



A Muslim Jew Under the Swastika

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51 minutes, 14 seconds

Speaker: Hugo Marcus

Transcribed by: Rachel E Lieu

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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Time Transcription

00:00 [Read Write Think Dream / The Library UC San Diego Channel /
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00:11 Susanne Hillman: It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to today's Holocaust Living History Workshop featuring the distinguished historian, Marc David Baer in conversation with Professor Deborah Hertz. Needless to say, we had hoped to host Professor Baer on campus in person as originally planned, alas, due to the vicissitudes of the pandemic, this could not happen. I'm delighted, however, that Professor Baer can join us from London today. For once, I'm grateful for modern technology. Before introducing our guests, I would like to acknowledge our sponsors, first and foremost, the UC San Diego Library, and the Jewish Studies Program. I would also like to thank the co-sponsors of today's workshop, Thurgood Marshall College and especially its Provost Leslie Carter and The Middle East Studies Program at UC San Diego and its director, Michael Provence. Now, to our speaker, Marc David Baer earned his Ph.D. in history from the University of Chicago and is Professor of International History at the London School of Economics and Political Science. His publishing record is as distinguished as it is long, and I will limit myself to his major works.

01:22 Susanne Hillman: His major works include *Honored by the Glory of Islam: Conversion and Conquest in Ottoman Europe*, Oxford University Press 2008, and winner of the Albert Hourani Prize, *The Dönme, Jewish Converts, Muslim Revolutionaries, and Secular Turks*, published by Stanford University Press in 2010. *Sultanic Saviors and Tolerant Turks: Writing Ottoman Jewish History, Denying the Armenian Genocide*, Indiana University Press 2020, and the winner of the Dr. Sona Aronian Book Prize for Excellence in Armenian Studies, and of course, *German Jew, Muslim, Gay: The Life and Times of Hugo Marcus*, published by Columbia University Press in 2020, and the topic of today's talk. His latest publication is *The Ottomans: Khans, Caesar's and Caliphs* published with Basic Books in 2021, which offers a major new history of the Ottoman Dynasty. This is how it looks. I'm very much looking forward to reading it. I haven't gotten around to it yet. As the book titles just listed reveal, religious conversion has been a topic of abiding concern for Marc Baer. It is therefore eminently fitting that today's conversation on Hugo Marcus will be conducted by Deborah Hertz, a history professor at UC San Diego, the Herman Wouk Chair of Modern Jewish Studies, a founder of the Holocaust Living History Workshop, and an acknowledged authority on Jewish conversion. Conversion is at the heart of Deborah Hertz's books, *Jewish High Society in Old Regime Berlin*, in its second edition in both English and German, and *How Jews Became Germans: The History of Conversion and Assimilation in Berlin*, published by Yale University Press in 2007. It is a pleasure to welcome Deborah as well to the workshop today. The program will begin with

an introduction to the life of Hugo Marcus. And now I would like to ask Marc to come on stage so to speak.

- 02:52 Marc Baer: Thank you. What I'll do is I'll share my screen. Thank you for having me at the workshop. I'll spend about 20 minutes talking about, giving an overview of the life of Hugo Marcus. A novelist, poet, philosopher, political activist, and writer, Hugo Marcus committed to many different circles, movements, and ideologies over the course of his 86 years. His choices speak to a desire to find a utopia or to join the universal brotherhoods. After completing gymnasium in Posen in 1898, he migrated to Berlin. At around that time, he joined the first organization in the world to campaign for the rights of homosexuals. The Scientific Humanitarian Committee, founded by his friend Magnus Hirschfeld, who was also of Jewish background. Like many other sons of German Jewish provincial families in Imperial Germany, Marcus then studied philosophy at Berlin's University, where he befriended Kurt Hiller, another leading homosexual rights activist of Jewish background. Hiller's 1922 book, *Paragraph 175: the Disgrace of the Century* is a seminal work in the homosexual rights struggle, aimed at winning the liberation of a human minority that although harmless, is oppressed, persecuted, and tormented.
- 04:54 Marc Baer: Their academic mentors included Georg Simmel himself, the son of Jewish converts to Christianity, who although renowned today as one of the founders of sociology, in his day, was known as the philosopher of the avant-garde and played a leading role in the left-wing pacifist, feminist, and homosexual rights movements. Marcus found two pathways to what he conceived of as divinity. He first joined the George Circle, a quasi-religious group composed of the rapturous, middle-class youth disciples of the poet and profit Stefan George, who thought of themselves as avant-gardes waging a cultural and spiritual war of redemption to renew Germany and whose membership overlapped that of masculinist homosexual circles. He was either introduced to the circle by his well-known historian cousin, Ernst Kantorowicz, or he was inspired to do this by Simmel, who was George's close friend. Then however, Marcus went on to join the Ahmadi movement for the propagation of Islam, an Islamic confessional minority born in British India, becoming the only Jewish convert and member in Berlin.
- 06:11 Marc Baer: Prior to World War I, Marcus earns some renown with half a dozen philosophical works. In one of these, *Meditations*, written while the precocious 20-year-old was still a doctoral student, and whose writing, like that of Georgia's, is marked by an elitist, philhellenic homoeroticism, whose major themes are pederasty, the master-disciple relationship, and a search for a new utopia. In this, we catch a hint of his openness to joining a new spiritual community. Marcus' utopia includes a new lay priest order devoted to the purpose of spreading a uniform worldview and a truthful social doctrine. Marcus did not have the luxury of being able to devote himself to philosophical literary pursuits alone. Like other

