



## Arab Anti-Semitism

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## **Abstract**

Although anti-Semitism is a fact of Arab life, most individuals prefer to describe it as political animosity and religious polemic. This explains why my study has only drawn from works on the subject by Western historians – because no Arab historian has even acknowledged that it exists, let alone written about it.

In this study I compare and analyze the different views my sources have on some matters related to the subject of Jew-hatred among Arabs; these are Zionism, the origins of Arab nationalism, the legendary age of tolerance in Al-andalus (Muslim Spain) and the treatment of Jews in the Quran.

In most of my sources I find that:

- For Arabs, Zionism and Jewishness are one and the same thing.
- The influence of Nazi ideals and prejudices on Arab nationalism and the paranoid attitudes of the region's leaders effectively stymie any chances of reconciliation between the two peoples.
- Historical evidences show that the much-praised racial harmony of Al-andalus has been exaggerated for political purposes.
- The negative image of Jews in the Quran has been deliberately misinterpreted in order to keep hatred of Jews alive among Arabs today.

To see just how effective anti-Semitic indoctrination has been on reasonable, educated people, I sent a simple question to my Arab friends around the world asking them to say what they really think of Jews, hoping to get some candid answers. But to my great disappointment, not one of them replied.

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	4
1.1 The purpose of the study and the problem examined.....	5
1.2 Limitations and methods.....	6
1.3 Material and presentation of the authors. ....	8
2. Background.....	10
3. How do western historians and observers view anti-Jewish feeling in Arab countries and do they attributed to religious and/or political causes?.....	17
3.1 Zionism .....	17
3.2 The origins of Arab nationalism .....	25
3.3 The legendary age of tolerance in Al-andalus.....	33
3.4 Jews in the Quran.....	37
4. Summarizing Conclusions.....	42
5. Bibliography.....	45

## 1 Introduction

What inspired me to write about Arab anti-Semitism was the uproar created by UNESCO when it recently sat to choose a new Director General. The favourite candidate was Egypt's Cultural Minister, Farouk Hosny, but at the last minute he had to step down. His critics claimed he was unsuitable because he had previously declared that Israeli culture was inhuman and that all Israeli books in Egyptian libraries should be burned. When Hosny realized that his chance of leading the World's most prestigious cultural body was being threatened, he decided to apologize for his offensive comments, but when this failed and he was finally defeated, he reverted to his previous position, attacking Israel and blaming both the Jewish lobby and the American ambassador to UNESCO for his defeat. Soon afterwards, in his capacity as Egypt's Cultural Minister, he demanded that German museums return all their Pharaonic treasures, including the bust of Nefertiti.

Although the Minister's anti-Israeli remarks seem shocking, they are really no worse than what is said every day in the press and the street in most Arab countries, where people no longer even bother to distinguish between Israel as a political body and Jewishness as a cultural identity "Arab spokesmen in the West are careful to insist that their quarrel is with the Israeli state and Zionist ideology, not with the Jews as such nor with the Jewish religion [...] this argument [...] is fatally undermined by the seething hatred commonly expressed in Arabic books, newspapers, magazines, and even school textbooks in many parts of the Arab world. This hatred is not directed only against Israel and Zionism; it embraces the Jews and Judaism, which are condemned and vilified through the three thousand years of their history in book after book, article after article, speech after speech."<sup>1</sup>

This study will therefore examine how deeply these attitudes have taken root in the Arab world. Was the creation of the state of Israel the cause of anti-Jewish feeling among Arabs, or did this already exist before the new country was created? The role of Israel is crucial when deciding if Arab anti-Semitism is a new or old phenomenon. The Arabs claim that their anger is aimed at the Zionism which led to the creation of Israel and not against Jews as people, and to prove their sincerity they point to the racial tolerance of their ancestors in medieval Spain, whom they credit with seven centuries of harmonious and peaceful coexistence among Muslims,

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, Semites, 15

Jews and Christians. But in their daily political, academic and social discourse, Arabs commonly use the words Jews and Jewry as synonyms for Israelis and Zionists. Some Western historians contend that, in fact, Arabic and Muslim anti-Semitism was born with Islam itself, but in a form which was fundamentally different to racially-biased European anti-Semitism.

Growing hostility toward Jews among Europe's Muslim population can be directly traced to the anti-Semitism which is prevalent in their countries of origin. The political climate at home inevitably has a strong influence on Muslim and Arab communities in Europe. These minorities, in their desire to remain in touch with their homelands, are constantly exposed to anti-Jewish news reports and political and religious rallies, and tend to shape their opinions accordingly. "Antisemitism would have been rampant among these immigrants even if Israel had not existed, but Israel gave them a cause for which support could be rallied outside their community... the anti-Jewish propaganda of Al Jazeera, Al Manar, and other television channels gave them an enormous outreach in the Middle East as well as in Western Europe, an outreach far larger and more intensive than anti-Semitic movements had enjoyed in the past."<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, anti-Semitism in the Arab world must be seen in the perspective of the region's tightly-controlled political environment, in which free elections and freedom of speech are inadequate if not openly banned. People are as a matter of course expected to have the same opinions and objectives as their rulers. It follows that when Arabs say they hate Jews, they are simply echoing official propaganda, which as Bernard Lewis says, casts doubt on the sincerity of all of their public and collective declarations. "One is constantly surprised to find how the authors of even some of the most violent and Nazi-like anti-Jewish tracts are willing and able to have normal, sometimes friendly relations with Jews or even with Israelis when no one is there to watch or report them."<sup>3</sup>

### **1.1 The purpose of the study and the problem examined**

Israel's efforts to segregate its Arab population by creating new settlements and driving Palestinians out of their homes and villages are widely condemned. It is nonetheless true that the suffering caused is being used by Arab leaders to prove that the Israeli culture is cruel and inhuman, as the Egyptian Cultural Minister has said. My study does not intend to discuss the rights and wrongs of the situation but, rather, to show how Israel's policies are deliberately presented as reflecting the will of Jewish people in general.

There is undoubtedly strong anti-Jewish feeling in Arab countries, and my

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<sup>2</sup> Laqueur, 203

<sup>3</sup> Lewis, Semites, 258

aim is to explain some of its underlying causes. Therefore the main question this study will answer is; How do western historians and observers view anti-Jewish feeling in Arab countries, and do they attributed to religious and/or political causes?

## **1.2 Limitations and method**

As far as I have been able to see all studies on anti-Semitism in the Arab world have been carried out by Western academics. I have not been able to find any studies written by Arabs on the subject, which would have greatly enriched my findings. However, I did find a considerable number of Arab-authored texts which leave no doubt as to the existence of anti-Semitism in the region, but since they are obviously hate literature I chose to ignore them. "Even such subjects as biblical history or Hebrew literature, in what are intended to be scholarly publications, become the vehicles of anti-Jewish polemics. In the present atmosphere in most Arab countries, it is virtually impossible to say anything which might arouse sympathy for Jews, past as well as present."<sup>4</sup>

I chose rather, to refer to the Koran, the holy book which is revered by all Muslims and, consequently, the vast majority of Arabs. It is obvious that by virtue of its antiquity the Koran makes no references to Zionism or the Israeli state, which means that the many passages displaying contempt for Jews (as well, it is true, as others recommending tolerance for them) is proof of the fact that anti-Semitic feeling among Arabs was born long before the State of Israel and that this hatred for Jews is racial and religious much like the European variety.

I have, in my study, taken the liberty of referring to Arabs as Muslims, even though many Arabs practice other religions than Islam. The reason for this is that although all Arabs do not practice Islam, their social identity inevitably undergoes the influence of Muslim customs, traditions and attitudes. With the exception of Lebanon, Christian and other religious minorities are required to swear allegiance to the Islamic leader under whom they live, even when his government is officially secular. Also, in spite of the fact that Muslim anti-Semitism can be found in non-Arab countries, I have chosen to focus my study on the Arab ones. As a religion, Islam was born in Arabia, and it is inextricably linked to the Arabs by the language of its holy texts and its cultural identity, even though, as we know, the Arabs are numerically a minority among Muslims. Therefore it should be understood that when I refer to the attitudes of Muslims in this regard, I simply mean Arabs. Michel Aflaq, the founder of the Arab nationalist Ba'ath party, said: "Muhammad was the epitome of all the Arabs, so let the Arabs today be Muhammad... Islam was an Arab movement and its meaning was the renewal of Arabism and its maturity...

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<sup>4</sup> Lewis, Semites, 15

[even] Arab Christians will recognize that Islam constitutes for them a national culture in which they must immerse themselves so that they may understand and love it, and so that they may preserve Islam as they would preserve the most precious element in their Arabism.” Sylvia Kedouri Haim, the editor of the journal Middle Eastern studies, sees Aflaq’s argument as confirmation that Islam is Arab Nationalism.<sup>5</sup>

I have chosen to concentrate on four different areas which I think have bearing on anti-Semitism, based on writings on the subject, and these are:

1. Zionism
2. The origins of Arab nationalism
3. The legendary age of tolerance in Al-Andalus (Muslim Spain).
4. Jews in the Quran.

I will try to evaluate and compare the different ways these subjects are treated by my authors.

For example, I will establish if my sources describe Zionism as a nationalist movement, a political ideology or a part of the Jewish religion. I will also compare the authors’ views on the origins of Arab nationalism and the extent to which they believe that it has influenced the spread of anti-Semitism. This discussion will mainly concern the period of the European mandates and the two World Wars in the countries of Greater Syria.

I will compare too, the authors’ views on the history of Al-andalus, given that some of them consider the tolerance associated with this period as the fruit of a nostalgic desire to glorify past achievements, while others argue that it was a natural effect and consequence of Islamic rule. My discussion of religious tolerance in Al-andalus means that I will stay within the subject’s geographical limitations and focus on Judaeo-Islamic interaction in medieval Spain, in spite of the strong geopolitical ramifications in the Maghreb.

The last subject regards the way Jews are dealt with in the Koran, and how the various authors evaluate the passages related to them. Here, the various hermeneutical approaches are of great importance. I will also compare the authors’ views of how modern Islamic theologians make use of these passages when preaching hatred for Jews in their sermons. My aim is to make a comparative study of the various sources. Even though the Koran is obviously the leading work of reference, I do not intend to make a direct interpretation of its treatment of Jews. Rather, I will base myself on the relevant contemporary literature and attempt to

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<sup>5</sup> Sylvia Haim on Aflaq’s view on Islam, Boston, 179f.

determine whether or not the authors consider the Koran to have an influence on anti-Semitism in the region.

I thought it would also be interesting to create a micro-forum on the social network Facebook, where I explain the purpose of my study and ask all of my Arab friends to describe what they think and feel about Jews. This quantitative method might somehow provide a representative picture of how young Arabs with different economical, religious and social backgrounds see Jews.

### **1.3 Material and presentation of the authors.**

I found the historian and the British professor Bernard Lewis to be one of the leading authorities on Middle Eastern history and the history of Islam. I consulted two of his books which I thought have a bearing on my study. Lewis discusses in his book *Semites and anti-Semites* the origins of both European and Muslim anti-Semitism. He explains also how anti-Semitism in the Middle East and North Africa today is a European import. His other book *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East* focuses on the influences that shape people's individual identities in the region. The broad panorama he paints sheds light on the views which Middle Easterners have of both themselves and the world at large.

