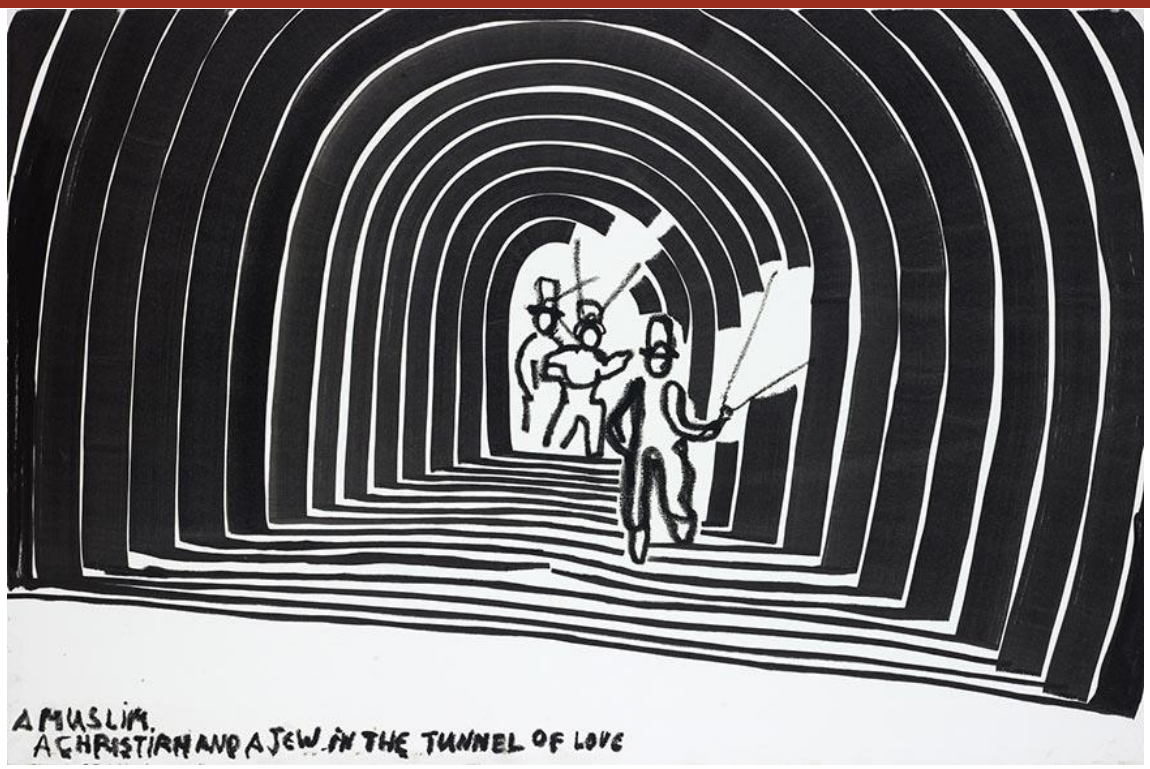
UNIVERSITEIT LEIDEN
Master Theology and Religious Studies

Tunnel Vision or Tunnel of Love?

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb's Reactions to Nazism in the Context of Egyptian Nationalism



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Introduction

The illustration on the title page of this thesis was created by the Jewish artist Eran Shakine. The drawing, entitled *A Muslim, a Christian and a Jew in the Tunnel of Love*, was part of the exhibition *A Muslim, a Christian and a Jew* at the Jewish Museum in Berlin, on display until March of this year.[1] We discern a tunnel, and three people walking in its darkness: aided by the subscription we know they are a Muslim, a Christian and a Jew. The persons are all wearing similar outfits, and stereotyping is absent: we are not able to discern who is who, we 'only' see three human beings. When we take a closer look, we notice that they are not walking in complete darkness. The three of them are holding something in their hands: a flashlight with which they illuminate the tunnel – the 'tunnel of love'. What message does Shakine want to convey with this drawing? Could it be this: both the Muslim, the Christian and the Jew possess and emanate their own ray of light, and, when lifepaths are shared and lights are combined, the initially dark and frightening tunnel is transformed into a tunnel of light and love? Moreover, might we assume that, through this process of enlightenment, the blindness by hatred is ended and the men are able to truly see each other as they are: beings like oneself, and sharing in human dignity?[2]

Shakine's drawing is an intriguing piece of art and forms a good introduction to my thesis in which I investigate the positions on Nazism taken by Egyptian nationalist intellectuals Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb. In this study, I wonder whether we can figuratively discern these intellectuals in the artwork: would Ḥusayn and Quṭb be willing to play the role of 'a Muslim' in the drawing: walking through the tunnel of Abrahamitic love, side by side with 'a Jew', sharing in humanity and dignity? Moreover, would Ḥusayn and Quṭb continue walking next to their Jewish companion in his darkest night, the Holocaust, kindling a fire and lighting his path? Or does tunnel vision prevent them from finding the tunnel of love and thus their Jewish brother?

In order to answer this research question, I will first explore the historical context of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb: their attitude towards Jews and their response to Nazism didn't take place in a historical

[1] Jewish Museum Berlin. *Eran Shakine. A Muslim, a Christian and a Jew,* 2016, oil paint stick on canvas, consulted on the 2nd of May 2017 on <https://www.jmberlin.de/en/eran-shakine>.

[2] This assumption seems to be correct, since Shakine himself says about the whole of his exhibition in an interview: 'The three similar figures, their religious background unidentifiable, create situations by means of a vivid and comical body language. (…) The three heroes, dressed as 19th century gentlemen, help each other in their journey to find the love of God. Here, there are no stereotypes, no one is the laughingstock, everyone is the same; we see three human beings who explore life, nature, culture and philosophy, out of shared curiosity, without trying to prove each other wrong.' Lersh, G. *"I don't laugh about religion. I laugh about human behaviour. An Interview with Eran Shakine",* 27th of October 2016, consulted on the 2nd of May 2017 on <http://www.jmberlin.de/blog-en/2016/10/interview-shakine/>.

vacuum. In the following chapter, I will therefore examine where 'the tunnel' is to be found: what did *their* Egypt – the Egypt between the two revolutions of 1919 and 1952 – look like, politically, economically and socially, and which challenges did Egypt face at the time? Great Britain and her decreasing control over Egypt will prove to be the most relevant historical event for the period under discussion, which will be elaborated upon in the historical overview below. It will become evident that the main question of the time was: How was Egypt to be redefined and reconstructed after gaining independence?

In the process of redefining Egypt nationalists have developed various visions and plans. In chapters two and three we will become acquainted with two of these nationalists: Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb respectively. By exploring their own, as well as relevant secondary writings, we will explore who they were, how they lived their lives, what they found important, and how they saw the future of culture in Egypt. It will become clear that Ḥusayn and Quṭb, both children from the Egyptian village and travellers to the West, formulated very divergent answers to the question regarding Egypt's identity: whereas one intellectual saw the light at the end of the tunnel in Egypt's embrace of the West, the other turned his back on the West and found in Islam the only remedy against the darkness in Egypt and the rest of the world. Additionally, I will demonstrate that the intellectuals under discussion held very different views regarding the Abrahamitic tunnel of love, and Nazi ideology.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I will explore whether we can discover a link between the positions on nationalism and Nazism taken by Ḥusayn and Quṭb. In other words, does their particular redefinition of Egypt lead them, through the tunnel, directly to the other end, i.e. a particular response to Nazism? Or is the path not necessarily as straight as we might think it to be?

CHAPTER ONE

Egypt between the Revolutions (1919-1952)

1.1 Historical overview

World War I and Egypt's first Revolution

In November 1914, Great Britain declared war on the Ottoman Empire. One month later, a protectorate over Egypt was proclaimed, by which Britain put an end to her 'Veiled Protectorate' over Egypt, which had lasted for 32 years, and to four hundred years of Ottoman over-lordship.[3] Before 1914, the British had ruled through the khedive of Egypt (i.e. the viceroy of the Ottoman Sultan) and his ministers. Now khedive Abbās II was dethroned and Ḥusayn Kāmil was appointed as the new sultan (in 1917 he was succeeded by his brother Aḥmad Fu'ād I). Sir Reginald Wingate was appointed high commissioner: the British representative of Egypt at the time.[4]

The Egyptians however were seething with discontent with their foreign rulers and local nationalist movements striving for independence gained much popularity.[5]

On November 13, 1918, two days after the signing of the armistice (i.e. the formal end of the First World War), high commissioner Wingate was visited by politician and nationalist Sa'd Zaghlūl and two other former members of the defunct Legislative Assembly. The three politicians informed Wingate that it was they and not the British government that were to be seen as the true representatives of the Egyptian people. Therefore they demanded autonomy for Egypt. Zaghlūl declared his intention of leading a *wafd* (delegation) to negotiate the termination of the Protectorate.[6] He and his *wafd* (which organized itself as a political party only in 1923) gained much popularity among the Egyptians, and the British government's refusal to receive the delegation and arrest of Zaghlūl caused an enormous revolt. Noticing the social unrest caused by these nationalists, the British exiled Zaghlūl and his associates to Malta in March 1919, which triggered widespread disorder, including demonstrations, boycotts and violence: an estimated 800 Egyptians died in confrontations with Egyptian police and British troops.[7] This led ultimately to Egypt's first modern revolution – the moment in time that forms the official starting point of this study.[8] General Edmund Allenby, the victor over the Ottomans in Palestine who

[3] Whidden, J. *Monarchy and Modernity in Egypt. Politics, Islam and Neo-Colonialism Between the Wars* (London, 2013), 13.
[4] Idem, 14.
[5] New World Encyclopedia, *Egypt.*
[6] Whidden, 14.
[7] Idem, 16.
[8] Idem, 15.

replaced High commissioner Wingate, insisted on concessions to the nationalists to appease the Egyptian public. Zaghlūl was released and next led his delegation to the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, where he met with very little success. In Egypt, however, he had become the leader of the nation and the man of the people.[9] Later that year, Zaghlūl and Lord Milner, the British colonial secretary, talked about the future relationship between Great Britain and Egypt, as a consequence of the disorder in Egypt. A declaration of independence was eventually signed on February 28, 1922.

Sultan Fu'ād I was crowned king on March 15, 1922. The new Egyptian government, founded in 1923 and based on the parliamentary representative system, drafted a new constitution. Zaghlūl was elected Prime Minister of Egypt in 1924. The kingdom would last till 1952.

Although the declaration of independence signed in 1922 officially ended the British protectorate, four matters were still left in British hands: the security of imperial communications, the defence of Egypt, the protection of foreign interests and of minorities, and the Sudan.[10]

In 1936 king Fu'ād I was succeeded by his son Farūq I, who would reign over Egypt till 1952 (the year of the second Revolution). In August that year, the long awaited and highly demanded Anglo-Egyptian Treaty was signed in Switzerland. It officially brought an end to the British occupation, but in reality Egypt was still not granted full independence: in the 1936 Treaty, a twenty-year alliance was agreed upon, which allowed Britain to maintain armed forces on Egyptian territory both in peace and war (with a maximum of 10.000 men) and which obliged Britain to defend Egypt from invasion and provide the Egyptian army with equipment and technical assistance when necessary. Additionally it was accorded that, after a transitional period, the capitulations (i.e. the extraterritorial legal system for foreigners) were to be abolished.[11]

As for the social atmosphere in the interbellum, Egypt in the twenties was relatively prosperous. Typical for this decade was also the mainstream desire amongst the Egyptian intellectuals to become a modern society, through modernization processes. One should note that modernization at the time was seen as *westernization*: the ultimate goal for Egypt was to become similar to Europe. Europe was imitated in all

[9] Whidden, 16.
[10] Marlowe, J. *A History of Modern Egypt and Anglo-Egyptian Relations. 1800-1956* (Hamden, 1965), 302. As for the question of the Sudan: since the early 19th century, nationalists of all stripes strived for Egyptian sovereignty over the Sudan. Great Britain separated the countries after the Sudan's reconquest in 1896-1898. The Sudan was a constant subject of Anglo-Egyptian negotiations, until independence of the Sudan was granted in the 1950s (Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 110, 111).
[11] Marlowe, 300. Regarding the Sudan: both parties agreed that 'the primary aim of their administration in the Sudan must be the welfare of the Sudanese' (ibid.). Practically it meant that Egyptian as well as British troops were to defend the Sudan, and that Egyptian immigration to the Sudan was to be unlimited (ibid.).

facets of life, both materially (copying Western technology, economic institutions and political structures) and spiritually (customs, values and mentality).[12]

At the start of the twentieth century a new group of intellectuals, the *effendiyya,* arose, who embodied this modern Egypt: a large group of westernized, Egyptian intellectuals, who were educated in westernized educational systems. This group originated from the educated middle and upper classes[13] and was visually recognizable by their European-style clothing: trousers, jacket, and Fez (*tarbush* in Arabic).

In the 1930s however, things changed. As a consequence of the educational developments of the time, a new and larger urban, literate, and therefore also a nationally involved class developed in Egypt, termed 'the new *effendiyya*'. This group is described as 'a broad social stratum of urban, literate, modern occupational groups', originating from the middle and lower classes, and from less westernized social backgrounds. Particularly among this group of new *effendiyya,* who experienced Egyptian life as 'an unsuccessful patchwork' of European values and native Egyptian traditions,[14] a new urge developed in the process of 'redefining Egypt'. Modernization – aside from a few exceptions – was no longer regarded as a synonym for Westernization as the ultimate goal that one was striving to achieve.[15]

Why this change of view? After European ideologies such as liberalism and nationalism had been met with a positive response in the twenties, relations with Britain were stretched to a breaking point in the thirties, for the Revolution of 1919 had still not achieved Egyptian independence. The West was regarded as an aggressive, imperialist civilization, whose only goal was domination.[16]

Another internal factor that contributed to the change of outlook was the economic depression of the early 1930s, with severe social ramifications: the industrial employment boom, which was unleashed by the First World War, collapsed with the war's end, and the world economic crises of 1929, the Great

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[12] Gershoni, I., Jankowski, J. P. *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945* (Cambridge, 2002), 38. The educational system was a means of modernization and thus westernization. In the interwar period, a state educational system had come into being, parallel to the religious educational system stationed in al-Azhar. This meant: a new professional class. In the state-controlled school system many Egyptian youngsters were socialized. The curriculum of this system consisted mostly of non-traditional, Western-derived, modern subjects. In the Egyptian University, the same Western emphasis could be found: 'with its French academic structure, largely European teaching staff, and Western subject-matter usually presented in European languages, the "Egyptian" University in its early years was only nominally an Egyptian institution' (idem, 17).

[13] Idem, 11, 216. As for the occupation of the *effendiyya*: the term *effendi* applied to a large range of groups – students in the Western-style schools, higher institutes, the Egyptian University, but also civil servants in the bureaucracy and teachers in the modern educational system (idem).

[14] Idem, 6.

[15] Idem, 51. There were *effendis* who kept on spreading Western ideas, and combatting the anti-Western feelings. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn will prove to be one of these exceptions. Other examples are: Salāma Mūsā, Ḥusayn Fawzī, 'Ismā'īl Aḥmad Adhām, Amīr Buqtur, and Amīn al-Khūlī (idem, 51).

[16] Idem, 213, 214.

Depression, exacerbated the already tense situation. The world price of cotton, Egypt's most important export product, dropped between 1928 and 1931 from 26 to 10 dollars per unit.[17] All Egyptian exports are estimated to have declined by one-third in value, which was reflected in Egyptian living conditions.[18] Furthermore, politically, there was a loss of faith in the parliamentary and Western-derived order erected in the 1920s:[19] the thirties was a decade of political unrest, polarization, and violence. For example, when 'Ismā'īl Ṣidqī was appointed prime minister in 1930, he 'dismissed the Wafdist-controlled parliament, abrogated the Constitution of 1923, introduced a more autocratic replacement in its stead, and rigged the elections of early 1931 to obtain a pliant parliamentary majority.'[20] In 1935, massive and violent student demonstrations took place, and the restoration of the Constitution of 1923 was forced. When the Wafd returned to office, the party was weakened due to internal schism, opposition from its parliamentary rivals, violence between its supporters and its opponents, and a tarnished image due to conflicts with King Farūq.[21] An external political factor was the crisis of democracy in Europe in the thirties, which eroded the popularity of the European model.[22]

This poor social, economic and political situation caused a widespread mood of disillusionment, in contrast to the spirit of optimism that prevailed in the preceding decade caused by the first Revolution and the attainment of independence. Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski rightfully conclude in their book *Redefining the Egyptian Nation, 1930-1945*: 'The operational impotence of the Wafd vis-à-vis the Palace and the British; the inability of the electoral system to reflect popular wishes; the elite-dominated and self-serving nature of parliament; the factionalism and corruption of the country's political parties; the manifest inequalities of the socio-economic order – all these indicated the failure of the new Egyptian state to achieve its proclaimed goals of independence, modernity, and progress. The utopian expectations that the Revolution of 1919 had heralded the inauguration of a new era of freedom, prosperity, and national revival came crashing down under the dual impact of depressions and repression.'[23] In conclusion, the new *effendiyya* found that redefining Egypt after her independence should take place by a route other than imitation of the West.

'Redefining the Egyptian nation'

Different nationalist 'redefinitions' of the Egyptian nation have been given by the *effendiyya* living between the Revolutions – by both 'the old' and 'the new'. In surveying the many nationalist utterances

[17] Küntzel, M. *Jihad and Jew-Hatred. Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11* (New York, 2007), 8.
[18] Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* 1.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Idem, 2.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Idem, 213, 214.
[23] Idem, 3.

of the time, Gershoni and Jankowski make a very useful categorization concerning these utterances. They distinguish between two main categories: the *territorial nationalism* of the 1920s, and the *supra-Egyptian nationalism* of the decades thereafter.

The *territorial nationalism* of the 1920s was the type of nationalism that achieved dominance in Egypt directly after the first Revolution, originating among the Westernized elite, the *effendiyya,* who strove to reconstruct the Egyptian society on a Western model. The Western ideas of liberalism, secularism and science, as well as the European model of the nation-state were admired by them and taken as the basis of their image of 'the new Egypt.'[24]

As the term already supposes, territorial nationalism was territorially orientated. Gershoni and Jankowski note: 'This outlook was based on the revivification of the Egyptian *ethnie* as it had emerged and had been shaped into a unique national community by the particular environment and the distinctive history of the people living in the Nile valley.'[25] Egypt's geographical location and ancient history thus determine the definition of Egypt; these define her national identity. Moreover, 'a natural bond between the East and the West was presumed by territorial nationalists'; the link generally being 'the Pharaonic past and/or the Greco-Roman legacy.'[26]

The idea behind this form of nationalism was that one could struggle politically against Britain and the West yet simultaneously draw from its culture in the process of nation-building.[27] Territorial nationalists found their way out of tradition, as embodied in Arab cultural legacy and historic Muslim community, and linked Egypt to her 'natural' milieu of the Mediterranean and the West. By doing so, these nationalists harmonized their wish for the preservation of Egypt's authentic identity, and their desire to modernize the country and to adapt to rapidly changing, modern conditions.[28]

The second category of nationalism is *supra-Egyptian nationalism*, which developed in the thirties and forties. The new *effendiyya* was the key group in the development of this style of nationalism.[29]

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[24] Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 214.
[25] Idem, 212.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Idem, 214.
[28] Gershoni, I., & Jankowski, J. P. *Egypt, Islam, and the Arabs: The Search for Egyptian Nationhood, 1900-1930* (New York, 1986), 271. The writers describe how the constitution of the 1920s, the parliament, the country's ministries and bureaucracy, the daily operations of the government, the activities of the new political parties, the foreign policy of the Egyptian state, the economic relationships with the region and the world, and even the educational program, all reflected this orientation of nationalism, whereby Egypt was considered to be separate and remote from the backward Islamic, Arab, and Eastern worlds, and close to the dynamic and progressive West (ibid.).
[29] Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* 216.

Since the late 19th century, a distinction between the East (Asia and Africa) and the West (Europe and its colonial outliers) had been accepted by various thinkers. From the 1930s onwards, however, this dichotomy between East and West took on a new quality: the differences separating the two civilizations were highlighted, and the conflict between them became the norm.[30] The new *effendiyya,* coming from the rural communities of Egypt full of anti-imperialist and anti-British sentiments, believed that it was impossible and incorrect to struggle against Western domination while at the same time trying to absorb its culture[31]: creating a new Egypt focussing on these dysfunctional and inauthentic Western and archaic Pharaonic ideas was unthinkable.

Because the new *effendiyya* was directly affected by the expansion of literacy at the time, the members of this group could now acquaint themselves directly with the holy religious scriptures and make the 'shared scripturalist version of religion a marker of their collective self-definition.'[32] They stressed that Islam is a universal religion, irrespective of geographical location, state structures, racial considerations or class differences. 'Neither time nor place affected Islam's validity.'[33] The supra-Egyptianists believed that Egypt's meaningful history didn't start with the pre-Islamic pharaoh's or the Greeks and Romans, as the territorialists believed, but with the entry of Islam into the Nile Valley.[34] This start of history, i.e. the birth of Islam, was an *Arab* history, thus for supra-Egyptianists there was a close connection between Islam and Arabism. These nationalists therefore didn't believe in a unique *Egyptian* national personality, but in the unity of the *Arab* nation, for Egypt shared her Islamic-Arab heritage with peoples *outside* the Nile Valley.