Jewish youth sent to the capital to seek higher education to educate, to facilitate their families' social climbing, he was expected to work in the family business, the First World War would change that. During the war, Marcus worked with Hiller in the latter's pacifist organization, The Activists League, and served on the staff of his pacifist socialist journal, *The Aim: the yearbook for spiritual politics*.

- 07:26 Marc Baer: After the war, Marcus' father lost his fortune when Prussian Posen became Polish Poznań, but Marcus considered this a lucky break, freeing him of the unbearable obligation to inherit his family's business. It was also as a result of this that he found Islam, which was presented to him as a universal brotherhood that united men of all nations and races, and that, as he quickly discovered, promotes homosocial bonds. To support his family, he began working as a German tutor to young Muslim men from the Ahmadi Mission. A community, not unlike the George Circle, in that both consisted of disciples who were devoted to the teachings of a charismatic master, originally seen as a prophet, and who perceived themselves as a select few waging a war to redeem the soul of Germany. He made a strong impression on the mosque community. In 1923, the Ahmadi hired him for life as editor of all of its German-language publications. He formed an especially close bond with the chic, handsome bachelor Maulana Sadr-ud-Din. Inspired by the Imam, Marcus not only wrote homoerotic poetry and fiction, but he also converted to Islam in 1925. Some of that gay fiction takes place in the mosque.
- 08:57 Marc Baer: It would be mistaken to consider the pre and post-conversion phases of his life to be entirely distinct. He viewed Islam in a Jewish way as rational and a pure expression of Jewish monotheism. And reflecting the fact that he was gay, he created an Islam for himself. He promoted the idea that one of the core pillars of Islam is purity, which includes pacifism, love and beauty, brotherhood, and tolerance of exceptional cases like himself. For a dozen years, under the adopted name, Hamid, the praised one, he was the most important German in Berlin's mosque community. As the Ahmadi boasted, the West is destined sooner or later to witness the sunrise of Islam and we hasten to congratulate Dr. Marcus on his being one of the few chosen ones who are the harbingers of that sunrise. Referring to Marcus as one of the few chosen ones speaks to his Jewish heritage. Nevertheless, he did not terminate his membership in the Jewish community or cut ties to Jewish friends and family, especially his mother. Despite his conversion to Islam, Marcus did not end his attachments with friends in the homosexual rights movement or with his younger, blonde-haired Polish Catholic friend, Roman Malicki, a fellow native of Posen, either.
- 10:25 Marc Baer: The year of Marcus's conversion, he helped craft and signed a petition that was organized by Hirschfeld's Institute for Sexual Science and sent to the Justice Minister, urging repeal of Paragraph 175 of the criminal code, which penalized in the laws language, unnatural sexual acts between men. Marcus was

the leading German Muslim in the Islamic community centered on the first mosque in Germany established by Muslims, the Berlin Mosque, completed in 1927 by the Ahmadi. Marcus played a key role in articulating the meaning of Islam for Germans in his capacities as chief editor of the *Ahmadi Journal*, the *Muslimische Review*, in which he published 19 articles between 1924 and 1933, the most by far by any German author. He was chairman of the German Muslim Society. He was a frequent lecturer at the society's mostly public Islam evenings, attended by acquaintances from gay rights and literary circles such as Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse. He was also editor of a Quran translation, commentary, and introduction. In his mosque lectures and publications, including his own conversion narrative, Marcus promoted the utopian project of an Islam for Germany, demonstrating what he saw as the similarities between Muslim and German values and philosophy, especially as represented by Friedrich Nietzsche. Presenting the Muslim views of Muhammad and Islam, he attributed to Goethe. Expressed in Goethe's poems, *Muhammad Song* and his *Hymn* and his famous *West-East Divan*, including its *Notes and Essays for a Better Understanding of the West-East Divan*, as well as Goethe's incomplete *Muhammad Tragedy*.

