

Anti-Zionism, Anti-Semitism and the Jewish Community in Egypt, 1939 to the Present

JOEL BEININ
Stanford University, California

ABSTRACT: *The Jews of 20th century Egypt were mostly not Zionists and anti-Semitism did not become a significant factor in modern Egypt until the late 1930s. After the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, under both the monarchy and the regime of the Free Officers, there was a movement towards renormalization of the status of Egyptian Jews. However, the political orientation of the Free Officers tended to exclude Jews from the political community. Anti-Semitism in Egypt grew dramatically after the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty due to disappointment with Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and its other actions in the Arab world.*

In September 2000, the Institute for the Study of Anti-Semitism of the Technical University of Berlin convened a conference to examine "The Formation of Racial Stereotypes in the Arab-Israeli Conflict." It is altogether positive that a German academic institution is dedicated to the study of anti-Semitism. However, this attempt to extend the competence of the Institute beyond Europe to the Middle East was fraught with misunderstandings. The invitation to the conference explains that

"...an overly harsh rejection of Israel (anti-Zionism) primarily among West European leftists and the policies of the former eastern bloc nations, which supported the Arab side of the Middle East conflict...often escalated to world conspiratorial anti-Semitic thinking.... [T]he European traditions of anti-Semitism have been adopted and spread by Arab anti-Zionism.... As a result of the contact and the migration of Muslims to Europe, there exists the possibility today of a kind of re-importation of parts of the original Christian occidental tradition of anti-Semitism that had been borrowed by the Arabs..."

“The fundamental anti-Zionistic position of the Arabs, who early on turned against the Zionist settlement projects in Palestine, determined the attitude toward European anti-Semitism and the Holocaust.”¹

This language suggests that anti-Zionism, escalating into anti-Semitism, resides among “the Arabs” and left wing Europeans and that “the Jews” are the victims of this process. It proposes that Arab anti-Zionism is responsible for Arab sympathy with the Axis powers in World War II. It conflates the Soviet bloc’s Cold War support for several of the Arab states in the conflict with Israel - principally Egypt, Syria and Iraq - with its underlying position on the Arab-Israeli conflict from 1947 on. It suggests that Muslim immigrants may now be a significant cause of anti-Semitism in Europe. The effect of this approach to these issues is to displace some of the responsibility for 20th century anti-Semitism from Europe and Germany, where it primarily belongs, to the Arab world. Thus, legitimate concerns about the possible resurgence of anti-Semitism may actually contribute to promoting stereotypically negative views of Arabs and Muslims prevalent in Israel and the West.

The conceptualization advanced in the invitation to the conference is mistaken in several major respects, especially as it relates to Egypt. The first outbreak of European-style anti-Semitism in the modern Middle East had no connection to the Arab-Zionist conflict and was the work of Europeans. In the 1840 Damascus ritual murder trial, the French consul promoted the traditional Christian calumny that Jews had killed a Christian to use his blood in making Passover *matza*. (Frankel, 1997; Wilson, 1999)

While European-style anti-Semitism gained adherents in Egypt and the Arab world in the twentieth century, it is not a transhistorical phenomenon with universal causes and effects. Anti-Semitism in Egypt, even when it adopts established European forms, has distinct local dynamics and characteristics. It is partly a colonial category: a vulgar and opportunistic response to the role of a visible minority of elite Jews as intermediaries between European capitals and Egypt from the mid-19th century to 1956; the privileged status of many resident minorities in Egypt during the British occupation; and of course, the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Israel Gershoni’s recent survey of Egyptian attitudes towards fascism between the two world wars demonstrates that, “Aside from marginal currents...the central and hegemonic blocs of Egyptian public opinion rejected fascism and Nazism and repudiated any option of adopting them culturally or politically.” (Gershoni, 1999a: 13-14) This is precisely the period when Egyptian political circles became more aware of the Arab-Zionist conflict due to the 1929 Wailing

¹ conference invitation

Wall incident and the 1936-39 Palestinian Arab Revolt. In a subsequent article, Gershoni demonstrates that the popular playwright, novelist and journalist, Tawfiq al-Hakim, intensified his opposition and criticism of Mussolini and Hitler during World War II and considered fascism and Nazism a threat to enlightened civilization. (Gershoni, 1999b: 62-78). Al-Hakim was not an exception, but belonged to a wide circle of prominent intellectuals including Taha Husayn, Muhammad Husayn Haykal, Ibrahim 'Abd al-Qadir Mazini, 'Abd al-Razaq al-Sanhuri and others. Moreover, the most prominent intellectual sympathizers with Nazism from 1933 to 1938 - Salama Musa and Ahmad Hasan al-Zayyat - changed their position after World War II began, admitted their error and criticized the Nazis as warmongers, racists and anti-Semites.

