

HIST 434: Anti-Semitism in Modern Times
Professor Paula Hyman

By submitting this essay, I attest that it is my own work, completed in accordance with University regulations. —Matthew Bozik

Modern Blood Libels and the Masking of Egyptian Insecurities

by Matthew Bozik

In September 1978, U.S. President Jimmy Carter hosted a summit at Camp David between Israeli and Egyptian leaders to examine the possibility of their two nations' coming to terms.¹ Decades of conflict between Israel and Egypt and the unyielding opposition of other Arab countries to a détente with the Jewish state – opposition that threatened to alienate any nation that associated with Israel – posed substantial obstacles to the peace process. Nevertheless, Egypt's President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin came to terms within two short weeks, and in March 1979 they formalized the peace, signing the Camp David Accords. The speed with which the two sides negotiated belied the discernible dissent among Egyptian leaders in the months preceding the peace talks: several officials had expressed tacit opposition to the proposed agreement, and Sadat's foreign minister, Ismail Fahmi, had even resigned when, in the spring of 1978, the president had journeyed to Jerusalem. But now, at the signing, the two nations' prospects were more hopeful. Shortly after the informal peace became public, the *Washington Post* observed that "Egyptians generally welcomed the news" and predicted that "the Camp David agreements are likely to be strongly supported by the Egyptian people, whose longing for peace was demonstrated by their enthusiastic response to the Jerusalem trip."² That Egyptian and Israeli officials were acutely conscious that public opinion would be critical in maintaining amity was evident in their agreement that each country's respective media would deal respectfully with the other nation: Article Three Clause Five of the

Accords stipulates that “both sides [must] strive to cultivate mutual trust and understanding and refrain from hostile propaganda.”³

And yet within several years this initial good feeling had dissipated among Egyptians, who began to register increasing scorn for Israelis – and for Jews in general – in a fury of antisemitic attacks. Indeed, Egyptian antisemitism became increasingly pronounced in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and when Egyptian authorities arrested the Musratis, an Arab Israeli family, on charges of espionage, media attacks grew even more virulent. The misfortune of the Musratis illustrates the extent to which Egyptians had abandoned the letter and spirit of the Camp David Accords. Members of the press declared the Musratis to be “carriers of AIDS” on orders from the Israeli government to infect the Egyptian populace. Academics, too, warned of the cultural assault that the Jewish state was initiating. But it was not only private citizens who were responsible for the scurrility, but also the government, which did not seek to rebuke the antisemitism that found its way into state-sponsored publications. The intensity of Egypt’s attacks on Israel both in the popular press and in academia did much to undermine the Accordsⁱ while also revealing a paradox in Egyptian thinking: after having signed a treaty for the express purpose of doing away with “hostile propaganda,” why would Egypt display such animus toward Israel? The incoherence and blatant sophistry of Egyptian antisemitism often obscures the impulses of this hate, but the story of the Musratis does offer insight into the various other strains of antisemitism in Egypt. Careful analysis of antisemitism in Egyptian writings suggests that these attacks were a product of deep-seated insecurities about Egyptian society and that they arose as much from feelings of political and religious impotence as from hateful conceptions of Jews.

ⁱ Indeed, the attacks prompted King Hassan of Morocco to declare: “For Egypt, Camp David is dead.... Formally, the treaty remains. It is difficult, of course, to tear up treaties.... Nevertheless, in politics, there is not only form but also substance” (*Christian Science Monitor*, “Is Israel Expendable?”, February 21, 1984).

The Musrati Debacle

It was in February 1992 that Egyptian authorities detained Israeli Arab Fares Musrati and his seventeen year-old daughter Faika on charges of espionage.⁴ Several days later, border police arrested Fares's son, Majid Musrati, for attempting to cross into Israel from Egypt using a forged passport; Egyptian authorities would subsequently indict Majid as a spy as well. The news shocked Israel, for it was the first time since the Camp David peace that Egypt had detained Israelis on such charges.⁵ While Israel vehemently denied the allegations, the Egyptian government detailed the Musratis' plan not only to spy on military installations but also to assassinate senior Egyptian official Boutros Boutros-Ghali. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Foreign Minister David Levy lobbied hard but unsuccessfully for the Musrati's release.⁶

While Egyptian authorities – unable to produce any substantial evidence to corroborate their suspicions – advanced their charges against the Musratis, Egyptian journalists, too, speculated about the Israeli family. Abdel-Wahab Motawie, the editor of the government-sponsored newspaper *Al-Ahram*, stated in an interview with the BBC: “We ask ourselves why Israel is sending spies to Cairo at this time. Does Israel believe that the peace process will make Egypt negligent in guarding its national security? Is it because Israel wants to sabotage the process with this action? Or does Shamir want to score a few points before the forthcoming election?”⁷ These comments signal the alacrity with which the Egyptian media propounded various sensationalist theories to account for the presence of the Musratis in Egypt. Although a distinguished journalist, Motawie commits himself to uncritical judgments here, presupposing that his questions' premise – that Israel is engaging in espionage – is valid: he simply assumes that the Musratis are spies – expressing wonder at Israel for “sending spies to Cairo at this time” – without acknowledging the possibility that the family is innocent. Motawie's speculation that

“Shamir wants to score a few points before the upcoming election” is also rather equivocal. Is he suggesting that Shamir intended Egypt to discover the Musratis in order that when the charges became public, the Israeli people would support him all the more? Is Motawie therefore implying that Israelis are scandal-mongers and sensationalists? He never clarifies his insinuations, and the ambiguity here signals Motawie’s own uncertainty in his attacks, for he posits two diametric hypotheses: that the Israelis seek to advantage themselves with the Accords and that they aim to undermine the entire “peace process.” Although Motawie himself tacitly acknowledges the speculative nature of his claims by phrasing them in question form, he nevertheless readily imputes the most sinister motives to the Israeli government. Furthermore, while Motawie disavows the notion that “Egypt [may have become negligent] in guarding its national security,” his questions betray anxiety about his country’s vulnerability.

