazi regime's Arabic radio propaganda aimed at North Africa and the Middle East. They include speeches by Husseini and other, unnamed Arabic speakers. The Americans in Cairo documented a veritable flood of vicious antisemitism broadcast on the Nazis' Middle East radio.

The broadcasts made no distinction between Zionists and Jews. The Jews, according to many broadcasts, were the cause of World War II and enemies of the religion of Islam. Zionism, they claimed, was merely the logical consequence of a

supposedly age-old Jewish antagonism toward Islam and Muslims. The Jews and Zionists were imperialists by nature. They controlled the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. Nazi Germany was fighting both these Jews and the Jewish-controlled powers of the anti-Hitler coalition. Whereas Nazi propaganda in Germany informed domestic audiences that the regime was in the process of "exterminating" and "annihilating" the Jews of Europe, the propaganda aimed at Arabs urged listeners to take matters into their own hands and "kill the Jews" as fulfillment of both Arab national interests and of the supposed demands of their religion.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Transcript of a broadcast made by Amin el-Husseini on March 1, 1944National Archives at College Park, photo courtesy the author

The texts of "Axis Broadcast in Arabic" and the files of the German Foreign Office, the SS, and the Propaganda Ministry added necessary texture to the argument that a meeting of hearts and minds—a cultural fusion of Nazism and Islamism—had taken place in Nazi Berlin. The result was a mixture of ideas that neither the Nazis nor the Islamists could have produced on their own: a distinctively Islamist antisemitism that combined a radical antisemitic interpretation of the Koran and Islamic commentaries with the secular conspiracy theories of Nazi Germany.

The Americans in Cairo also reported on the enthusiasm with which al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood, and other segments of broadcast and published Arab opinion, greeted Husseini's return to the Middle East in 1946. For his supporters, his collaboration with the Nazis was a point of pride—at worst an alliance of convenience, but not a source of shame or embarrassment. Though the U.S. State Department was well informed about details of Husseini's collaboration with the Nazis, as well as the role of ex-Nazi collaborators in the Arab Higher Committee, it chose not to make its files public even in the face of appeals from political liberals such as Sen. Wagner and Congressman Celler and the liberal press in New York. With the publication of *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World*, whitewashing or making excuses for Arab collaboration with the Nazis became more difficult. In 2009, the Israeli diplomat and scholar Zvi Elpeleg published *Through the Eyes of the Mufti: The Essays of Haj Amin*, bringing more textual evidence of Husseini's hatred of Judaism, the Jews, and of the Zionist project to English readers.

In 2010, the late Robert Wistrich, historian of antisemitism at Hebrew University, published *A Lethal Obsession: Antisemitism from Antiquity to the Global Jihad*. Wistrich's massive synthesis argued that first the Nazi collaboration, and then the Soviet-era campaigns of anti-Zionism, had brought about the shift in the global center of gravity of antisemitism from the European heartland to the Muslim majority societies of the Middle East and the Islamic Republic of Iran. In 2011, David Patterson's *A Genealogy of Evil: Anti-Semitism from Nazism to Islamic Jihad* synthesized the by-then very considerable English language scholarship on Nazism and Islamism, including discussions of Haj Amin el-Husseini and the Muslim Brotherhood.

In 2014, Harvard University Press published David Motadel's excellent *Islam and Nazi Germany's War*, a work that added yet more archival evidence regarding Nazi and Islamist collaboration. Motadel focused on the collaboration of Husseini and other Arab figures with the Nazi regime, especially in the Balkans and Caucasus. He elaborated further on Gensicke's work on the Nazi and Islamist collaboration in forming a Muslim SS division in Bosnia, and on Nazi efforts to sympathetically address the cultural and religious customs of Muslim soldiers fighting with the Wehrmacht. *Islam and Nazi Germany's War* added still more evidence of the enthusiasm of Nazi leaders, especially Hitler and Himmler, for an understanding of Islam as a religion of warriors, favorable to authoritarian government,

implacably hostile to the Jews, and thus a natural ally of National Socialism. Motadel offered important new material on the continuation of the Nazi-Islamist alliance on the European continent, especially on Nazi Germany's eastern front until the very end of the war in 1945; his book restored this material from its previous role as a footnote in Nazi history to its actual historical role at the center of Nazi ambitions for Muslim lands.

