

Mehnaz Afridi's public lecture, March 18

Megan Hollinger: and I will make sure that the transcriptions are on.

Megan Hollinger: Dr. Afridi is a professor of religious Studies, and the director of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Interface Education Center at Manhattan College. She teaches courses on Islam, the holocaust, genocide, comparative religion, and feminism. Her most recent book is *Shoah Through Muslim Eyes* (Academic Studies Press, 2017)

Megan Hollinger: Dr, Afridi's recent book was nominated for the Yad Vashem International Book Prize for Holocaust Research and the Jacob Schnitzer Book Award.

Megan Hollinger: She is currently working on a book *The Wounded Muslim* which will be published through Lexington Books, as a co-edited book on *International Approaches to the Holocaust* from Nebraska University Press.

Megan Hollinger: These last two are forthcoming. In 2019, she was awarded the Costello award for teaching excellence in the School of Liberal Arts at Manhattan College, and in 2022, as an educator, she was awarded the Distinguished Lasallian Award.

Megan Hollinger: Dr. Afridi obtained her PhD from the University of South Africa, and her Master's, and bachelor's degrees from Syracuse University. I will now call upon Dr. Deidre Butler, director of the Zelikovitz Centre for Jewish studies at Carlton, to say a few words.

Deidre Butler: Thank you so much, Professor Hollinger, and for the students in this class for opening up your class today and welcoming us to listen to Professor Afridi with you. I'm really delighted that this lecture is happening in this class, which is a course on the holocaust that's really been revised and renewed by Professor Hollinger. Professor Hollinger, herself is an emerging scholar, who is contributing to Holocaust Studies, in her important work on holocaust denial. This talk feels very fitting.

Deidre Butler: We're so grateful to Professor Afridi for joining us today. As some of you heard as we were just getting started, we have a Carlton connection with Dr. Afridi as she generously contributed a guest lecture to the *Hear Our Voices* project.

Deidre Butler: This project is an open educational resource that's available to teachers, to students and to researchers, and we're launching it next week on November twenty fourth. So please reach out if you'd like to join us for that.

Deidre Butler: Professor Afridi is a leading scholar of Muslim responses to the holocaust and her book *Shoah Through Muslim Eyes*, which Dr. Hollinger just mentioned, marks a key intervention in bridging the disciplinary conversations of Holocaust studies and Muslim studies.

Deidre Butler: I'm particularly pleased that Dr. Afridi is speaking today during Holocaust Education Month, speaking on this important topic of Muslim and Arab responses to the Holocaust. And before we begin, I want you to think for a moment about that topic that theme, and about all of the assumptions we all bring to it.

Deidre Butler: What preconceived notions of the antisemitism or holocaust denial do we bring to this lecture? Do you imagine that there's no connection? Do you imagine there are no responses? Or do you imagine negative or positive responses?

Deidre Butler: The historiography of the Holocaust has only in the last several years taken seriously how Muslims and Arabs should be engaged in thinking about the Holocaust.

Deidre Butler: Questions about the ways in which the Nazis and their supporters sought to engage Muslims and Arabs; How Arabs were targeted racially by Nazi ideology and how Muslims rescued Jews often at great personal risk. All of these are being explored today in ways that were simply unimagined even twenty years ago.

Deidre Butler: If our historical understanding of this period is still growing responses to the holocaust among Muslims and Arabs are also still evolving.

Deidre Butler: Responses among Muslims and Arabs take place in particular historical, political, religious, and cultural contexts. And whatever assumptions you bring to these questions, it is more complex than we might imagine.

Deidre Butler: For this reason, we're most fortunate to have Professor Afridi here today to guide us through these difficult questions.

Deidre Butler: Thank you,

Megan Hollinger: Pretty. I'll pass it to you, Dr. Afridi.

Mehnaz Afridi: Do you have the capabilities to screen share. Whenever you're ready to do that, you're good to go.

Mehnaz Afridi: and to mention that it is, you know, Holocaust Week this week. And I just want to say that this is a very complex issue and topic that I teach. I teach a class called "Muslims in the Holocaust" at Manhattan College, and we have some very fiery

Mehnaz Afridi: tense conversations towards the end of the class like yesterday. We did. But it, it's one of the things that you know. If you are studying the Holocaust, you realize, regardless of who you are.

Mehnaz Afridi: There are so many complexities around what happened? Who was involved? What countries were involved? What races were involved? I think. What? What's interesting about

Mehnaz Afridi: looking at Muslims, and the Holocaust is Wow! What do Muslims have to do with the Holocaust? And I think people, I think students, are really attracted to this topic, but they're also attracted to this topic, because it has a lot to do with the contemporary situations that we're in, and I always feel

Mehnaz Afridi: that as professors and as educators, we have to make things really relevant. So I'm just going to say that as I open.

Mehnaz Afridi: Thank you so much for your introduction. I just wanted to say a few things about myself. I am Muslim. I was born in Pakistan, and I was raised in Europe in the Middle East, and I came to the United States when I was in high school.

Mehnaz Afridi: I really had different experiences growing up with many different cultures, especially Western Europe, but also the Middle East.

Mehnaz Afridi: I also have a real deep connection with Pakistan, because my mother lives there, so I have to go there every year, and it's a very long flight. Now you know the I do have a very eclectic background, and I feel like I'm very privileged to have this background.

Mehnaz Afridi: to do a PhD. And be here in the United States at a university. So, having said that I wouldn't say that I run the Holocaust, Genocide, and Interfaith Education Center at our college. Our college is Catholic. Our community is Jewish, and I'm Muslim.

Mehnaz Afridi: It's a very interesting kind of mix that we have at Manhattan College, and I think those are very interesting mixes, and it's very interesting and important and significant that non-Jews talk about the Holocaust. .

Mehnaz Afridi: It's very important that you know. Non-Muslims talk about Islamophobia, and I think it's very impactful, especially for students and communities.

Mehnaz Afridi: I want to begin with showing you and just taking you through a highlight of the kinds of work that I do, and perhaps what we can even begin to learn today.

Mehnaz Afridi: In terms of my book, which is, *Shoah through Muslim Eyes*. This book keeps giving, by the way, Right? It's like I've put it away. I publish all these articles. I start talking with Muslims. I was like. No, no, we want to talk about the *Shoah Through Muslim Eyes*. And the reason I wrote this book is because I was frustrated as a Muslim within my own community.