Bernard Lewis is a controversial writer and has been strongly criticized by the American Left and accused of sympathizing with Israel and advocating Zionism. He took part in heated debates with, among other intellectuals, the late Edward Said who questioned Lewis' political impartiality and accused him of being an armchair historian with little first-hand knowledge of the Arab world.

I also used a book written by Walter Laqueur, an American historian who lived in Israel for some years after World War II and whose parents were the victims of German anti-Semitism. This personal loss marked him strongly and explains why his views are often felt to be those of a hard-liner. His book, *The Changing Face of Anti-Semitism*, was praised by Zionist organizations in both America and Europe. In it, he describes anti-Semitism in the Ancient World and attempts to explain how the phenomenon changed from being a position of Christian and far-Right groups to become, today, that of Leftists and Muslims. It is however, important to remember that Walter Laqueur strongly believes in the theory of Eurabia, that is, the overtaking of Europe by Muslims and the fall of Western civilization. He claims in his book, *The Last Days of Europe, Epitaph for a Dying Continent*, that Muslims are barbarians who will soon turn European culture into a huge museum.

*The Legacy of Islamic Anti-Semitism, from Sacred Texts to Solemn History*



is another book on the subject, written by Andrew G. Bostom. It is a collection of extracts from Arabic literature and Islamic scripts, intended to show that Islamic anti-Semitism has existed since the rise of Islam. The author, a medical professor with a keen interest in history, strongly criticizes Islamism and Leftist support for anti-Israeli actions.

*A Lethal Obsession: Anti-Semitism - From Antiquity to the Global Jihad* also sets out to trace Jew-hatred down through the ages to its roots in social and political dissatisfaction. The author, Robert S. Wistrich, himself of Jewish background and a well-respected professor of European and Jewish History at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, has devoted this encyclopedia-like book to the growth of anti-Semitism. He was also a consultant for the BBC's historical documentary entitled "Blaming the Jews". Wistrich, like Laqueur, agrees with Bat Ye'or's theory of Eurabia "Multiculturalism has, if anything, contributed to accelerating Europe's long-term transformation into "Eurabia," with all the resultant loss of a distinctive cultural identity that that could entail"<sup>6</sup>

Philippe Simonnot is the only author studied here who is neither a certified historian nor a Jew by religion or background. This Professor of Economics at the University of Paris focuses in his book, *Enquête sur l'antisémitisme musulman* (Inquiry into Muslim Anti-Semitism) on the way in which anti-Semitism is spreading among Muslims both in Europe and the Arab world, from an economic perspective. He takes issue with Bernard Lewis' claim that Muslim Jew-hatred is a recent phenomenon, arguing that Islamic sources clearly show how such attitudes have existed since the rise of Islam.

*Nazi propaganda for the Arab world*, by Jeffrey Herf, is the last book to which I referred in my study. The author teaches Intellectual History at the University of Maryland. His book describes how the Nazis tried to make their ideology understandable and attractive to Arabs, by giving it a specifically Islamic slant and thus identifying the Jews as their common enemy.

The aforementioned books are my main sources, but I also consulted other scientific publications which are listed in the bibliography.

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<sup>6</sup> Wistrich, 56

## 2. Background

Anti-Semitism as a term was popularized by the German journalist Wilhelm Marr around 1879, but as a phenomenon it goes back to ancient times. The Romans were suspicious of Jewish rituals, and Laqueur explains how Seneca saw the Jewish celebration of the Sabbath “He was particularly annoyed by the ritual of the Sabbath; this meant that the Jews were wasting one seventh of their lives doing nothing.”<sup>7</sup>

Jews were also accused of being misanthropic and disliked for regarding themselves as superior to others by choosing to venerate one single God. “Pre-Christian anti-Semitism had no obvious social and economic roots and it was not religiously motivated, except perhaps in the sense that while Jews had pioneered monotheism (and were proud of it), this was considered by Greeks and Romans a great spiritual achievement...at the same time the Jews stuck to their own, isolated themselves and considered themselves to be somehow better than others because of being the chosen people and having special connections with God”<sup>8</sup>

Jews were persecuted in the ancient Mesopotamian kingdoms and in Pharaonic and later Roman Egypt. “Claudius told the Jews that they should be satisfied with the freedom to live and pray and work but should not claim the rights of fully fledged citizens.”<sup>9</sup> This is reminiscent of their dhimmi-status under Islamic rule, which I plan to examine further on. The Jew-hatred intensified and changed in nature from common xenophobia and mistrust to the full-blown anti-Semitism prevalent after the birth of Christianity. From then on, Jews were accused of the heinous crime of deicide for which deportation was no longer punishment enough. Christians everywhere called for their complete elimination and extermination. “From the time when the Roman Emperor Constantine embraced the new faith...there were few periods during which some Jews were not being persecuted in one or other part of the Christian world. Hostility to Jews was sometimes restrained, sometimes violent, sometimes epidemic, always endemic. But though hatred of the Jews was old, the term anti-Semitism did indeed denote a significant change- not the initiation but rather the culmination of a major shift in the way this hatred was felt, perceived and expressed.”<sup>10</sup>

Jews had a precarious existence in the Middle Ages, and their persecutors acted mainly for religious reasons. In Western Europe, they were

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<sup>7</sup> Laqueur, 43

<sup>8</sup> Laqueur, 3

<sup>9</sup> Laqueur, 41

<sup>10</sup> Lewis, Semites, 81

massacred by the Crusaders and forced to move eastward. “The ferocious massacres and repressions of Jews in western Europe at the time of the Crusades on the one hand and the tolerant and even, at times, beneficent policies of Medieval Polish rulers on the other, led to a great movement of the Jews across Europe from France and Germany to Poland and Lithuania.”<sup>11</sup>

The Jews had helped the Muslims to enter Spain and overtake the peninsula; they also helped them to resist the invasion of the Crusades in the Middle East. In other words, they had to sail with the political wind. In medieval Spain they enjoyed long periods of peaceful co-existence, during which they were allowed to practice their religion and held important government posts, such as “the extraordinary careers of Samuel Nagdela and his son Joseph, who for decades virtually directed the affairs of the kingdom of Granada and employed many Jews in government posts; enabled their adversaries to fan the hatred against Jews in general.”<sup>12</sup> However, the Spanish era of harmonious existence between Muslims, Jews and Christians was not as harmonious as it may sound. The Jews were discriminated and their synagogues were ordered to be destroyed on several occasions. “The council of jurists (shura) in Cordova, having been consulted, approved the demolition of a synagogue (sanuga) built in Cordova.”<sup>13</sup>

Jews naturally did their best to benefit from the changing relations between Muslims and Christians. Simonnot sees the Jewish switching of allegiances between the two larger religions as a survival strategy, pointing to the T.P. O’Connor’s biography of the British Prime Minister Disraeli as proof of the fact that “having a common enemy makes people friends, and since the Christians were the enemies of both Jews and Muslims, the latter two formed an alliance.”<sup>14</sup>

Lewis also points to the pragmatism of the Jews and how they managed to benefit from the Christian-Muslim relations. “While Muslims and Christians lived side by side, both were obliged, even in the intervals of warfare, to show some tolerance to one another, and Jews benefitted from this in both Christian and Muslim Spain.”<sup>15</sup>

Hatred against Jews for ethnical and racial reasons did not become part of official anti-Semitic policies until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. When the Christians reconquered Spain, both Jews and Muslims were offered two choices, to convert or to leave forever, and many became Christians as a result. However, the new converts were increasingly accused of being crypto-Jews and practicing Judaism in private, and the “false Christians” were

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<sup>11</sup> Lewis, Semites, 58

<sup>12</sup> Bostom, 335

<sup>13</sup> Bostom, 323

<sup>14</sup> Simonnot, 198 (All quotations from Simonnot are my own translations from French)

<sup>15</sup> Lewis, Semites, 82

examined by the Spanish Inquisition, which notoriously confiscated the wealth of those it found guilty. "As far back as 1449, the first statute of purity of blood was promulgated in Toledo. It declared converses unworthy to hold positions of public or private trust in the city and dominions of Toledo."<sup>16</sup> Bernard Lewis quotes an Inquisitor called Juan Escobar de Corro to explain what was meant by converse: "by converse we commonly understand any person descended from Jews or Saracens, be it in the most distant degree."<sup>17</sup> From then on purity of blood became the quest of every Spanish Christian. Wistrich qualifies this as an unprecedented development. "In no other Christian society before the Nazi era had a set of racial values become so entrenched."<sup>18</sup>

Anti-Semitism became more prevalent in Eastern Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the Cossacks rose up against the Polish nobility. The Jews in Poland had enjoyed tolerance and access to important jobs, especially unpopular ones involving economic exploitation such as collecting taxes. Therefore they were attacked by the Orthodox Cossacks along with the Catholic nobles they served, and with a special vengeance. "For the Jews, he (the Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky) was the perpetrator of the most appalling atrocities committed against them between the fall of Jerusalem to Rome and the rise of Hitler in Germany."<sup>19</sup>

The Khmelnytsky rebellion of 1648 and the invasions of Poland by the Russians and the Swedes worsened the lot of the Jews. "They were gradually squeezed out of banking and also from major trade activities by the rising Polish urban middle class. The frequent wars taking place in Poland in the eighteenth century also played a negative role, compelling them to live in smaller communities and engage in more marginal professions."<sup>20</sup> The persecution of Jews was the obvious consequence of their social degradation. "While anti-Semitism in Western Europe was an ideological issue, in Eastern Europe it was, or became, an objective problem in view of sheer numbers"<sup>21</sup>

In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia decreed the Pale of Settlement, in which it limited the areas in which Jews could reside and the jobs they could hold, with severe sanctions for anyone who dared to stray from it and go "beyond the pale". Jews were as usual accused of conspiring with Russia's enemies. "The attitude of the Czars and the ruling class toward Jews was one of suspicion and hostility"<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis, Semites, 83

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*

<sup>18</sup> Wistrich, 92

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, Semites, 60

<sup>20</sup> Laqueur, 66

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>22</sup> Laqueur, 81

Elsewhere in Europe, the Enlightenment's new ideas of liberty, equality and even tolerance were gaining acceptance, with the emancipation of Jews becoming a reality in Germany and post-revolutionary France. In Czarist Russia, however, growing social tension led the rulers to look for a scapegoat. "The presence of Jews among the revolutionaries fueled anti-Semitism among the nationalist and the right-wingers, but it did not play a paramount role as far as the pogroms of 1882 were concerned"<sup>23</sup>. Material interests and the economic success of a minority of Jews made them subject to envy in a society where the vast majority of people lived in misery. Popular agitation played a major role in some of the worst pogroms of the 1880s. However, the pogroms between 1904-06 and 1918-1919 were significantly different in nature. "This period should be regarded in many ways as a transitional stage between traditional, old-fashioned anti-Semitism and modern, Nazi-style anti-Semitism"<sup>24</sup>. In these two periods, preceding and following the Russian Revolution, anti-Semitic publications and literature became more popular, and people were eager to learn more about the presumed Jewish plotters. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, written at the end of the century, strongly influenced the political climate in Russia as it still does in many other countries. Conspiracies for ruling the world, blood-libels, ritual murders, poisoning of wells and spreading of illnesses are only few examples of accusations against the Jews. They could sometimes be contradictory. "The age of capitalism brought two major accusations against the Jews - one, that they had created and were maintaining it, and two, that they were trying to undermine and destroy it."<sup>25</sup>

