

tinuing occupation of Arab settled territories after 1967 [which] has been a disaster; successive Israeli governments have not followed wise policies vis-à-vis their Arab neighbors and their Arab minority” (139–140). Placing himself on the “center-left” of the political spectrum in the course of his intellectual odyssey can explain this blunt verdict, though he fails to explain the nature of the “disaster.” Apparently the entire Israeli national adventure in modern times has largely left Laqueur cold, for he is a European in culture and spirit, and a Westerner in civilizational and political outlook. His education was in Europe and he fundamentally became a historian of Europe. All of that is perfectly fine, and he made an impressive mark as author and editor of books and journals, while never escaping his Jewish origins or the Jewish dimension of his critical savvy. For Israel, while not his personal choice, was yet part of his life, and also the target of some of his criticism.

This readable autobiography is full of both thoughts and anecdotes, an insider’s depiction of Jewish life in Nazi Germany and of life riding the intellectual currents in Europe and America after the Second World War. Laqueur also wrote extensively on the Middle East, such as his book *The Road to War* dealing with the 1967 military clash, and lived to see some developments—like the rise of militant Islam and the national vigor of Jewish Israel—that superseded some of his own political forecasts and personal sensitivities. Laqueur’s characteristic political sobriety was notable and consistent, though when it came to Israel, as when he proposed that Jerusalem become the capital of two states (133), one might wonder why the “Jerusalem syndrome” of ecstatic utopianizing swept away the reasonableness of a sound political education.

DR. MORDECHAI NISAN’S most recent book is *Only Israel West of the River: The Jewish State and the Palestinian Question*, available at Amazon.com and CreateSpace.com/3584834.



## THE HOLOCAUST IN ARAB EYES

*From Empathy to Denial: Arab Responses to the Holocaust*, by Meir Litvak and Esther Webman, Columbia University Press, 2009, 435 pp.

Reviewed by Arnon Groiss

Several years ago a group of Israeli Arabs, men and women from various walks of life, visited the Auschwitz death camp on an organized tour. An Israeli Jewish re-

porter accompanied the group in an attempt to document its members' reactions. She later described how one of them, a woman named Umaymah, who had shown no signs of empathy throughout the visit, suddenly fainted upon seeing the case at the Auschwitz museum that contained clothes of murdered babies.

This episode attests to the enormous emotional impact a certain aspect of the Holocaust may have on any person, notwithstanding his or her predispositions, even prejudice—and prejudice toward the Holocaust is abundant in the Arab world because of the Middle East conflict, as proved by the book under review. In other words, one can still entertain a hope that as more tangible information about the Holocaust becomes known in this exceedingly communicational era, even amid the intertwined Holocaust denial and justification campaigns, more Arab individuals are bound to be affected like Umaymah.

For the time being, however, no such breakthrough is anticipated. Even the very few voices in the Arab world today that call for empathy vis-à-vis the Jewish Holocaust trauma are self-seeking—one insight out of many found in the book under review—as they aspire to extract from Jews similar feelings toward the Palestinians' Nakba accompanied by political gains for the latter.

*From Empathy to Denial* is the first thorough study of Arab attitudes toward the Holocaust. It is a comprehensive book covering a wide spectrum of issues and solidly based on a vast inventory of sources in Arabic and other languages. It is well written and easy to read, though its minuscule font somewhat spoils one's full intellectual enjoyment.

As for the authors, Prof. Meir Litvak is a senior lecturer at Tel Aviv University's Department of Middle Eastern and African History and senior research fellow at its Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. He specializes in intellectual history and has written and edited works on Shiite religious scholars in Ottoman Iraq, Islam and democracy, Palestinian collective memory, and Hamas's ideological doctrines. Dr. Esther Webman is senior research fellow at the Dayan Center and director of the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Anti-Semitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University. Her main field of expertise is Arab anti-Semitism.

Following a methodological explanation, the book presents the historical peaks of Arab discourse on the Holocaust, each related to a significant event or process. The chapters in this part of the book cover the Holocaust itself and its aftermath, the reparations agreement between West Germany and Israel in the early 1950s, the Eichmann affair in the early 1960s, and the two Vatican pro-Jewish initiatives in the early 1960s and 1998. The second part deals with thematic aspects of the Arab approach to the Holocaust, namely denial, justification, equation of Zionism with Nazism, the alleged Zionist-Nazi cooperation, Arab retrospective perceptions of Nazi Germany, the Palestinian Nakba as a reflection of the Jewish Holocaust, and, finally, the new voices calling for reassessment of the Arab approach to the Holocaust.