The meaning of the 1919 Revolution for supra-Egyptianists was this: the Revolution is an expression of a general Muslim revolution against the West – parallel to similar revolts in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, North Africa, and elsewhere: 'The *umma* as a whole was rising to throw off the Western yoke, to recover its lost independence, and to return to a golden age of unity and splendour similar to that which had obtained at the start of its history.'[35]

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[30] Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* 37.
[31] Idem, 215.
[32] Idem, 216.
[33] Idem, 79.
[34] Idem, 88.
[35] Idem, 90. Gershoni and Jankowski divide this second category of supra-Egyptian nationalism into three subcategories: (1) Egyptian Islamic nationalism, (2) integral Egyptian nationalism and (3) Egyptian Arab nationalism. *Egyptian Islamic nationalism* attempted to build a religiously based alternative to supplant the territorial nationalism of the twenties (idem, 79). *Integral Egyptian nationalists* drew their inspiration mostly from pessimistic schools of modern European thought (especially from the Italian and German fascist versions), worshiped power and had a populist, anti-Western tone (idem, 98, 99, 107). Islam for integral nationalists was a religion that proved to be congruent with the Egyptian, strong and militant character (idem, 114). *Egyptian Arab nationalists* primarily discussed national identity in cultural terms. Egypt's 'Arabness', her Arab language, and her Arab history, are highlighted by these nationalists. They believed that the whole Arab region was a unity and that

World War II

In 1939-1945, a second war was waged: World War II had not only devastating consequences for Europe, but also immediate repercussions for Egyptian political life. Although Egypt maintained neutrality until 1945 (when the country officially declared war on the Axis powers),[36] directly in 1939 the Egyptian government severed relations with Germany, declared a state of siege and imposed strict censorship on the press. The latter especially affected movements displaying anti-British inclinations, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. Full martial law was proclaimed in 1940.[37] In that same year Britain pressured the Egyptian king to form a government that was more supportive of the British case than the Aḥmad Māhir-ministry that was governing at the time. Also in 1940, Italy invaded Egypt from Libya. Two years later, in 1942, Germany invaded the country: Nazi Germany's General Erwin Rommel with his German and Italian *Afrika Korps* penetrated Egypt till al-Alamayn, only a hundred kilometres west of Alexandria. There, he and his troops were finally stopped by the British Lieutenant General Bernard Montgomery and his army in November 1942.[38]

Earlier that year, before Nazi Germany's invasion, a well-known British political intervention was executed in Egypt, later known as 'the February 4th incident'. On this date the British authorities in Egypt forced king Farūq I to install a Wafdist ministry and accept Muṣṭafā al-Naḥḥās as its new Prime Minister. The British believed that by putting a Wafd- government in place, this party would be able to tone down the pro-Axis sentiments that seemed to exist around the king. Furthermore they reckoned that the Wafd would be able to gain the support of the Egyptian masses to choose the British side in the war. So the British army surrounded the Palace in Cairo, and an ultimatum was given to the king: abdication of the throne, or a government corresponding to British demands. Farūq I 'chose' the second option, and a government according to British demands was formed. The incident caused the tarnishing of image of both the king and the Wafd, for they both had cooperated with the foreign occupiers. A further disillusionment of many Egyptians with the existing order was the inevitable result.

A revision of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 was deeply wished for by the Egyptians after World War II, meaning a complete evacuation of British troops from Egypt and the ending of British control in the Sudan. Negotiations with Britain, undertaken by the new Prime Minister Maḥmūd Fahmī al-Nuqrāshī

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dividing it into Egyptian, Iraqi, Syrian and other categories that fragmentized the Arab world, was the negative and artificial result of imperialism. Only a return to Arab unity would lead to an Egyptian revival.

[36] Why didn't Egypt, standing under British rule, declare war on Germany right away, one could ask. Egypt not doing so was a strategy to extract political concessions from Great Britain. 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Azzām, minister of Social Affairs, suggested a list of requirements which should be implemented by the British (such as the 'support for the aspiration of the Egyptian people concerning Arab unity'), in exchange for Egyptian entry into the war (Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 199).

[37] Idem, 192.

[38] Krämer, G. *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914-1952* (Seattle, 1989), 156.

and (and after February 1946 by his successor 'Ismā'īl Ṣidqī), didn't succeed, because Britain refused to grant the Sudan independence. The case was even brought to the United Nations in 1947, but this didn't resolve the situation.

Since the Wafd, formerly known for their struggle against occupying Britain, was seen by the new *effendiyya* as being in cahoots with the West after the February 4th Incident, other radical alternatives were preferred by the new social class: politics was passing into the hands of radicals, the most important and popular radical movement being the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928 by members of the new *effendiyya*.[39] This movement was considered to be more authentic than the moderate parties, and their reformist character was much more appreciated by the Egyptian masses.[40] Meanwhile the Wafd, in need of a rehabilitation of its image, looked for new directions in its political strategy, resulting in the wish for an institutionalized Arab cooperation. After many negotiations in 1943 and 1944 by the Wafd, the League of Arab States was established in Cairo in 1945, with Egypt playing a leading role[41]: an 'Egyptian triumph'.[42]

'The Palestine-problem'

Meanwhile, from 1936 onwards, Egypt had become nationally involved in 'the Palestine problem', backing the Arabs in Palestine. The Arab Revolts that took place in Palestine from 1936 till 1939[43] were front-page news in the major Egyptian newspapers, with a strong sympathy for the Palestinian Arab position.[44] The Muslim Brotherhood, who called for Egyptian support for the Palestinian Arabs from the start of the revolt, gained much popularity at that time, and stepped up its radical and violent activities. Protests and mass demonstrations were organized to point out to the British their 'atrocities' in Palestine: appeals were made to the Egyptian government to involve itself in defence of the Palestinian Arab cause, and from 1938 onwards, the Muslim Brotherhood asked publicly for volunteers to join the Palestinians in their *jihad* against the British.[45] In the last years of the 1930s, the Palestine question 'had

[39] These 'radicals' (such as the Muslim Brotherhood), can be characterized by their fierce activism, their insistence on Egyptian authenticity, their call for Muslims to reverse the un-Islamic course of recent history, their wish to reinvigorate the traditional Muslim mores within Egypt and their defence of the status of Muslims throughout the world. Young Egypt, although being a popular *secular* society, demonstrated the same spirit (Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 19). As for the Brotherhood, Küntzel gives some figures: The Brotherhood's membership rose from 800 members in 1936 to being at the peak of its power in 1948 with a million members and sympathisers. It had developed into a state within a state; with its own factories, weapons, schools, hospitals and military units (Küntzel, 9, 54).
[40] Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 195.
[41] Idem, 197.
[42] Idem, 210.
[43] The Arab Revolts were nationalist revolts by Palestinian Arabs against the British and their Palestine Mandate, in order to achieve Arab independence and the end of Jewish immigration which, due to the German Reich, had risen greatly (Küntzel, 25).
[44] Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 168.
[45] Idem, 180-183.

become a matter of wide and deep concern in Egypt.'[46] The Egyptian government, which had refrained from engaging in the Palestine issue until 1936, was forced by the agitated concern of especially the new *effendiyya* to do so. The Wafdist ministry of Al-Naḥḥās (and later also the ministry of Muḥammad Maḥmūd: 1938-1939) found itself drawn into both public and private efforts in support of the Palestinian Arabs.[47] Egypt played a central role in the collaborative Arab efforts concerning the Palestine question.

When after World War II the Jewish State named 'Israel' was proclaimed on May 14, 1948 by David Ben-Gurion in agreement with the United Nations General Assembly, the League of Arab States opposed this and large pro-Palestine demonstrations in Egypt followed whereby Jewish and European institutions were attacked. A few hours after the creation of the state Israel, the armies of Egypt and those of Jordan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon crossed the borders of Palestine. Both sides sustained many losses, but one can say that the Arabs dramatically lost the war.[48] These events contributed to the disillusionment and political instability of the time.

Egyptian Jews

In the interbellum, Jews[49] occupied a secure and respected place in Egyptian society: no restrictions were imposed on their religious, cultural, social, economic or political life, Zionism included. In the Egyptian economy, Jews were considered to be highly influential.[50] Especially under the rule of king Fu'ād I (his son Farūq I was more Germany-inclined, as noted above), the Jews of Egypt were an accepted and protected part of public life. Matthias Küntzel explains that Jews were members of parliament, were employed at the royal palace and occupied important positions in the economic and political spheres.[51]

The Egyptian Muslim majority viewed the Jews as just one of several non-Muslim minorities, 'and not the most important or potentially threatening one.'[52] They were, according to Krämer, consequently

[46] Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 179.
[47] Idem, 170.
[48] Küntzel, 53. He writes: 'In January 1949, the Israelis were mourning the deaths of over 4,000 soldiers, and 2,000 civilians. The defeat of the Arab armies, which gave no figures for their losses, was almost total, extremely humiliating and marked by the flight of almost 80% of the Arab population originally living in the new state of Israel' (53, 54).
[49] Gudrun Krämer highlights that 'the Jews' were not a homogeneous entity: 'Large-scale immigration, social differentiation, and cultural change together had created a fragmented community divided along lines of regional origin, rite, language, nationality, social class and, within the limits of a basic sense of Jewishness, of identity as well.' (Krämer, 222).
[50] Ibid.
[51] Küntzel, 16.
[52] Krämer, 223. There were the Copts who were by far the most important non-Muslim minority, and the Greeks who rivalled the Jews in numbers, economic power, social prestige and cultural influence. Also the Syrians and the Armenians, though fewer in number, played an important part (ibid.).

included by the Muslim majority in one group, amongst whom were not only the Greek, (Christian) Syrian and Armenian people, but also the British, the French and the Belgians living in Egypt.[53]

Especially the Egyptian Jewish middle and upper classes adopted the European culture and education, languages and first names, and gradually integrated into the cosmopolitan subculture. Gudrun Krämer notes that on the economic level, these classes were closely linked to, and identified with the economic system established and upheld by the colonial power. Politically, the Jewish elite stressed its loyalty to the Egyptian nation and the king, but barely participated in the national struggle:[54] 'The dynamism and westernization of the Jewish middle and upper classes, which proved so useful in the economic sphere, maneuvered them into a marginal, and ultimately precarious position within Egyptian society at large.'[55] Yet Krämer notes that there is no indication of any hostility towards Jews in the years between World War I and the outbreak of the Arab revolt in Palestine in 1936.[56] Matthias Küntzel adds that the Zionist movement in the first third of the twentieth century was likewise accepted impartially as up until that point there was a lack of emotion regarding the Palestine issue.[57]

In the second half of the thirties, relations between the Muslim majority and the local Jewish minority deteriorated, although this didn't lead to open persecution or mass migration. Due to the socio-economic difficulties and the change in outlook towards Islam and pan-Arabism described above, public life was increasingly defined on Arab and Islamic lines. Foreign presence wasn't much appreciated: the large majority of Greeks, Italians, Belgians, French and British left Egypt, especially after 1936. Jews had more strikes against them than others who stayed.[58] The Jews were increasingly regarded as the enemy by committed Muslim nationalists.[59] Krämer concludes: 'In sum, a Jewish question as it emerged in nineteenth-century Europe did not exist in twentieth-century Egypt. Jews were not discriminated against because of their religion or race, but for *political* reasons (it. AJ). While it was possible to mobilize

[53] Krämer, 223, 224.
[54] Idem, 230.
[55] Idem, 231.
[56] Idem, 224. Krämer does suggest that religious sentiments against Jews at the time may have been *latently present*, because in later years these sentiments could be easily activated. Still, she holds that the negative references in Islamic Holy Scriptures, denouncing Jews as enemies of the Prophet and Islam, remained irrelevant in Egypt until the late 1930s. From then on, they began to be cited in the context of the Palestine conflict. And even from the late thirties onwards, religious arguments against Jews were restricted to opposition groups in the nationalist and Islamic camps (idem, 225, 226). I will elaborate on this issue in chapter 3.
[57] Küntzel, 16.
[58] Why then did not the British, *the* colonial power of the time, become the Arab enemy, one could ask. Küntzel answers: first of all, the conflict with Britain lacked religious symbolism. Great Britain wasn't interested in Palestine's holy places, nor did it want to create its own state. Secondly, the British were too strong for their existence to be challenged. The conflict with Israel on the contrary *did* have religious symbolism: for one, the fight for Jerusalem, for it was a central Muslim symbol. Secondly, Jewish presence in the House of Islam (*Dār al-Islām)* calls for war. Thirdly, in the Islamic Holy Scriptures a negative attitude towards Jews can be detected (idem, 99, 100).
[59] Krämer, 232, 233.

religious (Islamic) resentment against them (…), religious resentment was secondary and only came to bear under specific political and economic circumstances [i.e. the Palestine conflict].'[60]

Egypt's second Revolution

The Second World War had ended, and the Jewish State had been declared. Great Britain still had rights in Egypt according to the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. In 1950, the Wafd won the general election and Al-Naḥḥās again formed a government. He couldn't reach an agreement with Great Britain, so in 1951 he abrogated the Treaty of 1936, which was subsequently followed by large anti-British demonstrations and guerrilla warfare against the British presence in the Canal Zone. Al-Naḥḥās was dismissed, and four Prime Ministers succeeded him in the next six months. This continued instability, caused by the growing Egyptian resentment of the continued British control over Egypt and the political power struggles that resulted from this, led to the second Revolution in 1952.

Radical measures were wished for. A military coup was executed by the movement of the Free Officers, led by Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣīr – better known for an English speaking audience as 'Gamal Abdel Nasser' – on July 23, 1952. The preparations for this coup took place in close coordination with the Muslim Brothers, who had been legalized in 1951. King Farūq I was forced to abdicate, in favour of his son Fu'ād II.[61]

This, the end of Egypt's monarchy caused by the second Revolution of 1952 led by Gamal Nasser, is the end of the period of time relevant to this study. Of course, Egypt's history didn't stop here. An agreement was signed in February 1953: a transitional period of self-government for the Sudan would be established, and the Sudan would be granted full independence in January 1956. The Egyptian Republic was declared on June 18, 1953. Prolonged negotiations led to the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement signed in 1954, in which it was stated that British troops were to evacuate gradually from the Canal Zone. General Muḥammad Naguib was the first president of the Republic, but was forced to resign in 1954 by Nasser, who became president, and who was 'the real architect of the 1952 movement'. After an attempt was made to assassinate Nasser by a Muslim Brother, the Brotherhood was again banned. A number of members was executed, and hundreds of Brothers were imprisoned – a move that triggered a generation of Muslim Brothers to draw even more radical conclusions about the future of Egypt.

[60] Krämer, 234.
[61] New World Encyclopedia, *Egypt.*

Nasser declared full independence of Egypt from Britain on June 18, 1956. He nationalized the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956, which prompted the Suez Crisis. Three years after the 1967 Six Day War (which Israel victoriously won from Egypt), Nasser died and was succeeded by Anwar Sādāt.[62]

1.2 Egypt and Nazism: two stories to be told

Whereas I have already elaborated shortly on the influence of Nazi Germany on Egypt during the monarchy in the first section of this chapter, in this final section I will go further into this topic, as it will shed some light on the way the nationalists of interest – Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb – dealt with Nazism as discussed in the following two chapters.

When reading about the role of Nazi Germany in Egypt and on the response of the Egyptian people to Nazism in particular – the topic that is the focus of this thesis – one point is striking: that there are two stories prevalent among scholars. The title of the first story could well be: *'A pro-Axis Egypt!'* The second story: *'A pr o-Axis Egypt?'* Note the difference in punctuation marks. The main question is whether the majority of Egyptians welcomed and rejoiced in the Nazi ideology (as some historians claim), or rejected Nazism point blank (as others argue). Both stories will be discussed in this section.

The traditional narrative: a pro-Axis Egypt!

Robert St. John in his book *The Boss. The story of Gamal Abdel Nasser,* published more than fifty years ago in 1960, is an advocate of the traditional narrative. The pro-German position is understood as part of a larger narrative: the revolutionary story of Nasser, aided by his Free Officers, initiating the second Revolution in Egypt and becoming president in the fifties. The pro-Axis narrative can be discerned in the decades leading up to the Revolution: the thirties and forties are described as *the* source of revolutionary motivation, and are only considered in this light. These were the times Nasser and his associates were allegedly inspired by the totalitarian regimes of Italy and Germany. Mussolini and Hitler were admired and they were the inspiration to carry out a revolution in Egypt: to achieve a prosperous economy, to create a vast military power, and to win international prestige. Military officers like Nasser set up underground organizations to prepare the ground for the Axis' conquest of Egypt and to eliminate

[62] New World Encyclopedia, *Egypt.*

the British occupation.[63] Especially the 'February 4th Incident' was used by them to launch an anti-British, pro-Nazi revolution.[64] St. John's conclusion: Egypt had betrayed the Allies.[65]

Not only Nasser and his Free Officers were enthusiastic about the Nazis, according to St. John. Their actions were based on the 'fact' that there existed a general sympathy among the Egyptian public for Nazism. Egypt's youth in particular was influenced by Italian fascism and German Nazism. We can read how on the streets of Cairo 'Rommel! Rommel! Rommel!' was shouted by the crowds.[66] St. John writes: 'The pro-Axis sympathies of most Egyptians at this time were not based alone on the conviction that the Germans and Italians were going to win the war. Nor alone on the Arab proverb: "He who is the enemy of my enemy is my friend." *The ideology of the two totalitarian powers was ready-made for a country like Egypt.* (…) *There was something in it for every Egyptian* (it. AJ). Military men such as young Lieutenant Nasser were impressed by the might of the Wehrmacht and the Luftwaffe, by the military genius that had so quickly brought about the fall of Warsaw, Copenhagen, Oslo, Brussels, Paris, Athens and Belgrade.'[67]

That this traditional pro-Axis storyline isn't a view held only by older historians, is shown by the earlier mentioned study of Matthias Küntzel *Jihad and Jew-Hatred. Islamism, Nazism and the Roots of 9/11,* written in 2007. Whilst this book offers a lot of interesting information, the traditional narrative of *'a pro-Axis Egypt!'* is the story told by Küntzel. He gives his readers a narrative in which Jew-hating Egyptian Muslims are the main characters. Muslims who rejected the Nazi views on Jews are, despite a few exceptions, absent.

Küntzel writes: '*Throughout the Arab world, National Socialism often met with sympathy and not infrequently with enthusiasm* (it. AJ). This affinity was not only based on the conviction they were fighting the same enemies – Britain and France. In addition, the German idea of the people (*Volk*) defined by language, culture and blood rather than borders and political sovereignty, was far closer to the Islamic notion of the *umma* than to the British or French concept of citizenship. For in the Arab as well as German tradition, communities, not individuals, are the basic element.'[68] The Arab response to the upcoming Nazis went hand in hand with hostilities that are described by Küntzel, who attributes a large role to the Jew-hating Grand Mufti of Jerusalem Amīn al-Ḥusaynī.

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[63] Gershoni, I. Beyond Anti-Semitism: Egyptian Responses to German Nazism and Italian Fascism in the 1930s, in: *EUI Working Papers*, 32 (2003), 3.
[64] St. John, R. *The Boss. The Story of Gamal Abdel Nasser* (New York, 1960), 45, 46.
[65] Gershoni, *Beyond Anti-Semitism,* 4 (Gershoni paraphrasing St John, pages 36-57).
[66] St. John, 46.
[67] Idem, 40.
[68] Küntzel, 25.

Noteworthy is that Küntzel proposes that the opposition towards Israel is what binds the Arabs from 1948 onwards. He writes: 'It is remarkable that since then the cohesion of the Arab world has been defined not by religion or a particular relationship to Britain or the USA, but by opposition to Zionism or more precisely Israel. Hatred of the Jews has become the most important shared bond.'[69] Can this, then, be added to the supra-Egyptian ideas described by Gershoni and Jankowski, that came up in the Egyptian thirties? Aside from a shared history, language and religion, that define and bind the Arab nation together, a shared enemy can now be added to (the top of) the list.

In conclusion, there are four arguments that the pro-Axis-narratives have in common, many of which can be detected in St. John's and Küntzel's views as well: (1) 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend': the Egyptians sought for an ally against British occupation and Rommel was an ideal candidate. The entire Egyptian community supported his campaign. (2) The fascist and Nazi ideologies and practices are in tune with 'the Egyptian Muslim mentality'. (3) The 'liberal experiment' (to establish liberal-democratic institutions) of the twenties had failed in the thirties. Fascism and Nazism offered a form of government that was far more suitable to the political culture than liberalism. (4) 'The betrayal of the intellectuals': Egypt's leading intellectuals undergo a 'crisis of orientation', and start writing about Islam and the early Islamic society, fostering fundamentalist orientations and venerating fascism and Nazism.[70]

The counternarrative: a pro-Axis Egypt?