Mehnaz Afridi: About holocaust distortion mainly, relativity and denial. I also was, was very, very tired of

Mehnaz Afridi: arguing with people, and I realized that no Muslim had really just put down on paper what the facts were about the holocaust, and that's all I did. It's written, it's well researched but it's written for a general audience on purpose.

Mehnaz Afridi: I'm very happy to say that it's been taught in book clubs, in high schools and colleges, and that's really cool, because it has reached a lot of people, and it's not just sitting on an industrial shelf, which is what probably happened to most of my work and my research.

Mehnaz Afridi: *Shoah Through Muslim Eyes*, was a project where I began to interview survivors. One of them was Robert Clary, who just passed away two days ago.

Mehnaz Afridi: On Wednesday. He was a man who was an actor. He was from France, and he was at Buchenwald, and so I just wanted to mention his name because he just passed away, and he was just an amazing person.

Mehnaz Afridi: It was probably the first time that a Muslim sat down with holocaust survivors and asked them questions not just about their story, but also about their feelings about Islam and the Middle East, and what was going on. So, it was a very interesting journey for me.

Mehnaz Afridi: That chapter in my book is called “The Document”, because one of the things that

Mehnaz Afridi: I learned from a lot of the survivors that I did interview, was that what would you say to someone who was denying the holocaust or making it, relativizing it.

Mehnaz Afridi: And one of them she turned around to me, Elizabeth Ben, and said, Well,

Mehnaz Afridi: I am the document. I am the living document. So that's why the chapter is called “The Document.” I just wanted to address that, and also respect the survivors that sat with me for hours telling me their story.

Mehnaz Afridi: The framing that I kind of want to do is, you know, make, and mention my other book *International Approaches to the Holocaust* which we have finished, and hopefully it'll be out next year is why that for me. I want to reach non-Jewish audiences, and also

Mehnaz Afridi: talk about the scope of the holocaust, the expansion of the holocaust, and another chapter in my book is called

Mehnaz Afridi: “The Holocaust is Unprecedented”. I don't call it unique, but I call it unprecedented. And the reason I do that is because there is so much connected to the holocaust, and how far it went all the way to North Africa, under the Vichy government, to places like Greece.

Mehnaz Afridi: There were a lot of ways that we still think of the Holocaust as a European story, and I see it as an expansive story. So does the historian, Dan Stone, and this is on the framing of what I'd like us to think about,

Mehnaz Afridi: Stone argued that overseas imperialism acted as a model for Nazi claims for Lebanon's own living space. To him the holocaust should be understood as a continuation of the policy as undertaken by the European Imperial powers.

Mehnaz Afridi: Elie Weisel proclaimed that the Holocaust, not one atrocity in history, but a revelation.

Mehnaz Afridi: Auschwitz was a unique fan of phenomena, he reflected, a unique event, like the revelation at Sinai,

Mehnaz Afridi: and I say the Holocaust is entangled with colonial history that sometimes implicates other religious minorities, indigenous people, people, and in this case Muslims and Arabs.

Mehnaz Afridi: So. Why why the holocaust in Islam? It has a lot of people feel like they are juxtaposed to each other.

Mehnaz Afridi: I feel that they are not, not in terms of the religion itself, but also the fact that there were Muslims that were indeed part of the holocaust story in places like North Africa, and I'll put, as I found in my research later on in places like Dachau and Auschwitz as well.

Mehnaz Afridi: But what was interesting to me was that

Mehnaz Afridi: in Arab and African countries the Vichy Government was able to persecute Jews, change laws of citizenship, in places like Morocco, and also

Mehnaz Afridi: create labor camps in places like Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, and Libya,

Mehnaz Afridi: and the questions I want us to ask, and I want you to ask, maybe, and I mean I can't. We can't cover everything today, as you know. But at least we can start to think about them. Didn't Muslims play a role in the Holocaust?

Mehnaz Afridi: Why would you teach the holocaust to Muslims? Why is this work relevant and important today. How do Jews and Muslims respond to this kind of work, especially today?

Mehnaz Afridi: And Yes, Muslims did play a role in the holocaust. And why would you teach this to Muslims? Because I think that

Mehnaz Afridi: it's important to teach Muslims about the history of others? It's important to teach non-Jews the history, and to Jews the history of Muslims. I think that we live in a perspective

Mehnaz Afridi: that has shaped us to see certain things in a certain veneer, and of course that's sort of the construction the society, the culture of the country we're from. Perhaps this pool we went to, the families we grew up in. But at the same time, what education does in the context of podcast education?

Mehnaz Afridi: It asked us very deep questions, questions about who was involved. Why they were involved.

Mehnaz Afridi: And what are the ethical implications of that involvement?

Mehnaz Afridi: Why is this work relevant, important today?

Mehnaz Afridi: It's important today, because when I teach the whole course, I look at colonization, especially in North Africa, I look at different laws, racial laws against Jews. I look at what happened? What happened with racial laws against the Arabs and the Muslims,

Mehnaz Afridi: and we'd start to start thinking about, what was the situation of Muslims and Arabs?

Mehnaz Afridi: pre holocaust, but also, we discuss the state of Israel in one thousand nine hundred and forty-eight, and I think that's a very, very important conversation to have.

Mehnaz Afridi: How do Jews and Muslims respond to this? Actually, they're really fascinated with this work. It's a growing field. Now there's a book called *North Africa and the Holocaust*

done by a friend of mine, Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein. He also has done the first kind of graphic novel about North Africa.

Mehnaz Afridi: There's work being done by David Matadel, a British scholar on Islam and Nazi Germany. It's a burgeoning field. And I'm really, really happy to be part of that field. Robert Satloff, author of *Among the Righteousness* writes about his quest to find the Arab hero whose story will change the way Arabs view Jews, themselves, and their own history.

Mehnaz Afridi: What do we know about the expansion, the holocaust? We know that it went to Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria. We have documentation from there, but we also have physical evidence of the Vichy Government, and their own list of

Mehnaz Afridi: Jews that were living there, as well as people who are political prisoners as well as resistance fighters, and a lot of them sometimes ended up in the same camps.

Mehnaz Afridi: What do we know about colonialism? Unfortunately, very little. I find myself in college, you know, teaching lessons about European colonization from the start of like one thousand six hundred to the present century.