With the benefit of access to previously closed archives, the scholarship of the past three decades has confirmed the arguments of Zionists and liberals in the late 1940s. Haj Amin el-Husseini's collaboration with the Nazi regime and its anti-Jewish policies was deep and consequential. Though Husseini was *not* a key decision-maker during the Holocaust, he was an enthusiastic collaborator, shared Nazi hatreds, did what he could to prevent Jewish emigration from Europe to Palestine during the Holocaust, and fanned the flames of Jew-hatred both in Europe and on the radio in the Middle East. Recent scholarship has also confirmed that the ideas which emerged in the fusion of Nazism and Islamism in the Nazi years persisted in elements of Arab and Palestinian nationalism and in the core of the Islamist movements after 1945. The rejection of the two-state solution by Hamas, the Islamic Republic of Iran, al-Qaida, Hezbollah, the PLO, and others remains in part an aftereffect of the fateful fusion of Nazism and Islamism in the 1940s.

One of the key documents of this fusion was the Hamas Covenant of 1988. It has been readily available in English on the internet since soon after 9/11 at the Yale Law School's Avalon Project website. Reflecting its origins in the Islamist ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, the covenant based its complete rejection of any Jewish state anywhere in what it calls "Palestine" on its reading of the Koran and commentaries. Armed struggle—that is, war—was essential to destroy the Jewish state. Compromise with it was religious heresy. As was the case in Nazi propaganda aimed at the Middle East during World War II, the Hamas Covenant drew on Nazism's antisemitic conspiracy theories as it blamed Jews and Zionists for the two world wars. Despite the fact that the Hamas Covenant has long been publicly available, scholars in the United States who regard themselves as leftists have bizarrely sought to present Hamas as perhaps an extreme element of an otherwise progressive global endeavor. Anyone who reads the text can immediately recognize the aftereffects of the Nazi-Islamist ideological fusion that emerged four decades before Hamas published its statement of beliefs.

In 2019, Matthias Küntzel published *Nazis und der Nahe Osten: Wie der Islamische Antisemitismus Enstand* (Nazis and the Near East: How Islamic Antisemitism Emerged). Currently under consideration for publication in English with the title *Aftershock: The Nazis, Islamic Antisemitism, and the Middle East,* the work again explores the link between Nazism and Islamism. Part of the "aftershock" was the decision of the Palestinian Arabs and then the Arab League to wage war in 1947 and 1948 rather than accept the U.N. partition resolution. Küntzel rightly places great weight on Husseini's previously underexamined text, "Islam and the Jews," first delivered in 1937 at a pan-Arab meeting in Bloudan, Syria. The work was subsequently published in Arabic, and in German in Berlin in 1938. Küntzel makes a compelling case that it was the canonical text of the Islamist war against the Jews, written before Husseini arrived in Berlin, and thus not primarily the result of the Nazi regime. "Islam and the Jews" was his own indigenous creation, and Husseini repeated its themes in his famous speeches in wartime Berlin in which he described Islam as an inherently anti-Jewish religion. He denounced the Zionist project as the modern expression of the Jews' supposed ancient hatred of Islam.

Husseini's hatred, which Küntzel calls "Islamic antisemitism," was the result of the fusion of Husseini's indigenous, autonomous interpretation of Islam with the modern conspiracy theories of Nazism. Küntzel argues that the decision of the Arab Higher Committee and then of the Arab League to go to war in 1947-48 should be understood as a continuation of a decadelong anti-Jewish war that Husseini and his followers and associates in the Muslim Brotherhood had been waging since 1937—that is, before, during, and after his presence in Nazi Berlin. Küntzel presents the fateful decisions to reject partition and invade the new State of Israel to be direct consequences of the Islamic antisemitism that emerged in the previous decade.

The nonindictment of Husseini and his return to the Middle East was understood at the time by American liberals and leftists to be one of the bitter fruits of an anti-communist consensus that diminished, if not displaced, the passions of wartime anti-fascism and anti-Nazism. Though in the crucial years of 1945 to 1949, the State Department was well aware of the extremism of the Muslim Brotherhood, it declined to bring that evidence to the public or to incorporate it into the public themes of American diplomacy.