Such readiness to assume the worst took on a more lurid form in other publications, inspiring antisemitism grounded in only the most chimerical evidence. The evening paper *Al-Masaa* proclaimed in an anonymous February 1992 editorial – ascribed to a “noble Arab” – that “the operation has Mossad fingerprints all over it. Sending girls with AIDS is a standard operating procedure at the Mossad.”⁸ The “noble Arab” levels his charge here as if it were a widely known fact and appears to suspect that his readership will eagerly accept the charge with credulity. The allegation that the Israeli government is waging an insidious form of biological warfare is incendiary enough, but on a deeper level this story perpetuates ancient views of Jewish cunning and perfidy: Jews, so the “noble Arab” maintains, will sacrifice their own without compunction in order to extirpate enemy populaces. Other publications elaborated such sentiments. *Al-Ahram* columnist Izat al-Sa’adani declared in an article entitled “Welcome, Israeli AIDS” that “Egyptian public opinion is preoccupied not only by the espionage story...

[but also] focused on the news that Musrati's daughter Faika is an AIDS carrier. There is grave concern that she came in order to contaminate Egyptian youth with the deadly disease." While it is perhaps unremarkable that the public would take interest in such a bizarre and uncommon "espionage story," the outcries over Faika's alleged disease seem to be singularly embarrassing evidence of Egyptian sensationalism. Al-Sa'adani does not even seem concerned by the idea that the Musratis may have compromised Egyptian national security – if anything, the more likely supposition. Rather, while not explicitly decrying Faika, al-Sa'adani infers that the charges against her are true: he does not appraise the veracity of the indictments but rather asserts emphatically that "Faika is an AIDS carrier." What remains uncertain for al-Sa'adani is whether Faika in fact came to "contaminate Egyptian youths." Because al-Sa'adani does not ground his analysis in unbiased reasoning, he paves the way for validating his a priori conclusion that Faika is guilty. The manner in which he addresses the subject presaged the enthusiasm with which the Egyptian media would "convict" Faika.

Other publications exhibited more apprehension about maintaining the cultural sanctity of Egypt than about any possible security issues; as popular conjectures strayed farther from the charges that the Egyptian government had initially proffered, the media's allegations grew more virulent and irrational. In the English-language daily *Egyptian Gazette*, Nabeel Hassan more graphically explored the charge that Israel was spreading AIDS among Egyptians. In an article headlined "Normalization of AIDS,"ⁱⁱ Hassan stated: "The most dangerous spy was not arrested for collecting data about military installations or the economic situation but for trying to destroy

ⁱⁱ This title plays upon the term "normalization" with which Israeli and Egyptian officials denoted the cultural exchange that they hoped would come about as a consequence of the Camp David Accords. Dr. Adel Safty, Dean of Law at Bahcesehir University in Turkey, states in reference to normalization: "The Israelis wanted more than diplomatic recognition and political economic relations with Egypt; they sought an acceptance of the ideological underpinnings of their State. This was clearly the goal of the process which came to be most inappropriately called normalization. One would have suspected that full diplomatic, political and economic relations would have ushered in as normal a relation as could be expected between former enemies. But Egypt and Israel were no normal enemies" (107).

Egypt's youth. Faika Musrati has AIDS, she has attracted many men, and through sexual contact contaminated them with the AIDS virus.”⁹ Hassan here does not disclose the source of such fearful charges and neglects even to identify the origins of his claims. Indeed, he distinguishes himself as more strident in his accusations than his colleague al-Sa'adani and wholly unwilling to question the reliability of the popular charges, and ironically, he may appear more authoritative too: while the discerning critic readily apprehends Hassan's willful negligence, the obtuse reader may erroneously conclude that Hassan presents a well-corroborated report. With Hassan, there is no speculation, only vitriolic declaratives: Faika *has* AIDS, and she *has* contaminated Egyptian men with the virus. Hassan proceeded, like many other Egyptian writers at the time, to ground his discussion in terms of the pernicious Accords: “What is the price of peace? Why does Israel try to destroy Egypt and the Egyptians by spreading AIDS? Normalization has proved meaningless. Israel does not know the meaning of peace, for it never enjoyed it. Its history is full of bloodshed.”¹⁰ Hassan starts here with an implicit conclusion – that Israel seeks to destroy its neighbors – and proceeds to substantiate it with contrived historical analysis, thus moving swiftly from a consideration of recent events to a concise – but nevertheless expansive – theory of the provenance of Israeli aggression. Hassan unhesitatingly attributes the Israeli proclivity to destroy to the nation's bloody “history.” In doing so, he employs specious reasoning to bolster his presumptive conclusions.