12:23 Marc Baer: So, Marcus took all of this material as precedent for his own views of Islam. And he believed that Goethe had converted to Islam, which he hadn't. But Marcus noted, after all, hadn't Goethe written or stated, the "truly sublime" Quran "attracts me, astonishes me and in the end, elicits my admiration." He had written that in *Notes and Commentaries to the West-East Divan*. Goethe had written, "I've contemplated devoutly celebrating that holy night when the Quran and its entirety was revealed to the prophet from on high." The writer of the book, the *West-East Divan*, does not even reject the supposition that he may be a Muslim. And most famously, Goethe wrote the couplet, "I find it foolish and quite odd, / That stubborn folks seek to deny: / If Islam means we all serve God, / We all in Islam live and die." Although scholars have grappled with Goethe's views of Islam, none have explored how members of the first-generation of German Muslims engage with his work. So, Marcus used Goethe's so-called conversion to make a bold argument about German and Islamic cultures.

13:40 Marc Baer: What Marcus envisioned was an Islam rooted in Goethe's Weimar classicism in the enlightenment era. He saw being German as viewing the world in the Muslim Goethe's terms. For Germans, being Muslim was to read Islam in a Goethean way. Now rather than see converts such as Marcus instrumentally as mediators between foreign Muslims and local Christians, which is how scholars usually write about it, between India and Germany, for example, where the Ahmadi came from, we should see some of these Muslims such as Marcus is playing an active role in responding to the crisis in German society. Marcus's astonishing analysis of the crisis reflects the broader to be about the future of German society and historical revisionism that marked Weimar Germany. Facing utter and complete change, Germans debated how to rebuild society. What could best

speak to the general disillusion with received religious creeds and scholarly philosophies and the demand for new formulations, new interpretations and new symbols, new explanations? If the war's end served as a historical rupture, at once the site of the invalidation of the past and the point of departure for the future, then what should that future look like?

- 14:59 Marc Baer: In Weimar Germany, renovation and crisis went hand in hand. And the era's consciousness of crisis produced a sense of possibility. Rather than perceive Weimar crisis talk as defeatist, historians have noted that it had positive and productive associations, providing Germans with confidence in their own capacity to change, innovate, surmount the crisis, offering a chance for renewal. So, in this turbulent era, marked by iconoclasm and syncretism, just as radical artists created multi-perspectivism of montage and people with wildly divergent aims deployed to transvaluation of values, intellectuals blended contradictory elements into blueprints for the future. This was the era when we have the first German Buddhist community en-large, for example. One such paradoxical utopian vision was Marcus's, where he brought Islam together with German enlightenment culture and romanticism. Rather than accept that enlightenment values had been proved false or that German culture was bankrupt, he re-evaluated the ideas and contributions of the greatest German thinkers, especially Goethe and Nietzsche, to make them relevant and useful for stepping back for the moral abyss and providing for a spiritually and politically sound future.
- 16:27 Marc Baer: Islam, the religion of eternal self-renewal, he called it, belonged to both the Germany's past and to its future, according to Marcus. It was the country's only salvation and he envisioned a mass conversion of Germans to save the soul of Germany. But other people had other ideas, other Germans. Marcus's envisioned potential future for Germany was not to be. A year after Marcus made arguments promoting an Islamic state guided by a cultural of elite including himself, the Nazis seized power. Marcus was incarcerated in Sachsenhausen Concentration Camp, not as a Muslim or a gay, but as a Jew in 1938, following the November 9th and 10th pogrom. He was brutalized and held in the barracks newly constructed for the thousands of recently arrived, arrested Jewish men. He had to stand at attention, at roll call at one point for 24 hours. He claimed to have remained there in the camp until a delegation led by his Imam, Dr. Sheikh Mohammed Abdullah, gained his release. We do know that Abdullah obtained a visa for Marcus to travel to British India, where a sinecure at a Muslim organization awaited him.
- 17:48 Marc Baer: Just before the outbreak of the Second World War, using travel documents secured by the Imam and with the assistance of his international network of gay acquaintances, Marcus was able to escape to Basel, Switzerland instead, right over the border in Switzerland where he intended to establish an Islamic cultural center and edit its Journal. So Marcus's life was saved by his taking refuge in Switzerland in 1939. After the war, he refused to return to the

Federal Republic of Germany, which persecuted gay men by implementing Paragraph 175's harsher version introduced by the Nazis. Just as he was known as Hamid to Muslims, Marcus was called Hans Alienus, Latin for Hans the stranger by other gay men, a reference to his being a German exile. And writing under that pseudonym, he was a frequent contributor to the international gay, or in the language of the day, homophile journal *Der Kreis*, published in Zurich. The only German-language gay journal, which featured articles for members of the pre-war German homosexual rights movement. Everywhere, it was a forbidden magazine, read in secret, passed from hand to hand; the lifeblood of a secret organization that hosted costume balls. It was an island of continuity from Weimar, Germany. Marcus published fiction, sometimes containing Islamic elements and nonfiction in the journal from the age of 68-85, from 1948-1965.