With all this convulsion in Europe, the Jews living in the Middle East were in many ways better off. Since the end of Arab rule, with the fall of Baghdad in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the Spanish Reconquest of 1492, the Jews, like the Arabs themselves, had been subjects of the Ottoman Empire. Even though they were not Muslims they were not discriminated in everyday life because of it. "In traditional society, an ethnic difference distinguishing the ruling dynasty and elite from the mass of the population was seen neither odd nor offensive."<sup>26</sup> Arabs, however, believed themselves and the Turks to be superior to Jews because of their Islamic religion. "In the worldview of Muslims, which they naturally also ascribed to others, religion was the determinant of identity, the focus of loyalty and, not less important, the source of authority."<sup>27</sup>

When Zionism, with its nationalistic ideology, was created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it mainly appealed to Russian Jews suffering from the

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<sup>23</sup> Laqueur, 83

<sup>24</sup> Laqueur, 84f

<sup>25</sup> Lewis, Semites, 110

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, identities, 90

<sup>27</sup> Lewis identities, 22

pogroms and in need of a homeland. When the Zionists proposed the Ottoman district of Palestine, the Ottoman rulers quickly realized the dangers that Jewish immigration would cause there and how it could aggravate already existing problems with its Arab subjects. “Anti-Turkish feeling among Arabs on a serious scale first appeared in the last stages of the Ottoman Empire and was clearly due to foreign influences – on the one hand the new idea of nationalism and consequently of a greater Arab nation suppressed by alien Turkish domination; on the other hand, the direct incitement and intervention of outside powers.”<sup>28</sup>

The measures taken by the Ottomans to limit the immigration were not, according to Lewis, due to Jew hatred. “Their policy was determined by calculation, not prejudice.”<sup>29</sup>

Zionism wasn't taken seriously among West European Jews, most of who were fully assimilated into their respective societies, until Hitler took power. Once his goals and beliefs were understood, the influx of Jews to Palestine from both East and West increased enormously. By this time, the British had replaced the Turks in the region and the Arabs saw the newcomers as an added threat to their dream for independence from foreign powers. Lewis explains for example that the early Zionists who arrived in Palestine were not feared because they were Jews. “From the literature of the time, it would seem that it was not as Jews or even as Zionists that the newcomers were feared and then hated, but as foreigners and especially as Europeans.”<sup>30</sup>

The local Jews were suspected of collaborating with the British and the Zionists, and this hostility was enflamed by the Nazi anti-Jewish propaganda which was flooding the region. “The exclusivist character of Arab nationalism and traditional Muslim feelings of superiority had been exacerbated by the impact of Nazism - making it virtually impossible for Jews or other non-Muslims to enjoy freedom and dignity in a modern Arab environment.”<sup>31</sup>

Simonnot confirms this view of the disadvantages of colonialism and how it affected the local Jews negatively. According to him, after the Ottomans abolished the poll-tax forced on non-Muslims, followed by the European occupation, Jews became thought of as political rival. “The traditional view of the Jew as an obedient and tolerated dhimmi slowly gave way to that of the Jew as a political rival who would stop at nothing to curry favour with

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<sup>28</sup> Lewis, identities, 90

<sup>29</sup> Lewis, Semites, 166

<sup>30</sup> Lewis, Semites, 174

<sup>31</sup> Wistrich, 682f

the Europeans and to enjoy their protection, to the detriment of the Muslims.”<sup>32</sup>

I won't dwell on the subject of Nazi anti-Semitism here because it is familiar to everyone. What should be made clear is the way in which Nazi atrocities against European Jews are either praised in the Arab world or totally denied and described as a Jewish invention “Some Arab countries, have become the main centers of international anti-Semitism, from which anti-Semitic literature and other propaganda is distributed all over the world.”<sup>33</sup>

Lewis agrees with Laqueur here and show his disgust with the vision Arab writers have of the Holocaust. “Where these writers mention the Holocaust at all, their practice, with few exceptions, is rather to deny or minimize, to excuse, extenuate, or even justify what happened.”<sup>34</sup>

From the creation of the State of Israel until now, the Arab propaganda machine has incessantly produced anti-Jewish material in the form of books and, more recently, television soap operas. According to Laqueur, “it is absurd to argue that contemporary Muslim anti-Semitism is wholly unconnected with the existence of Israel...But it is also true that this anti-Semitism is acting as a lightning rod used both by governments and Islamists.”<sup>35</sup>

Before moving on to the empirical aspect of my study, I should clearly define the Arabic term dhimma, to which I am going to refer several times. Dhimmitude is a status given only to Christians and Jews, as the non-Muslim members of monotheistic religions under Islamic rule. It confers on them a sort of restricted entitlement with its own limited rights and obligations. “The legal status of Jews in the Muslim world was that of dhimma; they enjoyed protection as second-class citizens. They were permitted to practice their religion...had to pay a special poll-tax...they were not permitted to give evidence in court in their own defense.”<sup>36</sup>

According to Simonnot, not being able to give testimony in court is discriminatory. “The refusal to accept the testimony of dhimmis is based on the belief that the infidel is a perverse liar who insists on denying the superiority of Islam.”<sup>37</sup>

They were expected to keep a low profile and make way for Muslims in the street; they were expected to be discreet in their religious rituals and to wear special garments to easily be distinguished from Muslims and so on.

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<sup>32</sup> Simonnot, 163

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, Semites, 195

<sup>34</sup> Lewis, Semites, 16

<sup>35</sup> Laqueur, 206

<sup>36</sup> Laqueur, 193

<sup>37</sup> Simonnot, 149

This status is considered to be discriminating according to today's criteria for tolerance. But many Jews and Christians enjoyed great autonomy within their own communities as long as they respected and remained loyal to Islam. Lewis describes how the religious minorities in the Middle East longed to be freed from their dhimmi status and how the Muslim rulers and community feared such emancipation. He explains that both Jews and Christians were better off under the Ottoman Empire, before nationalism gave equal rights to everyone "All too often, religious minorities were in fact worse off than before. The Dhimma had given them a recognized legal status, established by no less an authority than the Holy Law, and divine social and political order. Under Ottoman rule, Christians and Jews were allowed not only to observe but even to enforce their own religious laws."<sup>38</sup>

Bat Ye'or, on the other hand, sees in the system of dhimmitude not only a degradation of human values and ethics but also a major obstacle that will always prevent Muslims and Arabs from accepting Jews and Christians and their right to exist. "Dhimmitude should be recognized not only on a human and moral level, but also as a grave modern political problem. As long as the prejudices and the ideologies that have justified dhimmitude for Jews, Christians and other religious groups are not clearly denounced in the Muslim world, they will continue to influence Muslim politics and the perception of these peoples... It is therefore important that Muslim and political leaders denounce the sources of intolerance in their own culture, in order to build the bridges of a universal reconciliation."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lewis, *identites*, 129

<sup>39</sup> *Bet ya'or*, Bostom, 609



### **3. How do western historians and observers view anti-Jewish feeling in Arab countries and do they attributed to religious and/or political causes?**

#### **3.1 Zionism**

Zionism is a Jewish ideology and as such it is the cornerstone of the Jewish state of Israel. Trying to separate any of these three components - Zionism, Israel and the Jewish people – would be even more unfeasible today than before. “Israel is a Jewish state and Zionism defines a Jewish problem and solution”<sup>40</sup>

These three factors are interwoven in such a way that accepting one and criticizing the other is tantamount to hypocrisy. Laqueur states throughout his book how the Arabs constantly contradict themselves on the subject. “While Palestinian and Arab spokesmen had long asserted that their opposition to Zionism had nothing to do with their attitude toward Jews in general, who were their cousins if not their brothers and had always lived in peace in their midst, anti-Zionism turned increasingly into hostility against all Jews.”<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the concept of Zionism according to Lewis, can have different meanings depending on the related context and perspective. Historically, Zionism was born as an ideology and a normative theory that proposed a solution for the Jews living in the Diaspora who needed a homeland where they could work together to build their own national state. Given the nationalistic spirit of the times, it was believed that a homeland would be beneficial for all Jews, who regarded their scattering as one of the main reasons for their persecution. “[...] this was, briefly, that Jews were persecuted because they were strangers everywhere and had no home of their own. The answer was to create a Jewish national home which would eventually develop into a Jewish state [...]. It would be one place in the world where Jews could live as Jews, not dependent on the sufferance or tolerance or goodwill of others.”<sup>42</sup>

On the other hand, Laqueur felt that Zionism appeared a little too late, because nationalistic longings in Europe had by that time begun to spread to the colonies. The Zionists’ aspirations for a homeland in Palestine could only arouse the resentment of the Arabs, at a time when they themselves were clamouring for independence. “Zionism had appeared too late on the

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<sup>40</sup> Lewis, Semites, 22

<sup>41</sup> Laqueur 195f

<sup>42</sup> Lewis, Semites, 17

political scene to make a decisive contribution to the solution of the Jewish question... Since Zionism came so late, the establishment of a Jewish state was bound to provoke resistance. The Arabs were many and the Jews were few; Zionist aspirations collided with the claims of others and this was bound to lead to a renewal of hostility”<sup>43</sup>

The Dreyfus affair in France, where an army officer of Jewish origin was accused of treason and, previously, the Damascus affair of 1840 in Ottoman Syria in which Jews were for the first time -according to Lewis- accused of blood-libel, both did much to gain new supporters for Zionism in Europe. The Damascus affair helped spread anti-Jewish feelings in both the Middle East and North Africa region causing such concern that, as Simonnot says in his book, European Jews rose up to defend their brethren in the East for the first time in history. Their response was to form a delegation led by the famous Moses Montefiori of England and the French statesman Adolphe Crémieux for the purpose of personally beseeching the Ottoman sultan to calm the mob’s wrath against the falsely accused Jews. “In so doing, Montefiori and Crémieux were breaking new ground. The vast number of articles which followed their gesture in Jewish publications in Europe about the lot of the Jews of North Africa and the Levant shows that the Damascus affair created unprecedented awareness among Western Jews for the sufferings of their kinsmen in Muslim lands... Proof of this is that shortly afterwards the first proto-Zionist manifesto made its appearance”<sup>44</sup>

Laqueur, however, minimizes the importance of blood-libel accusations in the Arab world as an expression of anti-Semitism. He believes that in our times the Arabs have given such traditional accusations a new twist to make them seem less superstitious and therefore more convincing. “The traditional blood-libel... did not make much sense in the Muslim world. Instead it was claimed that Jews were abducting and slaughtering Arab children in order to use their body organs for transplantations to their own.”<sup>45</sup>

This brings to mind the article written by the Swedish Journalist Donald Boström (Våra söner plundras på sina organ), which reveals how Israeli soldiers steal the organs of wounded or dead people and then sew their bodies up before handing them back to their families. The reporter apparently got his information from Palestinian villagers, but nevertheless his articles touched off a diplomatic crisis between Sweden and Israel.