Antisemitism in the Popular Press and Tacit Government Endorsement

How had the optimistic enthusiasm for peace that Egyptians had displayed in 1979 inverted itself so dramatically by 1992? To some extent, antisemitism had been present in Egypt all along: antisemitism was pervasive in Egyptian society before 1979, and the Camp David

Accords could not have simply uprooted all prejudice in the country against Jews and Israelis.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, the assassination of Egyptian President Sadat in 1981 eliminated a linchpin of the peace; after his death, the Egyptian government noticeably altered its stance toward Israel and displayed less enthusiasm for normalization programs, even discouraging university faculties from communicating with Israeli academics.¹¹ The Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 – which many Egyptians viewed as a wholesale betrayal of the Accords – signaled the end of what political scientist Mark Tessler labels “the pretense of cultural cooperation”¹² and did much to engender further hostility.^{iv}

The ensuing Israeli-Lebanese War induced many journalists and intellectuals who had formerly endorsed the Jewish state to abandon their support. Anis Mansour, editor-in-chief of the major newspaper *Al-Akhbar*, had fervently advocated peace with Israel up until 1982. Beginning in 1972, when he became an adviser to President Anwar Sadat, Mansour had publicly encouraged other Arab nations to embrace peace with Israel, and after the Camp David Accords he had even invited Israeli writers to publish their work in his weekly journal, *October* – the first time an editor of a major Egyptian publication had made such an overture.¹³ But on July 17, 1982, five weeks after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, he issued this proclamation in his daily column in *Al-Ahram*:

There is not a single pen in Egypt which has not cursed Israel. There is not a single voice in Egypt that has not disavowed its previous faith in the possibility of total peace with Israel. The essence of peace is a Palestinian state.... otherwise

ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, the Egyptian government failed ever to win over to the peace most professionals or intellectuals. Dr. Safty writes: “Although Sadat accepted and supported normalization and decreed its implementation, he [failed] to convince... the major professional associations of doctors, journalists, university professors and lawyer, who all voted to boycott normalization, with the Egyptian Lawyers Association adopting a particularly active stand and remaining in the forefront of the Egyptian intelligentsia’s opposition to normalization” (110).

^{iv} Tessler explains: “Once Israel invaded Lebanon, all pretense of cultural cooperation ended. Newspapers continued to be exchanged and the Israel Academic Center remained open, but the national media joined the opposition press in its uninhibited criticism of Israeli policies” (74).

there is no peace even if every single Israeli carried an atomic bomb, and even if American space ships carried every Palestinian to the moon!... We had reconciled with Israel, looking forward to a comprehensive peace.... It turned out to be a mistake.... The most optimistic of us knows now that it will take another 34 years to correct that mistake.¹⁴

While Mansour does not here engage in any openly antisemitic attacks, his hyperbole both implicitly implicates all Israelis – “no peace even if *every single Israeli* carried an atomic bomb” – and signals contempt for the noxious influence of the West that the United States embodies – “no peace... even if American space ships carried every Palestinian to the moon!”. This latter assertion suggests that Israel’s offense is unredeemable: Mansour implies that even the most fantastic efforts to rectify the cataclysm cannot but fail because the very existence of Israel precludes a settlement. Given these tendentious views, was Mansour’s earlier stance disingenuous? Did he employ pro-Israel rhetoric merely to garner support for Egypt among Western nations and then repudiate the Jewish state when it became inconvenient or impolitic to offer such endorsements? Without involving ourselves in a discussion of the justice of the Israeli cause in 1982, we may safely conclude – given his record of defending Israel even when doing so would compromise Egypt’s status with other Arab nations – that Mansour’s change-of-heart is indicative not of underlying dishonesty but rather of his feeling that Israel had deluded Egypt in the 1979 talks. His harsh words reveal the embarrassment and sense of betrayal that many in Egypt felt at this time: having staunchly supported Israel and having assured other Arab nations that peace would be salutary, Egyptians – and particularly those in government – were derided as having foolishly misjudged Israeli designs. That a moderate like Mansour so swiftly reversed his stance toward Israel boded poorly for Israel’s image among the general populace of Egypt:

Mansour's sudden and fierce opposition to Israel encouraged those already ambivalent toward the Jewish state to follow his lead. That many other moderates echoed Mansour only reinforced this trend. Indeed, William Quandt, political scientist at the Brookings Institute in Washington, D.C., posited in 1988 that the recanting of ideological and political moderates catalyzed the public opinion shift against Israel.¹⁵ v

The popular intellectual Tawfik al-Hakim, who had denounced Egyptian intervention in the Arab-Israeli conflict and had loudly called for peace in 1979, published a short play that presented a tête-à-tête between him and Israeli Prime Minister Begin. The play underscored Israel's willful deceit: al-Hakim concludes by lamenting that he "has been deceived in his search for peace with Israel" – an expression of grief to which Begin responds with only a self-satisfied smirk.¹⁶ The jaundiced rhetoric of moderates like Mansour and al-Hakim – rhetoric that frequently resorts to hyperbole and that employs diction underscoring Israeli cunning and deceit – precipitated vitriol that easily metamorphosed into antisemitism.

