




4-25-2015

Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall*, Basic Books, 2014. Barry Rubin and Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Yale University Press, 2014.

Laina Farhat-Holzman
lfarhat102@aol.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr>

 Part of the [Comparative Literature Commons](#), [History Commons](#), [International and Area Studies Commons](#), [Political Science Commons](#), and the [Sociology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Farhat-Holzman, Laina (2015) "Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall*, Basic Books, 2014. Barry Rubin and Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Yale University Press, 2014.," *Comparative Civilizations Review*: Vol. 76 : No. 76 , Article 22.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/ccr/vol76/iss76/22>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Comparative Civilizations Review by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall*, Basic Books, 2014.

Barry Rubin & Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, Yale University Press, 2014..

Reviewed by Laina Farhat-Holzman

These two books treat one important subject that dominated 20th century history: the rise, fall, and influence of Germany.

Mary Elise Sarotte, *The Collapse: The Accidental Opening of the Berlin Wall*.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall fell, a dramatic end to the cold war between the west and the Soviet Union. Shortly thereafter, the Soviet Union collapsed too, greatly reducing the size and power of what had been a de facto Russian Empire.

This monumental event, when analyzed later from the accumulated archives, shares with many such events a confluence of accidents, mistakes, and unintended consequences. Historians who present events as predictable and inevitable are missing the mark.

The November 9th fall of the wall surprised everybody. Officials who could have prevented this were ill, traveling, or otherwise indecisive. In the book, we meet the players: the young radicals, the Stasi officer on duty at the wall that night, and the Politburo member who decided to open the wall to a press conference that included (by chance) Tom Brokaw from NBC News. As crowds massed, nobody seemed to know what to do. This had not been the case for decades, when an East German citizen daring to cross into the West usually ended with death or imprisonment.

The Fall of the Berlin Wall should remind us of the confluence of events that triggered the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, and (not yet acknowledged) the Iranian Revolution.

This should also be a reminder to all tyrants that they cannot count on their oppression to keep people permanently in line. Oppressors do fall.

Not only did the imprisonment of the East German population collapse during one night, but the reunion of East and West Germany has been so successful that Germany is now being led by two East Germans, the most famous of whom is Angela Merkel. Under Gorbachev, the Soviet Union was already going through a reformation, but the collapse of the wall overwhelmed this careful process and brought the roof down on the USSR.

This is a book worth reading and mulling over how accidents can change the world.

Barry Rubin & Wolfgang G. Schwanitz, *Nazis, Islamists, and the Making of the Modern Middle East.*

Not long ago, Israel's Prime Minister Netanyahu commented in a speech that Hitler was influenced by his ally, the Palestinian Grand Mufti, Amin al-Husaini, to murder rather than expel Europe's Jews. There was an immediate uproar that this statement was historically incorrect, and that by saying this, he was diminishing Hitler's role in the Holocaust. It seems that it was not incorrect, and this book, written by two very solid scholars, has not only validated this assessment, but has provided documents, letters, and photographs hitherto not widely available.

Why should this matter? The Holocaust was a Nazi program, no matter what the inspiration for it. But it does matter in another way: it reveals something that has not been widely understood: the long-standing parallel developments during the 1920s and 30s of a murderous brand of fascism that allied the Nazis with the Muslim world. We see the continuum of this ideology today in the similarity of ISIS genocidal practices in their conquered territories with those of the Nazis as they rampaged through Poland and Russia. The values are the same.

The authors spell out their rationale: “The story of Nazi Germany's involvement in the Middle East has hitherto largely been viewed as a dramatic tale of might-have-been that was nevertheless marginal to Middle East history and the course of World War II. In fact, however, this episode was central to the modern history of the Middle East and continues to reverberate many decades later given its profound effects on Arab nationalism, Islamism, and the course taken by the Palestinian Arab movement” (ix).

The rise of the Nazis after World War I paralleled fascist movements all over the world at that time. Dictatorships blossomed, all sharing the same disdain for democracy, votes for women, and tolerance for some ethnic diversity. The Muslim world, such as it was (ethnically divided) followed the same track. What that world had in common were authoritarian rule in their newly minted countries, a religion frozen in the Middle Ages, and injured pride over their obvious backwardness.

The new Nazi party played on this commonality, and one charismatic figure who emerged in the Palestinian territory (still under British control) was a man of Circassian ancestry (blond and blue-eyed), claiming descent from the Prophet Mohammad, and through family pull, appointed as the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem. Al-Husaini was not a cleric, nor was he pious; he was, however, ferociously ambitious and aspired to become the next Caliph, a dictator over all Muslims. (The last “Caliph” had been the Ottoman Sultan, both roles abolished when the Ottomans were defeated during World War I.)

Hitler and the Grand Mufti became allies, an alliance ignored in history until now. They met several times and the Nazis protected him throughout the war, even though the jihad he promised never materialized. Husaini had little luck in organizing an Arab army, but he

did better with the Muslims of the USSR, India, Afghanistan, and the Balkans, creating Muslim corps who assisted the Nazis in their holocaust.

Husaini was definitely a war criminal and was on Britain's list for trial and (hopefully) execution. The Swiss would not give him refuge as Germany fell, but the French did, out of spite against the British, and they released him to create decades of Islamist mayhem in the Middle East. The French did it again when they gave refuge to the Ayatollah Khomeini. Without these two men, world history would have been very different.

The great irony here is that the Muslim world always managed to choose losers: first the Nazis, and then the Communists. Now they are following the latest Islamo-fascist cult, ISIS. Saudi money is still supporting that movement, along with stolen oil, extortion taxes, “Islamic” fines on their conquered subjects, and criminal enterprises such as human trafficking and drugs. National borders are in meltdown, hordes of citizens fleeing, and the region's anarchy moving global.

The connection between the Nazis and the Muslim World is alive and well, but is doomed to the same end that the Nazis earned. This is a definitive book on this very current subject.

These reviews demonstrate how important Germany's involvement was in the worst 20th century events. Nothing that they did in World War II was a one-time only. The seeds were already planted in World War I, and before that, in the encouragement of the Muslim Arab world to revolt against their colonizers (Ottoman, and later British and French) and side with Germany in the world wars and after.

This is a sad observation when one thinks of the wonderful contributions of Germany before that to science, music, literature, and philosophy.