Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History
Journal of the Fondazione CDEC
QUESTIONI DI STORIA EBRAICA CONTEMPORANEA. RIVISTA DELLA FONDAZIONE CDEC

(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East

edited by *Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto*, and *Emir Galilee*

Issue 27, no. 1 (2025)

QUEST. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History
Journal of the Fondazione CDEC
CDEC Fondazione Centro di Documentazione Ebraica Contemporanea

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QUEST. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC
Reg. Trib. Milano n. 403 del 18/09/2009 – P. IVA: 12559570150 – ISSN: 2037-741X
Piazza Edmond Jacob Safra 1, 20125 Milano Italy
tel. 003902316338 – fax 00390233602728
www.quest-cdecjournal.it
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Cover image credit: Collage by Zohar Gannot, 2025.

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Mapping Emotions, Rewriting Geographies: Jewish MENA Migrations Reimagined

by *Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto*, and *Emir Galilee**

The migration of Jews from Muslim-majority countries between the 1940s and the 1970s—the departure of roughly 900,000 individuals from Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) lands—was one of the most significant demographic transformations in modern Jewish history.[1] Migration is rarely just the movement of a population across space; it is almost always, especially when occurring on a massive scale, a disruption, a recalibration, and a profound reimagining of the self and the migrating group in relation to space. As such, it is deeply emotional and the cartographies it generates are encoded with affect.

Thus far, much of the emotional complexity of these migrations is often flattened by conflicting nationalist narratives. In the early Zionist discourse and Israeli state historiography, Jewish migration from Arab countries was presented as part of an epic return to the ancestral homeland—a teleological process of *'aliyah,* a concept rooted in biblical tradition denoting the spiritual and national return of Jews to the Land of Israel. In the modern era, it also came to signify a redemptive migration from non-Western countries—particularly for Jews from decolonizing Asian and African states—whose 'aliyah was framed as a rescue from political, social, and cultural marginalization in "lands of distress."[2] This view emphasized

* This issue is the result of a collaborative initiative led by the Communities and Mobilities Research Hub at the Azrieli Center for Israel Studies (MALI), Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, under the direction of Aviad Moreno, in collaboration with Piera Rossetto, Department of Asian and North African Studies, Ca' Foscari University of Venice. We gratefully acknowledge the support of MALI and the contribution of the Rita Levi Montalcini Program for Young Researchers (Bando 2020). We also thank Zohar Gannot for creating the mental maps featured in this volume.

[1] Malka Hillel Shulewitz, *The Forgotten Millions: The Modern Jewish Exodus from Arab Lands* (London: Continuum, 2000), 139.

[2] Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, *Zionism in an Arab Country: Jews in Iraq in the 1940s* (London: Routledge, 2004); Tamar Katriel, "The Rhetoric of Rescue: 'Salvage Immigration' Narratives in Israeli Culture," in *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, eds. Ra'anan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 185-203.

religious longing and political danger that cast many Asian and African states in the post-colonial period in an increasingly hostile and unstable light. Such was the case of Ethiopian Jews, whose dramatic emigration was similarly framed as a rescue of a Jewish remnant from a "land of distress." Operation Moses (1984-1985) brought around 7,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel via Sudan in a covert airlift, while Operation Solomon in 1991 evacuated nearly 15,000 more in under thirty-six hours. These operations were celebrated in Israeli discourse as urgent, redemptive acts of national and spiritual salvation, reinforcing the narrative of ʻaliyah as both rescue and ethnonational repatriation.[3]

Concurrently, Palestinian and pan-Arab intellectuals have advanced a counter-narrative, arguing that Jewish emigration was not voluntary but the result of Zionist provocation, Western imperial interference, and local Arab regimes' complicity. Abbas Shiblak,[4] one of the earliest proponents of this construction, claimed that Zionist agents planted bombs in Jewish areas of Baghdad in order to terrorize Jews into fleeing to Israel—a view that became known as the "terror thesis." These opposing narratives—Zionist redemption versus Arab betrayal—were mobilized to fuel emotionally charged nationalist debates about migration, reducing the complex and varied experiences of Jewish departure to tools of political discourse.

Such historiographic frameworks, though ideologically divergent, often converge in their simplification of personal emotions within large cartographies. Both tend to erase the agency and affective worlds of the migrants themselves.

It was not until recent decades that scholars began to utterly interrogate the multiplicity of Jewish migration experiences and examine how emotions—particularly nostalgia, fear, pride, and shame—shaped the ways Jews navigated their exits, remembered their pasts, and redrew their affective geographies.[5] By

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[3] Steven Kaplan and Chaim Rosen, "Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *American Jewish Year Book 1994* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1994), 59-109; Shalva Weil, "The Complexities of Conversion among the 'Felesmura,'" in *Movements in Ethiopia, Ethiopia in Movement,* eds. Eloi Ficquet, Ahmed Hassen Omer, and Thomas Osmond (Addis Ababa: Centre français des études éthiopiennes, 2016), 421-431.

[4] Abbas Shiblak, *The Lure of Zion: The Case of the Iraqi Jews* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1986).

[5] Aomar Boum, *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); André Levy and Alex Weingrod, eds., *Homelands and Diasporas. Holy Lands and Other Places* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

understanding the emotional charge embedded in these migrations, as we hope to show in this issue, we obtain an essential point of departure for rethinking how geography is imagined, felt, and remembered by displaced populations.

This issue, *(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East*, explores the emotional dimensions of Jewish migration from the MENA lands (and Ethiopia) through affective and spatial lenses. It is situated within a constellation of recent interdisciplinary turns—not only the "emotional turn" but also the "spatial turn" and the "mobilities turn." Drawing on these frameworks, the contributors to this issue reconsider how migration stories are narrated, remembered, and silenced, and how these processes are spatialized through texts, artworks, embodied memory, and performance.

From Physical Cartographies to Emotional Maps

The "spatial turn" of the 1970s reoriented social theory toward the centrality of space in human life.[6] As Yi-Fu Tuan famously observed, space becomes place as it is endowed with meaning, a process inherently tied to emotion. With the spatial turn in the 1970s, the study of migration in the humanities and social sciences transmogrified from investigating mere physical movement between places to exploring deeply personal and emotive journeys intricately woven with perceptions, narratives, utopias, and cherished memories.[7] The subsequent "mobilities turn" further enriched this discussion, emphasizing the symbiotic relationship between human movement across space and material cultures.[8] Most

[6] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 [1974]); Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977); Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989).

[7] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Boston: The MIT Press, 1960); Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*; Barney Warf and Santa Arias, eds., *The Spatial Turn. Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2008).

[8] Kevin Hannam, Mimi Sheller, and John Urry, "Editorial: Mobilities, Immobilities and Moorings," *Mobilities* 1 no. 1 (2006): 1-22; Caroline Brettell, "Conceptualizing Migration and Mobility in Anthropology: An Historical Analysis," *Transitions: Journal of Transient Migration*

recently, the "emotional turn" has shifted our understanding of emotion from an external reaction to a core part of the human experience.[9]

Thus, in recent years, it has become widely acknowledged that migration is not merely a physical act of displacement but also a poignant emotional voyage. This journey severs individuals from their homelands and elicits a spectrum of emotional responses, such as nostalgia and forgetting, that are significant in community-building processes. Until recently, however, there has been a tendency in the social sciences "to overlook emotions in migration studies generally [...] something of a gap in mutual knowledge and recognition between the fields of migration studies and emotion studies."[10] In this context, continue Paolo Boccagni and Loretta Baldassar, "the central question to be addressed [...] is what the study of emotion adds to our understanding of 'migrant experience'; and how transnational migration studies, in turn, contribute to the social science debate on emotions."[11] Rather than treating emotions as subjective ephemera, scholars who embrace the emotional turn understand affect as historically and culturally mediated and bound up with political, social as well as spatial structures.[12]

Inspired by this promising dialogue between geography and migration studies and emotion studies, we aim to examine how Jewish migrants from MENA and Ethiopia, now living in Israel, Europe, and the Americas, recall and interpret their mobility experiences. Our analysis centers on the ways emotional geographies are both constituted by and constitutive of memory, whether articulated through collective narratives or conveyed in individual recollections. In so doing, we aim to trace and delineate "mental maps"—or, more precisely, "(e)motional maps"—that capture the emotionally charged memories embedded in migration experiences.

2, no. 1 (2018): 1-25; Paul Basu and Simon Coleman, "Introduction: Migrant Worlds, Material Cultures," *Mobilities* 3, no.3 (2008): 313-330.

[9] Joseph Ben Prestel, *Emotional Cities: Debates on Urban Change in Berlin and Cairo, 1860-1910* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Karen Barkey, "Reimagining the Emotional Turn," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 63, no. 2 (2021): 457-472; Derek J. Penslar, *Zionism: An Emotional State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2023).

[10] Paolo Boccagni and Loretta Baldassar, "Emotions on the Move; Mapping the Emergent Field of Emotion and Migration," *Emotion, Space and Society* 16 (2015): 73-80; 74.

[11] Boccagni and Baldassar, "Emotions on the Move," 73-74.

[12] Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); Ben Prestel, *Emotional Cities: Debates on Urban Change in Berlin and Cairo, 1860–1910*; Barkey, "Reimagining the Emotional Turn."