If the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 prompted widespread expressions of outrage among Egyptians, it nevertheless failed to arouse the antisemitism that would characterize the mid-1980s; Israel's bombing of the Palestinian headquarters in 1985 did much to precipitate more virulent manifestations of antisemitism.¹⁷ Egyptian writers at this time sought both to elicit opposition to Israelis and to discredit Jews in general by casting them as inherently misanthropic; a salient component of this charge was the blood libel. The newspaper *El-Nur* issued an exposé

^v Quandt does point out that – despite the subtle policy shift after Sadat's death – the Egyptian government did not substantially alter its stance toward Israel in response to the invasion and that officials remained relatively consistent even into the late 1980s: "Domestic alignments and political attitudes toward Camp David have not changed much in quality of direction from what they were in the fall of 1981... [although] there have been changes in the relative size of various political forces, the primacy of Egyptian-Israeli consciousness, and the intensity of expressed feelings and manifest behavior. Islamic groups have attracted a larger following and are increasingly leading the opposition in an anti-Israeli campaign" (29-30). Our task here is to examine the underlying rationale for "the intensity of expressed feelings" against Israelis and to assess this heightened animus toward Israel, which numerous Muslim writers evinced during this period.

of alleged Jewish practices in March of 1986: “The Talmud states Jews should have no mercy for non-Jews. Jewish history is full of blood, since Jewish religious cult obliges to spill the blood of non-Jews. The Rabbi who obtains a big quantity of human blood is considered to be a successful, Zionist Rabi.” *El-Nur* thus propagates the historically popular myth that Jews engage in ritual murder. The article does not confine its charge to a certain demographic of Jews but rather castigates them all. Historian Gavin Langmuir identifies allegations such as these as *chimeria*, “proposition[s] that grammatically attribute with certitude to an outgroup and all its members characteristics that have never been empirically observed.”¹⁸ Antisemites thus ground the allegation of ritual murder entirely in fantasy: the claim, as Langmuir emphasizes, derives from no observable phenomenon but rather from a blatant deceit that seeks to vilify and alienate a feared “outgroup.”^{vi} While the *El-Nur* article does not satisfyingly substantiate its claim, it nevertheless attempts to garner a veneer of validity; a principal mechanism by which it does this is by referring to Jewish scripture – What could be better evidence of Jewish villainy than that race’s ancient text? The article does not advance a sophisticated interpretation of the Talmud – while convoluted reasoning might make it more difficult to refute the allegation, it would also prove too complex for the average reader – but instead bluntly identifies its ostensible injunction to murder, as if such a command were patent in the text. The scriptural reference itself is vague – Where in the Talmud has the author come across the enjoinder to display no mercy to “non-Jews”? Obviously, such a command is absent in the Talmud, but this article’s objective is to arouse the emotions of its readers, not to appeal to their intellects. In making this emotional appeal, the article twice opposes syntactically the terms “Jews” and “non-Jews” to emphasize

^{vi} Langmuir, in fact, identifies charges of ritual murder as the “clearest example” of *chimeria*: “Had ritual murder occurred, that conduct would have been so corporeal that it could have been observed. But not only do we have no satisfactory evidence that Jews ever – to say nothing of a habit – committed ritual murder; a careful examination of the evidence makes it apparent that those who initiated the accusation had never observed that conduct themselves” (Langmuir 334).

that these two groups are fundamentally antithetical to one another. Furthermore, the article intimates that Jewish misanthropy is a core component of Zionism by spontaneously inserting the word “Zionist” into the final sentence of this passage in reference to the “successful Rabbi.” This almost inappreciable interpolation obscures for the reader that the article conflates Judaism and Zionism.

The sudden departures of Israel from the Camp David Accords in 1982 and 1985 seem also to have prompted Egyptians to adopt a more cynical view of Israeli behavior. When Jewish leaders attacked Austrian President-elect Kurt Waldheim in 1986 for his associations with the Nazis during World War II, Egyptian papers were quick to discern sinister motives behind Israel’s censure. Journalist Mohamed al-Hayawan, in the government-backed newspaper *Al-Gomhouria*, wrote that “Israel has always sought to capitalize on what it constantly describes as Nazi persecution of the Jews. It has always sought to remind Europeans of these fictitious crimes.”¹⁹ In addition, al-Hayawan objected that Israel denounced Egypt’s associations with the PLO but “has never ceased to trumpet out Hitler’s intentions to liquidate the Jews, the main motive each time being to extend support for Israeli aims and objectives.” Al-Hayawan here resorts to the common antisemitic claim that Jews exaggerate the severity of the Holocaust. One striking facet of this article is that al-Hayawan disclaims Jewish persecutions and appears to engage in Holocaust denial. But while he refers to “these fictitious crimes,” it is not clear whether al-Hayawan denies the Holocaust entirely, dismisses the extent of the suffering that the Third Reich inflicted, or regards the Holocaust as no “crime” at all. This ambiguity is surely not unintentional, for al-Hawayan must be aware that he cannot explicitly repudiate a historical event that the majority of the world recognizes and continue to appear rational. Rather, employing a

hackneyed artifice, he suggests that Israel misrepresents the Holocaust to extract political concessions.

While al-Hawayan's commentary is itself trite, its appearance in a state-sponsored publication raises questions about what messages the Egyptian government endorsed during this period. Israeli leaders called for their Egyptian colleagues to curtail the derogatory journalism, but rejoinders from Cairo indicated that while the government disapproved of libel, it did not oversee the media and could not constrain "mere opinion."²⁰ Despite efforts to escape the proscriptions of the Camp David Accords that strictly forbid such "hostile propaganda," the Egyptian government's control of the press was conspicuous.²¹ Given that President Hosni Mubarak could easily have suppressed such antisemitism, his failure to do so suggests tacit approval.^{vii} Indeed, al-Hayawan's article was not an anomaly that the government might simply have overlooked: Egyptian publications routinely criticized the Israeli state with the utmost fervor. On the same day that al-Hayawan's article appeared, *Al-Akhbar* published an editorial that denounced America for endorsing Israel's statements against Waldheim and questioned why the U.S. would jeopardize relations with Austria for the Jewish state.²² In addition, the conception of antisemitism as "mere opinion" that the Egyptian government implicitly espoused recalls the philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's opening argument in *Antisemite and Jew*: "The word *opinion* makes us stop and think. It is the word a hostess uses to bring to an end a discussion that threatens to become acrimonious. It suggests that all points of view are equal; it reassures us, for