The wave of sympathy unleashed by these 19<sup>th</sup> century tragedies for the Zionist movement did not only come from Jews. Many Christian

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<sup>43</sup> Laqueur, 169

<sup>44</sup> Simonnot, 169

<sup>45</sup> Laqueur, 140

Protestants strongly supported the Jewish quest for a homeland, and the Balfour Declaration promising Palestine to the Jews stands as the embodiment of what Simonnot calls Christian Zionism. “The famous Balfour Declaration of 1917, which is the cornerstone of the State of Israel, is a clear expression of what may be called “Christian Zionism”. The “Jewish-Christian coalition” which was already a thorn in the Arab’s side before the Declaration now took on colonialist, imperialist and even racist overtones which earned it the full opprobrium of the dwellers of Muslim lands.”<sup>46</sup>

Frankel speculates about the true religious nature of these Christian Zionists, whom he refers to as Evangelical millennialists. Referring to an article written at the time calling for Jews to seize the chance being offered to them and return to the Holy Land, he says “it is very possible that this article was... written by a Christian convert from Judaism. After all, millennialists of Jewish origin were accustomed to refer to themselves as Jews.”<sup>47</sup>

Simonnot is however strongly convinced that the Balfour declaration had the effect of a genuine *deus ex machina* on the Zionist political scene and that without it Zionism would have remained an irrelevant movement “...It was the Balfour Declaration, born of Christian zeal, that enabled Zionism to triumph, at the expense of the Muslim world.”<sup>48</sup>

Laqueur also points to the Balfour Declaration as one of the things that provoked anti-Zionist ire among Arabs “It was only with the first world war, the Balfour Declaration, and the establishment of a Jewish homeland that anti-Zionism became a major issue for the Palestinians Arabs...”<sup>49</sup>

Simonnot agrees with Laqueur that the Balfour Declaration destroyed the goodwill which the British had earned for helping the Arabs break free of the Ottoman Empire “The growing perception that the Zionists and the British were intent upon creating a Jewish State poisoned Anglo-Arab and Jewish-Arab relations from the beginning of the British Mandate... the Arabs’ dismay was made worse by the thoughtless promises which the British had made to them during the First World War... aimed at making them rebel against the tyranny of the Ottomans.”<sup>50</sup>

The author describes also the bitter reaction to the French decision, in 1870 – under the leadership of the same Crémieux who went to Damascus to defend the Jews – to grant French citizenship to all Jews in its Algerian colony, but not to Muslims. This had the immediate effect of embittering the Arabs and turning them against their Jewish neighbours,

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<sup>46</sup> Simonnot, 186

<sup>47</sup> Frankel, 314

<sup>48</sup> Simonnot, 215

<sup>49</sup> Laqueur, 195

<sup>50</sup> Simonnot, 222

as well as setting the scene for events to come. While the French had suddenly shown their desire to improve the lot of the Algerian Jews, the Arabs' were left with their old status as inferior "natives". This, according to Simonnot, added to the antagonism which the white settlers already felt towards the Jews, and led the Arabs to denounce them for breaking the sacred dhimmi pact and collaborating with foreign powers. "The Crémieux decree touched off an unprecedented wave of Jew-hatred and turned Algeria into the breeding ground of modern anti-Semitism."<sup>51</sup>

There can be no doubt that Christian Zionists were at the root of the idea of giving "a land without people to a people without land". Protestants in Great Britain believed it was their divine mission and would hasten the return of Christ to earth. "For him (the 7th Count of Shaftsbury) Great Britain was chosen by God to help the Jews return to the Holy Land and thus bring Christ back to earth."<sup>52</sup>

Laqueur argues, on one hand, that this idea of Palestine as a land without people was both simplistic and problematic, and that the Zionist dream to create a Jewish State there was unreasonable. "(Zionism's) real weakness was that it could offer an alternative and escape to only relatively few people. Palestine was not in Jewish hands and free emigration was impossible."<sup>53</sup>

On the other hand he finds no obstacle for Jews being able to settle in a land that was underpopulated compared to most parts of Europe and where there was already a significant Jewish population. "The Zionist were accused of settling in a country with which the Jew had a close historical connection but ignoring the fact that this country, Palestine, was not empty. This accusation is only half-true; while Palestine was not empty, its total Arab population was at the time (in 1900) about one-quarter that of Vienna... but it is also true ...that there was a Jewish majority in Jerusalem... well before Zionism appeared on the scene."<sup>54</sup> Simonnot also mentions the importance of this Jewish majority in Palestine. "It is obvious that the Jews of Palestine were then politically important because the Czar himself offered them greater protection than he gave to his own Jewish subjects."<sup>55</sup>

Frankel explains in his book how neither Syria nor Palestine were considered by European Jews and millennialists to be Turkish or Arab provinces. "The Turks and Arabs had their own territories, but they did not include the ancient homeland of the Jewish nation, which was inhabited by a mixture of all people and tongues... therefore, Syria and Palestine are

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<sup>51</sup> Simonnot, 178

<sup>52</sup> Simonnot, 192

<sup>53</sup> Laqueur, 169

<sup>54</sup> Laqueur, 203

<sup>55</sup> Simonnot, 170

free [...] Palestine and Syria lay astride potentially vital trade routes, and were tailor-made to serve as a great center of international commerce. The Jewish people were ideally equipped to make the maximal use of such potentialities.”<sup>56</sup>

Laqueur tells us that Zionism was thought to be the only way out for Jews, being a political ideology that offered them a solution for their tormented existence in Europe. “The only realistic way to solve this enormous problem was mass emigration to Palestine.”<sup>57</sup> He gives to Zionism an added philosophical dimension which seems to have escaped the other authors. He stresses its reactionary aspect, leading the Jew to defend himself against his aggressors and regain dignity, and to criticize other Jews who don’t care about their special identity. “Zionism emerged as a reaction against the cultural and spiritual tradition of the ghetto... It aimed at the restoration of self-respect among Jews. The absence of a Jewish defense at the time of the pogroms in the 1880s...had been a deep shock.”<sup>58</sup>

Wistrich agrees with Laqueur and focuses on the psychological aspect of Zionism and how it believed it would lead to the disappearance of European anti-Semitism, because the world would start seeing the Jews differently if they were to settle in their own homeland. “The Zionist therapy was to “normalize” the Jewish people by resettling them as productive citizens in their ancient homeland of Zion.”<sup>59</sup>

Lewis seems to be alone among my writers in describing how Arabs viewed the arrival of the first Zionists in Palestine. He explains that the Arabs thought well of them and had in general a positive perception of, among other things, their farming methods. “Some Muslim writers even spoke of Zionism with respect, seeing in it a model of religious faith, national loyalty, and active self-help that Arabs and Muslims would do well to imitate”<sup>60</sup>

After the birth of the Jewish state in 1948, Zionism took on a new significance for Arabs. A Zionist was seen as being anyone who did not support the Arab’s dream of destroying Israel and restoring justice, which meant creating a Palestinian state in its place. This Manichean attitude argument had the effect of dividing everyone into two categories, those who are with and those who are against the Arabs. “By this definition, even as consistent a critic of Israeli policies as Charles de Gaulle could be called a Zionist, the term “Zionist” embraces almost all Jews, including most of those who had previously been indifferent or even hostile to

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<sup>56</sup> Frankel, 314

<sup>57</sup> Laqueur, 167

<sup>58</sup> Laqueur, 168

<sup>59</sup> Wistrich, 13

<sup>60</sup> Lewis, Semites, 174

Zionism. Only those Jews who actively...opposed the existence of Israel are exempted.”<sup>61</sup>

It is common among Arabs for Zionist to be equated with Jew, by way of generalization, on the assumption that every Jew regardless of his political convictions is a Zionist. It is the sort of blanket condemnation we often hear in West, when people say that all Muslims are terrorists or that during the war all Germans were Nazis. “In some Soviet, Arab, and latterly also other Islamic polemical writings, “Zionist” simply means “Jews,” and therefore anti-Zionist means anti-Jew.”<sup>62</sup>

Wistrich also tells us out how the very term Zionism became a dirty word used in insults, as a result of the 1967 “six day” war. Then, Israel’s victory was seen by the Arabs as a catastrophic setback, or *Naksah*. “Zionism, would become a left-wing term of abuse, a propaganda tool for a multitude of Arab Israel-baiters, a form of hate speech inciting violence, intimidation, and terror.”<sup>63</sup>

Laqueur believes that the Arabs’ religion is at the heart of their refusal to accept defeat. They were horrified, after the war, not only by the fact that Israel was superior to them in military strength but also that their despised old dhimmi subjects were now able to fight them and win. “Because Islam had been traditionally a warring, expansionist religion, the defeats of 1948 and 1967 by an enemy whom no one had ever taken seriously represented a great trauma for Islam’s adherents.”<sup>64</sup>

Even Lewis speaks of the terrible humiliation which the war caused among the Arabs. “It was in the wake of these defeats, and because of the need to explain them, that Nazi-type anti-Semitism came to dominate Arab discussions of Zionism and Judaism as well as of the state of Israel.”<sup>65</sup>

He also underlines on the other side the advantages and the moralistic lessons of the Arab-Israeli wars. Lewis means that even though the Palestinians have not had their own state yet, the war had strengthened their common identity and unified their hopes in the Diaspora for establishing their own Palestinian state. Also, this war gave the PLO a stronger image among Palestinians by defining their role and aims. “The Six Day war in 1967 had another important consequence- the emergence of the Palestinian Arabs as a combatant force in the conflict, with a strong and growing sense of a common Palestinian identity...The Six Day War brought other changes. The emergence and sovereignty of the Jewish state had been hard for the Arabs to accept [...]. Apart from Transjordan, no part of Mandatory Palestine was now under Arab rule [...].The Palestinian Liberation Organization was founded in 1964, but it did not

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<sup>61</sup> Lewis, Semites, 19

<sup>62</sup> Ibid

<sup>63</sup> Wistrich, 61

<sup>64</sup> Laqueur, 196f

<sup>65</sup> Lewis, Semites, 240

become a factor until after the war of 1967...The PLO offered a new policy and aspiration, and a new method of waging war against the Israeli enemy.”<sup>66</sup>

It is my hope that this vision of Zionism in the words of the writers I have chosen will help to explain the continuing spread of anti-Semitism in the Muslim world. The Arabs’ rage at the Jewish breaking of the dhimmi pact, at the imperialistic policies which served Europe’s geopolitical and economic interests in the region, and also at the Europeans’ racially condescending attitudes toward Arab people especially prevalent at the time are just some of the roots of the tragic phenomenon.

An example of this is the following letter written by Balfour and including the text of his declaration. In it, he refers to the Arabs simply as “non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

*“Foreign Office,*

*November 2nd, 1917.*

*Dear Lord Rothschild,*

*I have much pleasure in conveying to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following declaration of sympathy with Jewish Zionist aspirations which has been submitted to, and approved by, the Cabinet:*

*"His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country".*

*I should be grateful if you would bring this declaration to the knowledge of the Zionist Federation.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Arthur James Balfour.”*

This negative definition of the Arabs, is according to Simonnot, highly problematic. “The Arabs of Palestine, who are still in a broad majority in the land, were, on paper, totally stripped of their identity. As “non-Jewish communities, they were negatively defined only by their relation to Jews. This could only have led to consequences of the most disastrous order.”<sup>67</sup>

Even though Zionism can be described (according to Lewis) as both a political ideology and a religious movement, and even though it is no longer (according to Wistrich) the only ideology which guides Israeli

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<sup>66</sup> Lewis, Semites, 186f

<sup>67</sup> Simonnot, 205

policies, as it was in early stages, and even though its founders and sympathizers (according to Simonnot) can be found in both Christianity and Judaism, and, yet again, even though all Jews were and are not Zionists, it will always remain a symbol of Jewish domination for the Arabs. By giving Zionism a Jewish identity, Arab regimes have successfully annihilated any chance of arousing sympathy for Jews, either for the suffering caused them by the Nazis or suicide bombers in Jerusalem. "For Muslims, in particular, the loss of old Muslim land to non-Muslim invaders is a heavy blow".<sup>68</sup>

Israel as the fruit of Zionism is simply too big an apple for the Arabs to swallow. What Wistrich describes as "the successful revolution of the dhimmis who were beginning to break out of the institutional straitjacket of social and political discrimination"<sup>69</sup>, the Arabs see as simply an act of impudent rebelliousness.