The second storyline, titled *a pro-Axis Egypt?,* questions the abovementioned traditional storyline.

Gershoni in *Beyond Anti-Semitism: Egyptian Responses to German Nazism and Italian Fascism in the 1930s* is one of the scholars who informs us of this counternarrative.[71] First, he explains how the traditional narrative (called 'the conventional and hegemonic master-narrative'[72]) came into being.

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[69] Küntzel, 57.

[70] Gershoni, *Beyond Anti-Semitism,* 5, 6. As for these arguments used by St. John and Küntzel: we saw that both scholars use the first argument ('the enemy of my enemy is my friend'). By embracing the Nazi's, the British are pushed away. Furthermore, both authors use the second argument and note that the Nazi ideology matches 'Muslim' ideology. In the book *Egypt in Search of Political Community. An Analysis of the Intellectual and Political Evolution of Egypt, 1804-1952* by Nadav Safran, I came across arguments numbers three and four. He dedicates a whole chapter (chapter 11) to the 'Crisis of Orientation' (argument three) and a paragraph to the 'Political and Social Failure of the Liberal Democratic Regime' (page 187) (Safran, N. *Egypt in Search of Political Community. An Analysis of the Intellectual and Political Evolution of Egypt, 1804-1952* (Cambridge, 1961, 181, 192).

[71] Whereas I find Gershoni to be the most explicit and comprehensive advocate of the counternarrative, other advocates exist as well. I found one in Gudrun Krämer, writer of *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914-1952.* She writes in her conclusion that 'the assumption that Islam is inherently intolerant, and that anti-Semitism is present at all times and places, is refuted by the economic and social success of the Jewish middle and upper classes in the interwar period, and even more so by *the absence of popular anti-Semitism during this period and beyond* (it. AJ)' (Krämer, 235).

[72] Gershoni, *Beyond Anti-Semitism,* 4.

The Revolution's leaders wished to present themselves as *the* anti-colonial power and therefore invented and spread a self-narrative during the fifties, 'which anchored their origins in the second World War, and described it in light of the anti-colonial struggle that would take place the following decade.'[73] The anti-British experience of the fifties was projected on to the early forties, which was 'clearly a revolutionary retrospective reading of the 1920s and 1930s' and an exaggeration of pro-Nazi tendencies, although there were marginal pro-Nazi expressions in the political and cultural peripheries of Egyptian society.[74] This story was then taken over by historians, both Egyptian and Western: most historians who describe Nasser's Revolution of 1952 (St. John included) argued that the Revolution had its roots in the Second World War. Egypt's so called betrayal of the Allies is placed at the centre of this narrative.[75]

The counternarrative in short, argues that there was more resistance towards Nazism during the thirties and forties than jubilation. Gershoni clams that an overwhelming majority of the Egyptian voices ('in political, intellectual, professional and educated circles, but in the urban middle classes and literate popular culture as well') *rejected* fascism and Nazism: 'as an ideology, as a practice, and as an enemy of the enemy [i.e. the British].'[76] He tells this counternarrative by reviewing and nullifying the four pro-Axis arguments mentioned above:

(1) Concerning the theory that *'the enemy of my enemy is my friend'*: Gershoni has done research on 'the Egyptian public's attitude' in the thirties, and by this he means the 'entire cultural field of public opinion that can be reconstructed from scores of newspapers, hundreds of books, works of art and radio broadcasts.'[77] From all this, it becomes clear that the response to Nazism was expressed through three types of representation: the Nazis were seen as imperialists, as extreme totalitarianists, and as racists. Gershoni writes: 'As far back as the early 1930s, the Egyptians themselves refuted the paradigmatic claim that Egyptian sympathy for fascism and Nazism was based on hostility towards their British occupiers and on the concept of "my enemy's enemy is my friend".' For: fascists were considered an arch-imperialist phenomenon[78], and Egypt's intellectuals preferred even the British and French imperialism to that of Italy and Germany. An alliance with the 'enemy of the enemy' represented a danger, 'more demonic and imperialistic than the enemy himself.'[79]

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[73] Gershoni, *Beyond Anti-Semitism*, 7.
[74] Ibid. Gershoni mentions these pro-Nazi voices from the thirties: Salāma Mūsā, Aḥmad Ḥusayn and Karīm Thābit. In 1939 however, Salāma Mūsā and Aḥmad Ḥusayn fundamentally changed their attitude towards fascism and Nazism and began to level harsh criticism against Hitler (idem, 8).
[75] Idem, 5.
[76] Idem, 8.
[77] Idem, 11.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Idem, 13.

(2) Gershoni in this article doesn't refute *explicitly* the argument that the *totalitarian Nazi ideology matches the 'Muslim mentality'*. However, as his whole article shows, there was no match between totalitarianism and 'the Muslims', since the majority was opposed to fascism and Nazism (despite a few exceptions in the periphery).[80] This nullifies the traditional argument.

(3) As for the *failure of the 'liberal experiment'* and the alternative Nazism offers: there is inconclusive evidence for the failure of the Egyptian system of parliamentary democracy, according to Gershoni. The democracy was not in a crisis or decline: the Wafd party made sure of this. This party was the dominant force in Egyptian politics, and the central democratic power. When general elections were held, the Wafd won them by a large majority. Attempts of conservative authoritarian forces to take over the government, society and culture, were halted by the Wafd. Mainstream intellectuals who were opposed to Nazism, and who supported democracy and freedom of expression were backed by this party, both politically and morally.[81]

(4) Finally, the *'betrayal of the intellectuals'* is discussed. The intellectuals are said to have come to the conclusion that parliamentary constitutional government was incompatible with Islamic society. Gershoni argues that this conclusion is based on the *Islamiyyāt* genre alone (i.e. the literature that was written on the Prophet, the first Caliphs and other classical Islamic heroes). When taking into account other textual corpora produced by these intellectuals in the thirties, it becomes clear that they were not 'enmeshed in a "crisis of orientation", but continued to advocate an Enlightenment's *Weltanschauung,* reason, progress, science, liberty, civil rights, democracy and alongside these, constitutional parliamentary government.'[82] Furthermore, the intellectuals were aware of what was taking place in the Nazi and fascist regimes of Germany and Italy as they anxiously followed the developments. Already in the middle of the twenties, after Mussolini had consolidated his power in Italy, the intellectuals had begun criticising fascist totalitarianism and dictatorship. After 1933, the major critique was directed against Nazi Germany.[83] Both ideologies were rejected as oppressive machines of power that attempted to obliterate any individual expression, annihilate society and undermine parliament and constitutional government. Fascism and Nazism were considered to be extreme imperialistic regimes, which also spread racist ideas that needed to be completely rejected.[84] Nazism

[80] Gershoni, *Beyond Anti-Semitism*, 17.
[81] Idem, 9.
[82] Idem, 11.
[83] Ibid. Well known anti-Nazi voices in the thirties mentioned by Gershoni are: Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh 'Inān, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād (idem, 14ff).
[84] Idem, 21, 22.

had to be fought by all means, which led to the conviction that Egypt should support the Allies: 'morally, ideologically and politically.'[85]

In the next two chapters, two influential nationalists will be discussed: Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb. From their narrative constructions, we will discover who they were and to which kind of nationalism they belonged. Furthermore, their response to Nazism will become apparent: were they characters in the '*Pro-Axis!*' or *'Pro-Axis?'* account*?* And what role did they play: supporting role or heroic main character? In what follows I will delve into their autobiographies in search of answers to these questions.

[85] Gershoni, *Beyond Anti-Semitism,* 22.

CHAPTER TWO

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn – a visionary

2.1 Introduction

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, the research question of this thesis is: '*What position on Nazism did Egyptian nationalist intellectuals Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb occupy?'* To answer this question, it was necessary to explore the political and social history of the Egyptian monarchy as well as the Egyptian majority's response to Nazism, in order to contextualize the thoughts and works of these two intellectuals. The focus of the present and following chapters are Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb respectively. How did these nationalists in particular 'redefine the Egyptian nation', and respond to the Nazi influences of their days?

We will commence in 2.2 by making acquaintance with Ṭāhā Ḥusayn: who was this famous intellectual? How did he live his life? What did he find important? Next, in 2.3 we will discover both his answer to the question: 'What should Egypt do with her independence?' and his redefinition of the Egyptian nation. Then, in 2.4, his ideas on Nazism will become manifest.

2.2 Biography: crossing the canal

Nadaf Safran, in his book *Egypt in Search of Political Community. An Analysis of the Intellectual and Political Evolution of Egypt, 1804-1952,* summarizes Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's life as follows:

> Born in a small village in upper Egypt and the seventh child of a minor employee in a sugar plantation, blind since the age of three, Ṭāha lived to become the undisputed dean of modern Egyptian and Arabic literature, to reach the positions of head of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Cairo, founder of the University of Alexandria, Minister of Education, and to be honoured by Oxford and the Universities of Lyons, Rome, Madrid, and Athens.[86]

While of course much more can and will be said about the person and life of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, Safran, in this one sentence tells us a lot about this Egyptian intellectual. He introduces us to the unexpected, impressive road the blind village boy has travelled – starting in 1889 in the village 'Izbat al-Kīlū and ending up in Egypt's capital and seat of Parliament: Cairo. A route of many twists and turns lies in between, much of which Ḥusayn himself has documented in his famous three part autobiography called *The Days (Al-Ayyām)*, published between 1926 and 1967. The first volume of this autobiography deals

[86] Safran, 129.

with his upbringing in the village, the second with his experiences at the Azhar, and the third with his studies at the Cairo University and abroad.[87] As I want Ḥusayn to speak for himself about his own life, in his own words, I will use many quotations from these works.[88] In addition I will give the floor to many secondary studies written by experts on Ṭāhā Ḥusayn.

Ḥusayn (1898-1973), in the first part of his autobiography titled *An Egyptian Childhood,* describes his youth in 'Izbat al-Kīlū as the seventh child out of a family of fifteen children.[89] This small village is one kilometre away from the city of Maghāgha, and a good 250 kilometres south of Cairo. We can read how the blind Ḥusayn explains that only a small section of this already small village was the only world he knew of:

> He [Ṭāhā Ḥusayn[90]] was convinced that the world ended to the right of him with the canal, which was only a few paces away from where he stood… and why not? For he could not appreciate the width of this canal, nor could he reckon that this expanse was so narrow that any active youth could jump from one bank to the other. Nor could he imagine that there was human, animal and vegetable life on the other side of the canal just as much as there was on his side.[91]

Furthermore, in *An Egyptian Childhood* Ḥusayn describes how he was brought up in a traditional, mostly Sufi environment, characterized by him as 'simple, mystical and ignorant.'[92] Many Sufi books were read to him, and Ḥusayn was destined to be a *sheikh*, just like his father. He therefore went to the village *kuttāb* (a traditional, Qur'ānic school) and was, as many other boys from the village, drilled by various local religious teachers to learn the Qur'ān by heart – the main objective of his education. Ḥusayn

[87] Malti-Douglas, F. *Blindness & Autobiography. Al-Ayyām of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn* (Princeton, 1988), 21.
[88] I realise that an autobiography is not a clear rendering of a person's life, since it is at least partially fiction, and thus a construction. Malti-Douglas writes that 'like every other autobiographer, he [Ḥusayn] selected certain aspects of his life and personality (idem, 5). Despite the fictional component in Ḥusayn's autobiography, I nevertheless choose to use this source, for no one can give more insight in one's life than the person who actually lived it. As for the reading of *The Days* as a classic of modern literature (and thus not as a source of biographical information): *The Days* is 'a landmark in the development of modern Arabic prose', Malti-Douglas writes (3). Ḥusayn makes use of several narrative techniques to highlight particular episodes in his life, for example 'narrative construction', 'narrative repetition', and 'stylistic repetition', and 'the use of time to displace the chronological sequence of parts of the narrative' (see idem, 144ff). Malti-Douglas' conclusion of *The Days* as a *literary* text is as follows: 'It is evident that *Al-Ayyām* is the story of success, even of triumph. Here also the tension at the heart of the condition of blindness plays a role. The basic plot line of *Al-Ayyām* could be turned into a naively optimistic children's story, showing that all things turn out for the best and that any problem can be conquered with sufficient will. *Al-Ayyām* is saved from being such pablum by its spicing of pessimism and resentment (…). The autobiography's continuing recognition of the social and personal conflicts associated with blindness gives the ultimate dignity, both to the hero's achievements and to *Al-Ayyām* as a work of literature (idem, 184).
[89] Ḥusayn, Ṭ. *An Egyptian Childhood. The Autobiography of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, translated by E. H. Paxton* (London, 1932), 15.
[90] To understand his autobiography, it is good to know that Ḥusayn often refers to himself in *The Days* in the third person: 'he', but also 'the boy' 'our (small) friend', 'the young lad'.
[91] Ḥusayn, *An Egyptian Childhood*, 9.
[92] Idem, 107.

succeeded and therefore became a *sheikh* when he was only nine years old.[93] However, the education by many experts of religion caused Ḥusayn much confusion in his mind at a young age. He writes:

> Our lad used to mix freely with all these ulema and took something from them all, so that he gathered together a vast amount of assorted knowledge which was confused and contradictory. I can only reckon that it made no small contribution to the formation of his mind, which was not free from confusion, conflicting opinions ad contradictions.[94]

During his Egyptian childhood, Ḥusayn lost both a little sister and an older brother – two very painful events that completely changed his outlook on life.[95] One way in which the young Ḥusayn coped with these losses, was by becoming very religious (extra fasting, praying, alms-giving and reciting the Quran).[96] Through living this life style Ḥusayn thought he could take away some of the 'sins' of his brother.

In *An Egyptian Childhood* the readers learn that Ḥusayn turned blind at the age of three. As a young child, Ḥusayn contracted opthalmia. Medical attention of the modern type was virtually non-existent: because of his condition, the village barber was finally called in to help. His 'treatment' caused not healing, but blindness.[97] On several occasions in all of the three parts of *The Days*, Ḥusayn writes about his solitude, summed up well by Malti-Douglas: 'lack of mobility and social isolation go together, and both are tied to blindness.'[98]

Although his blindness made Ḥusayn feel helpless and anxious both as a boy and an adolescent, later on, after a 'process of rebirth',[99] Ḥusayn found his voice, and became more of a confident man. He entered into theological debates with whomever was willing to debate with him. Ḥusayn creates a picture of his increasing ability to come to terms with his blindness and creating a social role for himself: he insists on behaving as a sighted person with the help of persons who become his eyes. He wants to break through barriers that used to confine the blind.[100] We can also read how Ḥusayn's loss of eyesight and his wish to be in the background caused Ḥusayn to indulge in what he calls 'the art of listening':

> Now this abstention of his from play [for he didn't want to be ridiculed[101]] led him to become fond of one kind of diversion, and that was listening to stories and legends. His great delight was to listen to the songs

[93] Ḥusayn, *An Egyptian Childhood*, 36.
[94] Idem, 94.
[95] Idem, 149.
[96] Idem, 150, 151.
[97] Idem, 133, 134.
[98] Malti-Douglas, 34.
[99] Idem, 54.
[100] Idem, 64, 65.
[101] Ḥusayn, *An Egyptian Childhood*, 22.

> of the bard or the conversation of his father with other men or of his mother with other women, and so he acquired the art of listening.[102]

Ḥusayn in his autobiography describes how in his days there were only two options for blind people 'who want to live a tolerable life':[103] functioning as a reader of the Qur'ān at funerals and in private houses, or studying at the Azhar, winning a degree and being assured of a livelihood from the daily allowance. Ḥusayn writes that he had no choice 'but to pursue his course of life at the Azhar.'[104] Thus in 1902, at the age of thirteen, Ḥusayn left his village to go to the 'bastion of [Sunni] traditionalism',[105] the 'venerable college of al-Azhar in Cairo',[106] where he spent the next six years of his life studying religion and Arabic literature.

This part of his life is described in detail in the second part of his autobiography, *The Stream of Days. A Student at the Azhar.* What Ḥusayn strived for, was collecting more and more knowledge. It would become his life work:

> His father and the learned friends who came to visit him had spoken of knowledge as a boundless ocean, and the child had never taken this expression for a figure of speech or a metaphor, but as the simple truth. He had come to Cairo and to the Azhar with the intention of throwing himself into this ocean and drinking what he could of it, until the day he drowned. What finer end could there be for a man of spirit than to drown himself in knowledge? What a splendid plunge into the beyond![107]

It becomes clear in this second volume that Ḥusayn finds it hard to study at the Azhar. Especially the endless repetition of tradition by the *sheikhs* and therefore the lack of creativity bother him. Furthermore, Ḥusayn ask many questions at the Azhar: too many in the opinion of the *shaykhs.* On different occasions he is sent away from class, and even from the school.[108] In 1908 Ḥusayn, fed up by the educational system at the Azhar and more and more attracted to secularism, became one of the first students at the newly founded and worldly oriented Cairo University as well, where European orientalists gave lectures that changed his perspective on his own inherited Egyptian culture.[109] Ḥusayn

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[102] Ḥusayn, *An Egyptian Childhood*, 23. Later on in *An Egyptian Childhood*, but also in the second and third parts of his autobiography, his readers learn how this 'art of listening' is practiced: he listens to his mother lamenting, his grandfather praying, the Sufis of the village incanting, senior students at the different universities discussing theology, and the people on the streets living their lives, etc.
[103] Ḥusayn, Ṭ. *The Stream of Days. A Student at the Azhar by Taha Ḥusayn, translated by Hilary Wayment* (London, 1948), 103.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Malti-Douglas, 7.
[106] Ḥusayn, *An Egyptian Childhood*, 153.
[107] Ḥusayn, *Stream of Days,* 12.
[108] Idem, 99, 124.
[109] For example on the Pharaohs and ancient Egyptian language and the links to Arabic, Hebrew and Syriac (Hourani, 326 and Ḥusayn, Ṭ. *A Passage to France. The third volume of the autobiography of Ṭāhā Ḥusain, translated from the Arabic by Kenneth Cragg* (Leiden, 1976, 34, 35).

writes that these teachers enabled him to cling to a strong element of authentic Eastern culture, and to hold together in a balanced harmony the learning of both East and West.[110] About the limitless learning possibilities in the University, he says:

> Life in the University (…) emancipated me from the confined, confused atmosphere of the Azhar (…) into an ample, uninhibited milieu which allowed me to fill my lungs with fresh air on my way to and fro and likewise to fill my mind with open knowledge which did not bind me like the narrow structures of the Azhar professors in their lecturing, nor ruin my intelligence with *qanqalahs* (citations), and arguments about this and that, and endless equivocation.[111]

Six years later, Ḥusayn received the University's first doctorate on the blind Arabic poet and writer Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī.

While studying at the Cairo University, Ṭāhā Ḥusayn wanted to enjoy Western, French, education as well. His departure to France was postponed because of the outbreak of World War I.[112] When the Germans were driven back from Paris, Ḥusayn received permission to depart.[113] Together with a brother, he continued his studies overseas. We can read about this in the third part of his autobiography: *A Passage to France,* which was published only six months before his death. One can state therefore that the volume it is the work of long retrospect.[114] In it we find a narrative that 'constitutes a personal saga of tenacity and perseverance in the face of daunting odds – blindness, the demands of French academic disciplines, the acquisition of new languages, the vicissitudes of the First World War and the jostling hopes and fears of a strenuous and sensitive ambition.'[115] His stay in France 'would cement his cultural ideas and the appeal that the West had always had for him.'[116]

In 1915, at the University of Montpellier Ḥusayn learnt Greek and Latin and he immersed himself in classical culture, in which he obtained his master's degree. Next, from 1915 till 1919, he took courses at the University of Paris (the Sorbonne) in history, philosophy and sociology. Also he continued to study the works of orientalists as he had done in Egypt. He earned a second doctorate for his thesis on the social philosophy of Tunisian historian Ibn-Khaldūn.

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[110] Ḥusayn, *A Passage to France*, 38.
[111] Idem, 34. Ḥusayn in the third part of his autobiography continues his habit of referring to himself in the third person. The translator of this last part, Kenneth Cragg however, has chosen to consistently translate this third person in the first person. This explains the change in style in the different quotations I use.
[112] Later on, Ḥusayn is again interrupted by the First World War. He was called back to Egypt by the University of Cairo. After three months, he was allowed to go to France again.
[113] Ḥusayn, *A Passage to France*, 69, 73.
[114] Idem (introduction by translator Kenneth Cragg), XIII.
[115] Idem, IX.
[116] Malti-Douglas, 7.

In France, Ḥusayn also met his future wife Suzanne Bresseau.[117] The effects of the war were noticeable for the couple. Ḥusayn speaks of the bombs that had fallen in the quarter they lived in, and buildings being destroyed close to their abode.[118] Suzanne and Ṭāhā survived the war however and studies were resumed.