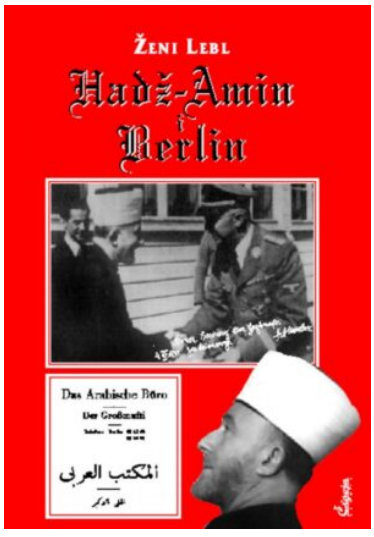
The actions of the Soviet Union at first differed sharply from the Western desire to sweep Islamist Nazism under the rug. From May 1947 to May 1949, the Soviet Union and the communist regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia offered consequential diplomatic and, in the case of Czechoslovakia, military support for the Zionists and then the new State of Israel. They did so at a time when the British government was doing all it could to prevent Jewish emigration to Palestine, and when the United States supported an embargo on arms to the Middle East. The arms that the Jews needed in 1948 came, in violation of the U.N. arms embargo, from communist Czechoslovakia. But when Israeli communists received only 3.5% in the first Israeli elections in 1949, and Ben-Gurion was able to form a coalition government without including the pro-Soviet Mapam party, Stalin realized that the new Jewish state was not going to be a pro-Soviet bastion and reversed course, launching antisemitic purges in Europe, and shifting Soviet foreign policy in favor of the Arabs and against Israel.

From 1949 to 1989, the Soviet Union engaged in a depressingly successful propaganda campaign that suppressed public memory of the brief era of Soviet-bloc support for the Zionist project, the U.N. Partition Plan, and Israel, as well as abundant evidence of the Arab Higher Committee's Nazi collaborationist era. In place of the actual linkages between leaders of the Palestinian Arabs and the Nazi regime, the Soviet Union and the PLO claimed that the real Nazis and racists in the Middle East were the Jews and the Israelis. This campaign of lies has proven to be among the most successful in world politics.

It was only in the aftermath of the Islamist attacks of 9/11 that historians drew renewed and necessary attention to the role of the Muslim Brotherhood and the ideological fusion of Nazism and Islamism in the 1940s. As Hassan al-Banna hoped in June 1946, Haj Amin el-Husseini and the Arab Higher Committee did indeed "continue the struggle" waged by Hitler against Judaism, Jews, and the Zionist project. Whether the scholarship about these issues receives the attention it deserves, and whether it has any impact on changing political attitudes toward Israel and its adversaries, remains to be seen. But it is getting harder to ignore.

Jeffrey Herf is professor of modern European history at the University of Maryland, College Park. His most recent publication is Israel's Moment: International Support for and Opposition to Establishing the Jewish State, 1945-1949 (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

Tablet, July 06, 2022



The Mufti of Jerusalem Haj-Amin el-Husseini and national- socialism
Ženi Lebl (Author)
English, 2007
Publisher: Čigoja štampa, Belgrade, 2007.

Israel Is Now the Middle East Strong Horse

By Dan Diker

Dr. Dan Diker, President of the Jerusalem Center for Foreign Affairs (photo credit: Guy Sidi)

- The 14th-century Arab Muslim historian and political theorist Ibn Khaldoun assessed that history is a cycle of violence in which strong horses replace weak horses. After Hamas's Oct. 7 massacre, Israel, by necessity, has become the Middle East's strong horse in its ongoing battle against the Iranian regime and its terror proxies.
- The Arab world knows this. They witnessed the IDF's destruction of both Hamas and Hizbullah's command structure and leaderships, and the detonation of much of their weaponry and ammunition stockpiles. They then watched as Israel's air force decimated Iran's anti-aircraft defenses and dominated Iranian air space.
- Arab League members widely denounced Israel's counterassault against the Iranian regime, while at the same time, Abraham Accords diplomats from Bahrain, Morocco and the UAE have remained in Tel Aviv, as have ambassadors from Jordan and Egypt, and even assisted Israel during Iranian regime missile and killer drone attacks.
- Israel's strong horse status is a key to winning peace and moderation in the Middle East but has been misunderstood in the West. America's mistaken mirroring of Israel as a small version of itself has constrained it from defeating radical enemies.
- Victory cannot be achieved against radical Islamic terrorism using Western principles and methods of compromise, ceasefire, diplomacy, and territorial concession. The Middle East does not work that way. Different rules apply.
- Compromise signals weakness. A ceasefire is merely a cessation of hostilities to rearm and resupply. Territorial concession is the fate of the vanquished. The unilateral territorial concession of Gaza in 2005 led to five Hamas wars, climaxing in the Hamas atrocities of Oct. 7. "Goodwill diplomacy" and territorial compromise opposite *jihad,* as demanded by the U.S. and Europe, proved to be a strategic disaster and existential threat to Israel.
- Israel's evolving self-awareness as an indigenous ethnic minority in a chaotic, unstable, and unforgiving Middle East recognizes that there is no alternative to the strong horse.