Mehnaz Afridi: But really colonization and very simple terms is the policy of practice of acquiring full or part of political control over another country, occupying it with settlers and exploiting it economically.

Mehnaz Afridi: North Africa was, of course, colonized by the French,

Mehnaz Afridi: and

Mehnaz Afridi: because of the Vichy government that was in power, the local people in North Africa were very used to the European sort of colonization practices. They also knew how Europeans had implemented certain

Mehnaz Afridi: racial laws for both Jews and Arabs living there.

Mehnaz Afridi: They also knew their resources were being taken, but they really were not aware of the holocaust in Europe, and that's the interesting thing.

Mehnaz Afridi: And what's interesting is that Jews that were persecuted in Europe were not aware of what was going on in North Africa.

Mehnaz Afridi: So today we have social media in a very different context, where we could watch right now, Iran and the protests we can perhaps see certain photographs of the Uyghur Muslims being persecuted in China. Perhaps we can even see they are hanging someone

Mehnaz Afridi: in Myanmar which they do. Social media. However, at this time there was no such thing as social media.

Mehnaz Afridi: and there really wasn't much talk about what was going on in Europe. There were certain Jews that did visit North Africa and had some knowledge, but we're still unsure because they were going back to Africa, and places like Morocco to visit their families.

Mehnaz Afridi: the holocaust and colonialism is not a comparison in my work at all. I make that very clear. But perhaps I ask myself. Can we understand historical context at different times of one another?

Mehnaz Afridi: When we think about, you know the colonization, And then we think of holocaust as a separate event. It provides an understanding of different power structures. It defines the many challenges that we face today. Also, between Jews and Muslims.

Mehnaz Afridi: Yesterday I gave a lecture on Zionism, and the question of whether it was colonization. We talked about why it perhaps was colonization? Why was colonization,

Mehnaz Afridi: and it was a very tense conversation, because there were a lot of students already who had been taking my class with a lot of presumptions of the fact that European Jews somehow were settler, colonial,

Mehnaz Afridi: peoples.

Mehnaz Afridi: What they had forgotten was the Jews of Europe for the ones, indeed, that were being murdered.

Mehnaz Afridi: These are very important conversations to have, because even if you're taking a class for a long time, or you're listening to someone you're reading about. It's just this, like this weird barrier that has been created somehow about the European, about the Jew in different ways.

Mehnaz Afridi: Muslims and the colonial membranes and boundaries are very important to a lot of Arabs and Muslims are still in many of these areas, and how they remember Jews living amidst them, and how they remember also what happened in Palestine, and then the creation and the state of Israel.

Mehnaz Afridi: There were seventeen slave labor camps that the Nazis established through the Vichy Government, three in Morocco, three in Algeria, seven in Tunisia, and four in Libya.

Mehnaz Afridi: That's a lot of labor camps, and the slave labor camps

Mehnaz Afridi: have been described, and there are descriptions of how they were, and these descriptions were saved. They were not like the European camps like the death camps in Europe.

Mehnaz Afridi: we can't really compare them, but sometimes they were even more brutal because they had extreme temperatures, and the heat and the cold, and there were Jews that were punished by being left outside in deep graves.

Mehnaz Afridi: a lot of us can say, Yeah, Well, this is worse, or this is a bad, but they were very harsh, and we have to recognize how to choose. In North Africa suffered.

Mehnaz Afridi: There were Muslims that helped the Vichy Government because they had no choice. They were working for the Vichy government. It was labor to them.

Mehnaz Afridi: There were Muslims that sometimes were perpetrators. And there were many Muslims that were just bystanders, or

Mehnaz Afridi: the last and most important point. for all of us are rescuers of Jews at that time who risked their lives.

Mehnaz Afridi: This is a photograph of a concentration camp in Libya. It obviously looks very different from say Europe, but at the same time we have a lot of labor. We have a lot of mix of the local Arab and African population, working for the Vichy.

Mehnaz Afridi: And then you have Jews that were put into these concentration camps. When I mentioned that also Arabs were in camps and Muslims, if they were Dissenters, or were political prisoners after Vichy, because they all of the countries, were interested in

Mehnaz Afridi: getting rid of the colonial empires. Even before we see the advent of the holocaust in North Africa.

Mehnaz Afridi: It's just a map for you. I know It's a class, so I love maps, and I'm sure the teachers are thorough here but one of the things that that you find out about Africa in one thousand nine hundred and forty. It's just sort of like a

Mehnaz Afridi: map that talks about who was in control of what right? The British control Egypt and Sudan and Nigeria. Then you have uh French West Africa, the Vichy French control. Algeria Libya was under Italian fascist control. Right, Mussolini,

Mehnaz Afridi: and then French equatorial Africa was where the French free forces were, and then up above you have the Soviet Union, Turkey, and Syria.

Mehnaz Afridi: What's interesting about this map to me is especially to me, maybe because I'm from the background. I'm Pakistani. You know my country was colonized, too,

Mehnaz Afridi: as the subcontinent of India is a long-standing colonization done by the British. Every Muslim country, including Turkey, in terms of the Ottoman protectorate was colonized by a European force. That's a very important thing for us to think about.

Mehnaz Afridi: I don't think we spend enough time thinking about that. And you know, when a lot of these countries were made into nation states and were liberated. There were a lot of issues, too, in terms of language. What language should we speak? All of North Africa spoke Arabic

Mehnaz Afridi: and French different kinds of Arabic dialect and French. you know, in Egypt and Sudan. They speak English

Mehnaz Afridi: and their own dialect. in my country, my background. It was English and Urdu. there's this sort of like, you know, these imprints that are left of the colonial control, their imprints of religion that are left in these areas like Christianity.

Mehnaz Afridi: So, you see many, many missionaries that came through all of these places, and set up churches, and changed the language, changed the schools, and it wasn't as if you couldn't practice your faith. You kind of went to a Catholic school, went home

Mehnaz Afridi: and did your *salat* as a Muslim. Very interesting kind of syncretic way of being in terms of religion.