"Mental Maps"

In the second half of the twentieth century, coinciding with a profound debate between regional primacy and thematic primacy in the philosophy of human geography, new ideas of humankind's understanding of its environment emerged. In 1960, the urban planner Kevin Lynch broached the novel theory of different geographical approaches toward the same environment by different people and laid the foundations of the idea of "mental maps."[13] Mental maps, Lynch advises, are "the environmental image, the generalized mental picture of the exterior physical world that is held by an individual."[14] An environmental image emerges through the dynamic interplay between the physical environment—which offers distinctions and spatial relationships—and the observer, who actively selects, organizes, and imbues these elements with meaning.[15] About a decade later, Peter Gould and Rodney White developed the idea into a more comprehensive framework: the study of a "geography of perception"—of the mental images we form of places, which are inevitably shaped by selective channeling of information.[16] The theoretical basis of mental maps influenced scholars, artists, authors and politicians in many ways.[17] In an interesting study of mental maps in various historic periods and cultures in the context of the Middle East, for example, Angelika Hartman-Giessen finds that attempts to map people's feelings have been implemented in urban planning practices,[18] while other scholars, re-

[13] Lynch, *Image of the City*.
[14] Ibid., 4.
[15] Luis da Vinha, "Charting Geographic Mental Maps in Foreign Policy Analysis: A Literature Review," *Human Geographies* 6, no. 1 (2012): 5-17, 6; Lynch, *Image of the City*, 6.
[16] Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974).
[17] Zef Segal and Bram Vannleuwenhuyze, eds., *Motion in Maps, Maps in Motion. Mapping Stories and Movement through Time* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020).
[18] Angelika Hartman-Giessen, "Mental Maps, Cognitive Mapping and Mental Space in Context of Near and Middle Eastern Societies," in *Authority, Privacy and Public Order in Islam—Orientalia Lovaniensia Analetica* 148, eds. Barbara Michalak-Pikulska and Andrzej Pikulski (Peeters: Leuven, Paris, Dudley, MA, 2006), 329-339; Emir Galilee, "A Nomadic State of Mind: Mental Maps of Bedouins in the Negev and Sinai During the Time of the Ottomans, the British Mandate, and the State of Israel," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East* 6, no. 4 (2019): 1-13; Yodan Rofe, "Mapping People's Feelings in a Neighborhood: Technique, Analysis and Applications," *Planum. The Journal of Urbanism* 9, no. 2 (2004): 2-27; Shlomie Hazam and Daniel

examining the spatial experience of boundary zones and immigration, claim that geographic conditions and mental states have a major effect on cognitive mapping.[19]

Moreover, recent work in neuroscience and anthropology has redefined mapping itself—no longer a static representation of space but an active, embodied, and emotional process. As Matthew Schafer and Daniela Schiller argue, humans construct "cognitive maps" that encode not just spatial but also social and affective information that are attached to space.[20] These maps, located in the hippocampus and related structures, support the navigation of both physical environments and relational spaces such as social hierarchies and memories.

Indeed, mapping is always more than measurement. As Elise Olmedo and Sebastien Caquard argue in their study of Rwandan exile narratives,[21] geolocated cartographies emphasize explicit spatial markers, while "sensitive mapping" or "dislocated cartographies" aim to express the emotional interiors of stories—the "guts," not just the "skin," of a narrative. In this vein, mental mapping and its various definitions and dimensions contributes to MENA Jewish studies, revising our understanding of ethnicity and migration in that regard.[22]

Felsenstein, "Terror, Fear and Behavior in the Jerusalem Housing Market," *Urban Studies* 44, no. 13 (2007): 2529-2546.

[19] Breanna Bishop, Eric C. J. Oliver, and Claudio Aporta, "Co-producing Maps as Boundary Objects: Bridging Labrador Inuit Knowledge and Oceanographic Research," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 39, no. 1 (2022): 55-89; Elise Olmedo and Sebastien Caquard, "Mapping the Skin and the Guts of Stories: A Dialogue between Geolocated and Dislocated Cartographies," *Cartographica* 57, no. 2 (2022): 127-146.

[20] Matthew Schafer and Daniela Schiller, "Navigating Social Space," *Neuron* 100, no. 2 (2018): 476-491.

[21] Caquard and Olmedo, "Mapping the Skin and the Guts of Stories."

[22] Yann Scioldo-Zürcher, *Devenir métropolitain: Politique d'intégration et parcours de rapatriés d'Algérie en métropole (1954–1962)* (Paris: Éditions de l'EHESS, 2020); Piera Rossetto, "A Map of Words: Research-creation Perspectives on Jewish Mediterranean Mobilities," in *Mediterranean Mobility between Migrations and Colonialism*, ed. Gabriele Montalbano (Bologna: Viella, 2024), 203-218; Aviad Moreno, "Remapping 'Tradition': Community Formation and Spatiocultural Imagination among Jews in Colonial Northern Morocco," *Jewish Culture and History* 22, no. 4 (2021): 378-400; Aviad Moreno, "There's No Home Like Place: Homogenizing Nostalgia among Moroccan Jews in Venezuela," *Jewish History* 39, no. 1-2 (2025).

This Issue

This issue brings together a variety of studies that explore how emotions, memory, and space are connected in the context of Jewish migration from the MENA lands and beyond, thereby generating a range of often-overlooked mental geographies and affective mappings of displacement and belonging. They center on non-elite migrants, women, artists, and religious minorities—to yield a more complete and diverse understanding of Jewish migration. A unifying methodological approach across the diverse case studies presented here involves the construction of alternative mappings of personal and communal experience—mappings that diverge from formal geopolitical or institutional cartographies.

These alternatives often arise from experiences of exclusion or nostalgia and challenge the boundaries drawn by states and official histories. Haim Bitton's study of Moroccan troubadours in Israel uncovers a counter-map within Israeli society. As tens of thousands of Moroccan Jews immigrated to Israel in the 1950s, most were resettled in peripheral "development towns" or transit camps that exposed them to cultural marginalization and racialized stigma. The "sung" mental map that Bitton sketches partitions Israeli space into experienced places of marginality and power: transit camps, peripheral towns, and urban slums for Mizrahi ("Oriental") immigrants versus the affluent urban centers of the privileged "veteran" Ashkenazim.

Emotion is not simply a reaction to place; it actively constitutes it. Affective geographies thus explore how emotions and places shape one another. Fattal-Kuperwasser's article contributes a crucial third dimension: the place of narration as integral to the interplay between memory and cartography. By closely comparing two memoirs by Baghdadi Jews who emigrated to London, she illustrates how their present diasporic context profoundly influences the way they reconstruct the landscapes of Baghdad and, particularly, the spatial experiences of the Farhud—an eruption of violence that targeted the Jews of Baghdad on June 1-2, 1941. The article highlights these memoirists as active agents who shape historical and spatial narratives through their distinct choices of language, audience, and emotional expression.

Fattal-Kuperwasser's analysis thus opens the door to a broader reflection on how memoirs operate as emotionally charged cartographies—or what some scholars refer to as "mental maps." These are shaped not only by memory and spatial experience but also by key narrative choices, including language, audience, and culturally specific emotional frameworks. As intimate as the memoir form may be, it is always written with a readership in mind. This communicative function necessitates strategic decisions, the most immediate of which, in Kuperwasser's case study, is the choice between Arabic and English. Such decisions inevitably shape both the content and the emotional tone of the narrative. Authors may intuitively select which emotions to express, suppress, or amplify based on what they believe will resonate with their intended audience. These dynamics reflect Carol and Peter Stearns's useful distinction between "emotions"—the felt experiences of individuals or groups—and "emotionology," the social norms and cultural expectations governing the appropriate expression of emotion (Stearns and Stearns 1985, 813).[23]

This relation is also relevant in Aviad Moreno's and Magdalena Kozłowska's case studies as well, although they explore two different types of sources: the latter centering on letters and the former on retrospective texts. Moreno's essay on Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli, a Moroccan-born Jew who embraced the anti-Zionist "ultra-Orthodox," Ashkenazi Musar (ethicist) movement, further entangles the interplay between migration and spiritual emotions. By tracing Elgrabli's biblical exegesis in *Tumat Yesharim*, Moreno maps the evolution of the rabbi's spatial imaginaries as they develop alongside his ethical and spiritual transformation. Elgrabli's narrative, composed in 1980s Israel, charts a journey from Meknes to Jerusalem—through Europe and the Americas—not to affirm a singular return to the Holy Land, but to articulate a diasporic spiritual path shaped by divine providence, ethical discipline, and communal responsibility. As Moreno argues, Elgrabli challenges both Zionist narratives of return and the inward-focused Musar tradition, offering instead a "layered map of spiritual becoming—rather than homecoming."

[23] Peter Stearns and Carol Stearns, "Emotionology: Clarifying the History of Emotions and Emotional Standards," *The American Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (1985): 813-836.

Kozlowska explores the microhistory of Rebecca Goldman—a Polish Jew who taught for the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU)—and the journey she took from her hometown of Kalisz, Poland, to Paris, where she attended the École Normale Israélite Orientale (ENIO), and finally to Beirut, following her appointment by the AIU as a teacher in the Lebanese port city. In particular, Kozlowska compares Goldman's reports to the AIU board in Paris with reports on Goldman's work from the headmasters of the schools where she worked to the same board. What emerges is a nuanced portrait of cultural dissonance, which Kozłowska attributes to the shifting cognitive and affective frameworks—or "mental maps"—that Goldman developed across different stages of her life.

Kozlowska's work narrative reminds us that emotional cartographies shift across historical contexts and geographies and take shape through diverse expressive forms. As Alon Tam shows in his contribution, emotions are conducive to such broadening and deepening, a process that allows a collective memory, alternative "to the hegemonic one espoused by Egyptian Jews in Israel," to rise to the surface. Tam's article on Egyptian Jews in Israel examines a contemporary example of "memory cartography": an online social-media group titled "From Egypt and Back." This Facebook group, created by descendants of Egyptian Jews now living in Israel, has become a vibrant archive of recollections, photographs, and discussions about life in mid-twentieth-century Cairo and Alexandria. The group, Tam argues, has "created an alternative to the dominant narrative in Egyptian Jewish collective memory"—a nostalgia-intensive narrative of elite cosmopolitanism that emphasizes a lost golden age and the trauma of exile (a narrative that conveniently dovetails with Zionist tropes of rescue). The maps his analysis presents, speckled with ordinary cafés, synagogues, and local slang and songs, remain vividly "immersed in Egyptian-Arabic culture" rather than in the Francophone milieu of the pre-1950s Jewish elite in that country.

