

# In Kurdistan, “Hitler” Restaurant Shut Down Despite Its Popularity

by Hugh Fitzgerald



**With the Kurds in the news**, it is instructive to recall that several months ago in Duhok, in the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq, a restaurateur gave his new restaurant the name “Hitler.” It seemed to go over well with his clientele; Iraqis flocked to the place. But criticism from some, less morally obtuse, Kurds caused the local government to finally act and it closed the restaurant. It was, of course, given the chance to reopen under another name. The story is [here](#):

*ERBIL, Kurdistan Region – A restaurant named after the genocidal German dictator Adolf Hitler in Duhok has triggered much controversy on social media, with some welcoming the move and others criticizing the government for permitting the*

*issuance of licences under such notorious names.*

*The owner of the restaurant said he does not necessarily like the mastermind behind the Holocaust, despite naming his restaurant after him, and simply wanted publicity.*

***“Hitler was the dictator of Germany and has nothing to do with me. I know I have named my restaurant ‘Hitler’, but that does not mean that I love him,” Rebar Mohammed told Rudaw English. “I have done it just to make my restaurant famous among people.”***

*Hitler led the National Socialist German Workers Party, commonly known as the Nazi party, and Germany in the 1930s and 1940s. His invasion of Poland in 1939 brought about World War II. During the course of the war, which ended in 1945, Hitler was responsible for the mass murder of six million Jews in concentration camps, as well as five million gypsies, political dissidents, Poles, homosexuals and others. Overall, more than 70 million died in the war.*

Rebar Mohammed explains that he doesn't see what all the fuss was about. He merely wanted to “make my restaurant famous” by naming it after Hitler. Apparently the officials with whom he had to register the name found nothing wrong with that name either. It was meant to attract customers; it apparently worked. Business was booming, and no one among his clientele found anything objectionable in his choice of name. Of course, those who did object strongly would undoubtedly have stayed away.

*Mohammed said officials did not pay the name much attention when he was registering the restaurant.*

*“Even when I started the paperwork seven months ago to register my restaurant's name, I did not receive any negative reactions from the government or security forces,” he said. “It was quite normal.”*

So the officials with whom he had to register the name were not concerned. What must they have been thinking? Possibly something like this: Why should we object to the name? Hitler isn't our affair. He's famous, that's all. He didn't do anything to us, the Muslims in the Middle East. Besides, Hitler is long dead. Must we keep on forever being sorry for what happened to Jews in Europe? Isn't it time that the Jews – the Zionists – were stopped from always bringing up "Hitler" and the "Holocaust" and "the camps" – which they do to make sure that Israel is supported? Naming a restaurant "Hitler" is not any different than naming it after John Lennon, or Nelson Mandela, or Batman. It's just a way to get attention, attract customers.

*Customers have a similarly nonchalant attitude to the Hitler signpost hanging on the wall, according to Mohammed.*

*"Whoever visits my restaurant says they do not care what the name of my restaurant is," he said. "What is important for them is the cleanliness and taste of my food."*

His customers, Muslim Kurds and Arabs, were not only "nonchalant"; some are no doubt secretly approving of the name "Hitler." Wasn't it Hitler who took care of the Jewish problem in Europe? Wasn't he the friend of the Mufti of Jerusalem, the distinguished scholar of Islam, Haj Amin el Husseini, who gave him advice on how to deal with Jews (he asked Hitler not to let them leave Europe for Palestine), and was even friendlier with Heinrich Himmler and Adolf Eichmann? El Husseini helped the German war effort, raising three S.S. brigades from among the Bosnian Muslims.

*Some customers agree. Hitler Restaurant was bustling with customers on Monday, many of whom seemed to not care about Hitler's involvement in crimes against humanity and genocide.*

*"For me, the name of the restaurant is not an important thing," Tahir Mohammed, a customer at the Hitler restaurant,*

*told Rudaw while waiting for his meal. "I come here because I prefer the dishes they serve."*

Tahir Mohammed could have objected to the name "Hitler." He could even have suggested to Rebar Mohammed, the restaurant's owner, that its name be changed. But for him it was unimportant; all that mattered was the quality of the food. He, and other customers similarly indifferent to the name, were morally deficient. They were apparently incapable of realizing that even if the owner did not intend to promote Hitler, that was the effect of naming the restaurant after him. Such moral idiocy is both unacceptable and shameful.

*Some Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) officials are now speaking out.*

*Abbas Fatah Salim, deputy head of the Legal Committee in the Kurdistan Parliament, denounced the name.*

*"Though there is no law as far as I know to disallow any names from being used for businesses, per our customs, we do not have to allow such named to be used," Salim told Rudaw.*

***"We have to take into account the fact that Germany helped us in the fight against Daesh,"** he said, using the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State (ISIS).*

So it's not the offense to Jews that worries Salim. It's the effect on Germans, who also suffered, in a different way, the consequences of Hitler's war. Kurds should be solicitous of Germans, apparently, because they helped "in the fight against Daesh"; that's the only reason he offers for opposing "Hitler" as the restaurant's name. Perhaps he really is offended by use of the name "Hitler." But even if so, it is telling that in order to rally support for a name change, he assumes he must appeal to Kurdish gratitude for German aid against Daesh. Simply insisting that Hitler was a monster who must never be

memorialized will not do.

*The Duhok Chamber of Commerce and Industry said no law restricts and prevents certain names for businesses to be registered under, and that people are free to choose the name of their businesses.*

***The head of the chamber said that while Hitler may be reviled in Europe, people in the Kurdistan Region are not concerned about him.***

*“Maybe for the German nation and Europe who suffered a lot under Hitler, it will not be accepted or welcomed,” Ayad Hassan told Rudaw. “But for this region, it will not be an issue to [name a business after] someone who has done good or bad things in history.”*

The head of the Duhok Chamber of Commerce claims “it will not be an issue” to name a business after some historical figure, “someone who has done good or bad things.” Is this true?

Would Ayad Hassan, or the restaurant’s owner, Rebar Muhammad, or any of the restaurant’s clients, be similarly “nonchalant” about a restaurant in Baghdad – owned and much frequented by Arabs – named “Ali Kimyawi” (“Chemical Ali”), after Ali Hassan al-Majid, the general responsible for the chemical attack that killed 3,000 Kurds in Halabja? Would that hypothetical drive the moral point home, to both the morally obtuse owner of the “Hitler” restaurant and his equally obtuse, because uncomplaining, clientele?

The Kurdistan Regional Government understood that a restaurant named “Hitler” would be bad for the region’s image, and shut the restaurant down until such time as it is given a new name. Some in the government, one suspects, may even have been genuinely appalled, and not only worried about Kurdistan’s “image.”

Now the Kurdistan government could turn this “Hitler” restaurant contretemps into a teaching moment. It could use the “Chemical Ali” hypothetical I’ve offered, to drive the point home: no matter who we are, we must not be indifferent to, or “nonchalant” about, a mass murderer, even if our own people were not among his victims. Empathy is required, and that doesn’t come naturally to Muslims, who are inculcated with the idea that they are the “best of peoples” and non-Muslims the “most vile of created beings.” They are very good at feeling sorry for themselves, but not very good, I’m afraid, at feeling sorrow for others. Perhaps this little episode, in dusty Duhok, will have a salutary effect. It might even be one for the books – the schoolbooks, that is.

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