Egyptian sympathizers with the Axis powers included courtiers of the royal palace, Young Egypt, the Muslim Brothers and elements of the army officer corps, of whom the best known is Nobel peace laureate Anwar al-Sadat. Anti-Semitism became a significant phenomenon in secular political circles and influenced state policy for the first time during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War; it escalated in the mid-1950s; and it became very widespread after the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. The growth of anti-Semitism in Egypt and the Arab world is a consequence, not a cause, of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The Soviet Union supported the establishment of the state of Israel and Czechoslovakia provided the arms that enabled Israel to prevail over its Arab neighbors in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. (Beinin, 1990; Krammer, 1974) The Soviet bloc and the international communist movement consistently supported the existence of Israel, though not its politico-military activism, its military aggression, or its post-1967 occupation of Arab territories.

In Germany, the greatest proportion of Muslim immigrants is Turks and Kurds who are, for the most part, not very concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict. European neo-Nazis do not need lessons in anti-Semitism from immigrant Muslims.

While anti-Semitism can be an expression of militant anti-Zionism, they are not the same thing. In fact, European anti-Semites have sometimes favored Zionism as a way to rid Europe of its Jews, an inconceivable position for Arabs. Anti-Zionism is a political position opposed to the core tenets of Zionism. Zionism maintains that all Jews throughout the world constitute not simply a religious or ethnic community, but a nation with the right to political self-determination. Prominent early Zionist leaders, like Theodor Herzl and Leon Pinsker, argued that the only solution to anti-Semitism was the territorial concentration of Jews in Palestine and the establishment of a Jewish state there.

Recognizing that many Jews do not wish to immigrate to Israel, Zionist doctrine now asserts only "the centrality of Israel in Jewish life."²

Zionism and Egyptian Jews

Based on this definition, one identifiable center of anti-Zionist sentiment in Egypt was the Jewish community, which numbered about 75-80,000 in 1948. (Beinin, 1998) Because Zionism had the potential to disrupt their status in Egypt and they were more aware of the Arab-Zionist conflict than other Egyptians, Jews were among the first to speak out against Zionism. The earliest Jewish anti-Zionists included the religious and lay leaders of the community.

The Chief Rabbi of Egypt, Haim Nahum Effendi, opposed Zionism throughout his term of office, from 1925 until 1960. Nahum advocated the political integration of Egyptian Jews and urged them to accept the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. As Gudrun Krämer wrote, he saw himself as an Egyptian patriot and "considered Zionism a potential danger to the security and well being of the Egyptian Jewish community." (Krämer, 1989: 98)

Most of the Jewish haute bourgeoisie, with some exceptions, were anti-Zionist. They embraced loyalist, Egyptianist (but not Arabist) sentiments - a natural accompaniment to their comfortable lives and prominence in many sectors of the economy. The most influential and prominent Jewish businessman of the first half of the 20th century was Yusuf 'Aslan Qattawi Pasha (1861-1942), one of Egypt's early economic nationalists. He belonged to the Egyptian Chamber of Commerce, a forum for the incubation of economic nationalism before World War I. In 1920, when Tal'at Harb established Bank Misr - the emblem of Egyptian economic nationalism - Qattawi Pasha became its vice-president. Qattawi Pasha served the Egyptian state as a member of the Commission of Commerce and Industry (1916), a parliamentary deputy (1915-22), a senator (1927-38), an elected member of the committee that drafted the 1923 constitution and twice a minister in non-Wafdist governments (1924-25). He was also president of Cairo's Sephardic Jewish community council from 1924 to

2 The modification is expressed in the reformulated "Jerusalem Program" of the World Zionist Organization adopted by the 27th Zionist Congress in 1968: "The aims of Zionism are: The unity of the Jewish people and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life; The ingathering of the Jewish people in its historic homeland, Eretz Israel, through *aliyah* from all countries; The strengthening of the State of Israel that is based on the prophetic vision of justice and peace; The preservation of the identity of the Jewish people through the fostering of Jewish, Hebrew, and Zionist education and of Jewish spiritual and cultural values; The protection of Jewish rights everywhere."