European backing for the Jewish cause, the Balfour declaration and the series of military defeats suffered by the Arabs created among them an obsession with their Zionist enemy. Lewis explains this as follows: "Against the background of humility and powerlessness, the emergence of a Jewish military power and the smashing victories which it was able to win, came as a shock."<sup>70</sup>

It is, therefore, easy to understand that since, for Arabs, Zionist is synonymous with Jewishness, anti-Zionism is also synonymous with anti-Jewishness.

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<sup>68</sup> Lewis, Semites, 238

<sup>69</sup> Wistrich, 47

<sup>70</sup> Lewis, Semites, 130



### 3.2 The origins of Arab nationalism

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, religion was the main factor which determined a person's identity in the Middle East and North Africa. Nationalism, which puts religion in second place, was and is still a relatively new phenomenon among Arabs. The basic concept, however, was welcomed by the region's religious minorities, which Lewis says was because "the new political loyalties, based on patriotism and nationalism, had a special appeal for Arab Christians, more open to influences emanating from Christendom, and naturally attracted by a definition of identity which [...] would make them full and equal participation in the polity- something they could never hope to attain in a religiously defined society."<sup>71</sup>

Even though nationalism was criticized by some as irreligious, the Grand mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, was one of the first leaders in the region to seek national independence from the European powers, so that Arabs could themselves resolve the Jewish question. It was quite normal, in this context, for a religious leader to pursue worldly aspirations, because "In Islam, church and state are not separate or separable institutions."<sup>72</sup> In this very complex region, the borderline between religious and political loyalties is often blurred, because "the more Arab nationalism became accepted by the masses, the more it came to be associated with Islamic themes."<sup>73</sup>

Herf tells us that the Grand Mufti saw his political mission of liberating Palestine as part and parcel of his religious duty as a Muslim leader. "Husseini saw no boundary between religion and politics and played a major role in integrating Palestinian and Arab nationalism with Islamic themes."<sup>74</sup>

Simonnot states that he was the most influential person in the region during the emigration of the Jews to Palestine, and that his opposition to the Balfour Declaration and the Zionist project of creating a homeland made him a national hero among Arabs. "This descendant of an old, feudal Palestinian family had more influence than anyone else between the two world wars [...] for years, he was the very soul of the Arab resistance movement opposed to Zionist colonisation."<sup>75</sup>

Lewis, however, when dealing with the rise of nationalism among the Arabs, appears not to regard the British and the French Mandates as the

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<sup>71</sup> Lewis, identities, 23

<sup>72</sup> Lewis, identities, 28

<sup>73</sup> Lewis, as quoted by Bengio and Ben-Dor, 11

<sup>74</sup> Herf, 8

<sup>75</sup> Simonnot, 229

root cause for the movement. Instead, he claims that it was Bismarck's unification of Germany that inspired the Arab intellectuals, because they saw their own situation as being similar. They felt that similarities between them and the Germans were manifold: "the German nation too, like the Arabs, had been split up into a great number of separate states... the successful struggle by which Prussia had achieved the unification of most of the Germans provided an example, indeed a model."<sup>76</sup>

This admiration may explain why the Arabs chose to adopt a form of nationalism that later proved in some ways similar to Hitler's national-socialism. The Nazi anti-Jew propaganda was music to Arab ears. In order to drive out the Jews, they were even willing to turn a blind eye to the racist diatribe that Hitler turned against both them and the Jews in *Mein Kampf*, although he was later persuaded to modify these passages. "The anti-Jewish theme, which had been at most a minor element in earlier versions of German nationalism and became a major theme in the Nazi version, gave it an added appeal for a people who felt themselves threatened by the development of a Jewish National Home in their midst [...] hostility to Jews was stressed both in German propaganda to the Arabs and in Arab appeals to the Germans."<sup>77</sup>

The Grand Mufti of Jerusalem sought repeatedly to establish official political relations between Hitler and himself as a representative of the Arabs. My authors all show that Hitler was very reluctant to make any promises to the mufti, for fear that it might endanger the territorial interests of his Italian ally, and also destroy any chances of his gaining British support: "the German interest lay in moving closer to Arab wishes but doing so cautiously so as not to come into conflict with the British."<sup>78</sup> Popular support for Germany was then growing constantly in the British controlled Iraq and Egypt, and the French mandate of Syria. Germany broadcasted its propaganda over shortwave radio and the Arabs listened raptly to the speeches of Hitler and the Mufti. "Ever since 1933 the Third Reich had aroused considerable enthusiasm among Arab leaders outside Palestine, impressed by its mix of faith and nationalist fervor, spectacular militarism, and opposition to the Versailles postwar settlement."<sup>79</sup> Germany was seen as being more benign than its European neighbours and more deserving of the Arabs' trust. This vision was, as Herf points out, based on a gross misunderstanding. The Mufti believed that because Germany had never shown any interest in occupying Islamic lands she could therefore be considered a real friend. "His confidence in the Nazi leadership had been enhanced by the fact that Germany was holding no

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<sup>76</sup> Lewis, *Semites*, 145

<sup>77</sup> Lewis, *Semites*, 146

<sup>78</sup> Herf, 28

<sup>79</sup> Wistrich, 675

Arab territories and by assurance that she had recognized Arab national aspirations.”<sup>80</sup> Herf relates how Germany played on this Arab misconception, because “the Germans hoped that their previous absence from the area as colonizers would help them as anti-colonial sentiment swept the region.”<sup>81</sup>

Herf also explains how the Arabs failed to see Nazi racism for what it was and interpreted their messages as simply a call for “inclusive nationalism.”<sup>82</sup> A possible explanation for this is found in Lewis’ book. He claims that racism as a doctrine is foreign to Muslim minds since Islam preaches equality among its adherents, regardless of their ethnic background. He says: “one characteristic feature of later European anti-Semitism was entirely lacking in the Islamic world [...] and that was racism. Judaism, like Christianity, was seen as a religion [...] and not as an inherent and unchangeable racial identity.”<sup>83</sup>

At any rate, Arab nationalism was the occupation of a small number of intellectuals who had been educated abroad and saw their independence from foreign domination as a goal to be achieved at any cost. In a region as vast as the Middle East and North Africa, with its many ethnic groups, Islam was the only binding factor that could make nationalism seem attractive to all. Anderson and Kapferer explain how “nationalism... often borrows its symbols from religion and myths, and in a brutal manner. Like other political ideologies, nationalism clothes itself with symbols that have strong meanings for everyone, and convinces them that they are also the symbols of the nation... due to the religious aspect of nationalism and its capability to present the nation as a sacred entity.”<sup>84</sup>

Moving forward a century, however, we see that this policy was not successful when used in Algeria, because the people there had been acculturated by the French to see Islam as a source of backwardness, and because “the process of secularization, which has affected broad strata of Algerian society, makes emphasis of Islamic motifs either unappealing or self-destructive.”<sup>85</sup>

All translations made into Arabic of Nazi propoganda took care to Islamize their anti-Jewish propoganda, to such effect that soon “in addition to protest from political leaders, Imams in Iraqi mosques were calling opposition to a Jewish state a religious duty of Muslims.”<sup>86</sup>

The reason for the effectiveness of this method was not only religious, but a result of the widespread illiteracy in the region which meant that most

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<sup>80</sup> Wistrich, 669

<sup>81</sup> Herf, 34

<sup>82</sup> Herf,32

<sup>83</sup> Lewis, Semites, 131

<sup>84</sup> Hylland Eriksen, 308

<sup>85</sup> Bengio, Ben Dor, 192.

<sup>86</sup> Grobba, as in Herf, 30

people were only able to read their holy book, the Qu'ran. "Henting (the Nazi in charge of the operation) insisted that the completed text (a translation of Mein Kampf) be read and revised by a scholar of the Koran who will give it the sacred tone which will be understood and valued in the whole Islamic world, a world that reads the Koran."<sup>87</sup>

Simonnot, Wistrisch and Herf believe that this strategy was essential for the spread of nationalism and anti-Semitism. In this, they all refer to the same particular speech given by the Mufti, in which he makes parallels between Islam and Nazism "... There are many things in common between the principles of Islam and those of Nazism, especially the veneration of combat and comradeship, the sacred role of the leader, the concept of order and the value given to work. All these things are shared by both our ideologies, and make it easy for us to cooperate."<sup>88</sup>

As a result of the political aspirations and religious misinterpretations of Arab leaders, and the Germans' determination to keep the Arabs in a permanent state of Jew hatred and consequently on their side, Arab nationalism and anti-Semitism became inseparable. By this token, the more nationalistic you became, the more anti-Semitic also. But, given that nationalism was the occupation of the intellectuals, does this mean that only intellectuals had anti-Jewish attitudes? Lewis says throughout his book that Muslim anti-Semitism is indoctrinated rather than instinctive or visceral, like European Jew-hatred. "Arab or Muslim anti-Semitism is still something that comes from above, from the leadership, rather than from below, from the society."<sup>89</sup>

Herf in referring to Wolff's memoirs, seems to confirm this: "Wolff reported that though anti-Jewish sentiment was not widespread in the Arab population, it was more prevalent in the upper strata and among the intellectuals, who together protested against Jewish immigration, Jewish land purchases, and Jewish capital."<sup>90</sup>

It is enough to see what Hitler really thought of the Arabs to be convinced that anti-Jewish feelings were not high among the Palestinian people at the time. "...the Arabs belong to an inferior race, and we do in no way deserve our trust. Proof of this is that many of them in Palestine are still selling their land to the Jews, showing that money means far more to them than the cause of Palestinian nationalism."<sup>91</sup>

Hitler was mistaken, though. Simonnot, referring to Ilan Pappé, says that the Zionists had much trouble buying land from the Arabs, because "they

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<sup>87</sup> Herf, 26

<sup>88</sup> A speech of the grand mufti in Simonnot, 236

<sup>89</sup> Lewis, 259

<sup>90</sup> Wolff as in Herf, 16

<sup>91</sup> Simonnot, 248f

could never find enough of it. By the end of the British mandate, the Zionists had only succeeded in purchasing 6% of the land.”<sup>92</sup> One reason for this may well have been the Mufti’s drive to put a stop to the Jewish immigration, described in Lewis, Wistrich and Simonnot.