In her article, Hadas Shabat-Nadir examines the memoir Farewell, Babylon by Iraqi-Jewish writer Naïm Kattan. After leaving Baghdad in 1947, Kattan wrote his memoir thirty years later in Montreal, where he reconstructed the world of his youth through narrative. His reflections clearly map the experience of a Jewish community that had largely vanished due to mass emigration and political upheaval. Writing about the city becomes a way of projecting memory onto a place that no longer exists as he once knew it. The emotional landscape of the memoir

is shaped by a longing for a cosmopolitan past marked by literary and cultural life, yet it is constantly interrupted by memories of violence—especially the traumatic events of the Farhud, as also explored in Fattal-Kuperwasser's work. Shabat-Nadir shows how Kattan constructs an imagined Baghdad from the dual perspective of a nostalgic former resident and a disillusioned exile.

Gilat Brav bases her contribution on the memoirs of nine "francisés" Tunisian Jews who moved from Tunis to Paris during the second half of the twentieth century. By examining representations of domestic spaces in these writings, Brav reveals how emigrants emotionally and spatially map their experiences of displacement and resettlement. Central to these emotional cartographies is the idea of home as a fluid, emotionally charged site—what Guy Miron calls a "liquid place of human existence"—that extends from intimate family interactions to broader community spaces.[24] Brav highlights how, in these memoirs, domestic space is often anchored emotionally by maternal maps, reflecting deeper shifts in the emotional and communal dimensions of Jewish life as it moved from the familiar context of Tunis to the unfamiliar landscapes of Paris.

If texts and memories map migration in imaginative ways, so do bodies and cultural performances. Hannah Kosstrin's article on Ethiopian-Israeli dance offers a striking example of emotional geographies embodied in physical movement by members of a community whose voice has long been overshadowed by dominant establishment narratives. Kosstrin examines the choreography of Dege Feder, an Ethiopian-born Jewish dancer who migrated to Israel as a child in Operation Moses (1984). Feder's contemporary dance works explicitly grapple with the Ethiopian Jewish journey and its aftermath. Kosstrin argues that dance—the physical performance of movement—can function as a form of mapping that transcends traditional cartography. She asks, "What if we identify diaspora through the body, instead of through [physical] maps?" By "grounding the emotional map of migration within the body," Kosstrin "makes corporeal, temporal, and artistic interventions" into how we understand affective geographies. In Feder's dances, the history of displacement is not illustrated by lines on a map but is rather inscribed in gestures, rhythms, and physical techniques

[24] Guy Miron, *To Be a Jew in Nazi Germany: Space and Time* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2022) [in Hebrew].

that make different sense of one's memory of home and relocation. For example, Feder incorporates *eskesta*—a traditional Ethiopian shoulder dance—into modern dance tableaux that depict stories of exile and homecoming. The distinctive shoulder shimmies and torso undulations of eskesta carry cultural memory; they index an African past even as Feder performs them on Israeli stages. Finally, in this special issue, we emphasize the critical role that emotions, memories, and creative mapping play in reshaping our understanding of Jewish migrations from North Africa and the Middle East and beyond. Central to our exploration has been the idea that geographic displacement involves more than physical movement; it escalates into an emotional, symbolic, and deeply personal process that generates alternative cartographies—mental and affective maps reflecting individual and collective experiences. Ewa Tartakowsky's project offers a valuable extension of this conceptual approach, applying it to an East European Jewish context through an innovative pedagogical practice that she terms "creative cartography." Tartakowsky's initiative, implemented in a course at Sciences Po Paris, invites students to engage emotionally and intellectually with the complexities of Central and East European Jewish history, specifically through Olga Tokarczuk's *The Books of Jacob*. By having students map subjective experiences, emotional landscapes, and spatial perceptions derived from Tokarczuk's narrative, Tartakowsky underscores the potential of creative cartography as both a scholarly and an artistic method. In bridging Tartakowsky's work with our special issue, we foreground the transformative potential of emotional and imaginative cartographic practices. Tartakowsky's project thus complements and enriches our collective endeavor by illustrating how affective mapping techniques can be effectively integrated into pedagogical settings, fostering deeper insights into the intricate connections between geography, memory, and emotion in diverse Jewish historical contexts.

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Keywords: Mental Maps, Mizrahim, Ethiopian Jews, Emotions, Mobilities

How to quote this article:
Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, "Mapping Emotions, Rewriting Geographies: Jewish MENA Migrations Reimagined," in "(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East," eds. Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15940

Spaces of Exclusion, Sounds of Resistance and Radicalization: Emotional Cartographies in the Ballads of Cheikh Mwijo

by *Haim Bitton*

Abstract

Cheikh Mwijo was a central figure in the "Moroccan troubadour scene," a grassroots cultural phenomenon that emerged within Moroccan immigrant communities in Israel's periphery during the 1950s. Like other troubadours, he traveled across the newly established state, singing in the immigrants' language, preserving the cultural heritage of Moroccan Jewry, and documenting their encounters with Israeli society. This article analyzes three "political ballads" he composed and performed, focusing on how they reflect the "mental maps" Moroccan immigrants used to interpret the divisions within Israeli space. By uncovering themes of mental mapping in Cheikh Mwijo's ballads, the article explores how emotional experiences contributed to gradual shifts in consciousness—such as polarization and radicalization—among Moroccan immigrants as a result of social, cultural, and political marginalization in Israel. I argue that these shifts unfolded within the context of two major historical developments: the emergence of radical Mizrahi discourse and the rise of Mizrahi politics in the 1980s and 1990s. The article concludes with insights into the common duality in Moroccan Jews' attitudes toward Israeli society—marked, on one hand, by sharp and even subversive criticism, and on the other, by moderation and forgiveness aimed at overcoming emotional burdens and integrating into society.

Introduction

Moroccan Immigrants' Encounter with the Israeli Space: Trauma, Insult, and Political Radicalization

Emotion and Radicalization: Theories of Trauma, Exclusion, and Confrontation

Mwijo and the Scene

"May God Forgive them"—Spatial Separation and National Solidarity

"They're Liars"—Spatial Differentiation and Double Alienation

"May their Innards Burn"—Space, Status and Political Radicalization

Conclusion

Introduction

Cheikh Mwijo (الشيخ مويسو, Moshe Attiya, hereinafter Mwijo) was a key personality in the "Moroccan Troubadours scene" (hereinafter: "the Scene"): a musical-culture scene that developed in Israel in the context of Moroccan-Jewish immigrants' encounter with the country.[1] Excluded from the general and Mizrahi-Israeli cultural mainstream hegemony, the Scene has been ignored in historical research. Manifested in Moroccan immigrant communities, frontier localities, and urban outskirts, it centered on immigrant singers whom I call troubadours due to their itinerant travels from community to community. In their singing, they described the lives of their reference group of immigrants with attention to the segregative nature of the space that they inhabited in Israel as a determinant of the immigration crisis and social marginality that they endured. As a troubadour, Mwijo, like the other troubadours, migrated among immigrants' family and community *haflot* fests,[2] sang largely in a Judeo-Moroccan dialect, and preserved the musical style in which he specialized.

Below, I present three selected works that I term "political ballads"—colloquial storyline narratives set to music and containing political content—that Mwijo composed. I use them to examine how his oeuvre reflects "mental maps"—partitions and imaginings of space, the Israeli space in this case. In these mental maps, cultural-value boundaries are drawn and distinctions are made between

[1] For brevity and in keeping with the Israeli idiom, hereinafter I will use the term *Moroccans* to denote Jewish-Moroccan immigrants in Israel, most of whom languished on the country's social and cultural fringes.

[2] *Haflot* means "parties" or "festivities." In those events (communal or familial), usually a troubadour and a band were invited.

Moroccan immigrants' spaces and those of Ashkenazi non-immigrants ("veterans" in the Israeli jargon) against the background of mass immigration from Morocco in the 1950s and 1960s and the polarization and political radicalization that the immigrants underwent between the 1970s and the "aughts." Within this frame, I will instancize the reflection of the memory of the trauma and insult that typified this partitioning. As argued elsewhere, Moroccans in Israel experienced collective trauma due to the circumstances that prompted their immigration and their freighted encounter with Israeli society, amplified by the insult of their peripheralization and pejorative stereotyping. Thus, some of those to whom Mwijo's ballads were addressed sat on ripe soil for the radicalization of their immigration narrative, manifested in abandoning the approach favored by the state-establishment—a tolerant analysis of the MENA Jews and Israel, contextualizing the hardships of the newborn state as the explanation for their conflicts. In lieu of that perspective, they adopted the radical Mizrahi discourse approach—a critical analysis of relations between MENA Jews and Israeli society that traces their conflictual relations to deliberate Ashkenazi xenophobia and patronization. The musical scene that developed in the Moroccan immigrant communities, I claim, reflected the immigrants' response to their cultural and spatial exclusion in Israel; for this reason, it is apt to find a spatial dimension and mental mapping in prominent troubadours' works. Analyzing the spatial aspect of the works of Mwijo, I contend that two sociopolitical processes influenced the shaping of his spatial narrative: the radical Mizrahi immigration-to-Israel narrative and the ascendancy of a branch of Mizrahi politics that mobilized this discourse and radicalized it under the prevailing political circumstances.