When the news came that Egypt was seeking independence from the British occupiers (i.e. the First Revolution), Ḥusayn writes that 'it set my heart aglow with gladness'. Also, when the Egyptians revolted against Zaghlūl's expulsion to Malta, for Ḥusayn this felt like 'water to a burning thirst.'[119] When Zaghlūl and his delegation came to the peace conference in Paris, Ḥusayn and Zaghlūl talked about the independence. Zaghlūl is quoted as saying: 'Here we are, we've come to Paris, and are denied access to the Peace Conference and excluded from all contact with the representatives of the Powers taking part in it.' Ḥusayn replied: 'Nevertheless, these efforts will awaken the people and alert them to their rights and thus inspire them to demand those rights and pursue them vigorously.'[120]

After his studies were finished, Ḥusayn and his wife rushed back to Egypt together with their firstborn. He was content with Egypt's independence (for the country was allowed to now manage her own affairs[121]), but not so much with the 'superficial aspects of the negotiations', with the result that independence itself 'was almost forgotten and abandoned in internal strife.'[122] For this reason, Ḥusayn wasn't a big fan of Sa'd Zaghlūl.[123]

Here, after the declaration of independence in 1922, *The Days* comes to an end. What happened next? First of all, it has to be noted that Ḥusayn and his wife spent much of their time living outside Egypt. Therefore, it can be concluded that Ḥusayn thus lived across two civilizations (the French and the Egyptian), both in his personal as in his intellectual life. For around thirty years after their return to Egypt, Ḥusayn was 'at the very centre of literary and academic life in Egypt.'[124] In 1919, he was appointed professor of classical literature in the Cairo University. Next, he was transferred to the faculty of Arabic letters,[125] and later founded the University of Alexandria, where he was rector. Furthermore, he served

[117] Bresseau is romantically referred to by Ḥusayn as 'that sweet voice', for she read books for him out loud in order to help him do research. She kept her own religion: Catholicism. The couple had two children.
[118] Ḥusayn, *A Passage to France*, 130, 131.
[119] Idem, 134.
[120] Idem, 138.
[121] Idem, 159.
[122] Idem, 157, 159.
[123] Idem, 158.
[124] Hourani, 326.
[125] Safran, 129-130.

as a writer and literary editor for several magazines and newspapers.[126] Nadaf Safran writes strikingly: 'This combination of teaching, journalism, translating, and writing scholarly and popular works on Arabic and French cultures, in addition to the novels he began later – all of it done in a didactic spirit – constituted the normal pattern of his activity (…).[127]

To share some more insight in the person of Ḥusayn, it will be interesting to highlight one important – provocative – work of his hand: *On Pre-Islamic Poetry (Fī al-Shi'r al-Jāhilī)*, published in 1926. This book caused quite a stir in the Arabic world, and it would eventually lead to his dismissal from the University,[128] for Ḥusayn, using the methods of modern critical scholarship,[129] attacks certain basic Islamic dogmas in this study.[130] He openly questions the authenticity of pre-Islamic poetry that had been used for many generations 'as a linguistic reference source for interpreting the terms of the Qur'ān and the Tradition, and as a historical source in his own right.'[131] In *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* the ground under many thus far unquestioned interpretations of holy Islamic scripture, on which many laws and doctrines had been based, was cut by Ḥusayn. He writes:

> This poetry proves nothing and tells nothing and should not be used, as it has been, as an instrument in the science of the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth. For, undoubtedly it was tailored and invented all of a piece so that the 'ulamā' might prove by it what they had set out to prove.[132]

Ḥusayn even hinted in his book that the Qur'ān should not be seen as an objective history book. For example, he ridiculed the traditionally accepted dogma that *jinns* exist, and that they were able to compose poetry. Similarly he doubted the historicity of the story of Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl.[133]

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[126] For example *al-Siyāsah (The Politics),* the daily organ of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party, writing about Arab cultural life in the first centuries of Islam, and about contemporary French culture (idem, 130).
[127] Ibid..
[128] *On Pre-Islamic Poetry* especially caused great uproar among religious scholars of the Islamic world, and the traditionalists of his own former school, the Azhar, in particular. Famous traditionalist of his time Rashīd Riḍa for example said that Ḥusayn had 'established his apostasy from Islam' (Safran, 155), a grave accusation. Ḥusayn's dismissal from the Egyptian University was demanded by several religious and conservative leaders, the University – 'fortress of secularism and liberalism' (idem, 130) that sheltered him, was attacked (the rector of the University Luṭfī al-Sayyid stood behind Ḥusayn), and Ḥusayn was libelled for insulting the religion of the state. The court dismissed the charge, for Ḥusayn didn't publish his own personal opinions, but only recorded the findings of an academic scholar. *On Pre-Islamic Poetry,* however, was banned. Ḥusayn felt compelled to leave Egypt for one year, until the storm had passed. Meanwhile, he withdrew his research, deleted some references, expanded the remainder, and re-published the book with little adjustments in 1927 under the title *On Pre-Islamic Literature (Fī al-Adab al-Jāhilī)*. Yet this was not the end to the uproar: Egypt's Prime Minister Ismā'īl Ṣidqī used this incident five years later, in 1931, to cause the dismissal of Ḥusayn from the University (idem, 155). And this time, it did take place. Luṭfī resigned in protest (Safran, 130, 131).
[129] Hourani, 327.
[130] Safran, 130.
[131] Idem, 153.
[132] Safran quoting Ḥusayn (*Fī al-Shi'r al-Jāhilī,* 10) on page 154.
[133] Safran, 155.

The years following his dismissal from the Cairo University, Ḥusayn spent much time fighting against Prime Minister Ismā'īl Ṣidqī who was the cause of his dismissal. He aligned himself actively with Ṣidqī's chief opponent: the Wafd party.[134] As a reward he was granted the position of Secretary-General in the Ministry of Education of the Naḥḥās government (1941-1945), and of Minister of Education in the last Wafd government (1950-1952) before the overthrow of monarchy. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn also became chairman of the cultural committee of the League of Arab States.[135]

In his famous work *The Future of Culture in Egypt (Mustaqbal al-Thaqāfa fī Miṣr)*, published in 1938, Ḥusayn wrote extensively about the importance of education (and he made clear: not the religious education system). He published this book two years after the Anglo-Egyptian treaty was signed in 1936. In *The Future of Culture in Egypt* Ḥusayn wrote a 'redefinition of the Egyptian nation', to be discussed extensively in the next section. As Minister of Education, Ḥusayn could partially realize his dream about education, which is elaborately described in the book: he was able to promote and realise free education for everyone, either rich or poor.[136]

Furthermore, Ḥusayn wrote frequently about the deep cultural and spiritual significance of Islam, above characterized as *Islamiyyāt.* He wrote, for example, the three volume book *In the Margin of the Prophet's Tradition ('Alā Hāmish al-Sīrah)*, the first volume being published in 1933.[137]

When Gamal Nasser came to power after the second Revolution in 1952, Ḥusayn lost his position in government, as did other Wafdist officials. However, he welcomed the downfall of the corrupt monarchy and supported Nasser's newfound nationalism.[138] In his later years, Ḥusayn served as president of the Arab language academy in Cairo.

Until his death in 1973 at the age of 83, Ḥusayn continued to write many novels, short stories, political articles, extended historical and critical studies and translations of Western classics. Albert Hourani writes in *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age. 1798-1939* that the majority and best of his works were written in the years between the First and Second World War: 'although since then, he has written much

[134] Although in his autobiography *A passage to France* he was very negative about this party (Ḥusayn, *A Passage to France,* 158).
[135] MacDonald, R.W. *The League of Arab States: A Study in Dynamics of Regional Organizations* (Princeton, 1965), 63.
[136] Safran, 130, 131.
[137] Furthermore, Malti-Douglas writes that also in *The Days* there are 'distinctive qualities of Ḥusaynian prose that echo certain Qur'anic forms, forms that appear rarely in other texts.' Moreover 'if *Al-Ayyām* is not dominated by the Qur'an as a topic of reference, it clearly shows the Qur'an's impact as a work of literature.' (Malti-Douglas, 155).
[138] Toth, J. *Sayyid Quṭb: The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual* (Oxford, 2013), 265.

and has become the elder statesman of Egyptian letters, he has received honorary doctorates and attended international seminars.'[139]

We can conclude: Ḥusayn travelled a long road, both personally and academically. He started from a very humble and traditional background (being a blind, relatively poor village boy, destined to be a *shaykh,* and later on a student at the Azhar), and ended up in the highest ranks of Parliament where he prevented the illiteracy of many Egyptians. Many twists and turns lie in between: many novels, essays and studies that shook op the traditional way of looking at things. We can now fully understand the quote of Safran at the beginning of this section. Stated slightly differently in *Blindness and Autobiography. Al-Ayyām of Ṭāhā Ḥusayn,* Malti-Douglas writes strikingly: 'From a modest rural background, the young man grew up to conquer the West educationally, then returned to his homeland and reshaped its intellectual and cultural future.'[140]

2.3 Ḥusayn's view of the Egyptian nation

In order to understand Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's concept of nationalism we need to engage with his vision of 'the East' and 'the West'. This – the conflict between the traditional and the modern, and between the East and the West – is one of the themes we can detect in *The Days*.[141] The life of Ḥusayn can be seen as a constant fight with his traditional background – pulling away from the village, from al-Azhar, and even from Egypt – and an ever-stronger attraction to the West – to the city, to the Cairo University and to France. 'The traditional' in *The Days* is often depicted as negative, and on many occasions we can read how Ṭāhā Ḥusayn breaks with tradition.[142] Throughout his autobiography we find this process of separation: 'going from village to city, from East to West, meant crossing boundaries and transcending limits.'[143]

Ḥusayn falls in love with the West. Not only did he marry a French woman: before this event we can read how he felt drawn to the modern '*tarbush* wearers' he came across in Cairo, to the Orientalist teachers and other seculars at the University, and later to the Europeans in France.[144] 'The West' in *The*

[139] Hourani, 327.
[140] Malti-Douglas, 8.
[141] Idem, 75ff.
[142] A striking example in *A Passage to France* is Ḥusayn's explanation to his brothers and sisters in the village that he 'he would return [from the West] having chosen for himself a French wife, educated, cultured, and who lived a refined and excellent life. She would not be ignorant, like them, nor heedless like them, nor immersed in a hard, crude life like them' (Ḥusayn, *A Passage to France*, 47). In this passage, the East and the West are diametrically opposed.
[143] Malti-Douglas, 88.
[144] Idem, 77.

Days is held up as a positive role model:[145] it is associated with culture and education, and with the freedom Ḥusayn finds after breaking out of his traditional social role.[146]

However, the West isn't always positively portrayed. For Malti-Douglas writes: 'The traditional is normally identified with the East, but the modern, though often synonymous with the West, *need not always be so* (it. AJ).'[147] Although Malti-Douglas doesn't give any examples of this last remark, there are instances I can think of. One of de discrepancies between the modern and the West, is the role the First World War plays in *A Passage to France.* Ḥusayn writes:

> All the years of the First World War I had spent in France and I had not lived through them in blissful ignorance of what was going on around me or oblivious of the implications of those evens. I do not remember a day passing in which I was not preoccupied with the course of the War and its reverberations in France and within the other belligerents. I read the French newspapers avidly, thinking long and hard about all that I read.[148]

It becomes clear in *The Days* that Ḥusayn finds the war in the West far from being modern, and standing in sharp contrast to modern scholarly freedom. The discrepancy between the traditional and the East can be found as well, for example when Egypt gained (more) independence in 1922: for Ḥusayn, this is a sign that Egypt can indeed be modern as the West.[149]

From *The Days* – which stops describing his life right after Egypt's independence of 1922 – we may well conclude that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn's nationalism has a *territorialist* inclination. This is in line with the 'territorial nationalist' framework of most intellectuals in the twenties, for in *The Days* the two-sided process is noticeable of Ḥusayn on the one hand wanting to eliminate European domination and striving for Egyptian independence and on the other, admiring the West, 'recognizing' European supremacy and drawing from it in the process of nation-building. Ḥusayn sees the West generally as the only model to lead Egypt forward.[150]

How did Ḥusayn's nationalism develop in the two following decades? In order to answer this question, we will explore his abovementioned book *The Future of Culture in Egypt,* published in 1938, two years

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[145] Malti-Douglas, 79.
[146] Idem, 83.
[147] Idem, 75.
[148] Ḥusayn, *A Passage to France,* 154. Besides the war being something Ḥusayn thinks and reads of daily, it is also the reason for his travelling back to Egypt against his will, causing him to postpone his studies, and even worse: destroying lives and houses in his neighbourhood, scaring him and his family.
[149] Idem, 134.
[150] And may I in this footnote draw a further, more psychological conclusion: isn't it true that Ḥusayn wants Egypt to follow *his* example? In his mind, he embodies the road he wants his country to travel as well: as *he* has left behind traditionalism and the East (the village, the Azhar, his traditional outlook on life) and figuratively 'crossed the canal', so should Egypt.

after the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty. This book forms Ḥusayn's redefinition of the Egyptian nation, and answers the question of the time: 'What to do with Egypt's independence?'

Ḥusayn explains his motivation for writing this book in its introduction. He mentions that the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian treaty in London, 'restored to Egypt a large measure of both her internal and external independence.' Secondly, Ḥusayn describes the experience he had in Paris during several conferences which he attended both as a representative of the Ministry of Education and the Egyptian University, and as an observer (his 'art of listening' comes to mind). Ḥusayn explains that during these conferences what he 'saw and heard stimulated a flow of ideas, feelings and hopes that simply had to be recorded'[151] for the youth of Egypt who deserve a better future than the previous (i.e. his own) generation. Ḥusayn writes in his introduction how the elder generation is anxious for the younger generation to 'win for their country the glory and honour as well as the comfort and ease that their elders could not achieve.'[152]

Ḥusayn observes the situation of Egypt – the independence due to the 1936 Treaty and therefore 'the revival of her honour',[153] and, inspired by European ideas, he writes a book on the future of Egypt. Already in the first lines of the book, Ḥusayn portrays the West as *the* model for Egypt. Even more so, *not* following this model in the past, according to Ḥusayn, was the reason for Egypt to have lost her independence. He notes: 'Had not Egypt neglected culture and science, willingly or unwillingly, she would not have lost her freedom and independence and would have been spared the struggle to regain them.'[154]

It is undeniable that Ḥusayn with this introduction continues his territorial nationalism of the twenties. And this line of the West being the role model for Egypt is elaborated upon in the rest of the book. What to do with Egypt's independence? Ḥusayn writes: 'We must not stand before freedom and independence in contented admiration. Like all advanced nations, Egypt must regard them as a means of attaining perfection.'[155] Only admiring the independence will get Egypt nowhere, and will be seen as a failure by the Europeans, who will 'magnify every shortcoming, however trivial, and say: they demanded their independence and struggled for it, but when they finally obtained it, they did not taste or enjoy it – they did not know how to use it!'[156] Ḥusayn thus wants the Egyptians not to feel inferior to

[151] Ḥusayn, Ṭ, *The Future of Culture in Egypt, translated from the Arabic by Sidney Glazer* (Washington D.C., 1954), vii, viii.
[152] Idem, viii.
[153] Idem, 1.
[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.

the Europeans, but wants them to 'take hold of our affairs with determination and vigour from today on.'[157] Again, in this quote it is clear that Ḥusayn highlights both sides of nationalism: he admires the West, but Egypt shouldn't remain stuck in this admiration, but should take action and get to work with her newly gained independence.

How to do this, 'vigorously taking hold of the Egyptian affairs of independence'? First of all, according to Ḥusayn, the fundamental question 'Is Egypt of the East or of the West?' needs to be answered. This is not a geographical question, but a cultural one: 'Is the Egyptian mind Eastern or Western in its imagination, perception, comprehension, and judgment?'[158] Ḥusayn's answer is clear: Egypt is part of the West, for it is easier for an Egyptian mind to understand an Englishman or Frenchman than a Chinese or Japanese.[159] Ḥusayn explains how Egypt in earliest times had no serious contact with 'the Far Eastern mind', nor with the Persian, but with the Greek.[160]

When Egypt belongs to the West, is it not a problem then that Egypt mostly is a Muslim country that speaks Arabic, and the West isn't? Ḥusayn explains that religious and linguistic unity do not necessarily go hand in hand with political unity. The Muslims realized this a long time ago, according to Ḥusayn: 'They established their states on the basis of practical interests, abandoning religion, language and race as exclusively determining factors.'[161] Ḥusayn writes subsequently: The fact that Islam spread over the world, and that Egypt made it her religion, didn't change her mentality. He compares it to the European situation: the European mentality didn't change because of Christianity, which originated in the East and then spread over Europe.[162]

Ḥusayn even holds that Egypt *has always been* part of Europe as far as intellectual and cultural life is concerned.[163] He concludes: 'Wherever we may search, whatever line of investigation we may pursue, we shall not find any evidence to justify the thesis that there is a fundamental difference between the European and Egyptian minds.'[164] The fact that Egypt is now drawing closer and closer to Europe and is becoming an integral part of her, Ḥusayn only sees as a confirmation of his thesis that Egypt is in fact European: the process of Egypt taking over more and more from Europe (building railroads, telegraph lines, telephones, sitting at the table, eating with knife and fork, wearing European clothes, adopting

[157] Ḥusayn, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 1.
[158] Idem, 3.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Idem, 4.
[161] Idem, 5.
[162] Idem, 7.
[163] Idem, 9.
[164] Idem, 10.

the European system of government and 'the European ideal becoming our ideal', etc.[165]) 'would be much more difficult than it is if the Egyptian mind were basically different from the European.'[166]

In short: what should the Egyptians do with their independence? The answer is simple: she should follow the Europeans – 'We must literally and forthrightly do everything that they do.'[167] Concerning 'administration, legislation, and education Egypt shouldn't behave differently'.[168] This also meant for Ḥusayn that Egyptians have to let go of the idea that there are nations created to rule and to be ruled: 'the principle of equality in rights and duties which we want to prevail in Egypt must also govern our relations with Europe', he says.[169] A new Egyptian generation should be raised that has no idea of the humiliation and shame 'that was the lot of their fathers: this can be done only by building education on a solid foundation.'[170] This new generation needs to be brought up with both Western ideas *and* with a love for their own country: Arabic language and literature.[171]

We can see here that the compromise the territorial nationalists made in the twenties between elimination *and* admiration and copying of the West, is still at work here, in 1938. On the one hand, Ḥusayn wants to eliminate European domination, for it caused much shame and humiliation for the Egyptians of his and previous generations. He wants to empower them by stressing the importance of their own country, the Arabic language and literature. On the other hand, the domination has to be cast off by *using European ideals* like the use of scholarly methods, equality and the notion that no nation from the outset is to be ruled, and no nation is destined to be a ruler.

One can wonder then whether *every* European issue is to be regarded as positive and should function as a model for Egypt, and whether everything typically Egyptian should be relinquished. 'No', says Ḥusayn clearly, for he doesn't approve of the European 'evils'. He pleads for a selective approach to the European culture, and not 'wholesale and indiscriminate borrowing'.[172] What thereby shouldn't be forgotten, Ḥusayn explains, is that this selective adopting already took place from the start of Islam: as soon as this religion crossed the Arabian frontiers, 'it came into contact with foreign civilizations whose

[165] Ḥusayn, *The Future of Culture in Egypt,* 11. As for Ḥusayn's quote of 'the European ideal becoming our ideal': what he means are the Renaissance and Enlightenment ideals (which Egypt would possess as well if the Ottomans hadn't influenced Egypt in a negative way and prevented the Egyptian renaissance). He writes: 'They [the Europeans] began their new life in the 15th century, while we were delayed by the Ottoman Turks until the 19th century. If God had preserved us from the Ottoman conquest, we should have remained in unbroken touch with Europe and shared in her renaissance. This would certainly have fashioned a different kind of civilization from the one in which we are now living' (idem, 13).
[166] Idem, 12.
[167] Idem, 15.
[168] Idem, 13.
[169] Idem, 15.
[170] Idem, 17.
[171] Idem, 92.
[172] Idem, 17, 18.

relationship to the Muslims and Arabs at that time was the same as Europe's is to us now.'[173] The Muslim Arabs were not deterred by certain unpleasant features, and copied some other, positive features from the non-Muslim Persians and Byzantine Greeks. The features were incorporated into their own heritage, and contributed to 'the glorious Islamic culture of the Ummayyads and Abbassids which our conservatives are seeking to recreate.'[174] Therefore, religious life will not suffer from contact with Europe.