Mehnaz Afridi: And here I just wanted to talk about Mohamed Azerki Berkani,

Mehnaz Afridi: who was an Algerian (Muslim) resistance fighter. He spent three years of camps, a year of concentration camp,

Mehnaz Afridi: two years in the disciplinary Centre. So why do I talk about this? There was a diary he wrote in one thousand nine hundred and sixty-four that we found at the University of Paris that we translated, my student, and I, which I am still wanting to publish at some point. His memoir (diary) is titled "Three Years of Camps: A Year of Concentration Camp, Two Years of the Disciplinary Centre: Djenien-Bou-Rezg sud Oranais (1940-1943) Vichy Government."

Mehnaz Afridi: But in this diary you we find that he was imprisoned with Jews. But they had different sections. They had the section for the Algerians or any kind of resistors, and they had the political prisoners, and then they had common criminals,

Mehnaz Afridi: and he describes the situation where one of the captains, Lieutenant Dóriko and this captain was extremely vicious and very, very brutal, and he tried to separate the wall between Jews and the Arabs, thinking they will kill each other.

Mehnaz Afridi: And he writes about this quite prolifically in this diary, that when he tore down the wall between the Jews and the Muslims. He says it was like we were brothers,

Mehnaz Afridi: and we fought against them.

Mehnaz Afridi: defying their assumption that we were to kill each other. It's a moment of,

Mehnaz Afridi: you know. You just sort of read that, and you go. Wow! Well, of course, because they were always together. They were co-existing together in this place called North Africa, with, of course, anti Semitism, and maybe anti Arab sentiments. There were *mellas*. These are ghettos in North Africa. But

Mehnaz Afridi: the feeling was that we, Jew, and Arab are Muslims together like brothers, and it's an amazing diary. That I share sometimes with my classes and in my lectures.

Mehnaz Afridi: What was the role of Muslims in Vichy. Here, on your left side is a family that's actually Jewish. And on the right is a very typical sort of interesting photograph of the Orientalism of the Muslim woman,

Mehnaz Afridi: wearing a headscarf, reading Lamond in Arabic, but also a French speaker, just to show you that the kind of intersections of Jews, the Arabs and Muslims that are Arabs, but also the colonial sort of influences that are coming through.

Mehnaz Afridi: in terms of North Africa, but especially in terms of looking at what was going on with Arabs and Muslims. Altogether

Mehnaz Afridi: there were bystanders. There was an army. the Hadžiefendić Legion (Muslim militia) was inducted into the 13th Waffen Mountain Division of the SS Handschar (1st Croatian). Mufti Amin al-Husseini's speeches and charismatic authority proved instrumental in improving enlistment (in the Handschar) notably. He was highly antisemitic, and was vying for alliances; he had one meeting with Hitler

Mehnaz Afridi: where Hitler really didn't promise him anything. He wanted to meet him again, and he was refused. But here is, you know, it says Islam, and the Jews basically or Judaism, and this is propaganda that was flown all over North Africa

Mehnaz Afridi: by the Germans. It was propaganda against the Jews. It was propaganda to encourage Arabs and Muslims to work against the Jews, using certain, not usual for Jews to sort of align with the Muslim Arab world, because at that time Hitler was in dire need of allies.

Mehnaz Afridi: So, there was this little blazing Handschar army built, and they lasted for about four months, and that's all.

Mehnaz Afridi: and then you have the wonderful story of rescuers. for example, in Tunisia. And here you know as we think about this and go through this, you see this sort of complexity, right? The perpetrators, the bystanders, but then you have the rescuers who are really rescuing their lives

Mehnaz Afridi: in order to help their Jewish brothers and sisters. Khaled Abdul-Wahab is a very interesting man. He was in Tunisia in December one thousand nine hundred and forty-two

Mehnaz Afridi: assisted two dozen Jews on his own, in the dead of the night

Mehnaz Afridi: to his estate twenty miles away. There he protected them from the German unit in the area until May 1943

Mehnaz Afridi: when his guests were able to depart safely. So, he really knew what was going on, and he also is known to protect a woman that was going to be attacked by a Nazi soldier

Mehnaz Afridi: sexually. And so, he goes back there. He knows what's going on, and he tries. He comes and intervenes and stops that from happening.

Mehnaz Afridi: So again, you have this story of the Protector, a man who was Muslim, clearly a Tunisian man, but also very much committed to saving, and also rescuing life.

Mehnaz Afridi: for these families that he kept in the back of his house.

Mehnaz Afridi: the Moroccan king (Sultan). He, too, was a person to be admired.

Mehnaz Afridi: He was somebody who really believed in Jews being Moroccan

Mehnaz Afridi: first. If you were Jewish, if you're a Muslim, if you're a Christian, it really did not matter to him. He really refused to follow the antisemitic orders by the Nazi

Mehnaz Afridi: Nazi controlled Vichy government in France and exclude any of the Moroccan two hundred thousand Jews from being publicly humiliated or going through any other regulations at all. He is somebody that people talk about in Morocco, right? He's a good memory.

Mehnaz Afridi: He's a person who protected the Jews, and he also did not allow them to wear the yellow star, because he felt that that was a humiliation for them.

Mehnaz Afridi: And the Sultan invited all Rabbis to the one thousand nine hundred and forty-one throne celebration and That was again a very rare thing to be doing in defiance of the Nazis and the Vichy Government.

Mehnaz Afridi: Albanians now Albania, what Albania was the only European country

Mehnaz Afridi: to save all of its Jews during the holocaust.

Mehnaz Afridi: They are seventy percent Muslim, thirty percent Christian

Mehnaz Afridi: Their code of honor, which is the promise they set,

Mehnaz Afridi: and they kept families in their homes. They changed the names to Muslim names. They walk the streets with them, and dress them like Albanian, Muslim woman. There are such amazing stories about Albanians rescuing Jews.

Mehnaz Afridi: And what's really sad about Albania? Is that right? After the same people who rescued Jews and you can read about this because there's tons of material and books and documentaries on this. Is that right after the Albanians saved their Jews, they were persecuted by the Communists

Mehnaz Afridi: and literally hung in those trials right after World War Two.

Mehnaz Afridi: I think we don't recognize this. You know a smaller country in Europe, but the only country that actually rescued all its Jews in terms of thinking about

Mehnaz Afridi: really about the fact that Jews and Muslims and Christians, with the people of the book. and they rely on this to discuss when they're interviewed. What they did. Some of them

are still known to those they rescued. Some of them are waiting and holding on to their objects for them and waiting for them to come back.