The Mufti worked hard to arouse in his fellow Arabs both sympathy for the Nazis and hatred for the Jews. His nationalistic aspirations were so strong that he was ready to stop at nothing. “The leader of the Palestinian Arabs was clearly driven by the premise that the shortest road to a postwar Arab Palestine ran over the corpses of European Jewry.”<sup>93</sup> Lewis agrees with Wistrich that the Mufti’s “immediate aim was to halt and terminate the Jewish settlement in Palestine. Beyond that, he aimed... for a Holy War of Islam in alliance with Germany against world Jewry, to accomplish the final solution of the Jewish problem everywhere.”<sup>94</sup>

The Mufti took many liberties interpreting the Qur’anic view of Jews, and his campaign against them didn’t stop at the Palestinian borders, because “throughout his public career, the mufti relied upon traditional Qur’anic anti-Jewish motifs to arouse the Arab street... Following his expulsion from Palestine by the British, the mufti fomented a brutal anti-Jewish pogrom in Baghdad (1941).”<sup>95</sup> His example inspired other national and religious leaders to adopt his anti-Jewish jargon, such as the Saudi king, Ibn Saud, who would attack them constantly. “Ibn Saud’s bigoted view of Jews was widely shared by secular pan-Arab nationalists in Iraq... Syria and... Lebanon.”<sup>96</sup>

Herf also points to the Mufti’s efforts to give Jew-hatred an Islamic justification. “He left no doubt that his hatred of the Jews was ineradicably bound to his Muslim faith and to his reading of the Koran... the attitude towards Jews in Islam was different than it had been in Christianity, but the Mufti had no difficulty finding textual support in the Koran for his hatred of the Jews.”<sup>97</sup>

At any rate, the ways in which Jews are portrayed has been revised repeatedly since the birth of Arab nationalism, as a function of the evolving political situation.

Lewis claims that Jewish immigration to Palestine was not opposed by the Arabs because they were Jews, but because they were seen as the servants of the European powers.

Laqueur’s analysis takes a different slant. “Between the two world wars the emphasis had been on the revolutionary, communist, atheist, and thus

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<sup>92</sup> Simonnot, 265.

<sup>93</sup> Wistrich, 671

<sup>94</sup> Hirszowicz as in Lewis, Semites, 147

<sup>95</sup> Boston, 94

<sup>96</sup> Wistrich, 676

<sup>97</sup> Herf, 154

subversive character of the Jews [...] Anti-Communism was the fashionable attitude at the time, but after World War Two this changed as the Soviet Union became a political ally of the Arab world. The emphasis thereafter was on the capitalist, imperialist, pro-American character of world Jewry.”<sup>98</sup>

The impact of Nazism on Arab Nationalism was significant, but the influence of the Mufti on later political and religious leaders was even greater. “The impact of Nazi political, social, and economic doctrines on Arab nationalist theoreticians of the time is easily detectible.”<sup>99</sup> Simonnot denounces, however, the fact that the mufti was able to go unpunished for his collaboration with the Nazis; he claims that the mufti’s visits to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy greatly influenced future Arab policies towards Israel. “And also many young people who hung on his every word and longed to destroy the Zionist enemy...Yasser Arafat took the old man for his model and thought of him as a hero his whole life long. Suddenly, it was as if all those years spent by the mufti in the service of Nazi Germany had been worthwhile.”<sup>100</sup>

The Ba’ath party is an example of the Nazi impact on Arab minds. This political party was founded in Middle East in the late 1930s. Wistrich, Simonnot and Lewis describe, referring to the same source, the spirit with which it was created. “We were racists, admiring Nazism, reading its books and the source of its thought, particularly Nietzsche... We were the first to think of translating Mein Kampf.”<sup>101</sup>

The Ba’ath regime is still very active in Syria and was until recently, in Iraq also.

As nationalism rose in the Arab countries, the situation of the local Jews became increasingly precarious and they soon read the writing on the wall. “In Egypt as in Iraq, the nationalist climate led to anti-Semitic slogans branding all Jews as Zionists.”<sup>102</sup>

Jews in North Africa also suffered from the rising nationalism to the east and the accompanying Jew-hatred. Both Wistrich and Herf seem to agree that what made it miserable for the Jews to live among the Arabs in North Africa was a combination of “right-wing French anti-Semitism, Arab nationalism and the tensions from the Palestinian conflict [...] and German propaganda.”<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Laqueur, 197

<sup>99</sup> Lewis, Semites, 203

<sup>100</sup> Simonnot, 259

<sup>101</sup> Sami al Jundi as in Lewis, 147 and Wistrich, 676f

<sup>102</sup> Wistrich, 682

<sup>103</sup> Herf, 89/ Wistrich 679.

The Jews in Syria and other Arab countries declared themselves to be enemies of Zionism and in favour of Arab nationalism, but Lewis doubts that they did this spontaneously. He attributes their show of loyalty to fierce political pressure, in these words: "It is for example improbable that Damascus Jewish leaders were really acting, as they stated, "of their own free will" when they announced that they intended to hold a banquet in honor of Fawzi al-Qauqji, a former Syrian officer who had served with the mufti's forces in Palestine, with Rashid Ali in Iraq, and thereafter in the German Army."<sup>104</sup> Wistrich also believes that there was no safe way out for the Arab Jews, because "it made little difference whether Jews abjectly mouthed the Arab anti-Zionist line as in Syria, donated generous amounts of money to the Palestinian cause as in Iraq, publicly proclaimed their loyalty as in Egypt [...]. In the end they all shared a similar fate and chose to emigrate or flee from the lands of their birth."<sup>105</sup>

Many measures were taken against the Jews by the nationalist governments throughout the entire Arab world, especially after the defeats of 1948, 1956 and 1967, because "like the Germans... some Arab governments seemed to have been principally concerned to get rid of their Jews... Emigration was the most obvious answer."<sup>106</sup>

Wistrich seems to agree on this point with Lewis, and sees the expulsion of Jews from Arab countries as a cynical measure taken by its governments: "the mass exodus of Sephardic Jews was by no means an inevitable by-product of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was far more of a conscious act of ethnic cleansing by the Arab world than the flight of Palestinians from Israel in 1948."<sup>107</sup>

As a result of the radical nationalism that prevails in the Arab world until today, Jews have become a taboo-like subject. They have gone from being real people who shared everyday life with their Arab neighbours to becoming bogey men who haunt the Arabs and add to their misery. Lewis appears to believe that this absence has in fact fueled anti-Semitic attitudes. "[...] this becomes easier with the departure of most of the Jewish inhabitants of the Arabs countries, so that the Jew was no longer a familiar neighbouring presence and could be the more easily depicted as a satanic embodiment of evil."<sup>108</sup>

Wistrich also believes that this can be attributed to the Islamization of anti-Semitism: "The current Islamist construction of the Jews clearly resembles

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<sup>104</sup> Lewis, Semites, 205

<sup>105</sup> Norman Stillman, as in Wistrich, 681

<sup>106</sup> Lewis, Semites, 206

<sup>107</sup> Wistrich, 382

<sup>108</sup> Lewis, Semites, 216

a mythical monster wholly detached from empirical reality- it is an unequivocal image of the total enemy.”<sup>109</sup>

Lewis also tells us that Jews and Jewish culture are not presented in modern Arab historiography as part of the region’s ancient civilization. This because, in order to reinforce nationalist sentiment among Arabs, it was chosen to “Arabize” the ancient cultures, with the result that “this retroactive Arabization made possible another feature of modern nationalist historiography. If the inhabitants of Iraq, Syria, Palestine and the North African littoral were already Arabs since antiquity, then the wars conducted by the Muslim caliphate were not conquests, they were wars of liberation”<sup>110</sup>.

He observes that because the Jews are the only people to have survived among the ancient civilizations, they represent a threat to Arab nationalism. If history had been different, he goes on to say, and “had the Israelites accompanied the Canaanites and Phoenicians into extinction, no doubt they too could have been claimed as Arab ancestors.”<sup>111</sup>

Even though the roots of Arab nationalism can be traced back to the second half of 19th century, the concept did not become popular among the Arabs until the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the inter-war period. The Arabs’ nationalistic feelings were strongly influenced by the Nazi ideal of absolute obedience to authority that is so central to Islam and which now found its worldly application in the Nazi model of government. That is why the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem came to be the leading symbol of Arab nationalism, with such deep and enduring effects on Arab-Jewish relations.

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<sup>109</sup> Wistrich, 65

<sup>110</sup> Lewis, identities, 70

<sup>111</sup> Lewis, Semites, 48



### 3.3 The legendary age of tolerance in Al-andalus

Simonnot strongly condemns the contemporary fashion of romanticizing the multi—cultural society which existed in Al-andalus, Islamic Spain between the 8th and 15th centuries. Unfortunately, this mythical world of religious tolerance and cooperation has been upheld by so many school books that it has become almost unassailable. The idea that, long ago and far away, Muslims, Christians and Jews lived peacefully side by side is understandably appealing to people living in today's contentious climate. Simonnot says that this consciously unrealistic version of Spanish history appeared credible to the anti-colonialists but was in objective terms just wishful thinking. "This idyllic vision of peace and harmony between Jews and Arabs gained a foothold in Europe at the time when colonies everywhere were struggling for their independence. European intellectuals, anxious to expiate their guilt as members of the imperialist nations, began to cultivate several such myths which are still alive and kicking in spite of the protests of serious historians."<sup>112</sup>

The author also refers to the explanation of the writer Albert Memmi, a Tunisian Jew. Memmi believes that what he calls "the myth of Jewish-Arab harmony" owes its existence to the political goals of left-wing European governments and their Arab counterparts. Essentially, Simonnot believes that the widely-accepted story of religious and racial tolerance in medieval Moorish Spain is a piece of politically-motivated historical revisionism. The very fact that non-Muslims were branded as dhimmis, with all the mandatory restrictions and penalties, is proof that tolerance as a philosophical concept did not exist among Muslims. "The burdens of dhimmitude cannot be underestimated, because they disprove the current myth of a Jewish-Muslim Golden Age, or a symbiotic shared Jewish-Muslim civilization which reached its apotheosis in Moorish Andalusia."<sup>113</sup> Lewis takes issue with him here, and defends a more moderate view because "this situation (dhimmi-status) was by no means as bad as modern connotations of this term might imply."<sup>114</sup>

Lewis explains that the lot of Jews in Moorish Spain was totally dependent on the outcome of Christian-Muslim relations, given that "their position had been profoundly affected, both for good and for evil, by the eight-centuries-long struggle between Islam and Christendom for the domination of the peninsula."<sup>115</sup>

The very concept of tolerance, Lewis emphasizes, did not appear until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, so at best what motivated the Muslims in medieval Spain was

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<sup>112</sup> Simonnot, 40

<sup>113</sup> Simonnot, 150

<sup>114</sup> Lewis, Semites, 123

<sup>115</sup> Lewis, Semites, 82

pragmatism.