Osama bin Laden said, "When people see a strong horse and a weak horse, by nature they will like the strong horse," in a 2001 interview, expressing a Middle Eastern axiom unchallenged for millennia. Bin Laden was alluding to the fourteenth-century Arab Muslim historian and political theorist Ibn Khaldoun, who assessed that history is a cycle of violence in which strong horses – in Arabic, "al-faras al-asil" – replace weak horses.

Middle East analyst Lee Smith's 2010 book, The Strong Horse: Power, Politics, and the Clash of Arab Civilizations, argues that violent power is central to the politics, society, and culture of the Middle East.

He writes, "Bin Ladenism is not drawn from the extremist fringe but represents the political and social norm." The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is merely a distraction from the larger, endemic, and ongoing power struggles in the Arab Muslim majority Middle East.

After Hamas's October 7 massacre, Israel, by necessity, has become the Middle East's strong horse in its ongoing battle against the Iranian regime and its terror proxies – the current "weak horses" of its own apocalypse – Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthis, and various militias in Iraq and Syria.

The Arab world knows this. They witnessed the IDF's lightning destruction of both Hamas and Hezbollah's command structure, the elimination of their leaderships, and the detonation of much of their weaponry and ammunition stockpiles. They then watched as Israel's air force decimated Iran's entire anti-aircraft defenses, and dominated Iranian air space for three hours, executing 20 separate attacks across the vast Islamic Republic. The assault shocked the Iranian regime to its core. Iran's cultural institute Tebyan, under the aegis of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, admitted being mystified as to how Israel succeeded in attacking

the IRGC's intercontinental ballistic missile testing center in the northeastern city of Shahroud, hundreds of kilometers from other targeted sites in Iran.
It will take years for the regime to recover, if at all. Israel's ongoing offensive ground operations in Lebanon and Gaza have hastened the enemy's desertion of the battle zone. Israel's renewed strong horse status has generated fear and awe across the Arab world. At the same time, the Arab powers suffer from cognitive dissonance.
Arab League members widely denounced Israel's counterassault against the Iranian regime, which contradicts the Saudis' decades-long enmity for their Iranian regime neighbors, notwithstanding recent diplomatic agreements and reports of security cooperation.
This cognitive dissonance underscores an important principle in understanding the political culture of the Middle East, which can be summed up as: "Watch what I do, not what I say." The evidence is overwhelming: Abraham Accords diplomats from Bahrain, Morocco and the UAE have remained in Tel Aviv, as have ambassadors from Jordan and Egypt.
Similarly, Israeli ambassadors have remained in those respective Arab countries. Beyond this, Jordan, Egypt, the UAE, and Bahrain opened their air spaces and even assisted Israel during Iranian regime missile and killer drone attacks on Israel in April and October 2024.
Israel's strong horse status is a key to winning peace and moderation in the Middle East but has been misunderstood in the West. The Biden administration had urged and even demanded that Israel refrain from attacking Hamas in Rafah, controlling the Philadelphi Corridor, and recently, in Northern Gaza.
Israel has done the opposite, reasserting its strong horse status opposite a bleeding and nearly defeated adversary. Israel's recent attacks on Iran, America's nightmare scenario, have changed the strategic balance, enhancing Israel's profile among its Middle Eastern neighbors.
America's mistaken mirroring of Israel as a small version of itself has constrained the Jewish and democratic state from defeating radical Middle Eastern enemies. Victory cannot be achieved against radical Islamic terrorism using Western principles and methods of compromise, ceasefire, diplomacy, and territorial concession.
The Middle East does not work that way. Different rules apply: Compromise signals weakness. A ceasefire is merely a cessation of hostilities to rearm and resupply. Territorial concession is the fate of the vanquished.Israel's strong horse status is a reversal of past missteps that proved lethal.
When Israel applied Western rules, such as its unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000, it invited four years of PLO and Hamas suicide bombings, murder, and mayhem, costing thousands of lives. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah referred to Israel as "weaker than a spider's web" following Israel's May 2000 withdrawal from Southern Lebanon.
Arafat and his Fatah and PLO colleagues were encouraged by Israel's overnight retreat from Lebanon, observing that for Hezbollah and the Palestinians alike, "resistance," meaning terror, was an effective weapon against Israel. The withdrawal was a prelude to the Palestinian "Al Aqsa Intifada," which resulted in more than 1000 Israelis killed and thousands more wounded.
The unilateral territorial concession of Gaza in 2005 led to five Hamas wars, climaxing in the October 7 "Al Aqsa Flood" of Hamas atrocities.
October 7 proved conclusively that "goodwill diplomacy" and territorial compromise opposite jihad, as demanded by the United States and Europe, was a strategic disaster and existential threat to Israel.
Having paid an enormously high human price, Israel has embodied the lesson of the strong horse in a chaotic, unstable, and unforgiving Middle East. Israel's evolving self-awareness as an indigenous ethnic minority today understands that, as Smith notes, "He who punishes enemies and rewards friends, forbids evil and enjoins good, is entitled to rule. There's no alternative, not yet anyway, to the strong horse."