Continuing, I illuminate the Scene as an alternative cultural phenomenon that emerged in the socio-geographic margins of the Israeli national space. I also offer the spatial dimension of Mwijo's ballads as a reflection of this social marginality, the socio-ethno-geographic partitioning of the Israeli space, and the political radicalization of those whose voices found no resonance in the public sphere.[3]

[3] Methodological remarks about translation, transliteration, and textual analysis: The Scene is a phenomenon of grassroots informal cultural marginality. Consequently, the troubadours who inhabited it neither described what they thought about the texts that they wrote nor stated when their songs were published. To overcome these complexities in compiling Mwijo's corpus, I first brought the text to the surface by listening to the ballads painstakingly. Then I transcribed and transliterated the songs from their source language—a Jewish dialect of the Moroccan *darija*—and

Moroccan Immigrants' Encounter with the Israeli Space: Trauma, Insult, and Political Radicalization

In the first half of the twentieth century, Morocco had a Jewish population of approximately 250,000, most urban; by the 1970s some 80 percent had immigrated to Israel. The push factors behind this move traced to the traumatic deterioration of Moroccan Jews' and livelihood under the influence of post-World War II processes—disillusionment with France due to the anti-Jewish Vichy regime that ran the country during the war, the Moroccan anti-colonial struggle, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as attested in the MENA region.[4] The migration occurred in two waves that differed socioeconomically but shared traumatic circumstances. The immigrants of the first wave (1947-1956, c. 110,000 persons) reached an Israel that faced nation-building challenges. They were religious, ill-inclined to modernity, inhabitants of the rural periphery, and former villagers who settled in the outskirts of the country's major cities.[5] Dependent on the immigrant-integration institutions due to their socioeconomic weakness, they became the main targets of a "population dispersion" policy that included relocation to outlying settlements in *ma'abarot* (transit camps, sing. *ma'abarah*), newly established "development towns" meant to disperse the population, cooperative farming villages, and low-skilled employment. The peripheral settlements, excluded and isolated, became ethnically identified with these immigrants, whose stigma distanced them from the nonimmigrant population

translated them initially into Hebrew (I thank Elad Mordechai's and David Muati's help for uncovering and transliterating the lyrics) and thence into English. Continuing, I contextualized the contents of the ballads by identifying events mentioned in them and mapping them on a historical timeline. Applying choice and discretion, I transliterated the texts only to analyze them as historical sources that may yield narratives. Namely, I do not pursue linguistic-syntactic or musicological objectives in this article.

[4] Emily Gottriech-Benishu, *Jewish Morocco: A History from Pre-Islamic to Post-Colonial Times* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 158-161; Aomar Boum, "Partners Against Anti-Semitism: Muslims and Jews Respond to Nazism in French North-African Colonies, 1936–1940," *Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 4 (2014): 554-570; Maite Ojeda-Mata, "The Sephardim of North Morocco, Zionism and Illegal Emigration to Israel Through the Spanish Cities of Ceuta and Melilla," *Contemporary Jewry* 40 (2020): 519-545.

[5] Aviad Moreno and Haim Bitton, "The Moroccan 'Yizkor Book': Holocaust Memory, Intra–Jewish Marginalization, and Communal Empowerment in Israel," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 23, no. 2 (2023): 261-283.

and left them neglected and disconnected from general society.[6] Mass immigration from the MENA lands caused cultural anxiety among the nonimmigrant population, which feared the collapse of its vision of modern Israel and the Levantinization of its culture. In response, the authorities applied a melting-pot policy, demanding that the immigrants disengage from their "exilic" culture and adopt Israel's secular-Western statist orientation. The immigrants' cultural-adjustment hardships plastered a collective stigma upon them that included the attribution of antisocial characteristics, and none suffered from this more than did the Moroccans.[7]

The second wave of immigration from Morocco came ashore between 1961 and 1964 (again involving roughly 100,000 individuals) and most Jews who remained in Morocco left afterward (1965-1980). Most urban immigrants, belonging to the lower-middle class and having modern education and occupations, possessed a hybrid cultural connection: to modernity and to the Moroccan Jewish tradition. Few of them, however, like their predecessors, had any option other than immigration to Israel.[8] In the 1960s, too, the Israeli cultural structure rested on a geographic-cultural distinction between immigrants, associated with political-economic inferiority, and the rest. The resulting mental map, gradually embedding itself in the collective consciousness of Israeli society, created a socio-geographic dichotomy of a "First Israel" (identified with Ashkenazim, strong socioeconomic status, and socio-cultural supremacy) and a "Second Israel"

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[6] Dvora Hacohen, *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and its Repercussions in the 1950's and After* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 95-129, 268-271; Erez Tzfadia, "Public Policy and Identity Formation: The Experience of Mizrahim in Israel's Development Towns," *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry* 1, no. 1 (2007): 57-82.

[7] Daniel J. Schroeter, "Moroccan Jewish Studies in Israel," in *Jews of Morocco and the Maghrib: History and Historiography*, eds. Aomar Boum, Jessica Marglin, Khalid Ben-Srhir, and Mohammed Kenbib, *Hespéris-Tamuda* 60, no. 2, Part I (2016): 83-105; Yaron Tsur, "Carnival Fears: Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel," *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture* 18, no. 1 (1997): 73-103; Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews* (London and New York: Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics, 2010), 43-58.

[8] Michael M. Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 194-199, 240-253, and 187-197; Tsur, "Carnival Fears," 73-103; Shai Hazkani, "Our Cruel Polish Brothers: Moroccan Jews between Casablanca and Wadi Salib, 1956–59," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 28, no. 2 (2023): 41-74.

(identified with Mizrahim, low socioeconomic status, and sociocultural inferiority).[9]

The development towns transformed the periphery into a space where exclusion correlated with ethnicity and marginality. The resulting stigma exacerbated its inhabitants' collision with the receiving society and caused cultural withdrawal, marginality, and radicalization. Immigration from MENA corresponded with a dramatic increase in crime between the 1950s and the 1980s, in which Mizrahi immigrants and their offspring were conspicuous. As evidence, between 1977 and 1985, Moroccan immigrants accounted for 47 percent of the population and 62 percent of lawbreakers.[10] The Moroccan collective's response to its trauma and spatial exclusion gradually became more and more radical. The first event on this upward slope occurred in the summer of 1959 with the "Moroccan riots" in the Wadi Salib quarter of Haifa, which escalated into a violent mass protest that spread to development towns countrywide. Despite its radical potential, most immigrants responded moderately, the protests waned after some time, and the ruling party regained their support. The aftermath of the Six-Day War (June 1967) saw the eruption of a polarized political discourse from the Right and the Left that legitimized radical confrontation by marginal groups against the Israeli establishment.[11]

In the early 1970s, second-generation immigrants led the struggle against the Moroccans' marginality in protests engineered by the left-wing Black Panthers (1971) and Ohalim (1973) movements. It is conventional wisdom to credit the Moroccan immigrants for catapulting the leader of the Likud Party, Menachem Begin, to the premiership in the 1977 election campaign, announcing the advent of a new Israeli politics.[12]

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[9] Elisha Efrat, "New Development Towns in Israel (1948-93): A Reappraisal," *Cities* 4 (1994): 247-252; Tzfadia, "Public Policy"; Moshe Lissak, *The Great Emigration in the Fifties: The Failure of the Crucible* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1999), 107-108 and 119-120 [in Hebrew].

[10] Tzfadia, "Public Policy"; Gyora Shoham, Moshe Adad, and Gyora Rahav, *Criminology*, 6th Edition (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2017), 321-332 [in Hebrew].

[11] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 62-73; Avi Bareli, "Mapai and the Oriental Jewish Question in the Early Years of the State," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society n.s.* 16, no. 1 (2009): 54-84; Hazkani, "Our Cruel Polish Brothers."

[12] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 94-100 and 138-145; Amir Goldstein, "The Creation of the Likud and the Struggle for the Identity of the Alternative Party," *Israel Studies Review* 33, no. 3 (2018):

As the Likud's policy toward the immigrants also stirred disillusionment, a Mizrahi politics that underwent gradual radicalization evolved. At first, the TAMI Party (*Tnu'at Masoret Yisrael,* Jewish Tradition Movement, 1981) preached a moderate populist political line but quickly dissolved. The political potential of radical sentiment was harnessed by the Shas Party (*Sefardim Shomere Torah*, Sephardi Torah Guardians, 1984), established by secessionists from Ashkenazi-Haredi political settings in response to the marginalization of Mizrahim in both the Haredi and the secular societies. As it amassed political power, Shas underwent radicalization that included the promotion of a post-Zionist theological line that proposed to subvert the Israeli social order.[13]

In the early 1990s, the immigrants and their offspring remained marginal notwithstanding their growing electoral strength. Since then, however, growing tension has been in evidence. Shas spearheaded this population's confrontation with the secular Israeli establishment in the form of unprecedented electoral achievements fronted by a large population—most from the Mizrahi fringes of Israeli society. Just the same, delegitimizing the State of Israel long remained an uncommon form of expression in the Moroccan intra-community discourse. This changed when groups of radical-Left Mizrahi intellectuals established the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition (hereinafter: the Rainbow), which crafted a radical and critical narrative concerning the "Zionist Ashkenazi hegemony" injustice toward Mizrahim. The cultural confrontation continues today, Shas leading a radical approach and assimilating it into a broad Mizrahi public that still inhabits the fringes of Israeli society.[14]

61-78; Udi Lebel, Moshe Fuksman-Sha'al, and Eithan Orkibi, "'Mahapach!': the Israeli 1977 Political Upheaval—Implications and Aftermath," *Israel Affairs* 24, no. 6 (2018): 939-943.