Bat Ye'or also believes that the Muslim's acceptance of other religions was purely pragmatic. "Indeed, many Qur'anic verses recommend tolerance, and Muslim rule over a vast multireligious and multiethnic empire, when Muslims were a minority, could only be maintained by a degree of political tolerance."<sup>116</sup>

The difference between tolerance and respect is thus defined by Åke Sander, professor in religious behavioral studies at the University of Gotheburg: "Tolerance is an attitude you have towards something you believe to be wrong or inferior in some way or towards something you generally do not like, but that you for the sake of some other principle or value are prepared to accept, while respect is an attitude you manifest towards something you experience as equal or better than what you yourself have; something you even think you might or can have something to learn from"<sup>117</sup>

By this logic, the non-Muslim communities were tolerated for the sake of social tranquility, as well as the extra income they had to pay in poll taxes. Lewis says that the sort of tolerance accorded to Jews and Christians under Muslim rule was both conditional and calculated, because it was "defined and limited by law. It subjects its beneficiaries to discriminatory social and fiscal regulations, but in return it guarantees them the free exercise of their religions and, more than that, a very large measure of autonomy in the conduct of their internal affairs."<sup>118</sup>

Jews had their ups and downs in a period that lasted for eight centuries, but Lewis assures the reader that "they were never free from discrimination, but only rarely subject to persecution."<sup>119</sup> However, he does condemn the Muslims' contemptuous treatment of Jews. "What the Jew under Muslim rule had to suffer was not hate, fear, or envy, but contempt."<sup>120</sup>

Lewis speaks of the famous Cordovan philosopher Ibn Hazm and his writings on Jews. Ibn Hazm describes the racial peculiarities of the Jews and lashes out at both them and the Muslim rulers who employ them. Lewis considers that such racist feelings were unusual for the period and could be attributed to the fact that Hazm lived in Spain where Christian anti-Semitism was rife. Bostom, however, quotes passages from Ibn Hazm which speak for themselves. "Ibn Hazm, known for his vehemence, is blunt in these pages. Dirty, vile, filthy, stinking, are epithets he frequently hurls against the Jews. Everyone who knows them, he contends,

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<sup>116</sup> Bat Ye'or, as in Bostom, 609

<sup>117</sup> Åke sander, state policies towards Muslim minorities, 2004, 212

<sup>118</sup> Lewis, identities, 119

<sup>119</sup> Lewis, Semites, 121

<sup>120</sup> Lewis, Semites, 124

recognizes that they are the filthiest people, a villainous breed, false, mean and cowardly... Among minds, theirs are like the odor of garlic among odors... What a people, what a lineage! Amram married his aunt, which is against the law, and Moses was born from this union.”<sup>121</sup>

Bostom tells us that anti-Jewish feelings in Muslim Spain were caused by the high status Jews attained in the courts and the jealousy they aroused. “It seems that the feeling pervading all the utterances of the Muslim authors was one of resentment at the sight of temporary suspension of *dull*, humiliation, through the rise of Jewish courtiers.”<sup>122</sup>

Simonnot, who rejects any suggestion of an Islamic golden age in Spain, points out that Jews were called apes. “In Spain, when the various religious communities were fighting with one another, the Muslims called Jews “monkeys” and Christians “pigs and dogs”<sup>123</sup>

Bostom confirms this, quoting the words of the great Cordovan philosopher and rabbi Maimonides. “God hurled us amidst this nation of hostile Ishmael... never has a nation arisen more injurious to us than this people; no nation has ever been so intent on humiliating and degrading us, and on hating us.”<sup>124</sup>

Maimonides erudition and eloquence did not save him from being persecuted. There were, Bostom says, several pogroms in the Muslim Spain. Simonnot mentions the Granada pogrom 1066 and Bostom describes the one which took place in Cordoba which, we know, affected Maimonides himself. These pogroms were conducted by the fanatical Almohad rulers, who aimed their wrath at anyone who didn't agree with them, not only Jews. Even the great philosopher Averroës, a Muslim, came to suffer the consequences of their intolerance and was condemned to exile.

Wistrich says little about this legendary period, but he describes the social consequences of the social and economic ascent of Jews. “Even the so-called golden age of Sephardic Jews, which coincided with one of the high points of medieval Islamic civilization, did not occur without also provoking envy and Muslim hostility at the influence and socioeconomic success of the Jews.”<sup>125</sup>

Laqueur gives some credence to the existence of a golden age in Muslim Spain and points out that some Jews were able to do very well for themselves. Nonetheless, he agrees that the image we have today of that period of somewhat exaggerated. “There was nothing in Christian Europe comparable to the Golden Age in Spain, with its flowering of the arts and

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<sup>121</sup> Bostom, 337

<sup>122</sup> Bostom, 340

<sup>123</sup> Simonnot, 49

<sup>124</sup> Bostom, 340

<sup>125</sup> Wistrich, 786

sciences in which the Jews played a prominent part. Or to be precise, some Jews played a prominent part; the goldenness of the Golden Age and the extent of Arab-Jewish symbiosis were often exaggerated in the nineteenth and early twentieth century... Their lot (the Jews) was better in Spain and the Near East than in North Africa and Central Asia."<sup>126</sup>

The culprits, for Laqueur, are rather overly-indulgent 19<sup>th</sup> century Jewish historians.<sup>127</sup>

Bostom, on the other hand seems to believe that the guilt is shared. "She (Jane Gerber) argues that two currents of apologetics-- one emanating from nineteenth-century Jewish historians; the other, contemporary Arab historians-- have sustained the fictional conception (the Golden Age)."<sup>128</sup>

There were periods in Muslim Spain during which followers of the three religions were able to live and work side by side. This was the case while the Muslims were still in the minority and were forced to be pragmatic in order to remain in power. But when al-Andalus was threatened from without, the non-Muslim minorities suffered both humiliation and persecutions. The religious tolerance of the Muslims has been exaggerated by both Arabs and Westerners alike for political reasons. In any case, it is clear that our concept of philosophical tolerance was nonexistent in the Middle Ages, which is proof enough in itself that the supposed Golden Age has been deliberately mythologized.

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<sup>126</sup> Laqueur, 69

<sup>127</sup> Laqueur, 193

<sup>128</sup> Bostom, 97

### 3.4 Jews in the Quran

As I have said, Simonnot tells us that the Jews in Muslim Spain were commonly called apes. He says that this custom, which originates in the Quran, has done much to spread anti-Semitism among modern-day Muslims. Laqueur, however, refers to verses that call for tolerance towards the Jews because “there should be no coercion in matters of religion; both Moses and Jesus were genuine prophets”<sup>129</sup>, although he also speaks of the verse which states that Jews are the descendants of monkeys. “As al Baqara, the second sura of the Koran, says about the Jews, slay them (the sons of apes and pigs) wherever you catch them.”<sup>130</sup>

The controversial verse was read repeatedly on Arab television, drawing the attention of Western observers and scholars, after a small girl was interviewed on an Islamic television program. She was asked if she liked Jews and when she answered no, she was asked to explain why. She answered that she didn’t like them because of the Quranic verse which says they are the sons of apes and pigs.<sup>131</sup>

Lewis makes no mention of this verse, but instead refers to passages in which the Jews are accused of being sly and hostile. “While Islam accepts the Christian account of Jewish evil intentions toward Christ, it sees their efforts as ending in unequivocal failure. They (the Jews) schemed (against Jesus), but also God schemed, and God is the best of schemers”<sup>132</sup>. The Quran, according to Lewis, stresses that the Jews were subjected to humiliation. The victory of Muhammad and Islam in the Arabian Peninsula defeated the Jews who refused to accept his teachings, and the humiliation they suffered was simply God’s punishment, because “the terms humility and humiliation, occur frequently in the Quran and later writings in relation to Jews. This, in the Islamic view, is their just punishment for their past rebelliousness, and is manifested in their present impotence between the mighty empires of Christendom and Islam.”<sup>133</sup>

Lewis believes these verses should be seen as a reaction to the Prophet’s conflict with the Jews, rather than representative of the Islamic attitude towards the Jews. He seems to feel that the insults are less important because of other verses which show the Jews respect. “They (the hard words) are to some extent balanced by other passages speaking more respectfully of the Jews as the possessors of an earlier revelation.”<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Laqueur, 192

<sup>130</sup> ibid

<sup>131</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhbHVEGnYD8>

<sup>132</sup> Lewis, Semites, 120

<sup>133</sup> Lewis, Semites, 128

<sup>134</sup> Lewis, Semites, 122

Laqueur for his part finds these remarks contradictory because although “the Koran also says that Muhammad had Jewish friends [...] verses preaching tolerance can be found [...]. It is equally easy to find quotations stating that Jihad is the sacred duty of every Muslim, that Jews and Christians should be killed.”<sup>135</sup>

Wistrich believes that the Quran expresses contempt for the Jews, and that these verses have done much to foster hatred for them among Muslims. “The harsh anti-Judaism present in the Koran has facilitated this shift (Islamizing Middle-Eastern anti-Semitism), enabling Islamists to claim that their hostility to the Jews has a firm anchorage in religious tradition.”<sup>136</sup> He believes that the Quranic description of Jews has inspired modern anti-Semitism. “In the text there are extraordinarily harsh passages in which Muhammad brands the Jews as enemies of Islam and depicts them as possessing a malevolent, rebellious spirit.”<sup>137</sup>

Even Herf is convinced that the Quranic verses are anti-Semitic in nature. He blames this for the warm welcome given by Arab countries to Nazi propaganda. “In war time Berlin, radical anti-Semitism of European and German-speaking provenance found common ground with the radical anti-Semitism rooted in Koranic verses and the commentaries on them in the tradition of Islam.”<sup>138</sup>

Bostom makes a detailed study of the Quranic verses referring to Jews. I reproduce two examples describing Jews as monkeys: “And ye know of those of you who broke the Sabbath, how we said unto them: be ye apes, despised and hated ..So when they took pride in that which they had been forbidden, we said unto them: Be ye apes despised and loathed.”<sup>139</sup>

He explains that the Jews are depicted as apes in the Quran because of the divine punishment they received for their misdeeds against the Apostles, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad. The same punishment was meted out to Christian and Muslim sinners too. “Although in the Qur’an, transformation into apes and pigs is connected only with Jews, Qur’anic commentary links transformation into apes and pigs with Christians as well... In the Islamic traditions, Muslims too were threatened with being turned into apes and pigs.”<sup>140</sup>

This punishment is also mentioned by Wistrich. He explains how such animal images have been used to attack Jews in the context for Israeli-Arab conflict, with Jews being branded as the enemies of Islam. “This

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<sup>135</sup> Laqueur, 192

<sup>136</sup> Wistrich, 64

<sup>137</sup> Wistrich, 787

<sup>138</sup> Herf, 3

<sup>139</sup> Bostom, 219

<sup>140</sup> Bostom 634

dehumanizing image (apes and swine) has become central to Islam's current war against the Jewish state."<sup>141</sup>

There is no worse insult for a Muslim than to be compared to an animal, proof of which is the Swedish artist Lars Vilks, who aroused such fury when he drew Muhammad as a dog.