19:24 Marc Baer: Just as he had modeled his own conversion narrative on the so-called conversion narrative of Goethe and he sought precedent in his own appreciation from Mohammed and Islam in his, Marcus turned to the writing in life of Goethe as personal and literary precedent and legitimizer for his own gay feelings and identity. For, just as Goethe's poetry and prose exhibit unmistakable praise from Mohammed and Islam, as well as apparent adoption of Islamic views, compelling German Muslims then and now to consider him to have been a Muslim, so too does Goethe's writing offer explicit homoeroticism, admiration of male beauty, and love between male friends, and the theme of pederasty, giving rise to queer readings of the man and his age. We see this in his early poetry, such as *To the Moon* and *Ganymed*, written around the same period as his *Muhammad Song*. We also see it in the *Elf King*, as well as in his prose, including *Faust*, *Italian Journey*, *Letters from Switzerland*, *Wilhelm Meister's Journeyman Years*, and then *West-East Divan*, written when he was mature. Goethe wrote striking lines which Marcus analyzed in his writing in *Der Kreis*. For example, Goethe wrote "in actual fact, Greek pederasty is based on the fact that, measured purely esthetically, the man is after all, far more beautiful, more excellent, more perfect than the woman. Pederasty is as old as humanity, and therefore, it may be said that it is rooted in nature." "I'd like to see," he wrote elsewhere, "young creatures gather around me and befriend me. One unpleasant experience after another failed to bring me back from this inborn drive, which at present, in the event of the most explicit conviction still threatens to lead me astray."

21:26 Marc Baer: He also wrote, and these are lines that Marcus analyzed in his work, "what a glorious shape my nude friend has! How duly proportioned all his limbs are! What fullness of form! What splendor of youth! What a gain to have enriched my imagination with this perfect model of manhood." That's from *Letters from Switzerland*. And from *West-East Divan* the famous couplet, "But my love is yet more dear / when a memory kiss I win. / Words go by and disappear. / Yet your gift remains within." This is the youthful cup bearer speaking to the mature poet in the *West-East Divan*. Marcus is perhaps the first and only writer to maintain that

Goethe was Muslim and gay like him. Now while Goethe and those like him could not have had a gay identity which emerged in the late 19th century, they were part of a subculture based on same-sex desire whose signifiers prefigured the identity of the modern homosexual. Among the signifiers, were Greek antiquity and culture, particularly the propensity for male-male love, such as Ganymed, the model for the socially acceptable erotic relationship between a man and a youth, Biblical traditions, Orientalism, which was a region stretching in the mind from the Muslim world to Italy, where one found classical civilization and sexuality perpetuated. Switzerland was also seen as part of, as one of the signifiers of same-sex desire and also the cult of friendship, *Liebesfreunde*.

23:01 Marc Baer: Friendship between men, which surpassed a man's love for a woman, was seen as an effusive, passionate, and intimate relationship. If these were signifiers of homosexuality for Goethe so are they in the fiction of Marcus where one finds the erotic themes of the beauty of the male nude, the superiority of male-male unrequited desire to male-female consummated love, temptation, and awakened yet never consummated desire, the meaning of true friendship, Christian imagery, and ancient Greek mythology. Now, queer Muslims are hardly conceivable in most discourse about Islam and homosexuality in Europe today, although this is changing. How much more is this the case for a Muslim man before gay liberation? Unlike as is often the case for Muslims in Europe today, however, following the mass migration of Muslims to the continent after the Second World War, no one could ask Marcus where you come from, as he was German. But as with the far-right today, the Nazis told him, you do not belong here. But because he was also Jewish. Not because he was Muslim. His answer, I am from here, was as unacceptable to the Nazis then, as it is Islamophobes in Europe today. A biography of Hugo Marcus helps us to queer Jewish and Islamic Studies. *German, Jew, Muslim, Gay* is the first biography devoted to examining the life of the German-born as Hugo Marcus, who became the Muslim Hamid, who the Nazis forced to be renamed Israel. A gay man who never called himself gay, but fought for homosexual rights. Who chose to write gay fiction out of the pen name Hans Alienus during his decades of Swiss exile. He saw Goethe as his pole star: model German, model gay, and model Muslim, whose life and writing offered a solution to Germany's cultural crisis.