1942. His wife, Alice (née Suarès), was first lady-in-waiting to Queens Farida and Nazli, the wives of Kings Fu'ad and Faruq. Qattawi Pasha and his sons, René Qattawi Bey (1896-?) and 'Aslan Qattawi Bey (1890-1956?), were the most outspoken anti-Zionists among the Jewish business elite.

René Bey was the more energetic and talented of the two sons and continued his father's activity in business, politics and Jewish community affairs. He served as parliamentary deputy for the Kom Ombo constituency - the site of the Egyptian Sugar Company, in which Qattawi family members were major investors - from 1938 until the abolition of the parliament in 1953. In 1935, René Bey and Rabbi Nahum encouraged the formation of the Association of Egyptian Jewish Youth, whose aim was to reverse the Europeanizing cultural influence of the Alliance Israélite Universelle and to re-Arabize and Egyptianize the community. In November 1937, the association published a manifesto entitled "Egypt is our homeland, Arabic is our language" and calling on Jews to take part in the Egyptian national renaissance. (Israël, November 18, 1937: Bat Ye'or, 1977: 27) After his father's death in 1943, René Qattawi sought the presidency of the Cairo Sephardic Jewish community council. The Arabic language Jewish weekly, *al-Shams* (The Sun), supported him as the candidate best able to promote the Arabization and Egyptianization of the community. He was elected and served until 1946. (Krämer, 1989: 101-02) René Bey aggressively opposed political Zionism, which gained significant support in the Jewish community as news of the mass murder of European Jewry reached Egypt during World War II. In November 1944, he and Edwin Goar, vice-president of the Alexandria Jewish community, sent a "Note on the Jewish Question" to a meeting of the World Jewish Congress in Atlantic City arguing that Palestine could not absorb all of Europe's Jewish refugees and noting Egypt's exemplary treatment of its Jews. (Cattaoui and Goar) In late 1944 and early 1945, Qattawi carried on a barbed correspondence with Léon Castro, head of the Zionist Organization of Cairo, demanding that Castro close the training camps operated by the Zionist youth movements. Qattawi was unable to impose his will on the Zionist elements of the community council, and this was apparently the cause of his resignation in August 1946. (Krämer, 1989: 201-202)

Jews were prominent leaders in the revival of Egyptian Marxism in the late 1930s and early 1940s, and several were quite militantly anti-Zionist.³ (Beinin, 1990: 55-63) Yusuf Darwish, a Karaite Jew, became an anti-Zionist during the 1936-39 Palestinian Arab Revolt and raised money to support the Palestinian cause. He and two other Sephardic Jewish comrades, Raymond Douek and Ahmad Sadiq Sa'd, established a Marxist group which was first identified by

3 Information on Marxism and Egyptian Jews is based on Beinin, *Was the Red Flag Flying There?* pp.55-63

the name of the journal they began publishing in May 1945, *al-Fajr al-Jadid* (New Dawn) and later known by several names, most commonly Workers' Vanguard. The three Jewish founders of Workers' Vanguard developed a reputation for uncompromising anti-Zionism. In 1945, they became the first Egyptian Marxists to establish contact with their Palestinian counterparts - the National Liberation League, which had recently split from the Palestine Communist Party. Workers' Vanguard adopted the NLL's approach to the Arab-Zionist conflict: support for a unitary democratic state of Arabs and Jews. (Sadiq Sa'd, 1946)

Hillel Schwartz, a francophone Jew, established the Iskra Marxist organization in 1942. Its members were predominantly Europeanized intellectuals, including many Jews. In late 1946 or early 1947, Ezra Harari and other Iskra members formed the Jewish Anti-Zionist League. They attempted to take over the leadership of the Zionist Maccabee Club in the Dahir district of Cairo in April 1947. In the ensuing clash between the two Jewish groups, the Cairo police sided with the Zionists. In June, the government banned the Jewish Anti-Zionist League. Several non-Jewish Iskra members who later became prominent pan-Arabist intellectuals had less militant anti-Zionist positions than the Jews, whose attitude may have been shaped by their understanding of Zionism as a threat to their Egyptian identity.