Simmonot and Bostom both point to the origin of this divine punishment, using the same source, Ilsa Lichtenstadter. "These verses were part of the Prophet Muhammad's attempt to win the support of the Jews of Medina, by threatening them with severe punishment if they persisted in refusing to join him... Apes played a role in legend or ritual in two ancient cultures, India and Egypt."<sup>142</sup>

Bostom flatly states that the Quran was more influential than any other work in fostering Jew-hatred among Muslims, because "radical anti-Semitism in the Muslim Arab world over the past century has steadily grown under the impact of modernity, though many of its seeds can be found in the Koran and early Islamic sources."<sup>143</sup>

Religious scholars from the Islamic university of Al-Azhar, including the Grand Mufti of Egypt, Sayyed Tantawi, have also said that Jews are doomed to eternal humiliation because they are "enemies of Allah, descendants of apes and pigs". These statements have unfortunately legitimized acts of aggression against Jewish people. "That anti-Jewish opinions have been widely spread in Arab nationalist circles since the 1930s is not in doubt, but their confirmation at Azhar by the most important authorities of Islam enabled them to be definitively imposed, with the cachet of infallible authenticity, upon illiterate masses that were strongly attached to religious traditions."<sup>144</sup>

The Egyptian mufti was not alone in preaching hateful messages about Jews. Many political organizations which hide behind religious disguises, such as Hizbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine, have taken the same road. "Anti-Jewish statements by prominent Muslim clerics are heard by Arab-speakers throughout the world [...]. As these Muslim preachers saw it, the whole world was hostile towards Islam, and the Jews were even more hostile than others. The Jews were the chief agents of imperialism and democracy. According to these clerics, America, the great Satan, was more powerful, but Israel and the Jews [...] were more virulent and dangerous."<sup>145</sup>

Simmonot cites several examples in which Jews are described by the

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<sup>141</sup> Wistrich, 788

<sup>142</sup> Bostom, 635, Simmonot, 51

<sup>143</sup> Bostom as in Wistrich, 785

<sup>144</sup> Bostom, 617

<sup>145</sup> Laqueur, 199

Imams as “the scum of mankind, the rats of the universe, the violators of pacts and agreements...”<sup>146</sup>

Lewis, however, refuses to take these threatening messages seriously, contending that invective of this kind carries less weight in Arabic than in European tongues. “In the Arab world, where tempers run high and language is strong, fair comment may sometimes look like bigotry.”<sup>147</sup>

Lewis also sees the often-expressed intention to destroy Israel in a relative light. “In the view of most Arabs, the creation of the state of Israel is an act of injustice, and its continued existence a standing aggression [...]. Arab hostility to Israel rests on a genuine grievance, a real conflict over mutually exclusive interests and claims. This conflict may be clouded by prejudice...It is not caused by prejudice.”<sup>148</sup>

Simonnot, however, sees no reason to take such threats lightly. He accuses the Imams of deliberately confusing today’s Jews with those of antiquity. Bat Ye’or, as quoted in Bostom’s, also shows that “the pejorative characteristics of Jews as they are describes in Muslim religious texts are applied to modern Jews.”<sup>149</sup>

I must agree with Simonnot here, because the specific verses of the Quran where Jews are called monkeys (ex. verse 2:65) were clearly written in an historical context rather than as a blanket condemnation of Jews in general. Such misinterpretation of the Quranic verses is obviously meant to inflame the political situation in a region where there is little awareness of historical perspective, by creating an unjustified nexus between entirely different eras. “The Saudi cheik [...] explains that the characteristics of Jews are the same in all times and places. The current behaviour of the brothers of monkeys and pigs, their treachery, their violation of agreements [...] proves the great similarity which exists between the Jews who are living now and those who lived at the dawn of Islam.”<sup>150</sup>

The fact that these images are found in the Quran means that all Muslims must believe them and that “there is no doubt that evil, envy, hatred, and cruelty are inherent in the Jews, since the Qur’an affirms this and it is the word of Allah.”<sup>151</sup>

The comparison of Jews with different animals is part of a tradition that has its roots in the ancient Bedouin world in which Muhammad lived. It was believed that certain animals should never be eaten because they were bewitched people from ancient times. Eating lizards was strongly banned because of the similarity of their feet and human hands. Other

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<sup>146</sup> Simonnot, 43

<sup>147</sup> Lewis, Semites, 240

<sup>148</sup> Lewis, Semites, 241f

<sup>149</sup> Bat Ye’or, as in Bostom, 617

<sup>150</sup> Simonnot, 44

<sup>151</sup> Fourth conference of the academy of Islamic research, Al Azhar, Bostom, 614



animals were thought to have been Jews, as we can read in the 9<sup>th</sup> century writings of Aljahiz. He says in his *Book of Animals* that “It is generally thought that the cheetah, eel, white ant, mouse, and lizard were originally Jews.”<sup>152</sup>

Lewis believes that the current image Arabs have of Jews is pieced together from several different sources. He says that “from the Qur’an, the Tradition, and the Commentaries, and from literature, historiography and folklore, it is, however, possible to reconstruct the stereotype of the Jews as he appeared to Muslim eyes.”<sup>153</sup>

Laqueur believes that the current Islamic image of the Jewish people helps the idea of anti-Arab plots to spread among Muslims. In his words, “the main ideological contribution of Islamism has been in the field of conspiracy theories.”<sup>154</sup>

The fact that the Quranic verses describing Jews as villains have been stripped of their historical context by Muslim theologians makes them a powerful tool in persuading people that the many existing conspiracy theories are valid. That is why the ancient Jews who were Muhammad’s enemies and conspired to destroy the one true faith reappear today in fantastic stories recounted in the Arab media. Just to name a few, cited in Wistrich’s book, “Israel sells hormonally altered fruit to kill Arab men’s sperm and supplies aphrodisiac chewing gum to women in order to stimulate lust and destroy Muslim morality.”<sup>155</sup>

I believe that this psychological onslaught mixing the demonization of the Jewish race, the irrefutable truth of the Quran and the political benefits to be derived from conspiracy theories makes it extremely difficult for the Muslims to perceive any other “truths” regarding Jews. “Jews are bad because the Qur’an says so. The Qur’an is a divine book whose teachings cannot be contested.”<sup>156</sup>

Jews are commonly described in the Arab world as the descendant of apes and pigs. They are also depicted as malevolent, sly and scheming. These images are borrowed from the Quran, which is an ancient book, and, without regard for their historical context, applied to today’s Jews by religious scholars and politicians. Muslims are thus led to believe that the ancient enemies of Islam are living just around the corner. The fear that they might soon conquer the Muslim countries, aggravated by terrifying tales of conspiracy, makes it effectively impossible for Muslims to accept Jews.

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<sup>152</sup> Aljahiz, as quoted in Bostom, 634

<sup>153</sup> Lewis, *Semites*, 127

<sup>154</sup> Laqueur, 200

<sup>155</sup> Wistrich, 51

<sup>156</sup> Bat Ye’or in Bostom, 613

## 4. Summarizing Conclusions

It can be very difficult to get a picture of what Arabs really feel and believe, because everything in their society is a function of the religion, Islam, and personal opinions and aspirations matter little. As Lewis states in his book "Islam is not so much a matter of orthodoxy as of orthopraxy. It is what you do, not what you believe, that matters. Only God can judge sincerity in belief. What you do is a social fact and of concern to constituted authority."<sup>157</sup>

Lewis believes that Arab anti-Semitism is, as the expression has it, top-down rather than bottom-up, and that the racial hatred for Jews is a foreign import from Christian Europe. For Christians, Jews were guilty of deicide, whereas the Jews who wanted to silence Muhammad's message failed, and were despised for this by Muslims, but not feared. Muslims never saw any reason to fear Jews because they thought they were so contemptible. Furthermore, Lewis says that it is almost impossible to be sure how deep current Jew hatred is because of the absence, in Arab countries of a free press and genuine freedom of expression. He denies that the Quran is the origin of anti-Semitism because its treatment of Jews is in some passages favourable as well as harsh. He even feels that Islam is fairly tolerant towards Jews, and that the dhimmi status which they were accorded should not be judged by modern criteria of tolerance. *Autres temps, autres mœurs.*

Simonnot, however, believes that the growing wave of animosity toward Jews both in Europe and the Muslim world should be heeded as a warning signal to the world. He says that this hatred has indeed existed since the rise of Islam, causing the Jews to suffer devastating persecution which is seldom reported in history books. He rejects the much-praised tolerance of Muslim Spain as false, because the dhimmi status of the Jews, rather than giving them equal rights, exposed them to constant discrimination. Simonnot strongly rejects Lewis' claim that Muslim anti-Semitism was imported from Europe. Christianity, he argues, was not the source of Muslim anti-Semitism because it had always existed, although Muslim rulers could be more benevolent to the Jews when it suited their interests. He claims that anti-Semitism is very much the norm in the Arab countries and media, but, at the same time, refrains from accusing all Arabs of hating Jews because he is aware of the pressure they are under from above.

Laqueur believes that anti-Semitism in the Arab world is constantly evolving from the Nazi model to a more Islamic one, although he blames Western leftists for fuelling the fire. Left wing politicians see the Jews as

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<sup>157</sup> Lewis, *Identities*, 124

being the agents of American oppression and the Arabs as being their downtrodden victims. He believes that the society of Muslim Spain was tolerant, but that this fluctuated with the ups and downs of the Christian Reconquest, as the Muslims saw their defeat approaching. He acknowledges that it is easy for the region's regimes to manipulate public opinion because of the widespread ignorance and fear. Ultimately, he believes that Arab anti-Semitism is more political than religious.

Herf agrees that Nazi propaganda greatly affected the spread of Islamic nationalism, and that their anti-Semitic messages were Islamized to make them more appealing to the people. For him, the collaboration of Arab nationalists with Nazi Germany during the war helped give a new and ominous twist to the traditional Jew hatred of the Muslims.

Wistrich believes that anti-Semitism among Arabs began when the Muslims lost control over their dhimmi subjects. The crushing defeat of the Six Day War later added to the Arabs' bitterness. They tried to rationalize their failures by demonizing the Jews and blaming Zionism, in order to save face among the masses. Wistrich also suggests that new interpretations of the Quran proposed by religious scholars and leaders have been effective in spreading Jew hatred. He, like Bostom, believes the phenomenon is both religious and political.

Bostom presents much evidence that Arab anti-Semitism is both a new and old attitude. Since the rise of Islam, Muslims have despised Jews, persecuted them and subjected them to discrimination. The author argues that wealthy Arab leaders pay huge sums of money to propagate the legend of a Golden Age of Muslim tolerance. According to him, hatred for Jews is deeply rooted in Islamic and Arab culture, as can be seen in the many literary works which deal with Jews. He agrees with Lewis that envy has always been an underlying cause of Jew-hatred, from the Middle Ages to the present day.

All my writers speak of the huge psychological pressure applied from above, making people cease to see any difference between the official opinions and their own. Nevertheless, I feel that the sources discussed here do not reflect just how devastating this pressure is on individual minds. It is so strong that it even breeds Jew hatred in Arabs and Muslims living in Europe, in democratic societies, far from the political prisons of their homelands. This might seem surprising to Westerners, but Arab schools and families are very conservative and do not develop the sense of individuality which is needed to stand apart from the group and speak one's mind. Even when they live in Sweden and Holland, Muslims fear the disapproval of their communities and find it easier to go along with what is said in the mosque.

Some of my authors are more moderate than others, but this may well be because they wrote at an earlier time. Lewis' books were written before 9/11 and the spread of Islamophobia, while Simonnot's and Wistrich's books are recent, which is why they believe that Arab anti-Semitism is serious enough to be of concern. Laqueur's and Bostom's works are also new enough to reflect current fears of the Islamization of Europe.

However, most of my writers clearly believe that a bizarre blend of divine dogma and nationalism has, in the Arab world, created a new breed of anti-Semitism which is both political and religious at the same time.

My personal analysis is that Arab regimes, except for Lebanon, are long-lived, passing on their power to a series of heirs belonging to the same dynasty. This keeps out truly new governments with their fresh ideas, visions and goals. Jew hatred belongs to the old dictatorships, and Jews will not be judged for what they are until new voices are heard in the region.

As to my personal survey, in which I asked a group of Arab friends what they think of Jews, the results were disappointing because not one of them has yet answered. They are 38 people, most of whom are Muslims and a few Christians, living in the United States, France, Sweden, Egypt, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates and Syria. One of them belongs to the ruling family in Syria and currently works for the Arab league in Cairo; another is a Palestinian living in Sweden while several are Syrian guest workers in Dubai.

I can only interpret their silence – which is most unusual, since they love sharing news with me – as meaning that they don't really have any strong feelings about Jews at all. The Jewish people they have met in Europe and America must seem very different to the caricatures they were brought up on, and they probably feel just as reluctant to speak against them as they would to speak in their favour.

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[www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhbHVEGnYD8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nhbHVEGnYD8)