24:57 Deborah Hertz: Well, Marc thank you so much. I was absolutely thrilled when you mailed me a copy of this book. It must have been a year-and-a-half ago, certainly before COVID time. And as an admirer, a huge admirer of your previous books, especially *The Dönme* book, I could really see that this was a perfect topic for you. It just rang every bell that was already in your, already in your very well-stuffed brain about different religions and the conversion process. What I really appreciate about the book is something I tried to do too, which was instead of reading the history of religion as a script of ideologies and ideas and major leaders, to look at personal decisions to convert allows us to really move into a much more interior

space in the history of religion. The first question I would like to ask you is to tell about your discovery of Marcus and how you decided that a full-length biography would actually be possible.

25:57 Marc Baer: Thank you, Deborah. Again, thank you for having me at your workshop. So, I was living in Berlin and this was in the late 2000s, 2008, 2009. I was actually following the Dönme in Germany. The descendants of the followers of the Jewish Messiah, Sabbatai Zevi who converted to Islam in the 17th century in the Ottoman Empire. They went underground, they created their own religion and they created their own diaspora, and they still are amongst us in the world today. So I was following traces of the Dönme in Germany in the 1920s, in the 1930s and discovered that the leading Turkish citizen in Nazi Germany was a Dönme. He was a Turkey citizen of secret Jewish background. When the Nazis got wind of this, they went after him and they trashed his store and they arrested him. But the Turkish authorities intervened. Turkey was - this is early 1930s before the war - Turkey intervened and rescued him and removed him from Germany. While this was happening in the 1930s, I was in Berlin and I was following the paper trail, looking at the Gestapo records and all these sorts of things. Then I realized that actually, an even more exciting story was happening across town. So this Dönme, this individual, his store was on the Kurfürstendamm not too far away. At the mosque in town, the leading, I learned, I found out that the leading German Muslim was an actual convert, not someone whose ancestors had converted 300 years ago, but an actual convert. Then I decided, well, I need to figure out, find out who this person is. The first question that I had to answer was, why hasn't anyone written a biography of this person before? He's someone who slipped through the cracks. So, on the one hand, he's gay. Maybe that's going to make him not very attractive for perhaps Islamic studies scholars, or Jewish studies scholars as well. He's a Jew who converts to Islam. So again, maybe Jewish scholars aren't too excited to talk about people who leave the community, leave the fold, not going to Christianity as something which you've written extensively about, especially in your masterpiece looking at centuries of conversion. This was a normal path, it seems, for German Jews, but he took a very unusual path and so he sort of fell between the cracks. Here's a person whose life sheds insight on German-Jewish history, Muslim-German history, and also gay history, and for some reason, no one had taken up to write about him.

28:59 Deborah Hertz: Well, that's really, really so wonderful because as a big believer in how biography can really open up bigger themes, you've done really a great job on that. I wanted to talk about the different kinds of conversion and what the term conversion means at least in the two religions, Judaism and Islam. So, you write about how his conversion in 1925 did not involve extensive rituals, and - I'm not an expert in this. I did a little digging. I found that really interesting because it's quite different from Christianity where baptism is a very set script of what has to happen. The other issue is different ways to leave Judaism. On many accounts, Judaism

doesn't really pay attention to other religions that you might add. It's a greedy religion that keeps you Jewish. Although sometimes in history, as you probably know, we have examples of Jews who converted to Christianity then wanted to return to Judaism, and actually had a ritual to return to Judaism. You also talk about his, I think it's 1936, his *austritt aus der Gemeinde* [exit the community], which is a communal decision rather than a religious decision. Could you talk a little bit about the swinging doors between Judaism and Islam?

30:25 Marc Baer: Absolutely. So normally, today in Islam, one converts by reciting the Shahadah, the profession of faith that there is no God save God and Muhammad is God's prophet. That's assumed to be the first pillar of Islam for Muslims around the world. A new believer needs to say that and then after that, they will change their daily habits, and learn Arabic, and learn how to pray, and so on. But that's key. This formula is key. What's intriguing is that this Muslim community that Marcus joined was called the Ahmadi, and they are a small sect within Islam. In fact, they've split into two - I'm not going to go to all the details - but the group that he joined developed in British India in the 19th century with this charismatic, messianic, prophetic figure. They did not require that people have to state the profession of faith, that people did not have to declare there's one God and Muhammad is God's prophet. That's how Marcus was then able to create his own new pillar of Islam, which for him is beauty and love and pacifism, and so on. The group he joined gave him this ability to fashion an Islam for himself. This isn't just wacky Weimar eclecticism, this is also that particular group and its approach. In fact, in those years when they are active in England and in Germany, they did not require that people leave Christianity or Judaism either. Now, of course, today, Muslims would say, well, this is impossible. You cannot believe that Jesus is Christ's Messiah. Jesus in Islam is only a prophet, so they contradict. You can't be, any Muslim today in San Diego would tell you you can't be Christian and Muslim at the same time. But this group, the Ahmadi, did not demand. That's probably the first question.