Dr. Dan Diker, President of the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, is the longtime Director of its Counter-Political Warfare Project. He is former Secretary-General of the World Jewish Congress and a Research Fellow of the International Institute for Counter Terrorism at Reichman University (formerly IDC, Herzliya). He has written six books exposing the "apartheid antisemitism" phenomenon in North America, and has authored studies on Iran's race for regional supremacy and Israel's need for defensible borders.

November 3, 2024

This article originally appeared in the Jerusalem Post on October 31, 2024.
View all posts by Dr. Dan Diker

Ibn Khaldun was an Arab sociologist, philosopher, and historian widely acknowledged to be one of the greatest social scientists of the Middle Ages, and considered by many to be the father of historiography, sociology, economics, and demography studies.

The Mind Behind James Bond

By Anna Mundow

'Ian Fleming' Review: The Mind Behind James Bond© Provided by The Wall Street Journal

From the first arresting moment in Nicholas Shakespeare's biography "Ian Fleming: The Complete Man" it is clear that we are in good hands. At a hastily arranged funeral in a village church, Fleming's widow arrives late, accompanying his coffin, causing the ceremony to be restarted and thereby demonstrating that, "as in life, so in death, a strong woman had played a defining role." Eager to learn more, we gladly enter a monumental edifice of a book that at first glance seems somewhat daunting.

What lies ahead could, after all, be the literary equivalent of a country-house tour that winds through room after room of arcane objects, past portraits of the rich and reprehensible. For Fleming's life, though relatively short (he died in 1964 at the age of 56), was crammed not only with stuff—the handmade cigarettes, the gold-plated typewriter—but also with personages. He knew everybody, from Winston Churchill and JFK to Claudette Colbert and Truman Capote, not to mention a host of military men and secret agents. Depending on whom you believe, Fleming also played a vital undercover role in World War II as well as the Cold War. Then he created James Bond and became an industry himself.

Fleming was "the son of wealth, but the grandson of poverty," as Mr. Shakespeare tells it, his grandfather Robert having come from nothing to become, by 1928, a merchant banker controlling "maybe a trillion pounds" in today's money. And Robert Fleming is wonderfully described here in all his canniness and thrift, keeping silver in one trouser pocket and pennies in the other for fear of overtipping. Fleming's childhood was a fairly typical one of social privilege and emotional deprivation, shadowed by the tragedy of his father's death when Ian was 9 and presided over by a willful, narcissistic mother. His peerless father, Val, having been killed in World War I (Churchill penned his obituary) and his older brother, Peter, being a famous explorer and writer, young Ian had more than one legend against which to measure himself.

Educated (and sadistically flogged) at Dunford and then, at the age of 13, at Eton, the academically lazy but athletically talented boy was molded to enter not only elite British society but also the shadowy world of espionage. "It was a spy network already in the making," Mr. Shakespeare writes of Eton, "a class of English men raised to rule the Empire . . . all known to one another from boyhood." Even in his Moscow exile, the disgraced "Cambridge Five" spy Guy Burgess still wore his old school tie.