So in what 'nationalist category' can we place Ḥusayn in the thirties and forties? I find that in these later decades, Ḥusayn can still be seen as a territorial nationalist, with certain (Arab nationalist) supra-Egyptian tendencies. As we have seen, Ḥusayn in the twenties was an exemplary advocate of the territorial nationalism, basing Egypt's nation-building on her geographical and ancient history. This line of thought is still very visible in *The Future of Culture*: Egypt is a Mediterranean nation, oriented towards the West, not to the East. In this work, Ḥusayn tried to combat the anti-Western ideas of many other Egyptianists of his time. Gershoni and Jankowski therefore call this work 'the most prominent attempt to challenge the emerging Easternist paradigm in the 1930s.'[175]

However, there are many supra-Egyptian changes noticeable in this and other works, most important of which is his emphasis on the *Arab* nation, *Arab* literature and *Arab* language. For example, Ḥusayn writes: 'The Arabic language is not a foreign language for us. It is our language. It is a thousand and one times closer to us than the language of the ancient Egyptians.'[176] And in *The Future of Culture* he writes about the Arabic language being 'our national language' and 'a component shaping our patriotism and our national personality.'[177] Ḥusayn finds that Arab cultural revival should play an important role in the education of the next generation (and exactly this he promotes when he starts working for Egypt's Ministry of Education). Furthermore, wishing to promote the Arab cultural revival, he started from the thirties onwards to write books in the *Islamiyyāt* genre.[178] In his *In the Margin of the Prophet's Tradition* he notes that 'nothing in the life of the ancients was worthwhile in and of itself; its entire importance was in what it could provide as inspiration for moderns.'[179] In other words: modern Egyptian culture should be based on the foundation of the (Mediterranean/Arab) past.

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[173] Ḥusayn, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 18.
[174] Ibid.
[175] Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 51.
[176] Idem, 128 quoting Ḥusayn (*'Ila al-Ustadh Tawfiq al-Hakim',* 1933).
[177] Ḥusayn, *The Future of Culture in Egypt*, 83. Ḥusayn's 'territorialist Arab nationalism' shows overlap with the Islamic nationalists of his days: the emphasis on Egypt's Arabness and the Arab language. He shares with the integralist nationalist the view that *Egypt* should lead the Arab nation. In *The Future of Culture* Ḥusayn writes: 'Something which no one can doubt is that God has bestowed upon Egypt the power to revive and spread culture such as has not been granted to any other Arab nation' (idem, 149).
[178] Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 68.
[179] Ibid.

Islam in Ḥusayn's works doesn't play the important role that it has for many supra-Egyptianists of his time. In fact, in 1933 he wrote in one of his columns that Egypt suffered 'injustice' and 'aggression' at the hands of various invading groups: '*the Arabs included* (it. AJ).'[180] In other words: Ḥusayn equated the Muslim Arabs with 'other invaders' of Egypt, which caused fierce criticism. Ḥusayn refuted this by maintaining that he didn't mean to say that he opposed Arab revival or unity. However, he wanted to show that the Arab rule over Egypt had originally been beneficial, but later 'deteriorated into a mixture of good and bad, justice and injustice.'[181] In that context a critique of *The Future of Culture in Egypt* wasn't too long in coming. His opponents accused Ḥusayn of having ignored the tremendous influence of the Arabic language and that of Islam on the Egyptian nation: 'it was these forces, rather than a more tangential linkage with the West, which were the determinants of Egyptian national culture and collective self-image.'[182] As will become clear in the next chapters, Sayyid Quṭb criticizes Ḥusayn precisely on this point.

2.4 A pro-Axis Egypt: 'not every *sulṭān* is an *amīr*!'

In this fourth section it is time to examine the 'European evils' and Ḥusayn's attitude towards them. What was his response to Nazism? Did he redefine Egypt with the title: *'A pro-Axis Egypt!'* or with *'A pro-Axis Egypt?'.* Furthermore: was there a connection between his response to Nazism and his nationalism, discussed in the previous paragraph?

The question whether or not Ḥusayn had a pro-Axis Egypt in mind, will be dealt with first. We commence with the last part of his autobiography, *A Passage to France*, where Ḥusayn looks back on his life after 1922. As to his political stance, he remarks: 'I myself looked on neutrality at that time as both cowardly and hypocritical. The fact was that I was absorbed, any way, in politics, caught in its fires. Whatever the consequences might be, I would bear them. Ever since those days, has not my whole life taken its natural direction from my commitment to politics, my entire and ardent immersion in them?'[183] These words, applied to the 'pro-Axis?-question' proved to be true: *not every* sulṭān *was an* amīr for Ḥusayn, and Hitler certainly was not. So to answer the question directly here at the outset of this section: Ṭāhā Ḥusayn didn't imagine a pro-Axis Egypt, nor in fact did he remain neutral on this question (as the quote

[180] Ḥusayn wrote this in his regular column in *Kawkab al-Sharq*, on the 28th of August, 1933 (idem, 28).
[181] Idem, 30 (Ḥusayn in a later column in *Kawkab al-Sharq*: the 8th of September, 1933).
[182] Gershoni, Jankowski, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation*, 126.
[183] Ḥusayn, *A Passage to France*, 161.

above already indicates). Ḥusayn was one of the many Egyptian intellectuals who rejected Nazism point blank and who fought German totalitarianism intensely.

On many occasions in his life this attitude becomes clear. For example, after the Berlin book burnings in the 1930s in which the Nazis destroyed 'subversive' books (written by, amongst others, Jewish authors), Ḥusayn called for international protests.[184] In 1943, in the midst of the Second World War, he visited the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, following an invitation by its President Judah Magnes. There he fiercely spoke out against Nazism, showing great empathy for the fate of the European Jews, who at the time were being persecuted and murdered by the Nazis.[185] In November that same year, Ḥusayn held a lecture about Arab-Jewish relations at the Alexandria Jewish Community Centre. This was criticized for he did this at a time when the Palestine issue had become a hot item for the Egyptian public.[186] Furthermore, Ḥusayn helped Jewish scholars who were deprived of their jobs in Germany, by offering them a teaching position at the Cairo University and tried bringing them from Europe to Egypt.[187] Moreover, he dedicated himself to the magazine *Al-Kātib al-Misrī* (*The Egyptian Writer)*, which was established by the Ashkenazi Harari family, and was published monthly by Ḥusayn. It was a liberal platform where Jewish, European and Arabic ideas and culture had their place. In a short time (1946-1948) the magazine became one of the most important cultural magazines of Egypt. When war was waged in 1948, Ḥusayn was criticised for publishing a so-called Zionist magazine. However, he remained committed to the magazine, until the time the Harari family was forced to cancel further editions.[188]

In these many deeds, a sharp protest is voiced against Nazism and the persecution of Jews in Europe. However, in this section I want to mainly focus on Ḥusayn's own *writings* for Ḥusayn was, above all else, a writer. He was called 'the doyen of modern Arabic literature' for a reason! As a journalist he produced many articles in magazines and newspapers, as a scholar he wrote many academic writings and popular works, and as a novelist, he wrote many books. In many of these writings, an even fiercer rejection of Nazism and the persecution of Jews in Europe is visible.[189] I would like two discuss two of these writings

[184] Lepenis, W. *Kafka von Arabien. Wie ein deutscher Jude aus Prag zur Identifikationsfigur für arabische Intellektuelle wurde,* consulted on the second of February 2017 on: <https://www.welt.de/welt_print/kultur/article7107156/Kafka-von-Arabien.html>
[185] Ibid.
[186] Beinin, J. *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry. Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (New York, 2005), 65, 66.
[187] Kamil, O. *Der Holocaust im Arabischen Gedächtnis* (Göttingen, 2012), 174, 175. Two of these Jewish scholars were Israel Ben Zeev (before changing his name from 'Wolfensohn') and Paul Kraus. Ben Zeev studied in 1922 under Ṭāhā Ḥusayn at the Cairo University, and after receiving a doctorate in Germany, became a teacher at the Cairo University with the help of Ḥusayn. Ḥusayn offered Kraus a chair in Arabic literature, philology, and Semitic languages (idem, 175).
[188] Idem, 175.
[189] Kamil agrees: 'Hussain hob in seinen Schriften stets die universal Bedeutung der europäischen Aufklärung hervor und vertrat die Auffassung, dass die europäische Moderne ein Vorbild für Ägypten sein könne. Doch

– although very different in style – in this section. The first one is Ḥusayn's novel *From Cairo to Beirut* (written in 1946), and the second is a book review of Hermann Rauschning's work *Hitler Told Me* (published in 1939 and reviewed by Ḥusayn in March 1940).

From Cairo to Beirut (1946)

From Cairo to Beirut was published in the above-mentioned *Jewish* magazine *al-Kātib al-Misrī* in 1946.[190] The times were hectic: a few years earlier the Second World War had started, with major impact on Egypt and in 1945, Egypt had declared war on the Axis powers. In 1946 then, when the war was over, the Egyptians and the Arab world deeply wished for independence from the British. Furthermore, from 1936 onwards Egypt had become deeply involved in the Palestine problem, and the relatively good relationship between Egyptian Muslims and Jews subsequently deteriorated in the second half of the thirties. Moreover, supra-Egyptian nationalism had become mainstream under the new *effendiyya* of Egypt who desired to redefine Egypt based on the Arab and Islamic past.

In the midst of this situation, Ḥusayn wrote *From Cairo to Beirut.* The work is a literary travel log, and elaborates upon a boat journey to Beirut, the passengers on board and Beirut itself. The section of interest here is the imaginary arrival in the harbour of Haifa of a large group of refugees – European Jews. Although this section doesn't play a prominent role in the continuation of the book, it *does* say a lot about Ḥusayn's attitude towards the fate of the Jews in Europe and the situation in Palestine.[191] He paints the horrific picture of the state of being of the refugees setting foot on Palestine:

> Haifa erreichten wir am nächsten Tag. Welch einen traurigen Anblick bot uns dieser Hafen. Eine Szene, die in der Seele Schmerzen, Wut, aber auch Zuneigung hervorrief. Ein Schiff trug etwa tausend geschwächte jüdische Einwanderer: Kinder und Knabe, die die Pubertät noch nicht erreicht hatten, und Frauen, denen schweres Leid zugefügt worden war.[192]

He then turns to the Palestinians and explains that they didn't ask for this situation, other places in the world exist where these Jews could be received, and find refuge and protection. Now they have to watch how British soldiers with their weapons exercise their power, guarding the harbour and making sure the

Hussains Begeisterung für Europa hinderte ihn nicht daran, die dunklen Seiten der europäischen Moderne zu erkennen. Er setzte sich gegen den Nationalismus und die Verfolgung der Juden in Europa ein' (idem, 174, 175).

[190] The Arabic title of this work is *Min al-Qāhira ilā Bayrūt.* The chosen section is the ninth chapter, pages 3-13.

[191] For Albert Hourani writes that many ideas on politics and society during Egypt's monarchy were expounded by 'masters of Arabic style' (such as Ṭāhā Ḥusayn), for the most part in magazine articles, 'or by implication in novels and plays' (Hourani, 325). This justifies using a novel to discuss Ḥusayn's response to Nazism.

[192] Kamil, 175. The only traceable translation of *From Cairo to Beirut* exists in the German language.

arrival of the poor refugees goes well. Palestine, according to Ḥusayn, is forced by the imperialists to give these people asylum.[193]

Then comes the turning point in the story: the refugees start singing, with broken voices. Ḥusayn writes that he wondered about the reason why they did this, and then gives an answer: *'Ich weiss nur, dass ihr Singen die Seelen [der arabischen Bewohner Palästinas] mit Wut und Zorn, aber auch mit Mitleid und Erbarmen erfüllte.'* At first, Ḥusayn explains, the Palestinian workers in the harbour feel angry and powerless; they criticize the power of the Allies who made it possible for a French boat to moor in Haifa allowing the group of Jews to move to Palestine. But then, he writes, when witnessing this heart-breaking scene: *'Der Kummer schwand und die Last auf den Herzen verflog.'*[194]

This section shows how Ḥusayn, in the midst of the anti-Palestinian sentiments of his days and the worsening of Arab-Jewish relations, makes a distinction between the empathy for Jewish Holocaust victims on the one hand, and the Jewish home in Israel and British occupation on the other. He isn't too positive about the latter, but shows empathy for the former. Can we consider this fragment to be a plea to the Palestinians and other Arabs to have compassion for the Holocaust victims and their move to Palestine? Who knows. In any case, the Jews are described by Ḥusayn as victims of a horrible, unjust war and their fate in the hands of the Nazis as horrific – a sight that made *'der Kummer schwand'* and the burden on the Palestinian hearts vanish.

Review of Rauschning's book Hitler Told Me (1940)

An even more explicit rejection of Nazism is to be found in a review of the book *Hitler Told Me,* written by Hermann Rauschning in 1939. Rauschning was initially a member of the Nazi party, but later opposed its ideology. On March 18, 1940, Ḥusayn published this review (four years after the signing of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty, and two years after writing *The Future of Culture in Egypt)*. The first lines of the review are:

> If you took it upon yourself to lift the lid concealing the conscience of that man, you would see that it is scarlet in colour, dripping with blood, even though he does not acknowledge the existence of an agency called the conscience. He maintains that to believe in it is mere illusion, to obey its injunctions mere weakness, and any compassion felt at the sight of blood mere folly. And if you opened his heart, you would see only a hard, impenetrable, unfeeling, inert rock, a sterile, crude block, cruel with a gratuitous cruelty.[195]

[193] Kamil, 176.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ḥusayn, Ṭ. *Review of Rauschning's Hitler Told Me,* in: Meddeb, A., Stora, B. *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day* (Princeton, 2013), 370.

From what follows, it becomes perfectly clear: Ḥusayn speaks about Adolf Hitler here. Already in 1940, Ḥusayn harshly condemns him, for he has a conscience 'dripping with blood', he feels 'no compassion', he finds 'nothing respectable or sacred', and he is an 'enemy of the spirit, humanity, of all the ideals of civilization'. Hitler knows 'only instincts', he is 'pushed forward by a blind and stupid force' and 'will go wherever its wild fantasies lead it' and he doesn't have 'any scruples about shutting down the universities, persecuting scholars, in order to place scholarship and instruction in his exclusive service.'[196]

Furthermore, Ḥusayn writes, Hitler thinks he has come into existence to lead Germany, and with it the world, toward a new phase of their destiny: 'Every means can be used to that end, whatever the difficulties and obstacles.'[197] As to that last note, Ḥusayn mentions the many sacrifices that are made, in Hitler's attempts to achieve his goals of German world domination: the vanishing of one's individuality, the suffering of hunger and death, thousands of atrocities, and the killing of millions:

> The individual exists only insofar as he places himself in the service of the German people. What does it matter if he suffers from hunger, thirst, woes of every kind? What does it matter if he is sacrificed, if he dies or is subjected to a thousand atrocities, provided the Hitlerian regime takes root in Germany? What does it matter if millions of others are also sacrifices so that German domination of the world can be established?[198]

Next, Ḥusayn points to the origins of the disaster of Hitler's power: the lack of instruction and a neglected education. These causes produce 'despicable results in some individuals, who take advantage of a crisis situation to seize power and to exercise it in a despotic manner.'[199] Moreover, Ḥusayn notes that another lesson to be learnt is that true civilization cannot be found in material progress of for example industry, commerce or scientific research. Above all, civilization is to be found in a morality 'diffusing itself to souls, hearts and intelligences: one that prepares them to resist evil and to shun it.'[200]

In his concluding notes, Ḥusayn tells how he 'gives thanks to God' that he didn't wait until the declaration of war to hate Hitler and his regime, but that he had hated them since the moment they made their appearance. He calls his readers to stand up against Hitler and Nazism as well, 'and to mobilize every resource against both so that humanity may one day recover its civilization intact and its conscience in integrity.'[201]

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[196] Ḥusayn, *Review of Rauschning's Hitler Told Me,* 370, 371.
[197] Idem, 370.
[198] Idem, 371.
[199] Ibid.
[200] Ibid.
[201] Ibid.

From these two selected writings, but also from other writings and events in his life, it becomes clear that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn rejected Nazism and the persecution and murdering of many Jews as a consequence. Israel Gershoni writes in *Beyond Anti-Semitism* that Ḥusayn furthermore was concerned about the destruction of intellectual pluralism and cultural heterogeneity by Nazism. He was afraid of people being pushed to speak with only one voice, and to be completely submissive to the will of the state, or better: to the *Führer.*[202] We have come across this fear in Ḥusayn's review of *Hitler Told Me,* in which he wrote that the individual exists only insofar as he places himself in the service of the German people. Gershoni adds that Ḥusayn understood very well that individual creators in the totalitarian regimes had lost their own individual artistic personalities and were absorbed by the impersonal, national collective.[203] In other words: 'Ḥusayn viewed the totalitarian regimes in Italy and Germany as anti-humanistic and indeed, anti-cultural, and at "total war" with human civilization as it developed from the Enlightenment onwards.'[204]

[202] Gershoni, *Beyond Anti-Semitism,* 15. Gershoni refers not to the review of *Hitler Told Me,* but to another essay published on the 1st of February 1937 in *Al-Hilāl*, where Ḥusayn established a division between the German and Italian 'camp of cultural destruction' and 'the democratic camp', which was a camp friendly to democratic, pluralistic culture, and where genuine intellectual and artistic creations could take shape. Ḥusayn's thesis was clear: 'Only in a "democratic environment" could an individual creator find the freedom and independence necessary to defend his individual autonomy of thought and creation (…). In a "fascist environment", on the contrary, creators and thinkers were programmed to create, think and work exclusively for the collective ideals and goals of the state or nation, "goals" which were considered "divine"' (ibid.).
[203] Idem, 15.
[204] Idem, 16.

CHAPTER THREE

Sayyid Quṭb: blinded by hatred?

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss Sayyid Quṭb, a controversial Egyptian intellectual, who maintained a very different vision on nationalism than did his contemporary Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. Quṭb's radical writings inspired Osama bin Laden, who was a disciple of Muḥammad Quṭb (Sayyid's brother) in Jedda. Bin Laden familiarized himself with Sayyid Quṭb's writings between 1974 and 1978 and incorporated these later texts in his training programs in all the camps that he established in Afghanistan.[205] In an attempt to understand Quṭb's concerns, fears, and hopes, I will briefly present his biography in the following section, looking specifically at the way his life took shape against the background of the Egyptian and world events described in chapter one. Next, in 3.3, I will discuss Quṭb's reconceptualization of the 'future of culture of Egypt' and its diversion from that of Ḥusayn. Finally, in the last section I will explain the role played by the Axis in his redefinition of the Egyptian nation.

3.2 Biography: becoming a foreigner in the world

Sayyid Quṭb's life (1906-1966) 'unfolded against the backdrop of one of the most colourful and eventful periods in modern Egyptian history', John Calvert correctly states in his book *Sayyid Quṭb and the Origins of Radical Islamism.*[206] Sayyid Quṭb too collected his memories of this period of time in *A Child from the Village.* In what follows I will draw on Quṭb's account of his Egyptian childhood, as I did in the case of Ḥusayn.

Sayyid Quṭb was indeed 'a child from the village': he was born in 1906 in the village Mushā, located in Upper Egypt, about 160 kilometres south of Cairo. About forty years later, in 1945 and 1946, he wrote his memoirs. Meanwhile, he had become a prominent member of the secular intellectual and literary elite. He was a poet and literary critic, and an author who wrote on educational and social matters.[207] In other words, he was a 'Muslim Everyman':[208] an average Egyptian *effendi*, without any extreme opinions – yet. In his forties, a few years after having written his memoirs, Quṭb turned to Islamist

[205] Küntzel, 125.
[206] Calvert, J. *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (London, 2010), 11.
[207] Calvert, J. *Translators' Introduction of:* Quṭb, S. *A Child from the Village* (New York, 2016, originally 1946), xiii.
[208] Nettler, R. *Past Trials and present Tribulations. A Muslim Fundamentalist's View of the Jews* (Oxford, 1987), 25.

ideology, for which he is mostly known today. In *A Child from the Village,* however, this ideology has not yet crystallized.