32:33 Marc Baer: The second question is about his *austritt* [exit]. And again, he, we know about his decision from his writings, this is his later writings. And he says that he declares that he never wanted to leave Judaism, that he didn't have to, right? He was able to add Islam to his Judaism. He didn't see any contradiction. Like some of the people you've written about, some of these 19th-century figures who saw Islam as rational, anti-superstitious, just like Judaism, he didn't feel there was any contradiction. He joins Islam. He doesn't *abmeldung* [sign-off] from the Jewish community in Berlin. But in 1936, when the Gestapo is threatening to close the mosque or to hand it over to a pro-Nazi Muslim organization, the Ahmadi are, you wouldn't call them anti-Nazi, but they're not cooperating with the Nazis and they're not espousing Nazi ideology hardly ever, there's one case. Point being, that the Nazis wanted to take the single mosque in Germany out of their hands, give it to a violently pro-Nazi Muslim group that was also Sunni, not Ahmadi. But so to prevent

that, Marcus basically disappeared. He basically went underground. He resigned as head of the Deutsche-Muslimische Gesellschaft and he also left Judaism at that time so as not to get his Muslim brothers in trouble.

34:12 Deborah Hertz: Fascinating. One little follow-up question. What's so amazing about the Dönme and about the Frankists also, if listeners, the Frankists were very similar to the Dönme and they occur a century later. These were syncretist groups in which, as my understanding, there is an attempt to blend Jewish theology, Jewish practices with either Islamic or Catholic practices. Now, from my reading of your bio, Marcus is not a syncretist, he's a full-on Muslim. Although he doesn't break his formal ties, he doesn't seem - and he has these personal ties - he doesn't seem interested in bringing any Judaism into Islam. Did I read that correctly?

35:05 Marc Baer: Fair enough. When it comes to Jewish ritual, Jewish belief, Jewish theology, that's fair. But when it comes to being a German Jew who likes Goethe, some of these other cultural aspects of his life are familiar to those of us who look at German-Jewish history. He also was, you know, the people you've studied, he was very assimilated. His family, they were Jews in Imperial Germany, in that part which became part of Poland, in Pozen. But to one extent they probably had a Christmas tree like others, of someone like people in his circle, like Hirschfeld for example, very proudly had a Christmas tree at home as part of being German. He's coming from that assimilated Jewish milieu, so it's not too surprising that he's not bringing Jewish religion into his Islamic religion.

36:00 Deborah Hertz: You know, I could imagine a wonderful dialogue with Martin Buber, who was very interested in merging or keeping alive both his Jewish nationalism and Jewish religion and a German identity and a support for World War I. I can imagine a late-night dialogue. Let me move on to the other two very famous Jewish converts to Islam. I don't know their Islamic names. One was Lev Nussimbaum and the other one was Leopold Weiss. They're very different from each other. When you were framing your plan for the biography, did you make a conscious decision to keep them in the background rather than in the foreground?

36:42 Marc Baer: Absolutely. Again, much has been written about the one who is now known as Muhammad Asad for example. There have been books about him, there have been documentaries, there have been films. He's a well-known name around the world, partly because of his own writing, and his own, he was Pakistan's UN [United Nations] ambassador in the [19]50s and so on. Muhammad Asad is very famous, also very well-known. And the other, the other person you mentioned also was quite known in his day and there has been a very popular biography written about him which is a great read, but my interest was in this other figure, and there are a few reasons for that. First of all, as a historian, we like to discover new things. I thought I'm going to write about the one people haven't written about. But also because, as I mentioned in the beginning, the way he viewed Islam - you

could agree with or not agree with it - but he tried to make Islam into a German religion. He tried to find a place for Muslims like himself in Germany. Mohammed Assad on the other hand left Central Europe. He was from Austria. He left Central Europe. He went to Arabia. He dressed as a Bedouin. He rode around on a camel. He spoke Arabic. He married a series of Arab women. Eventually, he was too critical of the Saudis, they kicked him out. That's when he went to Pakistan. But he thought that there's no future for Islam in Europe. That to be Muslim, one had to leave Europe. Asad was like that. The other person, who you mentioned, Said Kurban, Kurban Said, was again also very Orientalist and he wrote a series of Orientalist novels that so infuriated the Muslims of Berlin, that they called him all kinds of negative even anti-Jewish slurs because they couldn't forget that he was a Jew who converted but then, in their view, made Muslims look bad. He too went around with Kafia and this sort of thing. There was another famous convert not to confuse the audience, but there was another one who also dressed up as an Arab. These other three men and they thought that to be a Muslim was to be Arab. And what I found so fascinating about Marcus, was that he thought that lifelong he never had to stop being a Jew or a Muslim, or a gay man, and still be a proud German. That's what I found so appealing.