Mehnaz Afridi: even a generation after.

Mehnaz Afridi: It was an incredible story if you're interested in researching that I really would recommend it.

Mehnaz Afridi: Also, Noor Inayat Khan is one of my heroes. She's an Indian Muslim woman rescuer, and she was killed in Dachau. She is the woman who became a British spy.

Mehnaz Afridi: She was the direct descendant of Tipu Sultan, an 18th century Muslim leader of Mysore. Her father was a musician and Sufi teacher.

Mehnaz Afridi: and she decided to spy for the British. She went to Paris. She was not very good at it. She wanted to do something for the Jews and

Mehnaz Afridi: because of her the color of her clothing. They had found out that she liked the color blue. There were two woman that told on her and found out that she was a British spy. She, along with two other people who were spying for the British

Mehnaz Afridi: against the regime. She was taken to Dachau and killed there.

Mehnaz Afridi: There's a statue of her in London. And there's also the writings that she did before the war, that you can access now on Amazon, and there's also a movie on about her. I do consider her an incredible heroine for me, especially because she's subcontinental. So, I sort of identify with her

Mehnaz Afridi: in certain ways.

Mehnaz Afridi: There was also the Turkish Vice Council, İsmail Necdet Kent. Kent during World War II, was the Vice Counsel in Marseille, France, between forty-one and forty-four,

Mehnaz Afridi: and he gave documents of citizenship to dozens of Turkish Jews living in France who did not have any identification to save them from deportation to the Nazi gas chambers. The question is, Why did he do that? Because he felt it was wrong. He was in a power

Mehnaz Afridi: position of power. And a lot of the vice counsels and diplomats in place, especially in in France became rescuers, and these diplomats were there as diplomats because Turkey was neutral during world war two

Mehnaz Afridi: and he was able to do that without anybody finding out.

Mehnaz Afridi: The grand mosque in Paris is also a very big story. The only problem with that story is, there is not enough historical documentation. There are people who are still trying to find out, but there's a book about it. There's a little cartoon on it.

Mehnaz Afridi: But basically, the imam was somebody who hid Jews. In the mosque.

Mehnaz Afridi: He actually rallied the religious leaders in Paris

Mehnaz Afridi: to abide by the canonic saying of taking care of the people and protecting Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

Mehnaz Afridi: And what's interesting! A lot of the religious leaders, even in North Africa were very proactive in trying to help Jews.

Mehnaz Afridi: You know it. It's interesting how we see that switch! And people's minds in terms of religious leadership. But the religious leadership really was about protecting, but still sort of concerned about the minorities

Mehnaz Afridi: taking from the egalitarian message of Islam that unfortunately we don't see all the time in many Muslim countries today.

Mehnaz Afridi: Also, another very important person was an Iranian junior diplomat in France, Abdol Hossein Sardari. He's called, like the Iranian Schindler. There's a book about him.

Mehnaz Afridi: He's very interesting because he came up with a racial category called the Mosaic Category to show that Jews were not indeed semitic, but they came from the prophet Moses.

Mehnaz Afridi: It's a very interesting theory, but he was successful.

Mehnaz Afridi: And he helped, you know. Fourteen families escaped by changing their names. And there were Iranian Jews that were stuck so, and he himself, of course, was Muslim. He's actually somebody I focus on because of our perception of Iran, and especially the way that we see Iran in terms of,

Mehnaz Afridi: you know, Iran, as a country rather than Iran as people. And I think that's really really important to bridge that gap today in contemporary life as what, as we know, what's going on in Iran today.

Mehnaz Afridi: Lessons in the holocaust to me is not one story. There are many, many stories that I'm happy to tell.

Mehnaz Afridi: This is one thing that I think most people don't even know about. This is a list of Muslim concentration camp inmates compiled by the SS main economic administrative office. And this tells you

Mehnaz Afridi: this tells you where they were, and this tells you who they were, and they're all identified as Muslims. So, you have Albania, Bulgaria.

Mehnaz Afridi: We also have Ukraine down here a Turkish Serbian, Russian Polish, and the question is what were they, what were they doing there? Some of them were actually caught in sort of an economic opportunity point. They had no idea this was going on and went there for our economic opportunity. And most of them

Mehnaz Afridi: were trying to flee Communism

Mehnaz Afridi: And they were caught, and they were taken to places like Auschwitz,

Mehnaz Afridi: in two thousand and eighteen, before Covid I took a group of fifty-two Jewish and Muslim women to Auschwitz I was there as a teacher and leader. We went to Auschwitz, and we went to Berlin,

Mehnaz Afridi: and at Auschwitz, we went to the Clearing House, which was called Canada, and we did a prayer, a Jewish prayer for the Jewish victims, and we did a Muslim prayer for the Muslim victims. and the Auschwitz Museum was kind enough to give us all the sixty-seven names that they could identify who were indeed killed there.

Mehnaz Afridi: So that was very special and actually very healing for us because it was a shared, you know, feeling and pain.

Mehnaz Afridi: by the way, that trip was incredible. Incredible. And we got to discuss contemporary issues, and

Mehnaz Afridi: you know it was all woman from the ages of seventeen to seventy-one. It was very interesting, the different generations.

Mehnaz Afridi: Muslims were also found in in this place. Camps. There were Albanians, Russians, Eritreans, Syrians, and you know some of them were things like I said from Communism, fascism, and economic poverty,

Mehnaz Afridi: I'm just going to share a couple of documents that I found at the United States Holocaust Museum a few summers ago about a Muslim Russian who was captured by Germans Turkish, moved to Russia captured by Germans in one thousand nine hundred and forty-four.

Mehnaz Afridi: There are tons of these documents. I only had a week there, and I could only go through a few hundred. But I need to go back and finish this work and see who these people were.

Mehnaz Afridi: and they are looking for people (volunteers). If you're interested in going to the Museum and doing this kind of work. It's really incredible. And then there's another document: a Turkish woman whose husband had died migrated to remain in one thousand nine hundred and forty-three, and the Germans arrested her and her family because she did not have papers,

Mehnaz Afridi: was deported by the Germans to work as a carer for the German military there was sent to Batenburg, after being in in a displaced person's camp for a year in one thousand nine hundred and forty-seven.