Fleming attended Sandhurst military academy but left prematurely in 1927, having become ill with gonorrhea. Dispatched to an academy-sanatorium in Germany, he considered the enlightened theories of the Viennese psychoanalyst Alfred Adler and dallied with women. ("His general taste," a friend observed some years later, "was for tarts who looked like nice girls.") A love of literature was also engendered, even though Fleming was being officially trained for a career in the British foreign service. By 1930 the unruly youth had a temporary job at the League of Nations in Geneva, where "he went to work at 8.30 a.m., walking around an old dog that lay on the steps at the entrance." Drowsy Europe too lies on the threshold of disaster.

In 1931, however, thanks to his mother's social connections, Fleming traded diplomacy for journalism, initially working at Reuters, where his early assignments included "sport, motor-racing, business, obituaries, and politics." The next career step was both inevitable and timely. In 1939 Fleming was recruited to be the new assistant to the head of the Admiralty's Naval Intelligence Division, and his role in confounding both Nazi and Soviet intelligence networks emerges here as vital. Mr. Shakespeare finds intrigue of all kinds to untangle—personal and political, domestic and international—when his subject becomes first an espionage professional and later a novelist courted by the likes of John F. Kennedy, who turned to Fleming for assassination tips.

At this stage in the narrative, world events might well have eclipsed personal biography. Mr. Shakespeare is so adept, however, at distilling complex history and conjuring cinematic images—the tea trolley rattling along the Admiralty's corridors, the "small gold pencils" employed by aristocrats when jotting down useful names—that entire eras materialize in artful sketches while the portrait of Fleming acquires

texture and shade with each trial and triumph. Marriage to the abominable Ann, for instance, whose "true interest was herself," is as riveting a drama as any wartime escapade. The creation of James Bond, occurring late in Fleming's life, seems almost pedestrian by comparison. Summoning the concision and discipline honed at Reuters, Fleming simply wrote like a demon, flinging each completed page out of sight, until a book was finished.

Bond's first outing, "Casino Royale," was published on April 15, 1953, and though reviews were positive ("Ian Fleming has discovered the secret of narrative art. The reader has to go on reading"), sales were slim. "My profits from Casino will just about keep Ann in asparagus over Coronation week," Fleming groused. Further volumes followed, but it was the Suez Crisis of 1956 that, in Mr. Shakespeare's words, "saved Bond." When the ailing British Prime Minister Anthony Eden decided to convalesce at Goldeneye, Fleming's Jamaican estate, it created a sensation. Book sales of the series soared and the fictional spy's future was assured. "Peter Pan with a gun," as Mr. Shakespeare calls him, would never grow old. Whether airborne or underwater, trading blows or banter, the suave Bond was forever Britain as it wished itself to be.

Much of the factual detail of Fleming's life has been examined by previous biographers, notably John Pearson ("The Life of Ian Fleming," 1966) and Andrew Lycett ("Ian Fleming," 1995), whose work and assistance Mr. Shakespeare acknowledges. He also lists "other excellent, if partial accounts," including Ben Macintyre's 2008 "For Your Eyes Only." Given these previous exhumations, Mr. Shakespeare was cautious about conducting another. When invited to do so by the Fleming estate, however, he was gratified to unearth a fresh specimen. Not, he writes, the "prickly, self-centred bounder" he imagined but "another, more luminous person." A Fleming of many contradictions consequently emerges: loving yet cruel, arrogant yet insecure, spiteful yet generous.

In the end he could afford to be; success made Fleming rich. In Mr. Shakespeare's astute opinion, the inimitable Bond also retrieved for his creator "the epoch in which he had thrived, young, single and free," while repairing the damage inflicted on the British psyche by the 1951 defection of Burgess and fellow spy Donald Maclean. As to the tortures inflicted on his hero, Fleming observed that anyone who knew, "as I know, the things that were done to captured secret agents" would never accuse him of exaggeration. Yet this jaded cynic remained loyal to his empire, citing its "vast contribution to the health and sanity of the world." The apparent contradiction is one of many in this remarkable biography. "He was lazy yet never stopped working," Mr. Shakespeare writes, capturing the paradox that might best connect the writer with his creation: "A playboy puritan who never stopped punishing himself; a deep melancholic who never stopped laughing."

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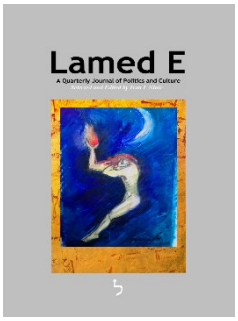

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