Another francophone Jew, the mercurial and charismatic Henri Curiel, founded the Egyptian Movement for National Liberation in 1943. In contrast to the Arab-centered anti-Zionism of Workers' Vanguard and the militancy of Iskra's Jewish members, Curiel recognized that a Jewish national community was developing in Palestine. He opposed the Jewish Anti-Zionist League and its provocative attempt to take over the Maccabee Club because he believed that a frontal ideological attack on Zionism was a tactical error that would unnecessarily repel Jews from Marxism.

Following the lead of the Soviet Union, all the Egyptian Marxist groups (including smaller ones not mentioned here, in which Jews were less prominent) except Workers' Vanguard, supported the 1947 UN plan to partition Palestine into an Arab state and a Jewish state, even as hundreds of Jewish and non-Jewish communists were incarcerated as Zionists for their stand during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The position of Workers' Vanguard was heavily influenced by one of its most militant anti-Zionist Jews, Ahmad Sadiq Sa'd. After the war, Workers' Vanguard adopted the positions of the Soviet Union and the international communist movement. The distinctive position of the Egyptian Marxists on the Arab-Israeli conflict for the next decade and a half was to reject Zionism as a solution to the "Jewish problem" while recognizing that a Jewish national community existed in Israel that deserved the right to self-determination. This was also the position of the Soviet Union.

Most Egyptian Jews were apolitical and non-Zionist. Two groups were especially distant from organized political Zionism: the poor, autochthonous, Arabic speakers concentrated in Cairo's Jewish quarter and Alexandria's port district and the Karaites - part of a small minority within Judaism (numbering about 5,000 in Egypt in 1948) who reject the validity of the Talmud as a source of Jewish law.⁴ The Karaite Chief Rabbi, Tuvia Babovitch, (r. 1934-56) opposed Zionism and discouraged Karaites from emigrating to Israel, even after 1948. One well-known exception to the non-involvement of Karaites with Zionism was Musa (Moshe) Marzuq. He and Sami (Shmuel) Azar were executed as spies and saboteurs for Israel in 1955 because of their leading roles in the bombing of public buildings in Cairo and Alexandria in 1954 - the infamous "Operation Susannah".

Many Arabic speaking Rabbanite and Karaite Jews were religiously attached to the Holy Land. This is not the same as Zionism. Zionism attempts to mobilize religious sentiment for secular, political objectives that reject the norms of traditional, religious orthodoxy.

Only about ten percent of Egyptian Jews formally identified with Zionism in the late 1940s.⁵ Even if we generously increase that number to account for passive supporters, political Zionists were a clear minority in the community. The low rate of emigration to Palestine/Israel is another measure of the lack of Zionist commitment. About 4,000 Jews emigrated to Palestine from Egypt and Su-

4 Karaites had resided in Egypt, mainly in their own neighborhood adjacent to Cairo's Jewish Quarter, for over 1,000 years and were well-integrated into the city's ethnic division of labor, typically working as goldsmiths and jewelers. The Karaite historical narrative legitimated their presence in Egypt with reference to its Islamic history and the protected status of Jews according to Islamic law. By the 1940s most Karaites had only partially assimilated the secular-liberal notions of citizenship and nationality recently introduced to Egypt. They saw themselves as a protected religious minority in a Muslim country, employed concepts and institutions derived from the Islamic cultural and political tradition, and regarded themselves as Egyptian in those terms. Arabic was the language of instruction in the Karaite schools and of the community newspaper, *al-Kalim* (The Spokesman, 1945-56). For comprehensive modern histories of the Karaite Jews of Egypt, see Mourad El-Kodsi, *The Karaite Jews of Egypt, 1882-1986* (Lyons, NY: Wilprint, 1987) and Yosef Algamil, *Ha-yahadut ha-kara'it be-mitzrayim be-'et he-hadashah* (Ramla: Ha-mo'etzah ha-'artzit shel ha-yehudim ha-kara'im be-yisra'el, 1985). In 1996, the last member of the Karaite community living in Cairo, Yusuf al-Qudsi, died.