Mehnaz Afridi: The really interesting stuff that you can find, and who

Mehnaz Afridi: what the migration patterns were, where these people went. Here you have nationality, Turkish occupation, housekeeping, born in 1903,

Mehnaz Afridi: and then the female, and what happened to her. The applicant was born in Turkey. She married nineteen, forty nineteen, twenty-four.

Mehnaz Afridi: and here is her documentation, or when she went to run away. You have everything there and documented even in these accounts to see where Muslims were and what they were doing,

Mehnaz Afridi: and that's it. And the question I have is, what can we actually learn?

Megan Hollinger: Thank you, Dr. Afridi. So much that was fascinating. especially the pictures of the documents that you found in your work. Towards the end that was just so cool to see.

Megan Hollinger: You know. Resources like that because we don't get to see those every day! We can open up the chat or the zoom. for

Megan Hollinger: questions, anything you want clarified. You'd like to know more about Dr. Afridi about her work. Anything you can either use the raise hand function under reactions in the bottom bar.

Megan Hollinger: That's the most helpful that allows me to kind of see who raised first, and who can go first to ask their question. If you prefer, you can put them in the chat either publicly, and I could read them out loud or privately to me, and you can indicate, if you'd like to be anonymous or not. We'll open the floor up to questions.

Megan Hollinger: Anybody

Megan Hollinger: Pamela

Pamela Walker: Mine is just a really simple little question. You mentioned that after the war in Albania the Communists were killing somebody, but I didn't quite understand what you meant. They were killing the Jews of Albania or somebody else, and I didn't understand that. Could you just clarify that?

Mehnaz Afridi: Yeah, I mean, Albania came under Communism, and they were killing Albanian Muslims

Mehnaz Afridi: the Muslims that were actually the Muslims that had rescued the Jews. So, it's, you know, when Albanians talk about it, they feel very sad about this story, because right after they were rescuing Jews; After WWII, their country was occupied by Communists, and was under Communism until the nineteen eighties.

Pamela Walker: Well, I know It's under Communism, but where they, where they, the Communist, murdering the rescuers, or are they murdering the Jews, or both? What's the connection between the murder of the people under Communism and the rescue of Jews, if any.

Mehnaz Afridi: They were murdering the rescuers.

Pamela Walker: Were they murdering them specifically because they rescued Jews or is it, they were just the same people. They were the same people. Sorry

Megan Hollinger: I had a question in the chat, although Nicholas kindly answered it for me. I wanted to know where the memorial, the statue is for Noor Inayat Khan. I think it's in Gordon Square, I believe. Yeah, that's what he had said.

Mehnaz Afridi: Deidre has a question.

Deidre Butler: I find this so interesting. But I want to ask you kind of a disciplinary question.

Deidre Butler: When we look at the history of the holocaust, I think we both signal that that this is an area of growth, that our understanding of the holocaust beyond Europe has really expanded recently, and I think this is a rich area for scholarship.

Deidre Butler: I guess what I'm trying to understand is in terms of the particular work that you do about

Deidre Butler: contemporary Muslim responses to the holocaust.

Deidre Butler: Do you see that area as growing as well, because it's hard to find other scholars who are doing the kind of work you do, and I'm just wondering what that means for you as a scholar working

Deidre Butler: what I see, as in somewhat in isolation. I'm just wondering if I'm seeing it in an accurate way, or if you could just comment on where you position yourself in terms of these kinds of questions and other scholars.

Mehnaz Afridi: that's a tough question. But I mean, you know, I teach the holocaust

Mehnaz Afridi: and I teach Islam,

Mehnaz Afridi: and you know

Mehnaz Afridi: it doesn't always intersect my work, right? I have a class of Muslims in America. I have a class, and I mean I'm doing a class next semester on women in Islam. I do memory and literature and Islam. I mean. There's a lot of classes I've developed on just you know Islam.

Mehnaz Afridi: But I have developed a class on Muslims in the holocaust, and I think

Mehnaz Afridi: I'm trying to find ways to intersect it because it's exhausting right. On one hand, I'm fighting antisemitism, right? I mean in the real world. This is what we're talking about, and, on the other hand, I'm fighting Islamophobia, and I'm experiencing Islamophobia.

Mehnaz Afridi: It's a very hard kind of challenging thing But the Muslim responses to the Holocaust, I think, are really important, and especially the rescue stories, because when I'm trying to point out to Muslims is that our faith, Islam actually just condemns the killing of anybody right.

Mehnaz Afridi: And the fact that many Muslims did risk their lives because they believed in the social justice message of Islam

Mehnaz Afridi: is incredible, and that maybe we have something to learn from this, Right? Maybe we have to stand up for the minorities as well. There's a lot of ways that we can think of the Muslim responses to the Holocaust. But, on the other hand, what I'm trying to do is. Say, look,

Mehnaz Afridi: you know, you may want to be revisionist towards the holocaust, which is wrong, which I think is a crime actually personally, or you may want to deny it, which is a total crime.

Mehnaz Afridi: The very fact of the matter is that

Mehnaz Afridi: the colonized countries, especially under the French and Italians and the Germans

Mehnaz Afridi: had it in their own country, right? They had,

Mehnaz Afridi: you know, rabid antisemitism and the same kind of racial laws that they were trying to implement. And you know some of you know about the Vichy. They were very brutal, even more brutal sometimes. I think there's also that point of historical connectivity.

Mehnaz Afridi: that does not allow you to deny and to relativize what happened during the holocaust. what it does is that it puts us in a different geographic space, but it also makes us think about

Mehnaz Afridi: what were the results of experiencing

Mehnaz Afridi: colonization

Mehnaz Afridi: right differently right like I've made that point. I hope that it's not a comparison, but it's an important aspect. And if we could just freeze time

Mehnaz Afridi: and say, Okay, let's just think about what the colonization meant,

Mehnaz Afridi: right,

Mehnaz Afridi: and just sit there for a while and pause like a moment. Edmond Jabès, his poetry and *The Book Of Questions*. Okay, one moment, and then you go to the other. And you say, Wow! Now, what were the Jewish experiences? They were some Jews were taken

Mehnaz Afridi: unbelievable, right? I mean, every time I teach that I'm like

Mehnaz Afridi: I still am shocked. So

Mehnaz Afridi: I don't know if I answered your question. again, I'm not surrounded by tons of Muslims that are doing this work

Mehnaz Afridi: just to be clear. But I think that there is something to be said in this work. There are.