[13] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 144-153 and 164-174; David Lehmann and Batia Siebzehner, *Remaking Israeli Judaism: The Challenge of Shas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 185-188.

[14] Moreno and Bitton, "The Moroccan 'Yizkor Book'"; Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 177-178 and 199-224.

Emotion and Radicalization: Theories of Trauma, Exclusion, and Confrontation

In migration studies, it is conventional to argue that the migration process influences migrants' relations with the receiving society and that mishaps in the process prompt the migrants to develop a negative narrative toward society. Since migrants' adjustment depends on the availability of instrumental resources (healthcare, social connections, economic capital) and symbolic resources (music, language, cultural gestures), the effort to mobilize alternative resources exposes them to trauma.[15] Trauma impacts migrants' socio-cultural adjustment and occurs at every stage of the migration process. Manifestations of cultural hostility, racism, prejudice, and discrimination toward immigrants aggravate trauma and inhibit migrants' identification with the receiving society,[16] creating a separatist cultural discourse between those who are in ("we") and those who are out ("they") in the migrants' encounter with their hosts.[17] Toxic emotions such as hate, states Sara Ahmed, are influenced by the histories of their integration, such that the "other" may be perceived as a threat and a dichotomy of "inside" and "outside" ensues.[18]

By extension, migrants' social lives strongly impact the way they draw their mental map. According to Bernard Guelton, the mapping process relies on two main cognitive actions: (1) memorial transcription—documentation and translation of representations of space in cyclical memory or spatial boundaries; and (2) symbolic projection—expression of spatial representations and symbols in textual and behavioral personal narrative. This makes the migration narrative fundamental in

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[15] Tania Zitton, Gerard Duveen, Alex Gillespie, Gabrielle Ivinson, and Charis Psaltis, "The Use of Symbolic Resources in Developmental Transitions," *Culture & Psychology* 9, no. 4 (2003): 415-448.

[16] Ido Lurie and Ora Nakash, "Exposure to Trauma and Forced Migration: Mental Health and Acculturation Patterns among Asylum Seekers in Israel," in *Trauma and Migration,* ed. Meryam Schouler-Ocak (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015), 139-159; Levent Küey, *Trauma and Migration: The Role of Stigma*, in *Trauma and Migration: Cultural Factors in the Diagnostics and Treatments of Traumatized Immigrants,* ed. Meryam Schouler-Ocak (Berlin: Springer, 2015), 57-69.

[17] Bruce Link and Jo Phelan, "Conceptualizing Stigma," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 363-385.

[18] Sara Ahmed, *The Politics of Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 194.

shaping the mental map.[19] It thus stands to reason that toxic interaction is translated into a mental map that distinguishes between "outside" and "inside."

Erez Tzfadia et al. argue that absent a just and anti-hegemonic spatial-planning policy, migrants' marginality may intensify their polarization and estrangement. The collision between migrants and hosts escalates when the migrants' physical space and ethnic identity are strongly correlated.[20] Apart from searing the clash into migrants' personal memories and mental maps, their response to these processes foments opposition to measures of cultural adjustment such as learning a language or letting go of the origin culture. Smart-Richman and Leary list three possible radical responses: assimilation of stigma and self-repression; righteous rage and active resistance; and indifference, withdrawal, and seclusion.[21] A collision between immigrants and nonimmigrants may unleash a permanent cyclical dynamic in which stigma and spatial exclusion cause trauma, in response to which migrants develop radical rage toward the society and resist its culture, prompting society to react by reinforcing the stigma, and round and round—making immigrants' place on the fringes of society and the law permanent.[22] Although Israel has long taken legal and institutional steps ensure immigrants' social integration and does not see Jewish immigrants as foreigners, immigrant integration in Israel has been accompanied by friction. It is against this background that Mizrahi immigrants found themselves mired in social marginality that gradually led to political radicalization.

In the process of their immigration, the Moroccans experienced all the foregoing: trauma, cultural adjustment difficulties, depletion of instrumental and symbolic resources, stigmatization, and spatial exclusion that led to social marginality and collision with Israeli society. The Scene was a response to this cultural

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[19] Bernard Guelton, " 'Mental Maps': Between Memorial Transcription and Symbolic Projection," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2023): 1-14.

[20] Assefa Mehretu, Bruce Wm. Pigozzi, and Lawrence M. Sommers, "Concepts in Social and Spatial Marginality," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 82, no. 2 (2000): 89-101; Tzfadia, "Public Policy."

[21] Laura Smart-Richman and Mark Leary, "Reactions to Discrimination, Stigmatization, Ostracism, and Other Forms of Interpersonal Rejection: A Multimotive Model," *Psychological Review* 116, no. 2 (2009): 365-383.

[22] Shoham et al., *Criminology*, 316-327; Lauren McLaren and Mark Johnson, "Resources, Group Conflict and Symbols: Explaining Anti-Immigration Hostility in Britain," *Political Studies* 55 (2007): 709-732.

confrontation on the social margins. Thus, in Mwijo's political separatism we find a reflection of more than three decades of radicalization in the Moroccan immigrants' Kulturkampf with Israeli society.

Mwijo and the Scene

Mwijo was born in 1937 in Meknes to a musical family and learned the trade as a boy who joined his father in performances. In his youth in Morocco, he sewed uniforms for the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces and in 1962, at the age of thirty-five, he emigrated to Israel and settled in Kiryat Ata, a working-class town near Haifa. In Israel, he pivoted to music-making and studied with the *ma'alem* (teacher) David Ben-Haroush in nearby Kiryat Haim. At the outset of his career, he specialized in mandolin performance; later on, he pivoted to the "North African" violin and the Algerian "Djiri" musical style. In the first decade of his career, he did most of his playing and writing for others,[23] foremost Sliman al-Maghribi.[24] In 1969, he began to record in the Judeo-Moroccan dialect,[25] a diverse repertoire embedded in the immigrants' culture and daily lives in matters such as admiration of saints, missing Morocco, romantic relations, cultural identity, family life, and daily life in Israel. As his repertoire gradually expanded, he distanced himself from his colleagues by becoming the most salient writer and performer of political ballads, some of them extreme, that included poetic paeans to politicians and descriptions of politics from the immigrants' point of view. His oeuvre has not been received with recognition, let alone success, among the mainstream Israeli public at large. To counter his artistic and political sense of marginality, in recent years Mwijo has efficiently utilized the advantages of the revolution of the new millennium by creating new media channels for free

[23] Chris Silver, "Meeting the Legendary Cheikh Mwijo," in Jewish Morocco blog spot, January 20, 2011, retrieved from https://jewishmorocco.blogspot.com/2011/01/meeting-legendary-cheikh-mwijo.html?m=1 (last access date for all websites is: June 27, 2025).

[24] Sliman al-Maghribi (Shlomo ben-Hamo), born in Meknes in 1925, immigrated to Israel in 1956 together with his family. His band had been successful in Morocco and performed a rich musical repertoire. He died of illness in 1998. Author's interview with Sliman's youngest daughter Nicole Gueta, 21 August 2024, Haifa.

[25] Silver, "Meeting the Legendary Cheikh Mwijo."

distribution of his music. Thus, he distributes his music and political agenda via YouTube and Facebook.

The troubadours' Scene presented here emerged in Israel of the 1950s, a time when East European musical influences surmounted those of MENA in the Israeli culture. The Israeli culture was shaped in accordance with the Zionist ideology and its national aspirations, and the contents of the songs were central in solidifying the collective consciousness. Between the 1940s and the 1960s, amid the struggle for and consolidation of statehood, songs took on a national character and served as mechanisms of immigrant socialization and acculturation. Indeed, the state controlled the contents of art and penalized artmaking in languages other than Hebrew until the late 1960s.[26]

As their socioeconomic adjustment hardships created a psychological need for a cultural resource, Mizrahi immigrants established musical settings of their own that made up the shortfall. In Israel's first years, most Mizrahi immigrants came from Mediterranean countries and the community's important musicians hailed from Egypt and Iraq. Some found positions with the Voice of Israel Orchestra in Arabic (1948-1993); others did so with Café Noah (1951-), located in the socially peripheral Hatikva (Hope) neighborhood of Tel Aviv. One salient exception among the Moroccan artists was Joe Amar, which had a successful acculturation in Israeli culture and did not affiliate with the troubadours currently under discussion.[27] For this reason, their musical establishment developed its own

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[26] These contents dictated the national musical agenda until the 1980s, when a "cassettes revolution" in Mizrahi music ensued. See Inbal Perlson, *Great Joy Tonight: Jewish-Arab Music and Oriental Identity* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2006), 33, 51-52, and 64-75 [in]; Sarit Cofman-Simhon, *Mi-safa le-mofa': Lashonot yehudiyot 'al ha-bama be-Yisrael* [From language to performance: Jewish languages on the stage in Israel] (Tel Aviv: MOFET, 2023), 47-50 and 61-65 [in Hebrew]; Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 71-75; Motti Regev, "Musica Mizrakhit, Israeli Rock and National Culture," *Popular Music* 15, no. 3 (1996): 275-284.