5 7,500 Egyptian Jews, about ten percent of the community, purchased *shekels* giving them the right to vote for representatives to the 22nd Zionist Congress in 1946 according to Shlomo Barad, "Ha-Pe'ilut ha-tzionit be-mitzrayim, 1917-1952," *Shorashim ba-Mizrah* 2 (1989):105.

dan up to 1947. Most of them were Yemenis, Moroccans, or Europeans who stopped in Egypt on their way to Palestine. (Krämer, 1989: 189) The 1948 Arab-Israeli war and its consequences made emigration to Israel a popular option for Egyptian Jews for the first time. According to the 1961 Israeli census, 14,895 Egyptian and Sudanese Jews arrived in Israel between 1948 and 1951; some 6,000 left Egypt for destinations other than Israel in the same period.⁶

Many of the more than 50,000 Jews who remained in Egypt expected to return to the pre-1948 era of tolerance and prosperity, especially after the Wafd returned to power in 1950. However, conditions became very difficult as a consequence of the 1956 war. Many Jews were compelled to abandon their assets and come to Israel as impoverished refugees. Altogether, perhaps forty-five percent of the Jews who lived in Egypt in 1948 reached Israel. Like Jews throughout the Middle East who abandoned their homes due to the intensification of the Arab-Israeli conflict, most of those who had a choice went to Europe or the Americas.

Because of their comfortable and privileged position, a substantial portion of the Jewish haute bourgeoisie remained in Egypt after 1948. Most of those who left did not emigrate to Israel. I was able to identify 892 Jewish names in the 1947 edition of *The Egyptian Who's Who*. A large minority, 43.5 percent, left Egypt after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. In 1952, 504 Jewish names - 56.5 percent of those noted in the 1947 edition - were still listed in *The Egyptian Who's Who*. After the initial departures, most of the remaining Jewish haute bourgeoisie remained, at least until the 1956 war. Over 37 percent of the names I could identify as Jews in the 1947 edition of *The Egyptian Who's Who* were still listed on the eve of the 1956 war. Some of those listed in 1947 had died in Egypt, and 170 new Jewish names that had not appeared in 1947 were added to the directory during the 1950s. Thus, in 1956, a total of 472 Jews were listed in *The Egyptian Who's Who*, 52.9 percent of the number listed in 1947. As late as 1959, at least 251 Jews were listed. (Blattner, 1947, 1952, 1954, 1956, 1959; Carasso, 1982) Despite the clear decline in numbers, the listings of Jews in *The Egyptian Who's Who* affirm that between the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1956, a substantial portion of the Jewish elite remained in Egypt and continued to occupy positions in its economic life in numbers far greater than their proportion of the Egyptian population, though their role was gradually diminishing.

6 These figures are somewhat lower than those presented by Michael Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970: In the Midst of Zionism, Antisemitism, and the Middle East Conflict* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), p. 187. Laskier relies on Jewish Agency records and makes no effort to resolve any of the inconsistencies in his sources. Part of the discrepancy is probably due to those who died or left Israel.

Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Egyptian Politics, 1939-1954

Three identifiable currents of political opinion commingled militant anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism using themes and imagery imported from Europe from the late 1930s on: Islamists such as the Society of Muslim Brothers and the Young Men's Muslim Association; the quasi-fascist Young Egypt; and *al-Rabita al-'Arabiyya*, a pan-Arab journal whose writers were mainly non-Egyptians. They directed verbal threats at the Egyptian Jewish community and accused Jews of dominating the economy of Egypt and other such spurious historical and contemporary conspiracies. Young Egypt and the Muslim Brothers called for an economic boycott of Egyptian Jews. In 1938-39, Islamists and members of Young Egypt attacked and attempted to bomb Jewish neighborhoods and businesses in Cairo and several provincial cities. (Jankowski, 1980: 1-38; Jankowski, 1984: 314-31)

These forces were responsible for the degeneration of the demonstration against the Balfour Declaration on November 2, 1945 into anti-Jewish rioting in which six people were killed, several hundred injured and dozens of Jewish, Coptic and Muslim-owned stores looted. The most serious incident was the burning of the Ashkenazi synagogue in Cairo. The violence was widely condemned in the press and by political figures including Prime Minister al-Nuqrashi, King Faruq and the Secretary General of the League of Arab States, 'Abd al-Rahman 'Azzam Pasha. The King invited Rabbi Nahum for an audience and the Prime Minister visited some of the riot sites. This was the first occasion in modern Egyptian history when Jews faced a significant collective threat of physical violence. It marked the growing strength of political forces that embraced anti-Semitism.