^{vii} An examination of Egyptian government policies toward Israel during this period confirms the view that Egypt maintained a strong bias against the Jewish state. Egyptian ambassadors to Israel routinely left their posts for long stretches of time – often for over a year in the 1980s. Furthermore, Egypt actively participated in the Arab boycott against Israeli businesses: the Egyptian national shipping company refused to accept Israeli shipping corporations as legitimate carriers on its behalf while the government prevented Israel from participating in major fairs, including the October 1982 Cairo Agricultural Fair and the Cairo Book Fairs in 1983 and 1984. The government also discouraged Egyptian tourism to Israel by establishing a variety of bureaucratic and administrative impediments (*Christian Science Monitor*, "Is Israel Expendable?", February 21, 1984). With these restrictions, only a few hundred Egyptians visited Israel in the 1980s while over 60,000 Israelis visited Egypt in 1988 alone (*New York Times*, "In Israeli's View, the Frostiness is Undeserved," March 19, 1989).

it gives an inoffensive appearance to ideas by reducing them to the level of tastes. All tastes are natural; all opinions are permitted.”²³ Although Sartre notes that “the word *opinion* makes us stop and think,” it is evident that he believes only astute observers will pause at the use of this term; his central concern really is that most people unthinkingly embrace as “inoffensive” anything couched in the terms of “opinion.” Sartre’s words here underscore the power of language to inform thought: the use of the word “opinion” in reference to antisemitism might seem insignificant – even, as some might claim, indicative of tolerance – but it ultimately threatens to render as innocuous and even justifiable what we would otherwise apprehend as hateful and violent. That the government would promote such a message seems to evidence subtle efforts to normalize antisemitism in Egyptian society.

The Jewish-Islamic Cultural Struggle

The Muslim Brotherhood, which had always passionately opposed peace with Israel, warned repeatedly of Israeli designs to subvert Islamic culture. In April 1981, it issued this condemnation of the Camp David Accords:

Whatever Islam does not allow we must reject and struggle to eradicate.... From this vantage point we consider the shameful peace produced at Camp David and the Treaty with the enemy of God, the Prophet, the believers, humanity and justice to be an illusion. We believe from the depths of our hearts that it is a false peace. The Zionist existence on the land of Muslim Palestine at the expense of the Palestinian people is totally illegitimate.... As the treaty is false, so are all its consequences.... It is a disguised Jewish invasion of Egyptian society which hitherto was the fortress of Islam. Egypt has been the last line of defense against

the three enemies of Islam: Western crusaders, Communists, and Jewish Zionists.”²⁴

The Muslim Brotherhood’s pronouncement here underscores that, in its view, peace with Israel is impossible. Quandt explicates inveterate opposition to Israel in terms of how certain Muslims conceive of the Jewish state, which – in their view – “is an aggressor on *dar al-Islam*. Israel is directly or indirectly behind the major calamities befalling Muslims everywhere, especially in Palestine. It has desecrated Muslim shrines in the Holy Land. As an evil it must be eradicated.”²⁵ Thus, as Quandt suggests, Israel functions as a scapegoat for the ills of Islamic society, even if it bears only the most tangential relationship – which can always be fabricated – to the misfortunes of pious Muslims. Israel thus assumes significance not only as the reification of a faith contrary to Islam but also as an “evil” that is homicidal and perhaps even deicidal: the Muslim Brotherhood’s declaration does not only cast Jews as antagonistic to “humanity” but to God Himself. The Muslim Brotherhood also expresses its grave concern for the rapid crumbling of Egypt as “the fortress of Islam.” Egypt’s incapacity to preserve traditional Islamic values, the organization maintains, compromises the rest of the Middle East. To inspire opposition to Israel, it issues a nostalgic call to Muslims to remember their courageous defense of their religion: the implication is that if Muslims could successfully defend themselves against “Western crusaders” and “Communists,” they can do so against “Jewish Zionists.”

Many other Egyptian writers exhibited deep-seated insecurities about the cultural vulnerability of Egypt. The editor Mansour – whom we have already encountered – while displaying unbounded animus toward Israel for its invasion of Lebanon, nevertheless refused to engage in antisemitism in 1982. He seems, however, to have undergone a profound transformation in the mid-1980s, for in his 1986 book *Wound in the Heart of Israel* he avers:

“The world must curse the Jews, and curse the day on which they came on earth... The Jews prepare for humanity every form of torture... They sell to people the lust for money and offer them sex instead of morals and values. They spread anarchist, communist, and deviationist schools of thought to destroy the society in which they live.”²⁶ In first issuing an appeal to the rest of the “world” to “curse the Jews,” Mansour suggests that these people are intrinsically – and uniformly – insidious. Evoking the stereotype of Jewish money-lending, he emphasizes the usurious depravity of Jews by declaring that they not only propagate “the lust for money” but also “sell” this lust to other people. Jews thus profit doubly from cultural disintegration: they not only attract followers to their materialistic ideology but also benefit financially from their proselytizing. However, in expressing anxiety that “sex” is supplanting “morals and values,” Mansour reveals his ambivalence toward the strength of Muslim culture: while Jews are patently evil to Mansour, he fears that this treacherous people will succeed in duping those less judicious than he. Mansour exhibits discomfort with the diversity of ideologies – “anarchist, communist, and deviationist” – that obscure and threaten to eclipse the Islamic faith – ideologies that he counterposes to the values of the “society in which [*he*] lives.” In objecting to “deviationism,” Mansour not only denotes his disregard for that subversive ideology within the communist party – the intellectual movement to which the term “deviationism” most strictly applies – but also reveals his more general discomfort with ideas that depart from Muslim norms.