[27] *Librarian's Podcast*—National Library podcast, "Zuzu Musa and the revival of Arab music in Israel," May 18, 2022 [in Hebrew], retrieved from: https://blog.nli.org.il/podcast-zuzu-musa/?utm_source=he.wikipedia.org&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=%22%D7%AA%D7%96%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%AA+%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%9C+%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C+%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA%22&utm_content=%D7%94%D7%A1%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%9D; see also *Bemedinat Hayeudim* [In the state of the Jews], television series created by Anat Zeltzer and Modi Bar-On, 2004, Part 4, retrieved from https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0498418/ ; Shaul Mayzlish,

hierarchy and hegemony, with immigrants from Egypt and Iraq at the top. According to the female troubadour Esther El-Fasi, the troubadours, like other Moroccan immigrants, experienced marginality vis-à-vis general society due to lack of resources and estrangement from the cultural mainstream. In the Mizrahi musical scene, too, they were distanced by cultural gaps and artistic disputes with the hegemonic Mizrahi musicians, making theirs a double cultural marginality[28]—which, according to Haim Uliel, persisted until the late 1980s.[29]

In 1957, responding to the Moroccan immigrants' cultural marginality and identifying its economic potential, Rafael Azulay and his sons—Meir, Nissim, Jacky, and David, born in Marrakesh, all of whom immigrated to Israel in 1948—established Zakiphon, the first independent label devoted to artistic, religious, and light music of the MENA Jews. The label was founded under shoestring conditions to meet the immigrants' demand and endured multiple technical mishaps until it gradually professionalized itself. When the cultural mainstream greeted the Azulays' project with contempt and ridicule, the family distanced itself from the mainstream and acted to preserve and disseminate the music of the fringe in the original language of the MENA immigrants, foremost Moroccans. The Azulay family label declined in the 1990s as online recording and diffusion technologies took over. From the "aughts" onward, all that remained was the family's vinyl-record store.[30]

Joe Amar: Ani Veshiri [Joe Amar: Me and my song] (Kiryat Gat: Danny Publications, 2005), 15-22 [in Hebrew].

[28] Eran Litvin, "Lonely Singer Is the Heart," in *Lonely Singer Is the Heart: Mizrahi Music in Israel*, ed. Eran Litvin (Ashdod: Ashdod Museum of Art, 2017), 6-68 [in Hebrew]; Perlson, *Great Joy Tonight*, 80-81; author's interview with the singer Esther Alfasi, Ashkelon, April 16, 2022. Born in 1940 in Salé, Alfasi immigrated to Israel with her family in 1961 and was housed in the ma'abarot of Ashkelon. She built an international career for Moroccan and Arab audiences and retired as she approached the age of seventy.

[29] Author interview with the singer and musician Haim Uliel, a founding member of the Sefatayim group, Sderot, June 15, 2023. His father, Matityah, established the Petit Bar pour les Amis (The Small Bar for friends) known as Matityah's Café (Le café de Matityah) in Sederot- during the 1958-1964. See also the documentary: *The pioneers* (HaHalutzim), Aharon Cohen and Sigalit Banai, 2007, 23:14.

[30] Uri Verthaim, "The Shop on Clock Square," in Litvin, *Lonely Singer is the Heart*, 80-97 [in Hebrew]; Chris Silver, *Recording History: Jews, Muslims and Music across Twentieth-Century North Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022), 18.

The disinterest of the recording companies and the cultural mainstream, coupled with the psychological need to cope with stigma and loss of cultural resources, created demand among the Moroccan immigrants for music from their country of origin. Thus, a unique alternative cultural scene evolved within the immigrants' marginal habitus, manifested in countrywide family events such as fests in cafés and nightclubs even as most of this population was mired in economic distress. Therefore, paradoxically, the Scene catered to immigrants who had economic resources, on the one hand, and who belonged to the dominant group on the cultural and social fringe, on the other hand. Under these circumstances, the main audience in the Scene was composed of socially marginal types, members of the underworld, criminals, alcoholics, males with their concubines, drug addicts, and the purportedly jobless who inhabited the informal economy. This gave the Scene a dubious reputation. Ironically, however, it was those on the social and legal margins, and not the official state institutions, who founded and then preserved the Moroccan immigrants' musical culture.[31]

The Scene grew and matured under the Israeli cultural radar in its marginal habitat on the periphery. Due to its harsh underlying conditions, the troubadours had to hold jobs in addition to their musical careers and to circulate around the country from one immigrant community to the next, most of them in the periphery. Due to their existential difficulties, cultural marginality, singing in the Mughrabi Jewish language, and the characteristics of their audience, the Scene adopted unique cultural practices that burdened the troubadours' occupational lives. Lacking distribution and marketing technologies, access to transport, and adequate demand, for example, troubadours who were invited by *mulua'in* (Moroccan music devotees) had to be perpetually mobile and willing to be hosted at length in the communities where they performed. Also, their recompense, negotiated with their hosts, was based mainly on tipping (*ghr'aamah*) from the audience for singing and playing not only pieces from their repertoire but also familiar hits and classics from the MENA countries. Due to their dependency on

[31] Author interview with the singer and musician Haim Uliel, Sderot, June 15, 2023; author interview with Reuven Abergil, a founding member of the Black Panthers movement, Jerusalem, April 20, 2022. Reuven's father, David, ran Dere'ei's Café (*L'qahawah di Dere'ei*) in Jerusalem; author interview with Shimon Yifrah, the scene fan and the former stage manager for the Ashdod Andalusian Orchestra, Ashdod, March 25, 2024.

the audience, which was largely comprised of economically hard-depressed individuals and criminals under the influence of alcohol and drugs, the performances were not time-limited. They went on for hours at length even against the wishes of the troubadours, who were susceptible to humiliation and even violence if they failed to satisfy the audience's demands.[32]

As the Scene operated in peripheral localities and was ignored by the cultural establishment, the troubadours' songs escaped state supervision. In addition, unlike the crowds of first-wave immigrants that they encountered in the periphery, the troubadours were second-wavers in terms of their sociological profile. For this reason, they had agency and cultural capital that helped them to hold a dual position toward Israeli culture at a time when cultural uniformity was encouraged and were able to speak out for the 1950s immigrants. Therefore, on the one hand they criticized their socio-spatial exclusion and even subverted the cultural mainstream: they sang in Judeo-Moroccan and not in Hebrew and, unlike the cultural mainstream, which pledged itself to the nation-building effort by promoting the socialist-secular cultural melting pot, they probed romantic relationships at a time of puritanism in the mainstream culture, lauded their exilic cultural heroes, and referenced their culture of origin—mythical rabbinical personalities, traditional liturgical songs, and classical folksongs (*sha'abi*). This was accompanied with protest songs against Israeli society, as in "'Oleh hadash" (New immigrant) by B'rham Essouiri; songs of yearning for Morocco such as "Sidi mulai al Hasan" (My lord king Hasan) by Albert Suissa. On the other hand, they also sang patriotic Israeli numbers such as Sliman al-Maghribi's "Dayan ve-Rabin" ([Moshe] Dayan and [Yitzhak] Rabin" and Albert Suissa's "Eli Cohen" (the famed Israeli spy, executed in Syria in 1965).

Although Mwijo did not come from these settings, his works speak the voice of the first-wave immigrants and critique Israeli society's attitude toward those from Morocco. As I will show, the mental mapping in his works—the way he draws boundaries between the immigrant communities and their hosts and creates categorical diffractions among them—reflects the processes of polarization,

[32] Interview with Haim Uliel, Sderot, June 15, 2023, and Jerusalem, April 20, 2022; author interview with Shimon Yifrah, former stage manager for the Ashdod Andalusian Orchestra, Ashdod, March 25, 2024.

religious radicalization, and sectoralization that Israel experienced between the 1980s and the "aughts."

"May God Forgive them"—Spatial Separation and National Solidarity

In its first decades, Israel enjoyed relatively strong social cohesion and broad support of its authorities, such that no meaningful opposition by Moroccan immigrants to the establishment is recorded. The Israeli victory in the Six-Day War (1967) elevated this strong cohesion to national cultural euphoria—manifested in the mainstream in a profusion of victory photo albums and musical paeans to the Israel Defense Forces and its commanders, and on the fringes in Sliman al-Maghribi's song "Yerushalayim ha-'atiqah" (Jerusalem the ancient), in praise of the architects of the military achievement and the liberation of Jerusalem. In the 1973 War, too, the Azulay brothers' label Koliphon (1973) produced a vinyl record packed with national morale-boosting songs for Moroccan immigrants.[33] The national consensus gradually fell apart from the 1970s on, as did the political power of Mapai, the secular-Ashkenazi-majority party that ruled the country since independence. This paved the way to the political upheaval led by Menachem Begin, heightened the Moroccan immigrants' awareness of their social status, and stimulated their demand for reform in the public and academic discourse. Here again, the intellectual trends and social struggles among these immigrants were essentially moderate and centered on efforts to attain social integration and identification with the national idea.[34]

Mwijo carved out a role for himself in commemorating the immigration trauma and sharing it with posterity. Thus, appealing to the immigrants or their offspring—"Sit down, my son, and I will tell you," or "Listen, you who understands me"— is a recurrent motif in his political ballads. In his ballad

[33] Retrieved from https://stereo-ve-mono.com/2135. Sarah Ozacky-Lazar, "'The Seven Good Years?' Israel, 1967–1973: The Critical Change," *Israel Studies* 23, no. 3 (2018): 18-24.

[34] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*; Yaron Tsur, "Israeli Historiography and the Ethnic Problem," in *Making Israel*, ed. Benny Morris (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 177-231; Arie Kizel, *The New Mizrahi Narrative* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2014), 53-56 [in Hebrew].

