



The Mufti of Jerusalem and the Nazis: The Berlin Years, by Klaus Gensicke. Middlesex, UK, and Portland, OR: Vallentine Mitchell, 2011. 301 pages. Bibliography and index to p. 285. \$64.00 cloth, \$37.50 paper.

REVIEWED BY GILBERT ACHCAR

The all-too-notorious Muhammad Amin al-Husseini was appointed Mufti of Jerusalem and Grand Mufti of Palestine in 1921, at the incongruous age of 26, by the very Zionist British High Commissioner to Palestine, Herbert Samuel. After years of collaboration with British colonial authorities, his fierce opposition to Zionism led him to clash with the Mandate power at the beginning of the Palestinian uprising of 1936–39, when he rejected the pro-Zionist recommendations submitted by Lord Peel's commission in 1937. Al-Husseini fled the country that same year, and after sojourning in Lebanon and Iraq,

his far-right ideological inclinations, including his racist hatred of the Jews, led him in 1941 to Berlin where he stayed (with periods in Rome) until the end of World War II. During these years, he became a close collaborator of the Nazi regime and the most prominent spokesperson for its propaganda targeting Arabs and Muslims.

Klaus Gensicke's book reconstructs the Mufti's years in Berlin. It does so essentially on the basis of West German official archives, along with other sources in English and German. The author obviously has no command of Arabic; he makes no use of the important material (memoirs, papers, correspondence, and so forth) that should be a key component of any research on al-Husseini's years in Berlin. Nevertheless, his book is in part a useful survey and summary of the German archives, which makes a convenient inventory of all references to al-Husseini that these archives contain.

But this is only in part. For the rest, the story of this book must be told as it is very symptomatic of a certain genre of German scholarship enlisted by Zionist propaganda. Gensicke's book is actually a modified and expanded version of a doctoral dissertation that he submitted in 1987 at the Free University of Berlin under the supervision of Abraham Ashkenasi, and published as a book the year after.* Indeed, although the dissertation concurs with the Zionist narrative on a number of issues—including the view that the Arabs were massively pro-Nazi during World War II, the explanation of the Palestinian exodus, and the blame put on the Palestinians for having rejected the 1947 partition—it draws a clear distinction between al-Husseini and the Palestinian movement after him. In his foreword to the 1988 book, Ashkenasi explains that the Mufti always represented the conservative clans among the Palestinians; that his personality was very divisive; that his politics were developed in exile and characterized by his uncompromising nature, his

* Klaus Gensicke, *Der Mufti von Jerusalem, Amin el-Husseini, und die Nationalsozialisten* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1988).

pan-Arab ambitions, and his bad choice of allies. He then asserts that Gensicke's research has shown that as a consequence of these elements "a political struggle was lost and the Palestinians, who were almost the only organized political national movement and people in colonial prewar time, were left stateless after World War II." The epigraph to the 1988 book is a quote from Salah Khalaf (Abu Iyad) stating that Husseini's relationship with Hitler's Germany "was an error that we all condemn in the strongest possible way."

In 2007, twenty years after the dissertation was submitted, the new German book—whose English translation is reviewed here—combines the bulk of the original edition with a harshly anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian narrative, partaking in the neoconservative and neo-Zionist discourse on the roots of al-Qa'ida's type of terrorism. Ashkenasi's foreword is replaced with one by Matthias Küntzel, a German author who has become a full-time propagandist for right-wing Zionism and the author of a third-rate book whose title, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred: Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11* (Telos Press, 2007),[†] summarizes the aforementioned discourse. The new epigraph is an out-of-context 1974 quote from Winston Churchill describing al-Husseini as the "deadliest enemy of the British Empire."^{*}

One of the most amazing additions to the new book is that it goes far beyond the original in subscribing to the Zionist myths about the Palestinian exodus (pp. 187–89), in spite of the important findings on this issue by the Israeli New Historians since the thesis was submitted in 1987. Readers of the new book are told that, although the Mufti is ignored nowadays among Palestinians and Arabs, "his legacy of terror, greed, corruption, murder religious fanaticism and intransigence remains alive and impervious to all attempts to uproot it" (p. 198); that this legacy is best represented by Hamas, and that the "landslide electoral victory" (*sic*) of the latter in 2006 was "further evidence of the extremism and self-destructive tendencies toward death and martyrdom that pervade a large part of the Palestinian political culture" (p. 200)—all this while the author asserts that "Arafat's vision, as far as Israel is concerned, scarcely differed from those of Hamas" (p. 201). Gensicke quotes British ultraconservative writer Paul Johnson to state that al-Husseini "was not only the progenitor of suicide bombings and such killer-networks as al-Qaeda, he was also the bridge between Nazi anti-Semitism and the Arab World." He does so after affirming that "Arafat proudly boasted about being privileged to follow in [al-Husseini's] footsteps and stressed that the PLO was continuing the path set by the Mufti"—the reference of the latter assertion being none other than Benjamin Netanyahu (pp. 202–3).

In sum, Gensicke's book is a blatant illustration of the way scholarship can be perverted and corrupted by ideology, a pattern that characterizes academic production when it is in the service of either totalitarian or colonial regimes.

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