Other Egyptians extrapolated this notion that Jews subvert other societies to limn how they parasitically infest Islamic society. Abu Islam Ahmad Abdallah writes in his book *The Free Masons in the Area 245*: “The Masonic cancer flows through nations as the blood flows in the veins.... We have to warn against cancerous groups within Muslim society and to warn against joining international crusaders’ organizations, attached in one way or another to World

Zionism.... Rotary is capable of blinding people through charity activity and dragging Muslims (from religion) to the banner of Humanism.”²⁷ Abdallah, in employing the motif of a “cancer,” expresses concern here not so much for external attacks on Muslim culture but rather for internal hazards. In advancing this charge, Abdallah disengages Islam from “charity,” which he insists is just a ploy on the part of Jews to lure Muslims “from religion.” In implicitly opposing Islam to “Humanism,” Abdallah underscores his antagonism to all western ideals. Even Abdallah’s punctuation underscores his charge that Zionism permeates all facets of society; in describing “international crusaders’ organizations” as being “attached in one way or another to World Zionism,” Abdallah inserts a comma between these two phrases in order to stress that all such international organizations suffer from Zionist associations: the presence of the comma denotes the phrase – “attached in one way...” – as nonrestrictive and therefore reveals that in Abdallah’s mind all “organizations... [are] attached to World Zionism.”

We might only expect then, given this prevalent phobia of Zionist machinations, that Egyptian academics would oppose the normalization process between Israel and Egypt and advance their own interpretations of the Jewish onslaught. Al-Sayyid Yasin, in an April 1983 issue of the prestigious journal *al-Siyasa al-Dawaliyya*, criticizes a Jewish scholar who called for “mediating concepts” that would ease the normalization process – concepts such as political legitimacy for each side and equality of cultures. In reference to these concepts, Yasin contends:

They strive primarily towards what can be termed as subjection of the Arab national personality. To be accurate, they are not merely aimed at forcing recognition of Israel’s legitimacy; more severely, their goal is eradicating the ideological, cultural, civilizational identity of Arab society through a carefully

planned cultural assault, consisting mainly of an innocent call to create a common culture and achieve cultural rapprochement via cultural exchange.²⁸

Yasin discerns only the most sinister intentions in Israel's attempts to facilitate "cultural exchange." Talk of "political legitimacy" is, for Yasin, really just a façade for Israel to obscure its underlying designs to subjugate other cultures. The "call to create a common culture" is thus not an effort to achieve understanding between the two societies but rather an insidious attempt to dupe an unwary enemy. Yasin thus intimates that Zionism can never achieve acceptance by Arabs of their own volition. For Arabs, acquiescing to Zionism would mean subverting their natural inclinations. Another article in the paper *al-Ahram al-Iqtisadi* indicates that the "Zionist phenomenon aims to destroy the Arab will, to subjugate the Arab mind, or at least to tame and control it, making it accept the fait accompli and yield to the existence of Zionism, its domination and superiority."²⁹ Like Yasin, this author does not suggest that Israel has the capacity to overwhelm Egypt with its military power; instead, the alleged threat of the Jewish state lies in its more deceptive stratagems. Assent to Zionism then, the author implies, is capitulation. While this commentary is, on the surface, a proposal for a realpolitik approach to relations with Israel, it also betrays – in expressing such forebodings about Jewish conspiracies – the author's underlying insecurities about Arab culture. Yasin and this writer both seem to fear most that Arabs will embrace the Israeli call for "cultural exchange." Although they do not clearly articulate the sentiment, these authors further the classic motif of the secretive, conniving Jew, who is so disingenuous that rather than merely conceal his intentions he makes "innocent call[s]" that run wholly counter to his true feelings. The Jews – so these authors suggest – are bent on "eradicating the ideological, cultural, civilizational identity of Arab society," but they do not do so openly, a duplicity that makes them all the more dangerous.