"Menachem Begin,"[35] about the leader of the Likud Party after the latter resigned the premiership in 1982,[36] Mwijo expresses the admiration that many Moroccan immigrants felt toward him. The lyrics tell an immigration story that is critical but concurrently establishmentarian and moderate, in keeping with the zeitgeist. Even though the ballad focuses on the Moroccans' experience of insult due to their stigmatization and spatial exclusion and expresses mordant criticism of their reception in Israel's first decades, Mwijo chooses mild language in addressing their discrimination at the hands of the Ashkenazim and drawing categorical distinctions between the ethnies. In the following excerpt from the ballad, he describes the immigrants' socioeconomic weakness and hints that it is this that made them dependent on the state and helpless against the population-dispersion policy. Criticizing the host society, he notes the trauma, discrimination, and insult that the Moroccans endured. Thus, in effect, the artist links these problems to the Israeli policy that steered them to the ma'abarot and the development towns—those lonely places of exclusion on the periphery—separating the immigrants from their families and communities of origin in favor of the Ashkenazim. Thus he writes:

> I began in the name of God Supreme to tell what happened to me / I arrived as a stranger who had nothing / a wretched new immigrant / would understand the story well. / Listen, you who understands me / Let me tell what I went through / in the days of the immigration in the 1960s / in the ma'abara, clutching the shovel / and the Sephardi was miserable.... / They called us "Moroccan knife-men" / We went through suffering and humiliation / They stuffed us away for no reason [an allusion to the population-dispersion policy—H.B.] / They separated us from our loved ones / and left us in our misery / They took no account of us... / they called

[35] Mwijo, "Menachem Begin," *YouTube*, May 21, 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sEaf8rgj8Y.

[36] As stated, the troubadours and the Azulay family label were not careful about noting the publication dates of their records. One may, however, infer this information from the texts themselves. In "Menachem Begin," Mwijo states that Begin is missed in the political arena and refers to his health woes; therefore, in my estimation, the ballad was written between Begin's retirement from politics and his death—1982-1993.

> us Blacks, the Iraqis, the Moroccans, and our brethren the authentically Jewish Yemenites / and gave jobs and housing to the Poles.
>
> bdyt b`ysm l›ali n›awd ma jra ly / jyt ghryb ma la waly / ›oleh ḥadash mskyn
> w`l`sefarady fḥaly yfhm l`ḳsyda b`zyn / sm› ya lfhemnya n›awd ma daz ›lya / f`ayam l`›lya f`›amat l`stin / f`l`m›abara w l`ṭwria w l`Sefarad kanw mghbwnin.../ w`smuna maroḳo sakin / duzna l`mḥna w l`›dab khbuna mn ghir l`sbab / feḳuna mn l`ḥbab w`bḳina mghbunin / ḳarw lanw shḥorim l›yrak w`lamaroḳaim u`l`akhwanna latemanim l`yehoud l`aslyin / l`khdma w l`shikunym ›ṭawhm l`polanim

Although emphasizing the unjust treatment of the Moroccans and criticizing the Israeli establishment, the ballad reflects the establishmentarian and moderate approach and the national responsibility that were widely upheld in 1980s Israeli society and that dictated the discourse among Moroccan immigrants. Accordingly, their pro-solidarity and forgiving attitude toward the nonimmigrants' hostility is presented in the ballad in one breath with criticism of discrimination against, and marginality imposed on, the Moroccans in favor of the Ashkenazim. Mwijo explicitly urges his listeners to forgive the Ashkenazim for this and considers them his brethren:

> We reached the Land of Holiness / in the days of protektsia [use of familial, political, ethnic, or other "pull" to obtain favors]. They ruined our lives / immiserated us / our Jewish co-religionists / may God forgive them from our hearts / How they sent us to Kiryat Shemona, in the shelter do we hide / in Yeroham and Dimona [three faraway disadvantaged development towns], seared by the sun.
>
> Jina laareẓ haḳdosha / F`ayam l`Protekẓia Tkrfsona tkrfisa / L`yehwd / khwanna f`din / ḥarw ›lina lma›ysha ysmḥlhum allah mn ḳolobina / kif mshituna f`ḳiryat Shemona f`l`miḳlat mkhbyn / Be-Yeruḥam ve Dimona Ba-shemesh niẓravim.

Until the 1980s, Mwijo's poetic ballads reflected, by means of spatial narrative, a categorical binary of Moroccan immigrants and Ashkenazi hosts. This narrative presents the dire effects on the Moroccans of their stigmatization and their referral to settlements in marginal areas in the periphery. Despite this criticism, the ballad reflects the nation-minded and moderate mindset that the Moroccans adopted at this time to avoid undermining Israel's national stability.

"They're Liars"—Spatial Differentiation and Double Alienation

Key processes in Israeli politics and academia gradually changed the state of mind among activists of Moroccan origin in the late 1970s and through the 1980s. In academia, neo-Marxist theories and "post" philosophies (-modernism, -colonialism) ascended dramatically, subverting the veteran elites and challenging the morality of the Western world in its attitude toward the Third World. In politics, rival Mizrahi movements—the religious Shas and the secular Rainbow—came into being. They acted to reshape the collective memory and the Mizrahi collective memory and identity and translated the social tension between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim into political power by disseminating polarized radical narratives, among other tactics.[37] These moves gradually weakened the grip of Israeli national establishmentarianism and set two critical intellectual currents in motion: Post-Zionism and a radical Mizrahi discourse. These streams rewrote Israeli history selectively and tendentiously—stepping up the critical tone, accusing the "Ashkenazi elite" of deliberately marginalizing the Mizrahim, and even challenging the legitimacy of Israel as a state.[38] Since then, Arie Kizel finds, the radical Mizrahi narrative has become the dominant force that dictates the patterns of Mizrahi discourse and historical consciousness. This discourse, Kizel continues, rests on three main narrative foundations: confrontation and historical reckoning with Zionism and the Israeli establishment, rewriting and cleansing

[37] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 193, 202-203; Uri Ram, *Israeli Sociology: A Conceptual History 1882–2018* (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2021), 113-119, 183-189, and 192 [in Hebrew].

[38] Tsur, "Israeli Historiography," 7-56.

Mizrahi history, and confrontational and separatist emphasis on the Mizrahi-Arab identity over the Ashkenazi-Jewish one.[39]

The Rainbow was the organizing player in the radical Mizrahi discourse, its intellectuals revolutionizing the field of knowledge about Mizrahim and its dissemination among the Israeli public. They diffused a polar and confrontational historical narrative that influenced the Mizrahi collective consciousness and sketched the image of the Mizrahi as the victim of deliberate discrimination, economic exploitation, cultural dispossession, and Euro-centric Orientalist condescension. Sami Shalom Chetrit credits Shas with identifying the electoral potential of this narrative among socially marginalized Mizrahim and using it to undermine the ruling hegemony of which it had been part.[40] According to Kizel, populistic forces dominated the radical-secular Mizrahi narrative from then on, assimilating a toxic depiction of Ashkenazi-Mizrahi relations into the public discourse and seeking a historical reckoning with Israel for the way the Ashkenazim had treated the Mizrahim in the first decades. This tendency grew in radicality from the 1990s onward.[41]

This leaning is reflected in Mwijo's political ballad "Im lo Aryeh Deri"[42] [If not Aryeh Deri], about the leader of Shas, recorded in 2001 and sung mostly in Hebrew. Disseminated on YouTube, it went viral and triggered a public debate due to what the journalist Avishai Ben-Haim called its "pungent lyrics."[43] In this ballad, Mwijo embellishes his migration narrative with an allusion to the Haredi ("ultra-Orthodox") Mizrahi and presents the trauma of the Mizrahi immigrant encounter with Israel in accordance with the logic of the radical Mizrahi narrative. Thus he creates a value differentiation, sharpens spatio-cultural boundaries, and invokes metaphors that describe the Mizrahi exclusion from spaces that he identifies with two "Ashkenazi hegemonies": the secular kibbutz and court of law,

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[39] Kizel, The *New Mizrahi Narrative*, 71-81.

[40] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 33-34 and 195.

[41] Kizel, *The New Mizrahi Narrative*, 81-109.

[42] Mwijo, "Im lo Aryeh Deri," *YouTube*, June 1, 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T81e3OxpuhY.

[43] Avishai Ben-Haim, "Lahit hadash be-qerev tomkhei Aryeh Deri: Shir meha'a harif shel zamar Marokai" [A new hit among supporters of Aryeh Deri: A pungent protest song by a Moroccan singer], *Ynet*, June 19, 2001. The song has attracted some 70,000 views to date. Retrieved from https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-832808,00.html

and the Haredi yeshiva (men's religious academy). The populistic narrative that Shas developed, claims Nissim Leon, managed to attract many lower-class Mizrahim because it expressed a dual challenge: to the dominance of wealthy secular Ashkenazi "Israeliness" and to the Ashkenazi Haredi hegemony in Israel's religious society.[44]

Thus, in one part of the narrative in this ballad, Mwijo compares the secular kibbutz as a space where the Mizrahim experienced exclusion with their geo-cultural dispossession and presents their being sent to the ma'abara— a place of marginality—as a deliberate measure of exclusion and cultural and economic deprivation. As a troubadour who memorializes the trauma of the immigration, Mwijo expresses in this ballad the influence of the radical Mizrahi intellectuals on the Mizrahi collective consciousness. Accordingly, he presents their radical critical interpretation of controversial historical episodes and social sensitivity that were discussed intensively in the public discourse, such as the alleged abduction of immigrant children from Yemen by establishmentarian Ashkenazi elements in the early 1950s and the forced secularization of children from Morocco by Zionist secular youth movements in Israel and by schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Morocco.[45] His choice of adopting the radical post-Zionist historical narrative in reference to the trauma, the insult, and the spatial exclusion that the Mizrahim experienced shows initial signs of the political radicalization that he, like other immigrants from Morocco, underwent at that time. This notwithstanding, even in this ballad Mwijo allows some moderation in explaining the discrepancy between the Moroccans' expectations of Jewish solidarity and fraternity and the offense that stigmatization and spatial exclusion did to them. Thus he wrote:

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[44] Nissim Leon, "The Haredic Unrest among Oriental Jews: Ethnographic Pictures from the Communal Synagogue Hatch," in *Shas: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives,* ed. Aviezer Ravitsky (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006), 165-193 [in Hebrew].