The concluding chapter of the book completes this valuable research with an in-depth analysis of sixty years of Arab reference to the Holocaust. The bottom line of the research: the Arab Holocaust discourse was made subservient to Arab political, ideological, and psychological needs emanating from the Jewish-Arab conflict. It has never been independent, “engaged in systematic study of facts and their meanings, but comprised of eclectic references to events and preoccupation with their ramifications in the Middle East” (380).

The book’s title is somewhat misleading, since one might think empathy was the initial Arab reaction to the Holocaust that was later transformed into denial under the impact of the evolving Arab-Israeli conflict. Actually, there has always been a mixture of attitudes in Arab discourse regarding the Holocaust, with some elements coming to the fore alternately according to political or historical developments, with empathy being a relatively new phenomenon. “Between Empathy and Denial” might have been a better title.

Each chapter’s discussion of the subjects is detailed and well documented. The authors have utilized a wealth of Arabic sources including books, articles, newspapers, and websites, and were careful to point out cases of inaccuracy or distorted evidence in the source material. They also are well versed in current research on the Holocaust and the various approaches to it worldwide. However, the discussion lacks an emotional appreciation. Arab discourse on the Holocaust sometimes involves deep emotions, particularly in the context of the Palestinian Nakba, and several examples of such expressions should have been studied within this research.

This last point might have some relation to a missing piece in the source material, that is, televised religious sermons by hard-line Muslim scholars dealing with the Holocaust. The Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI) once featured in an international conference on anti-Semitism held in Jerusalem a series of such sermons that were very revealing. Although treatises of such scholars are used as a source, especially in the chapter on Holocaust justification, the authors have unfortunately left out televised sermons.

Another missing item among the sources is the Egyptian scholar Dr. Ramis Awad’s *The Jews’ Holocaust: The Auschwitz-Birkenau Internment Camp*.<sup>1</sup> This book, which is an abridged Arabic version of the English *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, edited by Israel Gutman and Michael Berenbaum,<sup>2</sup> brings to the Arabic reader, perhaps for the first time in history, detailed description of various aspects of the Holocaust as reflected in Auschwitz. True, the book is wholly informative and does not take sides in the debate over the Holocaust. But it has such gravity that anyone who reads it is bound to have a completely different outlook on the Holocaust than one who does not.

Awad was aware of the book’s potential impact and was careful to note in the preface that the Holocaust, having been a historical fact (according to a verdict by

a British court, as he puts it), was actually a crime perpetrated by Europe for which the Arabs have paid the price. He further adds that the Holocaust cannot justify the maltreatment and humiliation committed by contemporary Jews against the Palestinians. All these are themes appearing in the Arab Holocaust discourse and discussed in the book under review.

On the whole, *From Empathy to Denial* represents a formidable research effort. It is full of firmly based and useful information on a crucially important subject that was not adequately studied before. It is highly recommended for reading and further study.

NOTES

1. Cairo: Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, 2006.
2. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.



AND THEN THERE WERE NONE

*La fin du judaïsme en terre d'Islam* (The End of Judaism in Muslim Lands), by Shmuel Trigano, Editions Denoel, 2009, 496 pp.

Reviewed by MICHELLE MAZEL

Well before the dawn of Islam, Jews lived in the expanse from the Arabian Peninsula to Persia, through Egypt and long-forgotten empires in what are today Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, and as far as North Africa. Sadly, all but a few thousand have been expelled, forced to leave their worldly goods behind, often happy to escape with their lives. How did it happen? It was to try and answer this question that Shmuel Trigano wrote and edited this book. Born in Algeria in 1948, Trigano, a professor of political sociology at Nanterre University in Paris and a prolific writer, has made Jewish studies his lifework.

The book appears to have been cobbled together too hastily. There is neither a table of contents nor a concluding chapter. Trigano sets down his goal in the lengthy introduction: it is not “to understand why that history—and the suffering of all the peoples it concerns—has been neglected, even occulted, but to pass judgment on the phenomenon itself and to understand the process that led to it” (9).

In Trigano's view, a process of exclusion of the Jews was carried out concurrently by a number of nations that are all Islamic though two of them, Turkey and