
Jeffrey Goldberg
Seeds of Hate

Rezension zu:

Matthias Küntzel, *Jihad and Jew-Hatred. Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11.*
Translated by Colin Meade. 180 pp. Telos Press Publishing.

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One day in Damascus not long ago, I visited the understocked gift shop of the Sheraton Hotel, looking for something to read. There wasn't much: pre-owned Grishams, a hagiography of Hafez al-Assad, an early Bill O'Reilly (go figure) and a paperback copy of "The International Jew," published in 2000 in Beirut. "The International Jew" is a collection of columns exposing the putative role of Jews in such fields as international finance, world governance and bootlegging. "Wherever the seat of power may be, thither they swarm obsequiously," the book states. These columns, which are based on the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion" — they are a plagiary of a forgery, in other words — were first published in Henry Ford's Dearborn Independent more than 80 years ago.

Next to "The International Jew" was a copy of "The Bible Came From Arabia," a piece of twaddle that suggests the Jews are not Jews and Israel isn't Israel. And then there was a pamphlet called "Secrets of the Talmud." Not knowing these secrets (I was raised Reform), I started reading. The Talmud apparently teaches Jews how best to demolish the world economy and gives Jews the right to take non-Jewish women as slaves and rape them.

The anti-Semitic worldview, generally speaking, is fantastically stupid. If its propagandists actually understood the chosen people, they would know, for instance, that no one, not the chief of Mossad, not even the president of Hadassah, could persuade 4,000 Jews to stay home from the World Trade Center on Sept. 11. ("And why should I listen to you?" would have been the near-universal rebuttal to the call.) Anti-Semitic conspiracy literature not only posits crude and senseless ideas, but also tends to be riddled with typos, repetitions and gross errors of grammar, and for this and other reasons I occasionally have trouble taking it seriously.

The German scholar Matthias Küntzel tells us this is a mistake. He takes anti-Semitism, and in particular its most potent current strain, Muslim anti-Semitism, very seriously indeed. His bracing, even startling, book, "Jihad and Jew-Hatred" (translated by Colin Meade), reminds us that it is perilous to ignore idiotic ideas if these idiotic ideas are broadly, and fervently, believed. And across the Muslim world, the very worst ideas about Jews — intricate, outlandish conspiracy theories about their malevolent and absolute power over world affairs — have become scandalously ubiquitous. Hezbollah and Hamas, to name two prominent examples, understand the world largely through the prism of Jewish power. Hezbollah officials employ language that shamelessly echoes Nazi propaganda, describing Jews as parasites and tumors and prescribing the murder of Jews as a kind of chemotherapy.

The question is not only why, of course, but how: how did these ideas, especially those that portray Jews as all-powerful, work their way into modern-day Islamist discourse? The notion of the Jew as malevolently omnipotent is not a traditional Muslim notion. Jews do not come off well in the Koran — they connive and scheme and reject the message of the Prophet Muhammad — but they are shown to be, above all else, defeated. Muhammad, we read, conquered the Jews in battle and set them wandering. In subsequent centuries Jews lived among Muslims, and it is true that their experience was generally healthier than that of their brethren in Christendom, but only so long as they knew their place; they were ruled and taxed as second-class citizens and were often debased by statute. In the Jim Crow Middle East, no one believed the Jews were in control.

Obviously, then, these modern-day ideas about Jewish power were imported from Europe, and Küntzel makes a bold and consequential argument: the dissemination of European models of

anti-Semitism among Muslims was not haphazard, but an actual project of the Nazi Party, meant to turn Muslims against Jews and Zionism. He says that in the years before World War II, two Muslim leaders in particular willingly and knowingly carried Nazi ideology directly to the Muslim masses. They were Haj Amin al-Husseini, the mufti of Jerusalem, and the Egyptian proto-Islamist Hassan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood. The story of the mufti is a familiar one: he was the leader of the Arabs in Palestine, and Palestine's leading anti-Jewish agitator. He eventually embraced the Nazis and spent most of the war in Berlin, recruiting Bosnian Muslims for the SS and agitating for the harshest possible measures against Jews. Kuntzel writes that the mufti became upset with Himmler in 1943, when he sought to trade 5,000 Jewish children for 20,000 German prisoners. Himmler came around to the mufti's thinking, and the children were gassed.

Hassan al-Banna did not embrace Nazism in the same uncomplicated manner, but through the 1930s, his movement, aided by the Germans, led the drive against not only political Zionism but Jews in general. "This burgeoning Islamist movement was subsidized with German funds," Kuntzel writes. "These contributions enabled the Muslim Brotherhood to set up a printing plant with 24 employees and use the most up-to-date propaganda methods." The Muslim Brotherhood, Kuntzel goes on, was a crucial distributor of Arabic translations of "Mein Kampf" and the "Protocols." Across the Arab world, he states, Nazi methods and ideology whipped up anti-Zionist fervor, and the effects of this concerted campaign are still being felt today.

Kuntzel marshals impressive evidence to back his case, but he sometimes oversimplifies. One doesn't have to be soft on Germany to believe it was organic Muslim ideas as well as Nazi ideas that led to the spread of anti-Semitism in the Middle East. In his effort to blame Germany for Muslim anti-Semitism, he overreaches. "While Khomeini was certainly not an acolyte of Hitler, it is not unreasonable to suppose that his anti-Jewish outlook ... had been shaped during the 1930s," Kuntzel says, citing, in a footnote, an article he himself wrote. He also oversimplifies the Israeli-Arab conflict. Jews today have actual power in the Middle East, and Israel is not innocent of excess and cruelty.

Still, Kuntzel is right to state that we are witnessing a terrible explosion of anti-Jewish hatred in the Middle East, and he is right to be shocked. His invaluable contribution, in fact, is his capacity to be shocked, by the rhetoric of hate and by its consequences. The former Hamas leader Abdel Aziz Rantisi once told me that "the question is not what the Germans did to the Jews, but what the Jews did to the Germans." The Jews, he said, deserved their punishment. Kuntzel argues that we should see men like Rantisi for what they are: heirs to the mufti, and heirs to the Nazis.

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