- 39:20 Deborah Hertz: Yeah. It must be a great read in German. Has it been translated into German yet?
- 39:28 Marc Baer: Not yet. No.
- 39:29 Deborah Hertz: Yeah. I can't wait for that. Let's move to probably the most famous Muslim in Nazi Germany, who was the Mufti [Haj Amin al-Husseini] who has a famous meeting with Hitler. And Benjamin Netanyahu recently made the shockingly Islamophobic comment that the Mufti is actually responsible for the genocide. He had to walk that back I think as in about five minutes later. I think that the American-Jewish audience, I can't speak for the German audience, finds it very convenient to find an antisemitic Muslim in Nazi Germany because it seems to confirm all the binaries of the Israel-Palestine conflict. You don't pay a lot of attention to him, of course, he's in your book. Can you talk a little bit about how you see your book as a refutation of a kind of shorthand Islamophobia around the Mufti?
- 40:31 Marc Baer: Well, in my book, I asked the question which Muslims, where does the history of Muslims in Germany begin? Does it begin with the Mufti in 1941? Or does it begin really in the 1920s with the Ahmadi who are liberal tolerant Muslims who allowed a gay Jewish man to be their spokesperson? A lot of focus has been on the Second World War and rightfully so. The Mufti, he not just met with Hitler but he met with Himmler, and he was well aware of what the Nazis were doing to the Jews, and he advocated that they continue what they were doing. It's all been documented. We know a great deal about the Mufti. There's no question that he was a virulent antisemite, and he was there with the Nazi leaders and egging them

all. But he's one person, one infamous person, he's one politician, there were also other pro-Nazi Muslims in Berlin, but there also were Hindus. One of the leading Hindu nationalist was a fervent Lao-Tze and all day long we don't hear about this character and no one's telling India they have to get rid of that national hero who was a Nazi at the time. But there are other Muslims too. And so, in this book, I'm shifting the focus to another type of Muslim, another possibility, and this was a group that again, they saved his deputy Imam. His Imam at the time saved his life. We don't know if he really rescued him from the camp. That's unlikely. He was probably released from the camp, by the Nazis authorities, because when they arrested men after [November] 9 and 10 pogrom, during the pogrom, they didn't intend to kill them all, they did kill a number of them. But the intention was to scare them, to release them from the camp, to steal their assets, and get them to leave Germany. That was really the intention. But the Imam did provide a character witness, a testimony that he was not a threat to the state. And with that testimony, he was able to get a British visa to India. Then he was able to take the train over the border to Switzerland. So a Muslim saved this Jew's life. And I thought that was an important story to bring up as well.

42:59 Deborah Hertz: Absolutely, absolutely - just fascinating. My final question has to do with secularism, socialism, pacifism, feminism, and gay rights. One of the things that I've found really fascinating is the role of a woman named Bertha Pappenheim, who was a very traditional Jew, who was also very involved in saving prostitutes. She strikes me as being in a way very similar to Marcus in the sense that she never gives up religion, even though she espouses causes that were mainly seen as secular. When Marcus calls for a mass conversion of Germans - presumably he means Jewish as well as Christian - to Islam, and yet his good buddies are militantly secular and certainly, gay rights, feminism, socialism are seen as very secular movements. Now we live at a time today when there has been this massive return to religion, and all the secular movements predicted that religion would be dead, God would be dead. So, in a way, he's kind of a salve to one of the huge binaries of the 20th century, which is, as it were, progress on one side and tradition on the other side. In your valuation of him as - I couldn't quite decide how you view him - do you view him as a tragic hero who's born at the wrong time, or do you see him as a flawed person who makes certain, let's say the roots of his intersectional identity are actually in conflict with each other and yet he manages to hold them all together? So, could you talk a little bit about secular versus religion in his, in his being?