Mehnaz Afridi: There is a growing younger population of Muslims that I meet internationally in places like Sarajevo, or you know, different places. They are very interested in this work.

Mehnaz Afridi: and they want to learn,

Mehnaz Afridi: but you know we would have to. They would have to come here, and I would have to, and you know a lot of people say, Well,

Mehnaz Afridi: you know who's going to do this kind of work. And I said, You know the young People. I think this is their job, you know. I'm just opening the field, you know, like I'm just like I've touched it. But there's a lot more to be done

Deidre Butler: talked about later on. that's really what I was trying to get at this idea that you really are opening this field, and I'm excited by the work here that you're doing, and that you're building on the historical, historiographical work that's being done and building these bridges. I think it's fascinating.

Deidre Butler: If I can just have a little follow up. Question is, I teach religious studies, and of course there are sources within Islam in terms of the Quran and the Hadith, which are used in antisemitic ways, and I'm just wondering how you deal with those

Deidre Butler: because you, of course, have a very different position in the classroom as a Muslim woman than I do as a Jewish woman talking about these sources, so I'm just. I'd love to hear your insights.

Mehnaz Afridi: Yeah, I mean, I discuss them in my book, actually, and discuss those verses that are highly antisemitic and

Mehnaz Afridi: and violent.

Mehnaz Afridi: I say, the Quran has these verses, and how do we understand the Hadith right, and we talk about that. I mean, there's not There's no denying There's no defense

Mehnaz Afridi: But you know we human beings create religion.

Mehnaz Afridi: We interpret religion, I mean I You know It's like God Doesn't knock on my door.

Mehnaz Afridi: you know. It's like I have to sort of create the way I think about God. You know the existence of God, or what to put on is saying, or you know, during Ramadan, every time I read, I just open it on any place, and I just want to read it, and every time I find something totally different,

Mehnaz Afridi: and that is something that you should understand in terms of interpretation, and how Muslims call it is, they have, you know, to go over and over again. Unfortunately, we have stopped educating Muslims to do that. And I think that's the deeper problem, Deidre

Mehnaz Afridi: not allowing enough women access to their own sacred texts. And that is just so. Such a tragic thing.

Mehnaz Afridi: not allowing, You know, people with different. Your interpretations come together in a social movement, right? I mean, That's a lot of the problems that Muslims are facing.

Mehnaz Afridi: But I think they are there. There are like little grassroots movements, you know, that are trying to even the flow, and saying, Wait a second.

Mehnaz Afridi: You know I've actually I've studied this

Mehnaz Afridi: but you know again, it's like doing interfaith work in the United States. If you're not an Imam, a rabbi, male, right, a male and Imam, a male rabbi, or a male priest or minister,

Mehnaz Afridi: you have no validity. It's still a problem here in the United States, right? Someone has to sort of like. Give you some kind of a position

Mehnaz Afridi: to do that, and it's highly problematic, right? I mean the female part of it

Mehnaz Afridi: in terms of your question. Yeah,

Deidre Butler: thank you.

Megan Hollinger: Well, that was very insightful. Thank you, Dr. Afridi. We actually have three questions. We have two that came in the chat first, so I will read. One is anonymous, and then we have one from Nicholas, then Joan, and then

Megan Hollinger: I will read those. the first question is anonymous. They would love to know more about some of the difficulties and complexities

Megan Hollinger: associated to teaching such a tense subject to students who come from different backgrounds or have diverse upbringing. What are some of those difficulties?

Mehnaz Afridi: I think the most challenging thing is, you know. I'm teaching about Muslims and the holocaust, and most people don't know much about Islam to begin with.

Mehnaz Afridi: It's really hard like this class. I feel like I cover like a unit on Judaism. I mean it on Islam. You know things about Muslim Empire, so I mean, I think it's. It's the lack of

Mehnaz Afridi: it's the lack of knowledge that challenges me to like. I can't assume anything, and it's such a complex topic. I mean. The other thing is, of course, the Israel Palestine issue, right? That's always sort of there, and it's not an else in the room for me. I

Mehnaz Afridi: very open about talking about it, and it causes problems, because when I start talking about you know that Israel

Mehnaz Afridi: Jews should have a state, but also that Palestinians are suffering I mean and the idea that you know there it's not black and white like we and you don't have to make a choice about being pro-human for one, and not for the other. This is not a stipulation

Mehnaz Afridi: of what we do. We point out that there that things are wrong

Mehnaz Afridi: in terms of colonization. We point out that racism is wrong. We point out what Israel policy does as a government is wrong, and we point out what Palestinian leadership does is wrong. I mean to me that becomes a normal dialogue.

Mehnaz Afridi: But to say that a State shouldn't exist, or that it's just seen as some pariah is the tense conversations that I have to have in classroom.

Mehnaz Afridi: Answer your question. Yeah,

Megan Hollinger: thank you, Dr. Afridi. All right. So, Nicholas. Then um, Joan, and then Pamela, So Nicholas asks

Megan Hollinger: He apologizes. This is outside of your scholarship, but he's curious about the memory of the Armenian genocide, and how that may have influenced Muslim responses to the holocaust? Is there any linkage?

Mehnaz Afridi: Unfortunately? No.

Mehnaz Afridi: There isn't. But you know,

Mehnaz Afridi: I think that.

Mehnaz Afridi: I mean, there are Muslims that do recognize the Armenian genocide, but not Turkey.

Mehnaz Afridi: There, aren't any real linkages of that now. I'm sorry.

Megan Hollinger: Well, thank you for that response. And Joan,

Joan Kavanagh-Wilson: I just have a question. During your research. Did you find any correlation between age? The older Muslims, as opposed to younger Muslim populations and their response to the holocaust.

Mehnaz Afridi: Yeah, I mean, that's again. I think that a lot of the people that could rescue except for in Albania, it was all ages, I would have to say but like you know up to And they were all, you know, sort of like in their forties

Mehnaz Afridi: established, had some power that they could actually do something. You know, and you have to see under colonization. There was a huge discrepancy between the labor right and certain people put in positions not just by the French, but also what was going on in terms of the different empires that came

Mehnaz Afridi: came before. it was like a feudal system. In that I would, I would have to say age would be more So the rescuers.