Nonetheless, the majority of political opinion remained friendly towards Egyptian Jews and did not resort to anti-Semitism in discussing the Palestinian-Zionist conflict. Zionist organizations operated openly and legally until 1948. Elite Jews were prominent in finance, business and entertainment and were favored by King Faruq before and after 1948. The largest political parties - the Wafd and the Liberal Constitutionalists - insisted that Egyptian Jews were distinct from the Zionist project in Palestine and that their rights should be protected. It was only with the 1948 Arab-Israeli War that verbal and physical violence directed against Egyptian Jews escalated to a level that placed their acceptance by the country's political classes in question. Some 700-800 Jews were detained during the war. The regime did not distinguish clearly between Zionists and communists; some Jews who were neither Zionists nor communists were arrested. Prime Minister Nuqrashi promoted the anti-Semitic notion that Zionism and communism were the same thing. (Krämer, 1989: 172-73) The

Cicurel department store and other Jewish-owned businesses in downtown Cairo and the Karaite and Rabbanite Jewish quarters of Cairo were bombed, most likely by the Muslim Brothers.⁷ A serious journal, like *al-Ahram*, suggested that the bomb in the Karaite quarter was placed by Rabbanites.⁸ The press and leading political figures did not speak out forcefully in defense of Egyptian Jews, as they had in November 1945. Karim Thabit, a Lebanese journalist in King Faruq's entourage commonly considered responsible for persuading the King to declare war on Israel, wrote articles in *al-Muqattam* full of incitement against Jews. The Wafdist daily, *Sawt al-Umma*, published attacks on Egyptian Jewish businessmen.

The coup of July 23, 1952 brought to power army officers including some who had collaborated with or expressed sympathy for the Axis powers during World War II (for example, Anwar al-Sadat). Gershoni forcefully contests the claims of al-Sadat and others that pro-Axis views were widespread among the Free Officers.⁸ If such sympathies were nonetheless common, it is all the more remarkable that the new regime maintained correct relations with the Jewish community despite the officers' humiliation by Israel's victory in the 1948 war and the intensification of anti-Zionist sentiment throughout the Arab world after 1948.

General Muhammad Naguib, titular head of the new regime, was committed to preserving good relations with the Jewish community. Days after the coup, Rabbi Nahum sent a telegram to Naguib affirming that, "The Chief Rabbi and the Jewish communities in Egypt supported the revolution and asked God for its success."¹⁰ A few days later, General Naguib responded with a statement on the importance of maintaining good relations with *ahl al-dhimma* (protected peoples).¹¹ This classical Islamic terminology suggests an attitude of benevolent paternalism towards the Jewish community implying that Naguib did not regard Jews as full and equal members of the Egyptian national polity. But on other occasions Naguib extended himself beyond formal gestures and formulas by invoking the secular-liberal discourse of citizenship and rights. On Yom Kip-

7 In a 1950 trial, members of The Society of Muslim Brothers were charged with carrying out all the bombings against the Jews of Cairo from June to November 1948 as part of a strategy to exploit the issue of Palestine and to destabilize and undermine the regime. See Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 58-79.

8 Gershoni, *Or ba-tzel*, pp. 20-30. Anwar al-Sadat's fullest account of the coup and its circumstances appears in his first autobiography, *Revolt on the Nile* (London: A. Wingate, 1957). Gershoni argues that most scholars and others uncritically adopted al-Sadat's narrative and ignored other evidence, including contradictory testimony by Muhammad Naguib

pur of 1952 he visited the main synagogue of Cairo on 'Adli Street and met with Rabbi Nahum, the first and only courtesy visit by a head of state to a chief rabbi in modern Egyptian history.¹² Days later, Karaite Chief Rabbi Babovitch and two leading members of the community called on General Naguib in his office. During a friendly discussion Naguib agreed to pay a return visit to the Karaite community. (El-Kodsi, 1987) On October 25, Naguib visited the Karaite synagogue in 'Abbasiyya and signed the guest register with a salutation declaring, "There is no difference between Jews, Muslims, or Christians. Religion is for God. The nation is for all."