Other academics combined outwardly detached political commentary with intolerant invective. Cairo University professor Hamad Rabigh, for instance, declares in his “Egypt and the Coming War” that Israel is gearing up for a massive Middle East offensive. Rabigh begins his paper by asserting that “Israelis have garnered the support of the U.S. which uses Tel Aviv as a storehouse for nuclear weapons.”³⁰ Here, Rabigh initially makes a rather innocuous statement – that the U.S. and Israel are allies – a statement that few would refute, but he then combines it with the unfounded claim that Tel Aviv has become a missile depot. Rabigh fails to qualify this allegation, illustrating the ease with which Egyptian academics could insert fabrications into legitimate observations. After commenting on international relations, Rabigh engages in acerbic antisemitism that further compromises his status as a high-minded academician. Not content merely to outline how Israel may prosecute a future war against Egypt, Rabigh observes that “the historical source for this behavior is Jewish behavior” and that Jews have always been distinguished for their “cowardliness, disloyalty, dealings in money... and [for] never recognizing any sort of value or ethics.”³¹ Rabigh goes on to assert that “the Jew distributes drugs and encourages permissiveness. He is a coward who fears everything, including himself.” Rabigh thus reveals that what may have appeared initially in his writing as anti-Zionism is really antisemitism. The author is opposed to Israel not so much because he fears its belligerent or expansionist policies or even because he protests the presence of a Jewish state in a region to which he feels Muslims are entitled, but rather because there is some inborn trait in Jews that makes them fundamentally incapable of coexisting peacefully with their neighbors. In addition, the author’s unwillingness to examine his own preconceptions signals the extent to which his stance is simply a product of its convenience. Rabigh here appeals not to his readers’ intellects but to their emotions: a rational reader would quickly reject Rabigh’s meaningless vitriol, which

easily beguiles the uncritical antisemite. Indeed, in advancing the claim that “the historical source for this behavior is Jewish behavior,” Rabigh only illustrates his proclivity to resort to vague antisemitic remarks when he has nothing original to report; the claim is not only frustratingly terse and facile but also circular in its reasoning: when we disaggregate the statement, we see that it amounts to: the “source for this behavior is... behavior.” Such a remark signals the lengths to which Egyptian writers went to “prove” Jewish conspiracy theories.

Such strident objections to seemingly benign foreign policy initiatives on the part of Israel begin to make a little more sense when viewed in the context of deep-seated Egyptian fears about national security and Cairo’s tenuous relationship with its Arab neighbors. One may observe that the corrosiveness of Rabigh’s paper obscures its putative objective: to assess the possibility that Israel may be preparing for war. Rabigh’s analysis betrays abiding concerns that Egypt, in agreeing to the Camp David Accords, has dangerously compromised its national security by dropping its defenses to a dangerous state and abandoning productive alliances with Muslim nations. Israel’s real goal, as Rabigh conceives of it, is to effect the “destruction of Egypt from within, estrangement of Egypt from its Arab environment, and paralysing of Egypt’s regional (leadership) role.” While Rabigh makes no real attempt to substantiate each discrete charge, his expansive hypothesis is united in the notion that Israel operates surreptitiously – a motif that numerous Egyptian writings, as we have seen, echo. In whatever foreign policies Israel pursues, the Jewish state, Rabigh intimates, never openly discloses its intentions

Professor Rabigh’s claims perhaps also betoken anxiety about the manner in which former President Sadat went about making peace with Israel.^{viii} Although Sadat had maintained

^{viii} Indeed, many of Sadat’s closest aides concluded that the president had acted impetuously during the negotiations. Thaseen Basheer, adviser to Sadat at Camp David, asserted: “Sadat should have avoided the severe confrontation with other Arab states. Sadat was too arrogant in the way he treated other Arab countries. He even toyed with the idea of selling other Arabs down the river.... His sloppy negotiating techniques caused many problems for Egypt.

to other Arab nations that he would not unilaterally seek peace with Israel, he conducted the meetings with Prime Minister Begin in complete secrecy. The news that Egypt had achieved peace with Israel was a shock to other Middle East Countries, and the Accords effectively isolated Egypt from its neighbors.³² Rabigh emphasizes that the peace scheme cannot obviate an unavoidable reality: “The Egyptian regime must understand very well that a war is coming to the region. There is no such thing as saying that we are loyal to the policies of Camp David. We opposed those policies and suffered because of them.”³³ There are several curious elements in Rabigh’s prophecy. It is striking that Rabigh insists that “we opposed those policies” when President Sadat had himself initiated the peace process by traveling to Jerusalem in 1977. Furthermore, Egyptians expressed almost unanimous support for Sadat’s enterprise, and two of the three major parties – the Liberal and Socialist factions – openly endorsed the president, even sending representatives along with him to Israel.³⁴ Thus, it seems that Rabigh is engaging in a fair bit of historical revisionism in employing such a generalized “we.” Rabigh’s assertion that “we are [not] loyal to the policies of Camp David” appears to be more grounded in fact, for Egyptians at this time were deliberately contravening the provisions of the Accords. But his use of the word “loyal” perhaps signals his suppressed misgivings that Egyptians have not been conducting themselves honorably in this affair, for acknowledging that one is not loyal is to concede that one is not acting faithfully toward something entitled to some measure of fidelity. And yet, despite his tortuous rationalizations, Rabigh does forcefully emphasize that the path to war is unavoidable.

Egyptian Antisemitism Today and Its Implications

They prevented us from taking maximum advantage of the opportunities presented by the Treaty” (“Interview with Dr. Thaseen Basheer” 8).

Egyptian antisemitism – virulent, as we have seen, during the 1980s and early 1990s – remains a potent force today.³⁵ The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* – a document so obviously spurious that it seems that it should be a mere vestige of the past – still enjoys widespread circulation in Egypt and even became, in 2002, the basis for the national television series “Horseman without a Horse.”³⁶ In June 2003, the daily newspaper *Al-Wafd* printed several cartoons depicting Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon as a cloven-footed, blood-sucking demon with horns and a swastika-emblazoned tie.³⁷ Egyptian media thus continue not only to identify Jews as inherently objectionable but also to represent Israeli leaders in the most graphic terms.