Okay, Thank you.

Megan Hollinger: All right. Via asked about when you visited Auschwitz. How was the public documentation about cases like you mentioned of Jews being deported from Africa all the way there, or even Muslims deported to Auschwitz.

Megan Hollinger: Dr. Butler did provide some information, so I don't know if that answered your question Via, or if you want Dr. Afridi to expand,

Deidre Butler: I don't see the response. Oh, I was just mentioning that there is a list of about a dozen Muslims who are murdered in Auschwitz, but they were Soviet POWs. They weren't sent there as Muslims, and also just specifying that the Nazis and their collaborators most they targeted. When Muslims were targeted, they were targeted more as Arabs racially than as Muslims.

Deidre Butler: Yeah, But as far as I know, Auschwitz doesn't have much documentation on this, but I haven't it's been like five or six years since I was there last.

Mehnaz Afridi: They have the names that I told you they sent me. but there are some names where they don't, they can't put down because they don't, they can't find right,

Mehnaz Afridi: which you know, we have some of those records, anyway, for Jews that were murdered. But

Mehnaz Afridi: yeah, I mean, I think this history is really not taught very widely, and I think,

Mehnaz Afridi: I think the connections are really important, You know. I think they are very interesting, fascinating connections. And actually

Mehnaz Afridi: you find that if you

Mehnaz Afridi: talk to Arab scholars or working in places like Morocco or Tunisia or Algeria, I mean they might find really good conversation partners and Jews and others that are working on this right. I mean, this is how you begin to sort of talk about something

Mehnaz Afridi: that might have relevancy, not just to Europe, right,

Mehnaz Afridi: but really to a larger context of race and racialization. Social strata, right? What about the women, I mean. The women were always trying to help the Jewish women to hide them, you know, even in Albania.

Mehnaz Afridi: Um, the permanent exhibit opened here in New York City that I was part of their Advisory Council, and I'm so pleased to say that in this, for an exhibit they have a full picture of

Mehnaz Afridi: how a Muslim family rescued Jews? It's in Sarajevo. when it was under, You know the Fascists, the Ustasi, and then forward in one thousand nine hundred and ninety-two, the Jewish community remembered

Mehnaz Afridi: and they helped the Bosnian Muslim family. Now, what an incredible story. That is right. I mean, that's a story about memory. It's about keeping that memory alive, but the positive memory of each other, and actually acting upon that memory,

Mehnaz Afridi: and those kinds of stories come out when you start to move around and start to look at. Oh, what happened in Croatia? What happened in Sarajevo. what is there today?

Mehnaz Afridi: It's Bosnia, right? I mean. So, there's all these wonderful ways that we can sort of look at this contextually, and talk about the holocaust, not losing the lessons of the holocaust, but the same time talk about the holocaust as actually a colonial venture.

Mehnaz Afridi: This is why I started with the quote by Dan Stone on Lebanon

Mehnaz Afridi: Right. This is why the Germans went Southwards. Between 1904-1907, Germans moved through Africa, to gain access of the lands belonging to the Herreros. They committed a genocide against these indigenous people in their colony of German Southwest Africa (present-day Namibia, through battle; through starvation and thirst in the Omaheke Desert; and through forced labor, malnutrition, sexual violence, medical experiments and disease in concentration camps. 80,000 indigenous people were killed in the genocide, representing 80% of the Herero people. That's the first genocide that I teach in the holocaust class,

Mehnaz Afridi: so that they can understand this sort of mentality, I want to expand, and I want to occupy, and I want to take over.

Mehnaz Afridi: I got very passionate about that.

Megan Hollinger: Thank you. We have Pamela's question, and then we might wrap up. I don't know if yeah, I gotta go. Actually, I have another thing. Dinging me right now.

Pamela Walker: Do I ask that question? Yes, of course. Yeah. Okay.

Pamela Walker: In one thousand nine hundred and sixty-three, the Algerians expelled all the Jews from Algeria and turned all this, destroyed all the synagogues, and turned them into mosques, and there are no Jews, that I believe, left in Algeria, so that's one thousand nine hundred and sixty-three, which is, relatively speaking, very close. And so, I'm trying to think. Is there a connection between

Pamela Walker: the holocaust and the expulsion of Jews from Algeria? And I think other North African countries, the very places where the Nazis had been, and

Pamela Walker: the obvious antisemitism of that this set of decisions and the expulsion of people who managed to live through the holocaust, but still get expelled from the country. They had spent their many, many, many, many, many generations.

Mehnaz Afridi: I mean, I think there is a connection. But I think it also is way more connected in a direct way to Israel.

Mehnaz Afridi: because we're talking about one thousand nine hundred and forty-eight

Mehnaz Afridi: right, and then you see, it's called it's not just from Algeria, but you see it from Morocco.

Mehnaz Afridi: You see it in. You see it in Libya.

Mehnaz Afridi: you see that in Egypt, you know, like after 1948

Mehnaz Afridi: But I think that because those expulsions occur in North Africa again, if you ask those North Africans. Do you know anything about the holocaust? They would say No.

Mehnaz Afridi: So that's why I think it's this huge gap right? So that's why when I interview the connecting thread is the antisemitism in both. There's the obvious very dominant

Pamela Walker: and you can say, Oh, it's because of Israel. But whatever you're still expelling your Jews. So

Pamela Walker: who weren't Israelis?

Mehnaz Afridi: Yeah, no, they're not at that point. They're Arabs right. They're Jewish Arabs absolutely

Megan Hollinger: Thank you again, Dr. Afridi, for taking the time today so generously to come and speak to us on this topic, and I hope we get to chat more, you know, in in the field of Holocaust studies about Muslim and Arab responses and experiences. It's very important and understudied, and so I'm glad that you're pioneering that field

Megan Hollinger: and moving ahead. thank you very much. After I stopped the recording. I just want my students to hang on for two more seconds. I don't know if Dr. Butler has anything else to add. But no, just a big thank you to everyone for being here, and of course, to Professor Afridi for

Deidre Butler: sharing her time with us. And we've learned so much from you. Thank you. Thank you so much. I appreciate it. Bye, bye, everyone everybody! Good luck with class to have a great class everyone.

Megan Hollinger: Hi, Dr. Butler,

Megan Hollinger: All right. I'm just going to stop the recording.