In February 1953, Shaykh Ahmad Hasan al-Baquri, the Minister of Pious Endowments and formerly a Muslim Brothers' student organizer, spoke on the state radio on "The Influence of Religion in the Formation of a Proper Citizen". The shaykh acknowledged that Judaism was a valid religion, but went on to say that today Judaism was no longer a religion and had become a racist ideology, like Nazism, which should be destroyed by the free peoples of the world. He referred to Jews as swine, an egregious insult in both Muslim and Jewish terms.¹³ Rabbi Nahum wrote to General Naguib and pointed out that the minister's words contradicted Naguib's own policy statements on the status of Jews in Egypt. Nahum reaffirmed that the Jews of Egypt were faithful to their religion and loyal citizens of the state. He asked Naguib, as president of the republic, to reassure the Jewish community. (Lettres Expédiées, 1953) Naguib responded by demanding that Shaykh al-Baquri formally apologize to Rabbi Nahum. When al-Baquri proposed to express his regrets by telephone, Naguib insisted that he visit Nahum at his home and deliver a proper face-to-face apology. (Mizrahi, 1977: 57)

Anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism in War and Peace

Until 1954, the majority of Egypt's political classes were preoccupied with ending the British military occupation and achieving full independence. The Arab-Zionist conflict was a secondary issue. I do not mean to suggest that all was well and that anti-Semitism remained a limited phenomenon in Egypt after 1948 as it had been previously. The Free Officers did not share the cosmopolitan cultural and economic orientation of the monarchy era, and elite Jews were not part of their circle. The consolidation of a pan-Arab nationalist outlook by Gamal 'Abd al-Nasir from 1954 on tended to exclude Jews from the Egyptian political community. Press coverage and government statements on the anti-communist trials of 1953 and 1954 and the Operation Susannah trial in 1954-55 did deploy anti-Semitic themes. (Beinin, 1990: 110; Beinin, 1998:99-102, 105-07)

Israeli policies and actions greatly contributed to the deterioration of the status of Egyptian Jews and the exacerbation of the conflict. The secret channels for

diplomatic contacts between Israel and Egypt were gradually closed down as the politico-military activism championed by David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Dayan and Shimon Peres sharpened the conflict with the Arab states, culminating in the 1956 tripartite attack on Egypt. (Morris, 1997) Israeli military intelligence unnecessarily imperiled the security of Egyptian Jews by launching Operation Susannah, an affair that raised questions about the loyalty of Egyptian Jews, even in the minds of those inclined to defend their civic rights.

Nonetheless, before the 1956 war, prominent political commentators were able to insist on maintaining a principled distinction between Zionism and Jews. In the spring of 1956, British Labor Party leader, Hugh Gaitskill, suggested that the Palestinian refugees should take the place of those Jews who had emigrated from Arab countries to Israel in the wake of the 1948 war - in essence, a population exchange. Ihsan 'Abd al-Qaddus, the pan-Arabist editor of the respected political weekly, *Ruz al-Yusuf*, responded, "The issue of Palestine is not a religious issue, and the war over Palestine is not a religious war....The issue is one of imperialism....We believe that the Jews of Egypt are Egyptians. No one has the right to take them out of their country, Egypt." ('Abd al-Qaddus, 1956) 'Abd al-Qaddus called on Chief Rabbi Nahum to express his opinion on the matter.

'Abd al-Qaddus's response to Gaitskill highlights a distinctive element of the Arabo-Egyptian discourse on Jews that Zionists perceived as anti-Semitism. In accord with Islamic, Ottoman and Jewish tradition, he considered Jews to be a religious community. The possibility that some Jews might wish to define themselves in other terms has no status in this discourse. 'Abd al-Qaddus's defense of Egyptian Jews contained an element of coercion because it denied them the right of self-representation. However, he was correct in presuming that Rabbi Nahum saw the Jewish community as he did.

A month later, *Ruz al-Yusuf* published the reports of an undercover correspondent it had sent to Israel - an unusual level of curiosity and permissiveness when the two states were formally at war. ('Izzat, 1956) Today, after more than twenty years of formal Egyptian-Israeli peace, Egyptian writers who visit Israel risk being isolated and banned from working.

The authoritative compendium of Arab anti-Semitic discourse in the 1950s and 1960s is Yehoshafat Harkabi's *Arab Attitudes Towards Israel*. Harkabi specifies that in Egypt "anti-Jewish themes are generally more frequent the further down we go on the scale of political respectability," that "many anti-Israel and anti-Zionist, but few anti-Jewish expressions are to be found in Nasser's speeches," and that anti-Jewish expressions in the leading daily, *al-Ahram*, "have been very rare in recent years, but they did appear in *al-Jumhuriyya*...the organ of the officers' junta after the 1952 revolution, while it was edited by Nasir al-Din al-Nashashibi" [a Palestinian]. (Harkabi, 1972) Harkabi does not pe-

riodize his material, creating the impression that Arab anti-Semitism is a constant factor in the conflict, unrelated to Israeli actions. In fact, the great majority of his references to Egyptian anti-Semitism are dated after 1956.

