

Recent Books

many publications of Yoav Gelber (who also wrote the foreword of the book), and not enough on primary sources. Especially in the sections dealing with the effects of the war on the civilian population, Jews and Arabs alike, and on the economic and social influences of the war, more reliance on primary sources, such as diaries, memoirs, private papers, and other records, could have proven useful. One wishes that the sections dealing with the civil society (mainly pp. 43–48, as well as other parts in the book) were more developed and analytical, because this could have been an important contribution to the literature dealing with civil societies in wartime.

The book explores some interesting processes and questions in the history of the country during the war years. It centers on the different political maneuvers, dilemmas, and changes in the British policies toward Palestine and especially the political aspirations of the Zionist movement, and discusses at length Zionist reactions and actions vis-à-vis the changing circumstances, including internal tensions within the Yishuv between the Zionist leadership and the revisionist organizations, as well as between David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett (at the time known as Moshe Shertok), and Chaim Weizmann. However, it fails to provide the other side of the coin, which is the Arab perspective on all issues that are discussed in the book. Here Sharfman discusses briefly the effects of the Arab Revolt on the Arab leadership and society, and touches upon the internal tensions and rivalries within the Arab leadership. The focus on the Zionist movement and the Jewish Yishuv is of course fully legitimate, but the expectation of the reader, based on the title and introduction, is to get a fuller picture and analysis of the history of Palestine at this time.

Reading the book, the reader is sometimes left with a desire for more information on some interesting historical episodes. For example, some of the issues discussed in chapter 3, including the story of the Germans who lived in Palestine during World War II and were forced to leave; the interesting episode of the Lehi trying to approach the Italians and the Yishuv's reactions; and more vivid evidence and documentation of the fear of an Axis invasion, including better use of archival material that would bring the inhabitants' voices into the analysis. Another issue that is missing in a later part of the book is the critical debate over Ben-Gurion's (and the Zionist movement's) late response to the news coming from Europe regarding the Holocaust. The debates over the ways to respond are mentioned quite briefly (p. 149) and are not thoroughly and critically discussed.

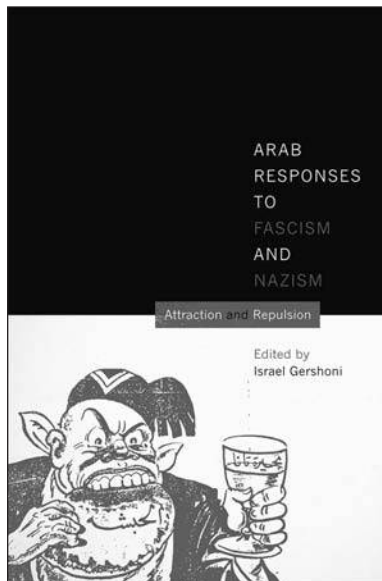
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Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism: Attraction and Repulsion, edited by Israel Gershoni. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014. 394 pages, including 10 pages of illustrations (photos and caricatures). Selected bibliography and index to p. 368. \$65.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY GILBERT ACHCAR

Since the turn of the century, a number of scholarly books have appeared in English challenging a view that has been predominant in Western media and academia during the second half of the past century, a view according to which “the Arabs” were massively sympathetic to Italian Fascism and,

more so, to German Nazism when these movements were in power. With the obvious exception of Arab elites closely tied to Britain, such as the Hashemite dynasty or liberal politicians in Egypt, this common wisdom had it that the Arab “street” and all Arab nationalists were pro-Nazi. Thus, the Arabs were seen as belonging to the camp of the losers of World War II, the correlate of this view being naturally that the Zionist movement, and eventually the Israeli state that it founded soon after the war, were a deserving part of the victors.



This representation has been proven to be heavily biased politically, and inconsistent with the facts, by a string of recent scholarly publications that reexamine this dense historical chapter, one of which—an overarching assessment of the whole record—was authored by this reviewer. Other publications have been generally dedicated to particular Arab countries: Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine, and Syria. The authors of most of these works—historians from Germany, Israel, and the United States—were gathered with a few others for a workshop held in Tel Aviv in 2010. The workshop was convened by Tel Aviv University’s Middle Eastern and African history professor Israel Gershoni, who

edited the resulting collection of papers. He has indeed been a prominent and leading contributor to the revisionist appraisal of Arab attitudes toward Fascism and Nazism, with a special focus on Egypt.* In his introduction to *Arab Responses to Fascism and Nazism*, Gershoni provides an excellent and most useful assessment of the “established narrative” on the subject, and points to its ongoing revision in preamble to a book that constitutes as a whole an important contribution to this same revision.†