In his memoirs Sayyid Quṭb describes his life from the time he was six years old up until the time he left the village for Cairo at the age of fifteen. We learn that he was born in the sort of family that was able to participate in and profit from the modernization of Egypt.[209] Both his parents came from respected families in the village. Sayyid's father was an educated man, 'who read the press and subscribed to the daily newspaper. And he was a member of the village committee of the Nationalist Party.'[210] Later on in his memoirs we learn that Sayyid's father was forced to sell parts of the family's land in order to cover their debts.[211] Sayyid's mother hoped that by sending her son to the new state elementary school where he was enrolled at age six, Sayyid would become an *effendi,* and the family fortunes would be restored.[212]

John Calvert in his *Translator's Introduction* points to Quṭb's concern for social justice expressed in Islamic terms in *A Child from the Village.*[213] This concern would become an important feature of his later more radical Islamist ideology, on which I will elaborate below. The most striking example of this concern I found in Quṭb's empathy for a group of 'poor foreigners that would come every year to work in the fields' of his family.[214] He cared deeply for these miserable workers, and made sure they were all right.[215] In the final pages of his memoirs, Quṭb remarks:

> He [Quṭb] learned many things, whose profound effects on his soul and whose harsh impact on his feelings have only become evident as he now reflects on them from time to time, and feels shame in the depth of his soul and contempt for himself and his people. He is a robber. He has robbed these 'foreigners' and many millions like them who create the wealth of the Nile Valley yet go hungry. He is a robber! (…) This was the feeling that always kept coming over him whenever he sat down to eat rich food or sweet fruit or luxurious sweets or whenever he enjoyed the simple pleasures of life amidst the millions of deprived.[216]

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[209] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xvi.
[210] Quṭb, *A Child from the Village*, 18.
[211] Idem, 126, 127.
[212] Idem, 130. After having attended the *kuttāb* for one day to please the village *shaykh,* Sayyid Quṭb noted the great contrast between the two schools. Whereas at the modern state school he was used to 'sitting in the school chairs with their receptacles for books, implements, notepads, and his fine writing slate, in the *kuttāb,* by contrast, there were no seats with book receptacles, nor bells, classrooms, books, inkwells, chairs' (idem, 19). Quṭb referred to the *kuttāb* as 'that filthy place' (idem, 20). The state school however, was called 'the sacred school', and 'a holy place, like a mihrab for prayer' (idem, 21). Furthermore, Quṭb informs his readers that as a young boy, he organized Qur'ān reciting competitions against some of the students of the traditional *kuttāb,* for he wanted to counter the argument that state school students weren't able to memorize the Qur'ān (Calvert, *Translators' Introduction,* xvi). Quṭb writes: 'Often the school emerged victorious. These victories made him feel overwhelmingly elated' (ibid.).
[213] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction,* xiii.
[214] Quṭb, *A Child from the Village*, 115.
[215] Idem, 116.
[216] Idem, 124.

Furthermore, Calvert explains how below the surface Quṭb calls for a reform and modernization of the village. The sacred state school that he had attended was a step in the right direction, but Quṭb has many more improvements in mind, especially in the areas of land reform and health care. However, when the British-dominated government implemented modernization strategies, the villagers did not often appreciate this, since their sensibilities and social and economic realities weren't taken into account.[217] In other words: modernization is not always a good thing. It has problematic aspects and can lead to psychological, social and cultural stresses.[218] In his memoirs, Quṭb teaches his readers that, whereas the village formerly perceived the government as remote, the British-dominated government imposed new structures of criminal law and agricultural administration, and intervened regularly in local village affairs.[219]

Samia Kholoussi in *Fallahin: The Mud Bearers of Egypt's Liberal Age* shares another insight, noting that Quṭb shows deep compassion for the peasants in his depiction of their servitude to the unsympathetic urban officials appointed to inspect, discipline, and administer the villagers.[220] The 'life-style gap between the urban and the rural constituted a common feature of Quṭb's discourse', according to Kholoussi.[221] A case in point of the state negatively interfering with village affairs is that of the government's confiscation of village weapons. Quṭb describes the event as follows:

> The village woke up terrified by the neighing of horses, the clatter of weapons, and the heavy steps of soldiers who were occupying the whole area. (…) It was a campaign for the confiscation of weapons! A campaign of 200 soldiers led by an officer who had pledged to the authorities that he would confiscate arms from all of the villages of the province. (…) Bullets began to resound about their heads: (…) these bullets were meant to terrorize, confuse, and unnerve. (…) More than a quarter of a century has passed since that incident. But the child still remembers it as if it happened yesterday. Like every child, man, and woman, he had been terrified.[222]

Furthermore, a process in which Quṭb respectfully distanced himself from the village and 'the village way of thinking' can be detected in Quṭb's memoirs: an 'awakening' if you will. A striking example of this awakening is the topic of the *'afārīt* (singular: *'ifrīt*): the 'demons' who were thought to haunt uninhabited or isolated locations. Quṭb dedicated one whole chapter in *A Child from the Village* to these beings. He writes that 'the naïve village imagination explained phenomena and events in terms of deeply rooted images and phantoms, frightening and mysterious the dark gloom.'[223] Quṭb and his family

[217] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xxxii.
[218] Idem, xv.
[219] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 41.
[220] Kholoussi, S. *Fallahin: The Mud Bearers of Egypt's Liberal Age,* in: Goldschmidt, A. *Re-Envisioning Egypt. 1919-1952* (New York, 2005), 298.
[221] Idem, 298.
[222] Quṭb, *A Child from the Village*, 101-112.
[223] Idem, 62.

participated in this village imagination ascribing the death of his baby brother to the *'afārīt.* He describes that later on however, after being introduced to the 'Great Tradition' of texts and theological schools,[224] he left behind village superstition and learnt that the death of his brother was in fact caused by a tetanus infection.[225] Although Quṭb experienced 'enlightenment', he could not and would not leave the village mindset behind: you can take the boy out of the village, but you can't take the village out of the boy, one could say. Quṭb writes that he would always remain a child from the village:

> Days passed. He left everything in the village and lived his life in the city and broadened his education. The myth of the *'afārīt* became a source of amusement and jest. But inquire of his dreams and visions today. They will tell you that the myth of the *'afārīt* is more deeply embedded in his soul than education, and that the *'afārīt* that inhabited his mind in childhood and youth will inhabit his imagination forever.[226]

As for the attitude towards Britain in *A Child from the Village,* Quṭb tells how as a young boy he was already a proponent of Egypt's struggle for independence. He describes how, by the time he had reached school age, the demands for Egyptian independence had become commonplace. His father shared these feelings: as a young boy he would see that supporters of the Nationalist Party would gather at the family house to discuss politics and the resistance to Britain, and he felt that 'something was going to happen.'[227] Indeed, in 1919, something *did* happen: the First Revolution took place. Quṭb 'exploded in enthusiasm', Sa'd Zaghlūl was heralded as a hero, and Quṭb delivered his patriotic poetry to whomever was prepared to listen.[228]

Quṭb's memoirs end when, at the age of fifteen, he travelled to Cairo to attend secondary school. We learn how this shift was delayed because of Revolution, because of major demonstrations against British rule and in support of nationalist Sa'd Zaghlūl.[229] In Cairo, Quṭb lived with his uncle who was a journalist, and completed secondary school. From 1929 onwards he attended the teacher training institution *Dār al-'Ulūm,* which can be characterized as the middle way between the traditional education of the Azhar, and the modern University of Cairo (both of which Ḥusayn had attended). Quṭb studied Arabic language and literature, English and several other subjects and graduated in 1933.[230]

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[224] In contrast to the 'Little Tradition' of the largely non-literate rural population, Calvert explains, using categories of anthropologist Robert Redfield (Calvert, *Translators' Introduction,* xxvii).
[225] Quṭb, *A Child from the Village*, 66.
[226] Idem, 77.
[227] Quṭb writes: 'It seemed that certain feelings were beginning to ferment. He remembers that now and realized that even though he was a child he, like the men, had the feeling that some as yet ill-defined thing was going to happen. He did not know what it was or how it would occur, but that it would definitely happen. Secret meetings took place at his house' (idem, 92).
[228] Idem, 96.
[229] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xvi.
[230] Nettler, 26.

In that same year his father died. How then, should the 27-year old Sayyid support his family? His answer must have been: 'by remaining on my career path.'[231] After his graduation, Quṭb joined the Ministry of Education, a job offered by none other than Ṭāhā Ḥusayn. Quṭb first worked as a teacher of elementary school for seven years, initially in Cairo and then in the provinces.[232] The troubles created by the Second World War didn't hinder him from advancing his career: in 1940, the Ministry promoted him to the office of General Culture, and a month later to the office of Translation and Statistics. In 1944 however, Quṭb was demoted to the rank of school inspector. John Calvert suggests that the reason for this was Quṭb's increasingly negative attitude towards the Wafd: 'in Old Regime Egypt, political affiliation could impact one's social standing.'[233] Only after a full year was Quṭb allowed to return to the General Culture office.[234] Moreover, Sayyid Quṭb had become an *effendi*: he had lived up to his mother's wish.[235]

As a 'poet and man of letters', Quṭb published his first article in a literary journal in 1924, and in the next decades, he wrote more than 130 poems, 500 articles and essays, and nine books,[236] all in the fields of literary, social and political criticism.[237] As for his political criticism, John Calvert writes: 'After the Second World War, (…) Sayyid Quṭb and many others in his circle began to speak out forcefully and passionately for full national independence and social justice against the continuing European imperialism and the political corruption, social stress, and economic inequality that would soon bring about the collapse of the old regime.'[238] It was in these years that Quṭb published his memoirs, in which social reform concerns lie very close to the surface.

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[231] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism,* 61.
[232] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xvii.
[233] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 105.
[234] Ibid. James Toth describes this incident of Quṭb's degradation to school inspector. He writes that the minister of Education had wanted to dismiss Quṭb after he learnt that Quṭb wrote political writings for the opposition Sa'dist Party. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn, a consultant to the Ministry at the time, intervened. He called Quṭb in his office and discussed the issue. Quṭb was 'more than ready to resign rather than submit to government pressure. Ḥusayn reminded him however of his financial and family difficulties – astonishing that this was so well known to Ḥusayn – but also, in the process, reinforced Quṭb's subordinate status' (Toth, 295). Ḥusayn then threatened Quṭb with house arrest should he quit, but Quṭb remained obstinate, not caring whether he left or not. Ḥusayn told him that he would intervene on his behalf. The result was that Quṭb became a school inspector, as mentioned above. Toth explains that this incident 'indicates Ḥusayn's condescending effort to belittle and dominate Quṭb. Such unpleasant conversations could only have alienated Quṭb to Ḥusayn's position and perspective' (ibid.). This alienation from Ḥusayn's view will become clear in the following paragraph.
[235] Calvert notes: 'In both his work and his mode of living, he was every inch an effendi. Like others of his social class, he drew a modest salary. In public, he wore a European suit and tie, although in the comfort of his home he would slip into a *jallabiyya*. However, even at home he would eat with a knife and fork at a table rather than with his fingers from a large tray of food, as was the custom in the villages. (…) He now worked towards fulfilling his true calling, that of a poet and man of letters' (Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 62).
[236] Toth, 16.
[237] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xvii.
[238] Idem, xviii.

In his early years in Cairo, Quṭb had become a member of the Wafd party. Later on, he shifted to the Sa'dist party, because he was very disappointed with the Wafd's willingness to cooperate with Britain – especially after the February 4th Incident.[239] However, Quṭb became increasingly critical of the political regime, which in his eyes was incapable of resolving Egypt's problematic relationship with colonial power Great Britain, diminishing the gap between rich and poor in Egypt, and supporting the Arabs in Palestine.[240] From 1945 onwards, he therefore belonged to no party.

It may well be that his critique of the political establishment was the reason for him being sent on a study tour to the United States from November 1948 to August 1950.[241] Calvert writes how 'it is variously claimed that he was sent on this tour to avoid being arrested for his views, to get him out of the way, and to expose him directly to the West in the hopes that this exposure would moderate his opinions.'[242] This last goal was not realized. On the contrary: his negative opinions regarding the imperialist West only became stronger. What Quṭb encountered in the United States was – from his point of view – a low moral and cultural state of its people. Calvert writes how Quṭb returned to Egypt 'all the more set in the direction his life had begun to move. This direction was toward Islamic activism.'[243]

Matthias Küntzel defines Islamism as 'a system of ideas which reads everything that happens according to a binary logic: everywhere, the embattled "good" (Islam) is engaged in an existential struggle with "evil".'[244] The only option is to eradicate the evil opponent. 'Because the world is divided into "us" and "them", a homogeneous community is created, which gives a certain form of security and identity.'[245] As we will see below, this definition applies to Sayyid Quṭb's way of thinking.

Although Quṭb had written about Islam and the Qur'ān before, one cannot say that his writings before 1948 are ideologically *Islamist* writings (Quṭb would describe himself as 'irreligious' during this period).[246]

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[239] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 104.
[240] Idem, 11.
[241] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xviii.
[242] Idem, xviii, xix.
[243] Idem, xix.
[244] Küntzel, 99.
[245] Ibid.
[246] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xix. Although *A Child from the Village* cannot be regarded an Islamist book, it *can* be regarded as an important step towards Quṭb's Islamist path. James Toth sees various principles in Quṭb's memoirs that would continue to guide the thinking of the later, Islamist Sayyid Quṭb. Toth mentions (1) the faith in ancestors as a source of pride and wisdom, that contrasts sharply with today's corrupt and immoral leaders who toss out traditional values, (2) the belief in the inherent goodness of his ordinary countrymen who are oppressed by unjust tyrannical governments, (3) an elitism that promotes an Islamist vanguard in contrast to the 'little people' of Egypt's villagers, and (4) the need to anchor one's identity in the authentic traditions of Egyptian society (Toth, 53, 54).

His first Islamist book was *Social Justice in Islam,* which was published just after he went to the United States in 1948.[247] In this book, the same demands for social justice become manifest as in his memoirs, but now they are given a clear Islamic foundation: Quṭb calls for a society governed by Islamic norms. However he is still prepared to cooperate with secularists for common social and political goals.[248] Later on, this willingness to cooperate with those who disagree with the Islamists will disappear, as will become clear when discussing his famous work *Milestones.*

When Sayyid Quṭb returned to Egypt after his stay in the United States, he joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1951. This organisation was composed of 'new *effendiyya'*, with 'a middle-class, urban and primarily Western-educated core.'[249] The fact that Sayyid Quṭb joined the Brotherhood should not be surprising: both shared the belief that Islamic moral reform and the implementation of Islamic laws are necessary in the redefinition of Egypt. Quṭb didn't only *join* the Brotherhood – he became one of its leading ideologues, writing many articles in its journals,[250] and taking charge of the Brotherhood's 'Propagation of the Call Department', one of the most important offices of the organization that 'in order to maintain doctrinal purity and organizational harmony, had the final say on anything published in the name of the Brotherhood.'[251] Furthermore, Quṭb supported the Free Officers coup in 1952, as did the Muslim Brothers, and resigned from the Ministry of Education in 1952.[252]

In fact, Gamal Nasser offered Sayyid Quṭb a variety of senior government posts, albeit in vain.[253] As already described in chapter two, the Muslim Brotherhood had a falling out with the government which escalated into an attempt to assassinate Nasser in October 1954. The Brotherhood was banned, some of its leaders were executed, and many others, including Quṭb, were imprisoned. Most of the rest of his life he would spend in prison. There he continued his writing, which became increasingly radically Islamist. Calvert notes that 'it is generally assumed that the harsh conditions and torture that he and others suffered contributed in a major way to this radicalism.'[254]

In prison, Quṭb's faith deepened: 'Cut off from the distraction of everyday life, with only the Qur'ān and other Muslim Brothers to keep him company, his faith assumed a calm certainty unencumbered by

[247] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xix.
[248] Ibid.
[249] Gershoni, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* 15.
[250] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xix, xx.
[251] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 187.
[252] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction,* xix, xx.
[253] Küntzel, 68.
[254] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xx.

sentiments of pride and personal ambition.'[255] Quṭb felt like a 'foreigner in the world', and realized that his punishment had a 'larger purpose' and was leading to 'some kind of dramatic conclusion.'[256]

In May 1964, Quṭb was released from prison, but was rearrested a few months later, because he was accused of plotting against the government. At this point in his life, Quṭb had become an extremely radical Islamist.[257]

Quṭb's hardened vision becomes visible in his book *Milestones,* which was published during his few months of freedom. *Milestones* brings forward an urge to follow the will of God according to Islamic Holy Scriptures whatever the cost (rather than the emphasis on social reform which Quṭb carried out earlier on in his life).[258] The existing order in all countries, including Muslim countries, was regarded by Quṭb as *jāhilī*, i.e. 'ignorant' (referring to the 'barbaric' order before Islam took over Arabia). Quṭb called Islamic activists to *jihād* (literally 'striving'): 'to fight against the *jāhilī* forces that were responsible for mankind's misery and confusion, and to replace the ignorant governments by a truly Islamic theocracy.'[259] Cooperating with the barbaric secularists was clearly not an option anymore. Through *jihād* Muslims would attain their freedom: not the freedom of the West (i.e. the individual's autonomy), but the freedom that comes with 'the realization of one's God-given nature.'[260] Furthermore, in *Milestones* it becomes clear that faith for Quṭb was most important in life. In fact, it was more important than life itself. Death he regarded no longer as a punishment, but as a means to the reward attained in the afterlife. Martyrdom for Quṭb therefore was something to strive after.[261]

His radicalism and his role in militant action against the state led to his second conviction (although the degree to which Quṭb actually advocated concrete militant action remains unclear).[262] The dramatic conclusion of his life, his execution, took place on August 29, 1966. *Milestones* was the only documentary evidence against him at his trial.[263] The book and its author received an enormous

[255] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism,* 200.
[256] Ibid.
[257] In his magnum opus *In the Shade of the Qur'ān,* which is a 30-part, six-volume commentary on the Qur'ān, his radicalized theology becomes visible as well: 'his most impressive intellectual undertaking and one carried out under the brutal condition of the Liman Tura prison' (Toth, 81). In this commentary it becomes clear that the Qur'ān for Quṭb became a guidebook for militant action against the enemies of Islam (Toth, 82).
[258] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xx.
[259] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 221.
[260] Idem, 222.
[261] Toth, 87.
[262] Idem, 89.
[263] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xx, and Toth, 89. During the last years of his life Quṭb was clearly in quest for an Islamic alternative to the social and political order, and at the same time he called to actively resist the powers of state. According to Calvert, these two notions qualify him as a radical: 'In contrast to the reformist trend within Islamism, which has sought to implement change gradually through a campaign of hearts and minds, Quṭb's writings targeted the state, insisting that the elite either conform to the precepts of Islam or step down' (Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 2).

following: Quṭb was regarded a martyr and his book an inspiration for radical Islamist groups including Al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic State.

3.3 Quṭb's view of the Egyptian nation

Quṭb didn't 'accidentally' write a work like Ḥusayn's *An Egyptian Childhood,* that even bore a similar title. No, Quṭb was encouraged by Ḥusayn's *The Days* to choose the same vehicle for 'oftentimes similar encounters with the forces of change.'[264] Moreover, he dedicated *A Child from the Village* to this intellectual, and wrote the following preface directed to 'Dr. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn Bey' (the title 'Bey' being a honorific title used in Egypt to address superiors):[265]

> To the author of The Days, Dr. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn Bey. These, dear sir, are 'days' like your 'days', lived by a village child, some are similar to your days and some are different. The difference reflects the difference between one generation and another, one village and another, one life and another, indeed the difference between one nature and another, between one attitude and another. But they are, when all is said and done, also 'days'.[266]

Why would Sayyid Quṭb incorporate this in his memoirs? Was Ḥusayn his master, a friend maybe, and did the two intellectuals have similar ideas? According to James Toth in his book *Sayyid Qutb. The Life and Legacy of a Radical Islamic Intellectual* this was not the case. On the contrary, actually: Quṭb's goal by writing this preface and the whole of his memoirs was a subtle way to criticize 'Dr. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn Bey'. In Quṭb's eyes, Ḥusayn in his autobiography belittled and disdained the village of his youth, showing it in an unfavourable light and mocking it. Quṭb however wanted to spread a counter message of feeling proud of the Egyptian village and its inhabitants.[267]

Bluntly criticizing the respected intellectual however, was not done. Therefore Quṭb's 'approach was to mimic Ḥusayn's *The Days* – using many of Ḥusayn's literary flourishes and style – but departing from his perspective in subtle but significant ways.'[268] I detected these subtle ways of arguing with Ḥusayn in several instances in *A Child from the Village.* Whereas Ḥusayn has more of a ridiculing style (he argues that nothing good is to be found in the village: only in the West can improvement be found), Quṭb speaks

[264] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xxiii.
[265] Toth, 303. Toth writes that Ṭāhā Ḥusayn lived from 1889 to 1973 and concludes that 'the two intellectuals were not necessarily from different generations in the strict sense. The difference may well lie in each intellectual's worldview' (ibid.).
[266] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, iv.
[267] Toth, 52.
[268] Ibid.

with respect and love for the village, although he does see many issues that need improvement.[269] The village is a place to be proud of, as Toth writes: 'Quṭb supported a national community that was based on the humour, honesty, and determination of the peasants and petit bourgeois entrepreneurs of the village.'[270] The village stands in contrast to the decadent city, where the opposite is found. Quṭb wants his readers to understand that tradition needs to be cherished and not crossed out by Western influence, in order to modernize. Staying *and* reforming the Egyptian, Eastern, Islamic civilization, is the only way to do Egypt justice and respect her people.