The 1948 war was the first occasion for sustained, officially sanctioned, politically motivated anti-Semitism in Egypt. After the war, while it seemed possible that the conflict with Israel might soon be resolved and the Muslim Brothers were banned, a more civil public discourse was largely, though not completely, restored. This was not immediately affected by the change of regime. It was only after the turn towards Arab nationalism, the Operation Susannah affair, the Israeli attack on Gaza in February 1955 and even more markedly, after Israel's collaboration with French and British imperialism in attacking Egypt in 1956, that officially sanctioned and politically motivated anti-Semitic expressions became common. Thus, it appears that from 1948 through the 1960s, anti-Semitism in Egypt intensified as the conflict with Israel intensified.

How, then, can we explain the unexpected observation of many scholars and journalists that since the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of 1979, anti-Semitism escalated and penetrated broadly throughout Egyptian society and culture.⁹ (Beinin, 1998: 241-52; Beinin, 1987; Lewis, 1986: 229-35; Yadlin, 1989) There are three basic reasons. First, Israel's actions in the Arab world since the signing of the peace treaty - its invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the suppression of the Palestinian intifada and the like - have provoked sensationalist condemnations. Egyptian public opinion is unable to understand why the U.S. government and other relevant parties are not scandalized by Israel's behavior, leading to conspiratorial and anti-Semitic explanations about the power of Jews to control the media and the like. Second, the growth of anti-Semitism is partly due to the resurgence of political Islam. Anti-Semitic notions, such as the association of Jews with freemasonry and sexual dissolution, previously embraced mainly, though not exclusively, by Young Egypt and the Muslim Brothers since the 1930s and 1940s, have gained acceptance in broader sectors of Egyptian society.¹⁴ Secular intellectuals, many of whom previously insisted on distinguishing between Jews and Zionists, have been the leading force in proclaiming a boycott on Israel, Israeli culture and Israelis, no matter what their political views, as long as the issue of Palestine remains unresolved. The boycott is an

9 The most comprehensive account is Rivka Yadlin, *An Arrogant and Oppressive Spirit: Anti-Zionism as Anti-Judaism in Egypt* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1989). See also Bernard Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites* (New York: Norton, 1986), pp. 229-35. I present my own collection of Egyptian anti-Semitic writings and dispute the analyses of Yadlin and Lewis in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, pp. 241-52 and in my review of *Semites and Anti Semites* in *MERIP: Middle East Report*, no. 147 (July-August 1987).

expression of weakness rather than strength. It encourages facile and stereotypical representations of Israelis because they remain unknown.

Anti-Semitic images of Israel and Jews proliferated at all levels of culture in the 1980s and 1990s. *Ruz al-Yusuf* no longer expresses the political nuance and curiosity about Israel it did in the 1950s. Crude anti-Semitic expressions have become almost as frequent in its pages as in the Islamist *al-Sha'b*, organ of the Labor Party. Both a low-brow spy thriller movie, like *Mission in Tel Aviv* ("Muhimma fi Tal Abib," 1992) and an art film, like Youssef Chahine's nostalgic recollection of his youth in Alexandria, *Alexandria Why?* ("Iskandariyya Leh?" 1978), make use of anti-Semitic imagery. An esteemed novel, Edward al-Kharrat's *Girls of Alexandria* (*Banat Iskandariyya*) set, like Chahine's film, in cosmopolitan Alexandria of the 1940s when Jews were prominent in the city, associates Jews primarily with communism and illicit female sexual allure, common anti-Semitic themes. Histories of the Jews in modern Egypt are full of conspiratorial anti-Semitic notions. (Beinin, 1998: 241-67)

As racism has been widely deployed as an element of war and ethnic conflict in the 20th century, it would be remarkable if anti-Semitism did not spread to the Egyptian secular, nationalist circles that had previously largely eschewed it as a consequence of the 1948 and 1956 Arab-Israeli wars. However, many were surprised to see anti-Semitism grow to unprecedented proportions following the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. Apparently, a peace reflecting the lopsided balance of forces and serving primarily the interests of the stronger party while leaving issues important to the weaker party unresolved, can lay the basis for even more enmity and virulent racialized hatred than war. If politicians and their media mouthpieces were not so excellent at adducing only those lessons from history that serve their narrow purposes, a study of 20th century European history might have anticipated this outcome.

NOTES

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