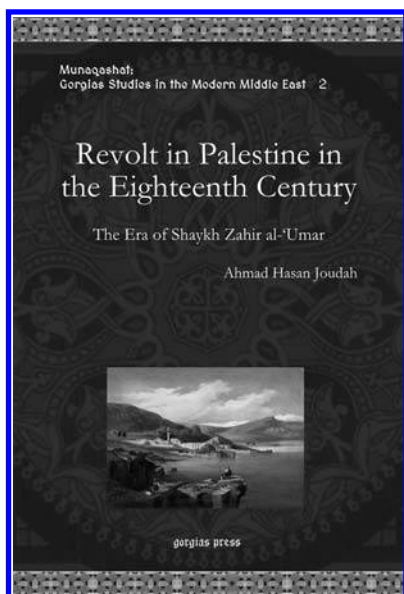
The collection includes eleven papers, grouped according to the countries they deal with—Syria and Lebanon: three papers, on press reactions to Nazism, the alliance between the Syrian National Bloc and Britain, and antifascism in Syrian politicians’ and intellectuals’ memoirs; Palestine: two papers, on Palestinian voices critical of Nazism and the Palestinian press coverage of the Spanish Civil War; Iraq: a paper on Iraqi antifascism; Egypt: four papers, on the assessment by the British Embassy in Cairo of Egyptian attitudes during World War II, the Egyptian communist movement’s antifascism, an assessment of Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat’s anti-Nazism, and of the public discourse on the war and the Holocaust in 1945–47; and, finally, a transversal survey of reactions to the 1935 Italian invasion and subsequent occupation of Ethiopia.

* His latest book in English, coauthored with University of Colorado professor James Jankowski, is an efficient deconstruction of the myth of Egyptian enthusiasm for the European far right regimes in the 1930s. See *Confronting Fascism in Egypt: Dictatorship versus Democracy in the 1930s* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

† See also Gershoni’s survey of the narrative about Egyptian intellectual history at the beginning of his own paper, “The Muslim Brothers Consider Fascism and Nazism,” pp. 217–19, in *Confronting Fascism*.

One of the many interests of the collection is to bring to the readers who cannot read German a glimpse of René Wildangel's remarkable research on reactions to Nazism in Palestine, which unfortunately and revealingly has not yet been translated into English[‡]—unlike every single German anti-Arab or Islamophobic book, however vulgar it might be. And although all other authors are published in English, their contributions to the volume include new findings and insights that enrich what has already become a solid body of scholarly antidote to a flawed historiography that contributes to the industry of “Nazifying” the Arabs in defense of Zionism.

Gilbert Achcar is professor of development studies and international relations at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London and chair of the SOAS Centre for Palestine Studies. He is the author of *The Arabs and the Holocaust: The Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010), *The People Want: A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), and numerous other titles.



***Revolt in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century: The Era of Shaykh Zahir al-Umar*, by Ahmad Hasan Joudah.**

Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013. 2nd ed. xi + 154 pages. Maps, appendices, and images to p. 204. Index to p. 230. \$177.97 cloth.

REVIEWED BY DANA SAJDI

This book, about the life and times of al-Zahir al-Umar al-Zaydani, is a welcome second edition of a work originally published almost thirty years ago and it comes at a time of renewed interest in the man outside the English-speaking academe.* The book is a Rankean narrative of the ascent, machinations, exploits, achievements, and tragic end of al-Umar in 1775. Various known as Zahir al-Umar, al-Dahir Umar, and Dahir al-Umar, he was a local petty *multazim* (tax-farmer) of tribal background, who managed to garner unprecedented power and prestige in eighteenth-century Palestine. Through a shrewd policy of alternating cooperation with and rebellion against the Ottoman authorities, and through several strategic holy and unholy alliances with forces near and far (ranging from the local Shi'i Mitwalis, to the Egyptian Mamluk rebels, Ali Bey al-Kabir and Abu al-Dhahab, to Russia's Catherine the Great), al-Umar managed to carve out a semi-autonomous state centered in Acre.

Unless the reader is a history buff who enjoys a well-written narrative about the intrigues of people long dead or is a scholar of the eighteenth-century Levant, she will not get an indication of

[‡] See in particular René Wildangel, *Zwischen Achse und Mandatsmacht: Palästina und der Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Klaus Schwarz, 2007). Wildangel is presently director of the German Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung office in Ramallah.

* Ahmad Hasan Joudah, *Revolt in Palestine in the Eighteenth Century: The Era of Shaykh Zahir al-Umar* (Princeton, NJ: Kingdon Press, 1987).