Quṭb had already 'argued' against Ḥusayn a decade prior to *A Child from the Village* when commenting on Ḥusayn's book *The Future of Culture in Egypt.* Ḥusayn in this study called for an embrace of Europe in the process of redefining Egypt, for she is in fact part of the West. Although Quṭb agreed with Ḥusayn on educational matters, not surprisingly he disagreed with the foundations of Ḥusayn's view: Quṭb criticized thinkers who tried to fit 'round pegs of Islam into the square holes of Europe.'[271] He didn't believe neither in Europe's superiority nor in the weak position of the Muslim world.[272] This becomes clear in the abovementioned book *Social Justice in Islam* as well. Here, Quṭb addresses Ḥusayn again. He finds that copying the West emanates from a feeling of Egyptian inferiority. He writes that 'Dr. Ṭāhā Ḥusayn' and others:

> believe that they are contributing a new access of strength to Islam when they connect it with other systems. But in reality all that they are doing is an error, spoiling Islam and ruining its spirit that it cannot operate. And at the same time this is the product of a hidden feeling of inferiority, even though such writers may not openly mention the word inferiority.[273]

For Sayyid Quṭb in the thirties and forties, and even more so in the fifties and sixties, the Egyptian mentality is not at all Western, as Ḥusayn proposed; Egypt is not a component of Hellenic-based, Mediterranean civilization, and never has been.[274] Instead, Egypt has an Eastern identity. This becomes clear for example when it comes to Eastern spirituality. Whereas Westerners explain the mind in strictly psychological terms and Western spirituality is an illusory spirituality that is always subordinated to the sphere of the material,[275] Egyptians and other Easterners have a true spiritual system, in which intuition, spiritual insight and deep feeling are present. The advent of the Qur'ān provided this Eastern spirituality

[269] An example is the young Sayyid's response when his mother tells him his father is forced to sell land: Sayyid then has 'dozens of beloved images' of the village that come to mind: Dozens of these beloved images passed through his mind in a fleeting instant. He wished he could put his hands around each one of these images and hold onto it for fear that it would slip away' (Quṭb, *A Child from the Village*, 128).
[270] Toth, 53.
[271] Idem, 283.
[272] Ibid.
[273] Quṭb, *Social Justice*, 90.
[274] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism,* 95.
[275] Gershoni, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* 52.

with an important practical direction.[276] Where Ḥusayn claimed that the imported religions of Christianity and Islam hadn't affected their adopting societies to any considerable degree,[277] Quṭb disagreed – and he became an even stronger opponent once he adopted the Islamist ideology: Islam had had and still has a great impact on the Egyptian psyche.[278]

Quṭb holds that, because she has an Eastern identity, Egypt should foster closer ties with her Arab neighbours. She should play an important role in leading other Arabic-speaking and Muslim countries to their reawakening.[279] Furthermore, Quṭb stood by his Arab brothers and sisters in Palestine. He had supported the Palestinian rebellion of 1936-1939, and he called for governmental and private forces to stop Israel's declaration of independence and Zionist expansion beyond its original territory.[280] Later on, especially in the fifties and sixties, Quṭb would advocate that Egypt needs to support Palestine in the struggle against Israel more intensely: he believed that imperialism had torn up the unity of the Islamic world, as exemplified by the State of Israel.[281]

In Quṭb's view, Egypt should turn away from the West, for Europe only wants to conquer the world by colonizing it (Israel is the latest example of this urge), and thereby extinguish the spirit of Islam, which is, according to Quṭb, an inheritance of the Crusader's hatred.[282] In particular, Quṭb accused England of taking 'a more devious and tortuous road to the same end in Egypt': the road of education, which 'encouraged the growth of a general frame of mind which would despise the bases of Islamic life.'[283] Overall, Quṭb finds that Egyptians should have enough self-confidence to realize that they don't need Europe: instead, they should retain and renew their Eastern, Arab and Islamic culture,[284] for the Islamic system is a system that stands by itself, and is independent of other systems.[285]

In the fifties and especially the sixties, his attitude towards the West became harsher, and more agitated and violent in tone. In *Milestones,* the division between the Self and the Other (which had been present

[276] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 95.
[277] Toth, 28.
[278] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 88.
[279] Idem, 98.
[280] Toth, 51.
[281] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 161.
[282] Quṭb, *Social Justice*, 235.
[283] Idem, 239.
[284] Calvert, *Translators' Introduction*, xviii.
[285] Should Egypt then leave the West behind entirely? No, says Quṭb in his comment on *The Future of Culture in Egypt.* As to this matter he makes a distinction between *culture* (religion, art, ethics and traditions) and *civilization* (sciences, engineering and technical arts). Quṭb urges Egyptians not to copy Western *culture*, but advises them to learn from Western civilization (Toth, 27, Gershoni, *Redefining the Egyptian Nation,* 41). According to Quṭb, civilizations should fruitfully interact with cultural others, but meanwhile should hold fast to their culture, i.e. its core identity (Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 96.). Later on, this view would change: he didn't want to have anything to do with the West.

earlier on in his thinking as we have seen above) sharpened. Whereas in the previous decades he 'only' made a division between the virtuous Muslim Easterners and the self-centred Westerners, he now thought in theological harsh categories of Islam vs. *jāhilīyya* (as described above).[286] In the long period of Muslim history the *jāhilī* West had made many efforts to invade and conquer Muslim lands, and to force them to submit to European rulers, instead of worshipping God.[287] Quṭb describes in *Milestones*:

> If we look at the sources and foundations of modern ways of living, it becomes clear that the whole world is steeped in *jāhilīyyah* (ignorance of the Divine guidance), and all the marvellous material comforts and high level inventions do not diminish this Ignorance. This *jāhilīyyah* is based on rebellion against God's sovereignty on earth. (…) Our whole environment, people's beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws – is *jāhilīyyah*, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy and Islamic thought, are also constructs of *jāhilīyya*.[288]

Quṭb in *Milestones* wants to assure his readers that they should not despair, for the *jāhilī* powers in this world are not as powerful as they appear, and Islam is not as weak as the religion may seem. He believes that when Muslims return to the Islamic Holy Scriptures, and when *jāhilīyya* powers are overthrown, a Muslim revival will set in and Islam will prevail.[289]

James Toth paints a clear picture of the life and development of Sayyid Quṭb's thinking: Quṭb lived in a time of turmoil:[290] the Great Depression, a variety of corrupt government institutions, continued British occupation, a post-World War II recession and political chaos, the republican revolution in 1952 and the revolutionary government's harsh consolidation of power.[291] Especially the outbreak of the Second World War, which had brought many British soldiers, symbols of foreign power, to Cairo, greatly affected Quṭb.[292] To this list of Egyptian turmoil, the defeat in the war against Israel in 1948 need be added: another deeply humiliating experience for many Egyptians. Quṭb concluded that his country was in trouble, that the Western oriented modernity had failed, and that the only solution was for Egypt to rely on her own authentic system: Islam. This system Quṭb developed over the period of 33 years: from

[286] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 227.
[287] Toth, 230.
[288] Quṭb, *Milestones,* 14, 15, 32.
[289] Nettler, 63.
[290] There was not only 'external turmoil' for Quṭb: besides the external and remote causes, Quṭb embraced Islam the way he did also because of personal reasons. Besides his personality, Toth points to the death of Quṭb's mother in 1940. Her death was an emotional shock to Quṭb. He felt disconnected and lost. Quṭb returned spiritually to his youth and to his village, and by doing so he figuratively left behind decadent Cairo, and travelled further on the path of tradition and Islam. Religion became for him 'a reassuring shelter' (Toth, 37).
[291] Idem, 6.
[292] Idem, 38.

1933, the year he graduated from *Dār al-'Ulūm*, to 1966, the year he was executed by the Egyptian government.[293]

It is indeed clear that this system developed over time: one should differentiate between Sayyid Quṭb's attitude in the 1930s and 1940s on the one hand, and the 1950s and 1960s on the other.

In the early decades Quṭb was, as already stated above, a new *effendi*. Like many of his fellow *effendis,* Quṭb was a supra-Egyptian nationalist who came from the rural, anti-British communities to the city (Cairo), experienced troubles and attributed this to a conflict between East and West. Quṭb rejected Ḥusayn's territorial nationalism with a positive focus on the West, for Western strategies weren't able to prevent Egypt from experiencing turmoil. Quṭb started off as a modern secularist who as a writer and poet promoted the principles of freedom, justice and equality. From a young age onwards he was an anti-imperialist who called for complete Egyptian independence. In his redefinition of Egypt he focused increasingly on the Muslim-Arabic heritage all Easterners shared. When Egypt would rely on this Islamic heritage, she would regain her confidence of which the West had deprived her.

Quṭb experienced a process of a deeper understanding of Islam during the fifties and sixties. This of course influenced his vision of the future of culture in Egypt, a vision that became increasingly Islamic and extended beyond the borders of Egypt. This type of nationalism can best be characterized as 'supra-Egyptian'; the type of nationalism I described elaborately in chapter one. No longer did Quṭb strive 'only' for *Egyptian* independence. Instead, he called for a *greater* liberation of the entire Muslim world,[294] for he believed that 'there is no nationality for a Muslim except his creed which makes him a member of the Islamic *ummah* in the Abode of Islam.'[295] Quṭb based this new understanding on the teachings of the Qur'ān and the example of the Prophet. He found that the Islamic vocabulary, codes and symbols he used to voice his discontent were untouched by the West, and were truly 'Eastern'. They provided Egypt with her raison d'être: she existed not as slave of the *jāhilī* West, but as a (leading) country in the Abode of Islam.

[293] Toth, 6.
[294] Idem, 57.
[295] Nettler, 27.

3.4 A pro-Axis Egypt: servants of God

Attitude towards Jews

In this last section of this chapter we hope to discover Sayyid Quṭb's response to Nazism. In order to do so we need first to enquire about Quṭb's attitude towards Jews, since Nazism and Jews were strongly connected in his thought.

In contrast to what one might expect, I noticed that in *Social Justice in Islam* and in other works[296] Quṭb stresses that Islam is in fact a very *tolerant* religion: equality of mankind is prescribed, and discrimination between men, or superiority of one over another is forbidden. He writes, for example:

> 'People are all equal as the teeth of a comb', says the noble Prophet of Islam. This equality extends its compass over all mankind, and transcends both patriotism and religion; for, since the Messenger said, 'All Muslims are of one blood', Islam grants to men of other faiths right of blood equivalent to those enjoyed by Believers – so long as there is a compact between them and the Muslims. (…) Thus Islam was freed from the conflict of tribal and racial and religious loyalties, and thus it achieved an equality which civilization in the West has not gained to this day.[297]

Moreover, in this same book Quṭb endorses the traditional *dhimmi* construction, which provides *dhimmi* Jews and Christians – People of the Book – living under Muslim rule with protection, in exchange for their payment of the *jizya* (i.e. the poll tax) to the Muslim state. By this contract, Jews and Christians are given 'full human rights'[298] because of their *dhimmi* status and poll tax payment, and they are 'granted the fullest freedom and protection in conducting their religious rites.'[299] Quṭb sees the *jizya* as 'a symbol of submission', and finds it 'a sign that there is no opposition to the doctrines of Islam'. It is also a 'symbol of Islam's universal tolerance.'[300] However, in some cases Quṭb's tone turns harsher: he finds that People of the Book ought to become Muslim, and 'that to retain their original religion was just plain *jāhilī* folly.'[301] Toth describes how Quṭb grudgingly recognized that the hierarchical *dhimmi* status could allow them to retain their religion, if only they didn't turn into Crusaders or Zionists, which would mean they had violated the *dhimmi* contract whereby Muslims were allowed to wage *jihād* against them.[302]

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[296] In *Milestones* we can find another example. There he writes that *in Islam* equality is to be found: 'Islam based the Islamic society on the association of belief alone, instead of the low associations based on race and colour, language and country, regional and national interests. Instead of stressing those traits which are common to both an and animal, it promoted man's human qualities, nurtured them and made them the dominant factor. Among the concrete and brilliant results of this attitude was that the Islamic society became an open and all-inclusive community in which people of various races, nations, languages and colours were members, there remaining no trace of these low animalistic traits' (Quṭb, *Milestones,* 87, 88).
[297] Quṭb, *Social Justice*, 47, 48.
[298] Idem, 168.
[299] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism*, 135.
[300] The three quotes in this sentence are drawn from: Quṭb, *Social Justice,* 168.
[301] Toth, 279.
[302] Ibid.

In his later work *Milestones*, Quṭb describes Jews as but one of the many *jāhilī* forces: just as there are *jāhilī* communist societies and Muslim *jāhilī* societies, there are also Jewish and Christian *jāhilī* societies. As to this last category, Quṭb writes:

> All the Jewish and Christian societies today are also *jāhilī* societies. They have distorted the original beliefs and ascribe certain attributes of God to other beings. This association with God has taken many forms, such as the Sonship of God or the Trinity; sometimes it is expressed in a concept of God which is remote from the true reality of God. (…) 'The Jews say: "Ezra is the Son of God", and the Christians say: "The Messiah is the Son of God." These are mere sayings from their mouths, following those who preceded them and disbelieved. God will assail them; how they are perverted.'(Q9:30)[303]

However – and unfortunately – his attitude towards Jews turned even more vicious, for Quṭb didn't 'only' see Jews as People of the Book and *dhimmis,* nor as one of many *jāhilī* societies. Quṭb ascribed another far more significant role to Jews: that of the embodiment of evil – a role that had everything to do with his fundamentalist, Islamist worldview.

In most of his writings Quṭb doesn't pay much attention to Jews and Israel.[304] In his books *Social Justice in Islam* and *Milestones* for example we find 'only' a few negative references.[305] In his work *In the Shade of the Qur'ān* there are already more allusions.[306] One work however stands out regarding this matter. It is called *Our Struggle with the Jews* and was written around 1955, the time Quṭb joined the Muslim Brotherhood, which was in its core an anti-Jewish, and not an anti-Zionist, movement.[307]

In this pamphlet his Islamist view of Jews becomes particularly clear. Above, I have described Islamism as a system of beliefs wherein everything that happens is read with a binary logic: the good that is struggling against evil. 'The good' in Quṭb's mind obviously is Islam. 'The evil', for the largest part of his life, was occupied by the self-centred, materialist, and atheist West. In the fifties, and thus in *Our Struggle with the Jews,* this last category received a narrower and more detailed form. Küntzel strikingly

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[303] Quṭb, *Milestones*, 150.

[304] This is also noted by Emmanuel Sivan who writes: 'Sayyid Quṭb himself paid only scant attention to Israel, although when he did so he made ample use of his vast knowledge of the Qur'ān to conjure up the image of an essentially depraved Judaism, an age-old enemy of Islam. All his writings on Judaism and Israel amount however, to but one small booklet *Our Struggle with the Jews'* (Sivan, E. *Radical Islam and the Arab-Israeli Conflict,* in: Curtis, M. *Antisemitism in the Contemporary World* (Colorado, 1986)).

[305] See for example *Social Justice,* 63, 64 and *Milestones,* 207.

[306] Quṭb writes for example in *In the Shade of the Qur'ān:* 'In reality, for fourteen centuries Jews have formed a compact mass, at war against Islam and Muslims through diverse subterfuges. European imperialism, then modern American imperialism, has Jews at its origins' (Carré O. *Mysticism and Politics. A Critical Reading of Fī Zilāl al-Qur'ān by Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966)* (Leiden, 2003), 107).

[307] Laqueur, W. *The Changing Face of Antisemitism* (New York, 2006), 198. Küntzel writes that especially from 1936 onwards the Brotherhood saw *the Jews* as the main enemy: 'Passages from the Koran on the alleged inferiority of the Jews were mingled with frightful rumours from the British mandate territory and elements of European antisemitism, and forms of struggle such as the "boycott of Jews" adapted from Germany' (Küntzel, 60).

notes: 'In Quṭb's fantasyland, not only is everything Jewish evil, but everything evil is Jewish.'[308] The evil West was now understood by Quṭb as inherently Jewish.

Quṭb proclaims in *Our Struggle with the Jews* that Jews were leading the Muslim Community away from their religion. He believed that Jews were the ones who had produced the modernity that he despised so much, and which was so antithetical to Islam. Quṭb describes several modern Western ideologies that were transported to Muslim lands and whose creators – Marx, Freud and Durkheim – were Jews.

He rightfully understands that these ideologies in the West had appeared 'in a context of religious and traditional decline in the West',[309] and he now sees the same process taking place in the Islamic world. For him, it is a proof of the Jewish role in the universal immorality that had been brought in the Abode of Islam by a Jewish campaign against Islam.[310] He writes:

> Behind the doctrine of atheistic materialism was a Jew; behind the doctrine of animalistic sexuality was a Jew; and behind the destruction of the family and the shattering of sacred relationships in society was a Jew.[311]

Thus the West was equated with 'the evil face of the Jews'. In order to understand why, we must turn to the Islamic scriptures, because Islamists, who take these sources literally, consider them to be the only sources of knowledge. No Islamist, including Quṭb, therefore doubts 'that the statement in the Qur'ān that Allah changed Jews into apes and pigs is to be taken literally, since the Qur'ān is no more or less than the truth itself.'[312] Islamists quote the passages in the Qur'ān that are negative about Jews regularly, i.e. Jews are arrogant, perfidious, selfish, avaricious, obstinate, fraudulent, domineering, and bloodsucking. The example of the Prophet, who after many disputations (for the Jews rejected Muḥammad as a prophet) defeated the Jews of Medina, is commonly cited.[313] Quṭb for example notes:

> The Children of Israel were the first ones who confronted the Islamic preaching with enmity, treachery and war in Medina and in the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. Thus the Jews were enemies of the Muslim Community from the first day.[314]

Although the struggle with Jews in Islamic scriptures is minor, for Quṭb and other Islamists, 'Muḥammad's conflict with the Jews was portrayed as a central theme in his career'[315] as this struggle

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[308] Küntzel, 84.
[309] Nettler, 55.
[310] Idem, 55, 56.
[311] Quṭb, S. *Our Struggle with the Jews,* in: Nettler, *Past Trials and Present Tribulations,* 83.
[312] Küntzel, 77.
[313] Furthermore, a *hadīth* of Al-Buḥārī, one of Muḥammad's chief interpreters, is well known to many Islamists, namely: 'The last hour will not come until the Muslims fight against the Jews, until a Jew will hide himself behind a stone or a tree, and the stone or the tree will say: "Oh Muslim, there is a Jew hiding behind me. Come and kill him"' (Laqueur, 192).
[314] Quṭb, *Our Struggle with the Jews,* 84.
[315] Küntzel, 66.

served as a model for the policy against Israel. We see that Quṭb's attitude towards Jews became increasingly harsh in the time of the Arab Revolts in 1936-1939, and turned even more violent when he heard the news about the declaration of the State of Israel (in Quṭb's eyes a colonizer of Islamic land) during his stay in the United States.[316] For him, Jews, Israelis and Zionists were interchangeable terms. Whereas the Muslims of seventh-century Arabia had won their struggle against the weak and cowardly Jews, now the Muslims clearly had lost, and in a very humiliating way: land that had been part of the Abode of Islam for centuries was now handed to Jews – a traumatic experience. Quṭb saw how the holy narrative, God's Truth, was turned around: masters had become slaves, and slaves had become masters.[317] The conflict between Israel and Palestine for Quṭb and other Islamists became a 'trans-historical symbol of evil.'[318] In other words: Quṭb believed the Islamic past lives eternally as the pattern for the present.[319] The situation in the here and now proved to him that the struggle of Muslims and Jews in seventh century Arabia is an eternal, cosmic struggle, that is now, as it was then, very much alive. Quṭb writes:

> The Jews have confronted Islam with enmity from the moment that the Islamic state was established in Medina. They plotted against the Muslim Community from the first day it became a community. (…) This is a war which has not been extinguished, even for one moment, for close on fourteen centuries, and which continues until this moment, its blaze raging in all corners of the earth.[320]

Everyone, Muslims included, who participated in processes of Westernization, was to be considered a traitor in this struggle by Quṭb. He called them 'agents of the Jews' and 'brown British'. Quṭb writes that the most prominent modern form of the Jewish deception was to be found in the new, modern classes of deceivers: the intelligentsia.[321] 'Behind their façade of Muslim identity', according to Quṭb, 'lurked their true Jewish nature.'[322] Although Sayyid Quṭb doesn't mention any names in *Our Struggle with the Jews,* it is clear to me that he addresses Ṭāhā Ḥusayn amongst others at this point. He writes:

> Indeed, this antagonistic force threatening the Islamic world today has a massive army of agents in the form of professors, philosophers, doctors, and researchers – sometimes also writers, poets, scientists and journalists – carrying Muslim names because they are of Muslim descent. (…) This army of 'learned authorities' intends to break the Creed of the Muslims in all ways. (…) With this and that, they fulfil the ancient role of the Jews. Nothing has changed except the form and the framework of that ancient Jewish role.[323]

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[316] Toth, 280.
[317] Nettler, 20.
[318] Webman, E. The Challenge of Assessing Arab/Islamic Antisemitism, in: *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, 5 (2012), 682.
[319] Nettler, 32.
[320] Quṭb, *Our Struggle with the Jews*, 81, 82.
[321] Nettler, 46.
[322] Idem, 48.
[323] Quṭb, *Our Struggle with the Jews,* 77.