These outbreaks of antisemitism have nevertheless induced government and social group reactions in recent years that were absent two decades ago. In response to “Horseman without a Horse,” the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights released a strong denunciation of antisemitism and petitioned the producers responsible for the series to recant the racism that pervaded their work.³⁸ The following year, Osama El-Baz, President Mubarak’s personal political advisor, issued a report that rejected all forms of antisemitism, particularly Holocaust denial and propagation of the *Protocols* – a report that twice appeared in *Al-Ahram*.³⁹ Disavowals of antisemitism such as these prompted Abraham H. Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League in Egypt, to announce in the summer of 2003: “While anti-Semitism continues to be a serious problem in Egypt, we have seen a diminishment in the level and intensity which we find very encouraging, and hope it continues. Anti-Semitism in Egypt is diminished, but still potent.”⁴⁰

However, Islamic fundamentalism – arguably the greatest progenitor of antisemitism in Egypt – remains as prolific and virulent as ever. Islamic fundamentalism pervades the Egyptian press, incessantly conflating Judaism and Zionism and labeling both as intrinsically antithetical

to Muslim culture. Mahmud Abu al-‘Abbas, in the article “The Arab Nation: Where to?”, which appeared in *al-Wafd* in May 2005, writes: “The Zionist enemy, the mortal enemy of Islam, which hates Muslims and even the whole world – for the Zionists in their own eyes are the rulers of the world, and everybody must be their servants – commit machinations and conspiracies in all the countries of the world and especially in Islamic countries in order to confuse the Arabs and Muslims.”⁴¹ Here, Al-‘Abbas not only condemns Zionism as misanthropic but also identifies it as displaying particular pathological affinity to Islam. Such paranoia – perceiving the dangers of Judaism “in all the countries of the world” and anticipating the wholesale delusion of “the Arabs and Muslims” by Zionists – is symptomatic of the neurotic thinking that facilitates and bolsters Egyptian antisemitism today. Egyptian journalists continue to voice fears that Jews are abetting the West’s infiltration of Muslim society. Fikriyya Ahmad, in “An Israeli Normalization Campaign Aiming at the Arab Youth in Holland,” which appeared in *al-Wafd* the same month as al-‘Abbas’s article, declared:

The camera and the guitar are a known Zionist method for spreading Zionist concepts in order to control the world and corrupt its values, side by side with the implementing of the normalization plans with the state of Israel. This is done by luring the Arab and Muslim youth by all means of materialistic and physical seduction, in order to commit what resembles brainwashing, so as to erase the Arab rejection of the Jewish crimes.⁴²

It is ironic that Ahmad disclaims the guitar, a musical instrument that likely arose in the Middle East or near it.⁴³ While Ahmad probably objects to the transmutation of the guitar in Western culture into a cultural icon, as he sees it, of loose morals, the length to which he goes to pinpoint the pernicious elements of Western ideals is striking. So many commentators like Ahmad fixate

upon “the Arab and Muslim youth,” underscoring the corruption of children that Zionism entails. Antisemites advance sexual tropes – relying upon such diction as “the lust for money” and, as with Ahmad, “materialistic and physical *seduction*” – that render perverse and aberrant mundane objects, such as the “camera.” We may observe that in denouncing Zionism nearly all of these antisemitic commentators avoid analytical assessments of the perceived threats of Judaism and instead focus upon Jewish attempts to subjugate the world and uproot traditional systems of belief: Zionism, as these writers conceive of it, never strives for anything approaching a moderate policy. Such rhetoric exposes the antisemites’ refusal to acknowledge that Jews and Zionists necessarily include a diversity of opinions.

If both Zionism and Judaism are so blatantly pernicious, why is it that antisemitic writers must struggle so to substantiate their claims and to convince others of their authenticity? Antisemitic commentators assume a stance that is arrogant in its unstated assumption that most people are too undiscerning to perceive – without the aid of a sophisticated critic – the threat of an ideology that is patently dangerous to the intelligent observer. One impetus for the intensity of antisemitism in Egyptian society, no doubt, is to attract attention through sensationalism: vitriol sells books and papers, and so it is perhaps unfortunately natural for these people to employ such means to profit from other people’s thirst for the lurid. But Egyptian antisemitism is symptomatic of more than mere avarice: it exposes a fundamental discomfort regarding the security of Islamic society. It is not only Judaism that confronts Muslims, but also Communism and the West. If Jews furnish the most comprehensible avatar of the threat to Muslim society, then racist writers can easily translate their message for common people by resorting to antisemitic tropes, which hold universal currency.

Ultimately, the Camp David Accords illustrate the failure of government-imposed thinking: a treaty cannot truly transform public opinion. At the very least, a sincere attempt at peace would have to enjoy the fervent support of public officials to have a reasonable chance at success. Even so, it would be necessary to counteract the deeply-rooted antisemitism in academia. The active promotion of scholarly dialogue between rival countries would be a solid step in the right direction. Governments will still have to confront the inbred antisemitism of their general populaces – a prejudice that has existed for thousands of years and that will probably always be latent in some sector of society but that nevertheless might be considerably reduced by concerted political action. Intense cooperation, ultimately, is the *least* that Egypt and Israel must undertake to refute effectively Mansour's bitter claim, in reference to the Accords, that "it will take another 34 years to correct that mistake."

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- ¹² Ibid.
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- ¹⁴ Ibid.
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- ¹⁹ “Anti-Jewish tone returns in Egypt.” *The Times*. June 18, 1986.
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- ²³ Sartre 7.
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- ²⁷ Ibid 3.17
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