44:52 Marc Baer: Yes. This is very important question. Because again you know in Jewish studies, German studies, Islamic studies, we sort of, we have these tropes and we always write about them. We write about the same figures. We write about these Jewish revolutionaries. They're always left-wing. There has been a lot of them from [Karl] Marx onwards and before Marx, after Marx. There's a certain way we think Jews have changed the world. They joined the left, they're

revolutionaries, and Marcus, again, he's kind of a right-wing fellow. He's patriotic. Men of his generation - he is born in 1880 - these are people who, if he were not who he was, wouldn't necessarily joined the Nazi party, but would still support the conservative parties. So, he also, he was quite misogynistic. I mean, his imagined world is a world without women and he has very disparaging things to say about women. This is one of the worst sides of him, of course. But in the biography - because it's the first biography of him in any language - I chose to just put him out there and not to condemn him, not to praise him, not to make them into a hero, but just to show these odd contradictory ways that human beings can be. So, he's not left-wing, he's kind of right-wing, but he's also a gay rights activist, but he's not the leader of any organization, but he's Hirschfeld's, right-hand man. Of course Hirschfeld and also Kurt Hiller. Kurt Hiller, I mean Kurt Hiller is my hero really. Marcus is not my hero. Hiller is my hero. He goes out there and he fights for his beliefs and he's a socialist and he's a feminist and he's a really radical thinker that cared about human freedom. Marcus isn't going to be on the street corner shouting at people, but he's going to be the one in the editorial office, you know, correcting everyone's poems and make sure that the publication is out on time. So he's like, he's like the glue in the movement. You needed people like that in the gay rights movement. You needed people who are calm and rational and good thinkers and good writers who could sort of help, help these people just get the text out on time and to get the word out and get the petition to the Justice Minister for him to sign in 1925 and 1929. So, that's how I see him. But he's a German patriot. That's probably his core value. But for him to be a German patriot, one really also needs to be religiously Muslim, sexually gay, and ethnically Jewish. This is the unique world he presents.

47:52 Deborah Hertz: My last question has to do with how Islam viewed - not his Jewish roots because that seems to go back really for centuries of Jews becoming Muslims in the Ottoman world - but his gayness. One of the intriguing things about your book is this notion that Islam is more tolerant of homosocial, not necessarily homosexual but homosocial relationships. And that's kind of a truism for East versus West. But the degree to which he took that by being in the Hirschfeld Society. Are we learning something important about the gender politics of Islam through his life?

48:37 Marc Baer: Well again, it was well-known that he was a gay rights activist. As I mentioned, he had this younger blonde Catholic boyfriend and they maintained their relations as I could trace it into the 1950s. And he has, you know, he links together, he does not separate his worlds. So, his Jewish mother knows about his gay boyfriend, and that is also known by his Imam. Now, whether his Imam - his Imam doesn't marry, he's good-looking, he's stylish - Marcus writes unpublished erotic short stories and poems about him. Who knows. The historical record only shows us so much. But this was a community again, and Marcus wasn't the only gay man in that Muslim community in Berlin. The man that they sent to Vienna to

establish a mosque there - it wasn't successful - was, today we would call bisexual basically, gay again also. This was a community that was open to those and that's also an important part of the book because there have been people in Germany - Muslims in Germany - who say that, well okay, it's fine if it's not acted upon. So, it's fine to be gay, but you just have to not love anyone. Well, but Marcus was loving people and so was this other member of the mosque community. So, it shows that at that time in that place that Muslim community was open to probably lesbians as well.

- 50:17 Deborah Hertz: Okay, well, I think our time is up. I think Marc, you, and I could go on for a nice long evening, but I think our time is up, so thank you so much. I'm only really sorry that we can't be in person because we could give you some sunshine and hopefully you'll come next year. Thank you so much. I want to say goodbye to our audience. Thank you, Marc.
- 50:41 Marc Baer: Thank you.
- 50:42 Susanne Hillman: I would like to add my thanks to Deborah's. Well, thank you, Marc, so much for joining us. Thank you, Deborah, for adding so much to our appreciation of Marc's book. Thank you again, everybody. Thank you, Marc and Deborah, and have a good rest of the day. Bye, everybody.
- 51:00 [Hugo Marcus: A Muslim Jew Under the Swastika / Featuring Marc David Baer, Professor of International History, London School of Economics and Political Science / April 6, 2022]
- 51:04 [Presented by / The Holocaust Living History Workshop / Deborah hertz, Director, The Jewish Studies Program, UC San Diego / Susanne Hillman, Program Coordinator, The Holocaust Living History Workshop / UC San Diego Library / Erik T. Mitchell, The Audrey Geisel University Library / Nikki Kolupailo, Director of Communications and Engagement]
- 51:08 [Read Write Think Dream / The Library Channel / UC San Diego / uctv.tv/library-channel/]
- 51:11 [uctv / University of California Television / www.uctv.tv/ / The views, contents, and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of the University of California / ©2022 Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved.]