Response to Nazism

Having explored his attitude towards Jews, it is now time to turn to Quṭb's view on Nazism. Just as Quṭb's attitude towards Jews changed and sharpened over time, his response to Nazism likewise evolved.

At first, Sayyid Quṭb responded very negatively to the Second World War and Nazism. We know for example that Quṭb was dismayed at the ferocity of the war, which 'harmed all of the earth's nations', and especially at the actions of the Germans which he considered 'monstrous'.[324] Europe's Holocaust, concentration camps and fire bombings, which were revealed in Egypt through the media, he considered barbaric.[325] The Nazi war was another proof for Quṭb that the West didn't have anything good to offer.[326]

Later on, however, Quṭb's attitude toward the Nazis shifted. This new vision has everything to do with Quṭb's abovementioned belief in Allah's divine order which was turned upside down by Jews: masters (Muslims) had become slaves, and slaves (*dhimmi* Jews) had become masters.

Was this then the end of Islam? No: Quṭb believed that the story would not end here and that Allah would set the order aright: He would put the Jews in their place, turn them into slaves again and punish them for their evil-doing. This Allah had done whenever the Jews turned the divine order upside down: He had destroyed the Jewish Temples in Israel, and in later times He had sent servants to punish the Jews. Quṭb reassured his readers that now too the Jews would be punished, *if only* his readers return to Holy Scripture, where they would be strengthened in their struggle against the Jews, and where they are taught how to participate properly in the punishing of the Jews. He remarks:

> Allah said about the Jews: 'You shall do evil in the earth twice and you shall thereby ride very high. Then when the promise of the first of these came to pass, we sent against you Our servants, men of great strength who roamed round the dwellings.' And this was a promise fulfilled. The first time may be explained as follows: They rode high in the Holy Land. They had power and sovereignty there. Then they did evil in the Land. Consequently, Allah sent against them His servants who possessed great strength, courage and power. (…) The story of Jewish evil-doing was repeated; as were Jewish humiliation and expulsion as punishment for this evil-doing. Whenever the Children of Israel reverted to evil-doing in the Land, punishment awaited them. The Sunnah is resolute here: 'If you return, then We return'. And the Jews did indeed return to evil-doing, so Allah gave to the Muslims power over them. The Muslims then expelled them from the whole of the Arabian Peninsula. Then the Jews again returned to evil-doing and consequently Allah sent against them others of His servants, until the modern period. *Then Allah brought Hitler to rule over them* (it. AJ) And once again today the Jews have returned to evil-doing, in the form of 'Israel' which made the Arabs, the owners of the Land, taste of sorrows and woe. So let Allah bring down

[324] Quotes of Quṭb in Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism,* 104.
[325] Toth, 44.
[326] The only silver lining to be seen behind the dark clouds of the war was Quṭb's prediction that *after* the war Western civilization would finally collapse, and a time of spiritual regeneration would commence, which only the East could offer. Egypt could play the leading role in this process (Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism,* 105).

> upon the Jews people who will mete out to them the worst kind of punishment, as a confirmation of His unequivocal promise: 'If you return, then We return'; and in keeping with His Sunna, which does not vary. So for one who expects tomorrow, it is close![327]

At first Quṭb responded very negatively to the Nazis whose deeds were considered to be monstrous and barbaric. Later on, his view changed. Although Hitler was part of the *jāhilī* world, Quṭb saw him as a servant of Allah, who put the Jews in their place after their continuous evil-doing: the Nazis have humiliated and punished the Jews and have thus restored the right order. They managed this however only for a short moment of time; the Jews have now once again returned to evil-doing as the State of Israel proves, and another punishment is required.

Although it goes beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the exact ways the Nazis have influenced Islamist thinkers, it is not hard to see National-Socialist influences in Quṭb's words. Jeffrey Herf in *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World* explains how, during the Second World War in Egypt, one could hear Nazi broadcasts in Arabic, wherein modern German anti-Semitism was fused with anti-Jewish themes extracted from Islamic traditions. He suggests that Nazi ideology found an echo in Quṭb:[328] not only do the titles *Our Struggle with the Jews* and Hitler's *Mein Kampf* show much resemblance; Quṭb's views of the Jews and his 'conspiratorial mode of analysis' also display a 'striking continuity with the themes of Nazism's wartime broadcasts, with the important difference that it was far more embedded in the Qur'ān and Islamic commentaries.'[329] Herf mentions that the Nazis claimed that world Jewry was planning on destroying Germany, whereas Quṭb believed that the Jews wanted to destroy Islam. Whereas the Nazis claimed that Jews were undermining the values of the community, Quṭb believed that Jews spread confusion about religious beliefs and undermined Islamic values. Whereas the Nazis saw the answer in a secular prophet (Hitler), Quṭb believed in the unshakable authority of Holy

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[327] Quṭb, *Our Struggle with the Jews*, 86, 87.

[328] Herf even goes so far as to write (rather suggestively): 'It is plausible that during World War II, Sayyid Quṭb listened to Nazi broadcasts and travelled in the pro-Axis intellectual milieu of the radical Islamists in and around Al Azhar University. Perhaps he heard or read German propaganda that described Hitler as having been sent by Allah to fight the evil Jews. All we can say now is that this idea emerged both from the offices of the SS in 1944 and again from the pen of Islam's leading political fundamentalists in Cairo in the early 1950s' (Herf, J. *Nazi Propaganda for the Arab World,* New Haven, 2009, 259).

[329] Idem, 255. Esther Webman draws a similar conclusion and writes that it is well possible that the current anti-Semitism in the Muslim world is a mixture of the negative attitude towards Jews in the Islamic sources with modern, European anti-Semitic notions (Webman, 682). In Pratt, D. Muslim-Jewish Relations: Some Islamic Paradigms, in: *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 21,1 (2012), we find another remark that underlines this view: 'The twentieth century has seen a distinct upsurge of anti-Jewish, anti-Semitic literature within the Islamic world, most disturbingly with the coming together of archetypes fixed in the consciousness of early Islam with the theories of a "world Jewish conspiracy" adapted from modern European antisemitism' (Pratt, 18). I conclude that the fact that the ideas of European antisemitism were accepted and passed on so rapidly in the Arab world, suggests that there already was a pre-existent negative attitude towards Jews in the first place, and that the European antisemitism of the 19th and 20th century then fuelled these ideas to a great extent, for there was a breeding ground: the conflict with Israel and imperialism.

Scripture.[330] And just as the Nazis had threatened the Jews with punishment for their wrongdoing, so Quṭb urged the punishment and humiliation of the Jews.[331]

Thus not only did Quṭb assign the Nazis a role in Islamic salvation history as servants of God who put the Jews in their place and restored – albeit for a short while – the divine hierarchy. Quṭb also made extensive use of the European anti-Semitism that the Nazis themselves transported to Egypt during the war.

[330] Herf, 256.
[331] Idem, 259.

Conclusion: making Egypt great again

This thesis started with Eran Shakine's drawing bearing the title *A Muslim, a Christian and a Jew in the tunnel of love*. In the introduction I wondered whether it is possible to figuratively discern Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb in this drawing. During the Egyptian monarchy, which lasted from 1919 until 1952, can we legitimately ascribe to them the role of 'a Muslim' in the tunnel of Abrahamitic love, walking side by side with their Jewish companions? Did they continue walking next to them when the darkness of the Holocaust fell on them? Did Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb light their path in the tunnel of love, and if yes: how? Or did their tunnel vision prevent them from finding and entering the tunnel? In a less metaphorical and clearer language, my research question was: *What position on Nazism did Egyptian nationalist intellectuals Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb occupy?*

The first step in answering this question was to explore the historical context of the Egyptian monarchy, which started after Egypt's first Revolution in 1919, and ended after the second in 1952. We discovered that the period under discussion was eventful, to say the least. In 1914 Egypt had become a British protectorate, after decades of being a British 'Veiled Protectorate' under official Ottoman rule. The following decades I described as an ever-stronger struggle for independence. And if that was not enough, during the time of the monarchy, Egypt witnessed the Great Depression and two world wars, which had direct negative economic, political and social consequences. Additionally, Egypt had become involved in the Palestine problem from 1936 onwards: solidarity with Palestine was felt, and the Israel-Palestine conflict was experienced as a deep national concern. In 1948 the Jewish State had been declared and Egypt, together with other Arab nations, entered into a war that was subsequently dramatically lost by the Arabs. As a consequence, Muslim-Jewish relations in Egypt deteriorated from the thirties onwards.

We have seen above how this situation provoked strong nationalist sentiments. We have furthermore explored how these sentiments changed in tenor over the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The twenties in Egypt were relatively prosperous. The class of *effendiyya,* educated in Westernized educational systems, proclaimed a nationalism that was territorially based. They longed for a reconstruction of Egypt on a Western model: liberalism, secularism, science and nation-state were key terms in their redefinition of Egypt. Westernization was the way to go, for it was believed that Egypt and the West were linked by a natural bond of shared history, i.e. the times of the pharaohs, the Greeks and the Romans. In the following decades however, it was felt that relations with Britain had come to a breaking point. A widespread mood of disillusionment had set in. Due to the educational developments, a new nationally involved class came into being, i.e. the 'new' *effendiyya'*. This group didn't believe in processes of

westernization and modernization to 'make Egypt great again'. Instead the new *effendiyya* had their mind set on nationalism that could be called 'supra-Egyptian': a form of nationalism that stretched beyond the borders of Egypt. A concentration on Islam and Arabness would make the whole Arab world great again, although Egypt was often granted a leading role in supra-Egyptianism.

As for Egypt's response to Nazism, we learnt that two narratives have been circulating amongst historians in both the past and the present: a *'pro-Axis!'* and a *'pro-Axis?'* story. In the first narrative the majority of Egyptians are described as having welcomed and rejoiced in Nazi ideology; in the second counternarrative most Egyptians seem to have rejected Nazism point blank. According to Israel Gershoni, the *'pro-Axis?'* narrative is the one that actually took place in Egypt during the Second World War: there was much more resistance to Nazism during the thirties and forties than jubilation.

After this exploration of the tumultuous times of the Egyptian monarchy and the question whether or not Nazism was welcomed in Egypt, it was time to explore what Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb had to say on these issues: in chapters two and three I submitted their respective writings as well as relevant secondary literature to careful examination.

Ṭāhā Ḥusayn (1889-1973) was a typical, famous and controversial territorial nationalist, with a few supra-Egyptian tendencies, we concluded above. Born in the Egyptian village but struggling with his traditional background, he felt an attraction to the West. He 'crossed the canal' as an adolescent, becoming a student at the secular Cairo University, and later at several universities in France. There he fell in love: not only with his future wife, but also with the West in general. He believed that Egypt should have a sense of pride because of her rich past and her Greek roots that she shares with the West, and because of her Arab language and literature. Egypt shouldn't therefore be dominated by any colonial power, but has the right of full independence from her foreign occupier (as does Palestine, according to Ḥusayn). But Egypt can only become great again when she follows the European example.

Sayyid Quṭb (1906-1966) belonged to the group of new *effendiyya,* and we discovered that his nationalism was dotted with Islamic supra-Egyptianism. In his early as well as his later writings a strong concern for social justice becomes manifest. His solution for all of Egypt's (and wider: the Arab world's) problems, was certainly not Westernization. Egypt is not part of the West, but has an Eastern identity, with Islam as a primary identity marker. Especially after his return from the United States, he figuratively moved back to his villag, to tradition and to Islam. There was the only solution for Egypt's identity crisis to be found: Eastern, Islamic revival would reconstruct the Arab world for the better. Muslims don't need the West, and therefore shouldn't be colonized by it. This view became increasingly radical as Quṭb grew older, to the point that he believed that the whole of the West and even parts of the Muslim world

were *jāhilī* (i.e. barbaric), wanting to destroy the spirit of Islam. In the fifties and sixties, Quṭb came to believe that the West was inherently Jewish. Influenced by (a selective reading of) Islam's Holy Scriptures and prompted by current events (the colonizing of the Arab world, and Palestine in particular), he believed that Jews were the ones that had produced modernity (Marx, Freud, Durkheim) and were set on destroying Islam. Quṭb proclaimed that the *jāhilī* forces have to be brought down, if need be with violence, for the Muslim world to be liberated and Allah's divine order to return.

In many respects, the two intellectuals under discussion resemble each other. Both Ḥusayn and Quṭb were 'children from the village', who enjoyed 'an Egyptian childhood', who developed into *effendis* and wrote about their youth. For both redefining Egypt's identity was a priority: Ḥusayn and Quṭb both promised their readers liberation from current Egyptian turmoil, and both found that this liberation was to be gained through education. Finally, both had strong opinions as to the role the West in the future of culture in Egypt, and the Arab world.

However, Ḥusayn and Quṭb have more frequently proven to be each other's opposites than allies. Although both were nationalists, in their nationalism they were diametrically opposed: whereas Ḥusayn was a territorialist nationalist, wanting to liberate Egypt from her '*jāhilīyya'* by imitating the West, Quṭb was an Islamic supra-Egyptianist, wanting to liberate Egypt from the *jāhilī* West by way of Islamic revival. Although both saw the solution in education, Ḥusayn found that Western, modern education was the future, and Quṭb believed that this type of education was a Western means to spread *jāhilīyya* and hate for Islam; proper knowledge of the Qur'ān was to be taught as a weapon against this evil force.

Another area upon which the intellectuals under discussion didn't agree was their response to Nazism.

One could assume that Ḥusayn, who left behind Eastern traditionalism and embraced and admired Western modernism, was an admirer of Hitler and Nazism, whose origins are of the West. Nothing is less true: 'not every *sulṭān* is for me an *amīr'*, Ḥusayn wrote in *A Passage to France.* He stated that there are 'European evils', which shouldn't be adopted by Egypt. The West isn't always synonymous with modernity, and is not always a model to emulate: not everything European should be admired. According to Ḥusayn, German totalitarianism should be fully condemned. A neutral stance is not possible.

In Ḥusayn's writings this strong condemnation of the Holocaust and Nazi ideology becomes visible. In his travel log *From Cairo to Beirut,* published in 1946 – directly after the Second World War and in the midst of the Palestine problem and the deterioration of Muslim-Jewish relations – we have read how Ḥusayn describes Jews as victims of a horrible, unjust war and their fate in the hands of the Nazis as

horrific. Although in this log he indicates that he doesn't agree with the consequences of Zionism in Palestine, without a doubt Ḥusayn shows an empathetic attitude towards the Jews and the Holocaust. Moreover, in his review of Rauschning's *Hitler Told Me* an even stronger condemnation of German totalitarianism is found, as early as 1940. In this review Ḥusayn writes that if Germany would achieve world domination, the consequences would be devastating: thousands of atrocities would take place, one would suffer hunger and death, millions would be killed and one's individuality would be wiped out. Ḥusayn rejects Hitler and his Nazi ideas point blank, for Hitler has a conscience that is dripping with blood. In conclusion, it is clear that Ḥusayn took part in the *'pro-Axis?'* counternarrative: not every Egyptian rejoiced in Nazi totalitarianism.

Here, I want to go one step further. While examining both Ḥusayn's nationalism and his response to Nazism, I discovered a connection between the two. He condemned the Nazis *because* of his embrace of the West. *Because* he admired Western values as liberty, equality and democracy and wanted Egypt to absorb them, he rejected the Nazis who, although of Western origin, oppose these values and thereby show their barbarism. Enlightened humanity which with Ḥusayn was acquainted thanks to the West, had become a driving force behind his rejection of National-Socialism. Moreover, Ḥusayn urges others to fight the Nazis with him so that Western civilization based on enlightened humanity can be restored intact.

As for Sayyid Quṭb, I discovered a similar line of thought. We concluded that Quṭb was a strong opponent of the *jāhilī* West. Therefore one could expect that he would reject Hitler, who was part of this barbaric West. Again, this is not what happened. Whereas Ḥusayn saw in the Nazis an *exception* to the good that is to be found in the admirable West, Quṭb saw in the Nazis an *exception* from all Western *jāhilī* matters to be rejected.

This became clear in his work *Our Struggle with the Jews.* Since Quṭb believed that the *jāhilī* West was inherently Jewish, the Nazis, who 'put the Jews in their place' were the ones that fought this *jāhilī* order and were doing God's work. In Quṭb's eyes, the Nazis were servants of God, who rightfully punished the Jews for their evil-doing. Furthermore, it became manifest that Quṭb made use of Nazi language brought to Egypt by Nazi propaganda broadcasts. We saw how Nazi theology and Nazi expressions found an echo in Sayyid Quṭb's thought.

Quṭb occupied himself with a reconstruction of Egypt and the larger East. John Calvert describes how he attempted to build a new sense of community, for which he and many others were desperately longing. Whereas Quṭb 'only' differentiated between 'the Eastern Self' and 'the Western Other', in the fifties and sixties religion became the dividing agent: 'the Self' on the one hand was Islam and God's

final Truth; 'the Other' was the *jāhilīyya* world.[332] In *Our Struggle with the Jews* I discovered a reinforcement of this line of thought. In this work, Quṭb saw in the Jews the ultimate 'Other': they were regarded as the sources of all evil in the world, and *the* anti-Islamic power that needed to be brought down.

Our Struggle with the Jews should be read in the light of Quṭb's nationalism – his attempt to reinvent, reconstruct and redefine Egypt. When the text is placed in this context and one is not distracted by the violent and condemnable words uttered in this work, we understand how Quṭb built, or fortified, the Muslim community. For one, Quṭb set clear boundaries in his pamphlet: he harshly distances the 'Self' (the true Muslims) form the 'Other' (the Jewish West). By creating this enemy of pure evil, the sense of community, belonging and interconnectedness within the community is reinforced. Furthermore, he connects this community both to the past and the future by linking it to a holy narrative: the struggle between the 'Self' and the 'Other' is the same struggle of the holy past. In the future however, the 'Self' (the good Muslims) will prevail: a holy vision. This holy narrative creates a sense of hope, self-confidence and pride, which increasingly raises the spirits of the community. It is a strategic way of making Egypt and the East great again (although it has become clear that it wasn't only a strategy; Quṭb truly believed his constructed view of the Jews).

We discovered that Ḥusayn participates in the *'pro-Axis?'* story and that Quṭb is involved in the *'pro-Axis!'* narrative. Both *effendis* were not alone in their opinions. My comparison of Ḥusayn's and Quṭb's response to Nazism indicates that both stories actually took place in Egypt: there were *effendi* like Quṭb who rejoiced in Nazi ideology, and there were *effendi* like Ḥusayn who rejected it fiercely. For further research it would be very interesting to elaborate upon the many more examples of the *'pro-Axis?'* counternarrative, since the pro-Nazi voices of the time are well-known. Only then will a truthful account of what actually happened regarding the response to Nazism during the Second World War be brought to light. Only then can the traditional *'pro-Axis!'* narrative be legitimately adjusted.

Lastly, this thesis proves that – at least in the case of Ḥusayn and Quṭb – a connection between views on nationalism and dealings with Nazism exists. I leave it to future researchers to point out whether this was also the case for other nationalist intellectuals living in the period between the Egyptian revolutions.

In conclusion, can we discern Ṭāhā Ḥusayn and Sayyid Quṭb in the drawing of Shakine? Are they walking next to their Jewish companion in the tunnel of love, even when the darkness of the Holocaust is spreading? Do they shine their lights to help them find their way?

[332] Calvert, *Origins of Radical Islamism,* 170.

It is clear that Ḥusayn can be detected. Although in reality he was not able to see due to his blindness, it is evident that the Arabic proverb in his case proves to be true: 'blind eyes see better than blind hearts'. Ḥusayn was inspired by Western values of equality and fraternity. Therefore he metaphorically offered his Jewish brother his arm in the tunnel of love and kindled a fire, so that the Jew was not swallowed by Nazi darkness, and the world would realize that this darkness should not prevail. Quṭb on the other hand was increasingly blinded by hatred for the outside world. As a 'foreigner in the world', he was not able to find the tunnel of love, nor to see 'the Jew' as his brother. Quṭb, in his attempt to reinforce the Muslim Community, needed the Jew to function symbollicaly as evil, whereby it was necessary to ignore or even deny his humanity. Discovering the Jew as a human being in the tunnel of love would undermine this attempt and would only be considered a 'struggle'.

I dedicate the final words of this thesis to Sayyid Quṭb, whose Qur'ān interpretation in *Social Justice* I quote:

"O ye who have believed, let not one people mock another, who are possibly better than themselves. (…) Do not scoff at one another, or shame one another with nicknames; it is bad to get the name of evil conduct when you are a Believer; and those who do not repent are evil-doers." The complete and far-reaching point of the verse is: "Do not scoff at one another." For when a man scoffs at his neighbour he scoffs at himself, for all men come of one soul.'[333]

It is my hope that every violent, present-day tunnel vision will be transformed into a tunnel of love, and that in the end, all will see the light –

'for all men come of one soul'.

[333] Quṭb, *Social Justice*, 54, 55 (Qur'ān 49:11).

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