[45] Shlomo Deshen, "The State of Religious Rift among Jewish Israelis," in *The Jewishness of Israelis: Responses to the Guttman Report,* eds. Charles S. Liebman and Elihu Katz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 130-137; Motti Inbari, "Uzi Meshulam and the 'Mishkan Ohalim' Affair: The Influence of Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy," *Israel Studies Review* 32, no. 2, (2017): 21-42 and 64-90.

> Sit my son next to me sit tilt an ear and listen / Back in the lands of the enemy, the Dror movement [a Zionist-Socialist youth movement] struck us / and at the crazy Alliance [schools] they confused the Torah for us / They named Zionists, educated on kibbutzim / a factory for secularism, into the Diaspora they sent them / We thought they had brought redeemers of Israel to us / Alas, the anguish from the ship to the ma'abara / without tefillin and without Torah / The secular took control of us / Respect fled, what a shame … / We mingled with them / studied their actions / read their newspapers / in which they laughed at us / They deserve no forgiveness for having stolen the Torah from us / We were ashamed of our ritual fringes, they sheared our forelocks / they stole our babies.
>
> Shev b'ni 'al yadi, shev hat ozen v'haqshiv / 'Od b'artzot ha-'oyeiv tenu'at dror, darbata bina / Ufal-'Aliyans al-Mazarub 'ala Torah telfuna / Qar'u lahem tziyonim, ḥun'khu b'ḳibutzim / Beit ḥaroshet l'ḥilonim, l'l'galut taba'una… / Oy l'otah ẓara, m'l'onia l'ma'abara / ḥashavnu moshy'im l`Israel jabuna / B'li tefilin u'bli Torah / Haḥilonim ḥakamu bina Mas'at alhiba ya ḥasra / it'aravnu beinahen / Lamadnu ma'aseihen / ḳara'nu 'itonoteihen / fihom yidḥaku 'alina Ein lahem meḥilah min b'dob haTorah w'd'nobna / Hitbayashnu b'ẓiẓiyot, gazzu lanu ha-pe'ot / Ganvu lanu tinokot.

In the second part, unlike the approach taken by the Moroccan immigrant Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli, who sees integration into the Musar (Novardok-ethicist) movement in Haredi society as a process of personal cleansing and reconnection with Judaism,[46] Mwijo criticizes the Haredi establishment trenchantly and accuses it of monopolizing the Jewish religion to the exclusion of the Mizrahim. In his immigration narrative, he presents the Haredi yeshiva, like the secular kibbutz, as a venue of exclusion and religious-cultural patronization of Mizrahim and draws a comparison that pairs the Ashkenazi Haredi leadership with the

[46] Aviad Moreno, "Mapping Moral Paths: The Spiritual Geography of Moroccan Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli" [published in this issue].

secular hegemony as those responsible for the exclusion of the immigrants from Morocco. In addition, Mwijo implicates the Mizrahi immigrants' spatial exclusion and patronizing treatment in their descent into crime and their exclusion from courts of law—another vector of disillusion and breaching of the promise of Jewish solidarity in Israel:

> Oh, what happened to us / how we shed tears for the Torah and the Divine presence / Their grand rabbis, too, pleaded / We kissed their feet / Their yeshivas did not admit us / We were thrown into crime / The court abused us… / My son, do not believe them, they're liars / who persecute their brethren.
>
> Ah ma' jrā bina / Kama horednu dma'ot 'al ha-Torah v'ha-Shekhina / Gam Admorayhem, hitḥnanu lahem / Nishaḳnu raglehem, / f'lishivot ma kibeluna /
> Nizraḳnu le-pesha, / beit ha-mishpat ta'amar bina… / B'ni al ta'amin lahem, shaḳranim shekamohem / Ha-rodefim aḥihem, Sefardim K'wanā

This political ballad reflects the disappointment and the first flickers of political radicalization among the Moroccans in Israel as Mwijo acquired his radical Mizrahi persona in the 1990s. The spatial narrative that he sketches melds the Haredi and the secular Ashkenazim into one group on his mental map and sorts the Mizrahim into separate places elsewhere. Gradually abandoning the moderation that typified the previous decade and adopting the radical Mizrahi historical narrative, he describes the spaces that the Mizrahim inhabited as avenues that usher the Mizrahim into poverty, marginality, and crime.

"May their Innards Burn"—Space, Status and Political Radicalization

The spatial-history narrative in Mwijo's political ballad "Im haya hai Begin"[47] (If Begin had lived) which, I believe, the artist recorded after 2005,[48] reflects the intensification of right-wing political polarization and radicalization in Israel from the late 1990s to the present. Focal in this tension, ostensibly, is an ideological struggle between parties of Left and Right, but it is accompanied by the common Israeli separatist binary based on the correlation of political ideology and ethnic identity—"them," the Ashkenazim, on the Left, and "us," the Mizrahim, on the Right.[49] In this ballad, Mwijo presents a spatial narrative that divides the Israeli space along lines of economic status and political affiliation that identifies the Ashkenazi space with values such as political Leftism and wealth and the Mizrahi space with marginality and Rightism. Paradoxically, the post-Zionist narrative on the encounter of Mizrahi immigrants and Ashkenazi hosts was adopted by political forces on both sides of the Israeli political map, allowing the political rhetoric of the Right on the Mizrahi issue to rest its case on the radical Mizrahi narrative that originated in the political Left.[50] Influenced by this phenomenon and reflecting the processes of polarization in Israeli society, the narrative that Mwijo presents in this ballad reflects radicalization by accusing the "Ashkenazi Left" of forsaking national solidarity and wronging the Mizrahim by discriminating against them in allocating resources, relegating them to the periphery, and creating Mizrahi marginal spaces. The spatial emphasis in this ballad is placed on a value-centric and moral distinction between the wealthy Ashkenazi space, corrupt and sated, and the Mizrahi space, disempowered and exploited in economic life, housing, and forced settlement in dangerous frontier

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47 Mwijo, "Im haya hai Begin," *YouTube*, February 24, 2013: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vf2raQ7bONY&t=582s.

48 I base my estimate on his reference to the latest historical event mentioned in the song, the disengagement from the Gaza Strip engineered by the Prime Minister of the State of Israel, Ariel Sharon, in 2005.

49 Daphna Canetti, Howard L. Frant, and Ami Pedahzur, "The Triumph of Polarization," in *The Elections in Israel 1999*, eds. Asher Arian and Michal Shamir (New York: Israel Democracy Institute and SUNY Press, 2002), 165-179.

50 Kizel, *The New Mizrahi Narrative,* 9-16; Daniel Gutwein, "Left and Right Post-Zionism and the Privatization of Israeli Collective Memory," *Journal of Israeli History* 20, no. 2-3 (2001): 9-42.

zones. In this ballad, as before, Mwijo eternalizes the immigration-trauma narrative by turning to the immigrants' offspring:

> Shame on the Ashkenazim for what they did to us / May God hound them as we were hounded / They in Savyon in villas, banks, and thievery; the Sephardim fight on the borders living on welfare, Amigour [public housing] apartments, and discrimination since the 1950s.... / [my son, H.B.] Tell and do not forget about the rule of the Ma'arakh [the Ashkenazi-dominated Labor Alignment], taking us by force and threatening us, whomever does not vote Ma'arakh gets fired from their jobs / tell about the [Labor-administered] Health Fund [HMO] and the stamp-booklets,[51] how we were unemployed and kicked out of the hospitals.
>
> L'ḥashuma di 'amalu le-na l'ashkenazim / Sir allah ittlihum kif khlawna mtlyin / Hem b'savyon b'villot, wolbankim wulgnivut, wosfardim f'legvulot b'la'katsba' ot'ayishin Dirot Amigor; wulafliyot min 'am al-ḥamsin / Saper V'al tashkach sheltuon dal'ma'arakh, lokhim otanu b'ko'aḥ u-me'ayimim alina Mi she-lo yibḥar ma'arakh mal'kedma ka'anu yiftruna / Saper al kopat ḥolim, wol'penkas wol'bulim hayinu muf'talim, mibayit ḥolim yidḥayuna.

Radicalization is expressed in this ballad in the escalation of Mwijo's critical tenor and his use of crude language—cursing the Ashkenazim and brutally dividing the space. In this narrative, he levels accusations and insults at prominent Israeli cultural and political personalities who publicly clashed with the Moroccan immigrants. He accuses them of stigmatizing and besmirching them, ridiculing their culture and heritage, and exploiting them economically in the past and the

[51] Here Mwijo is referring to the "red booklet" carried by members of the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor), established by the Zionist Labor Movement in 1920 to provide members with a range of services from education to recreation. The Histadrut was identified with Mapai (Labor) rule, and those on the Right considered the booklet a symbol of elitism due to the Histadrut's alleged discrimination against Right-leaning workers in the labor market. See Mordechai Naor (2007), "Pinkas haver" [Membership booklet], retrieved from https://naormor.co.il/m/history_item.asp?id=13.

present. Continuing, he associates these phenomena with the Moroccans' spatial exclusion and economic exploitation. He emphasizes the poverty traps to which the Mizrahim were directed in their spaces of marginality and the perpetuation of their situation due to their impoverishment as part of a deliberate racist policy. The ballad reflects the insult that the Moroccan immigrants felt due to their treatment when received in Israel and its blunt language shows that time has not attenuated the trauma. On the contrary: the agony has only increased and serves as fertile soil for radicalization. Nevertheless, importantly, Mwijo does not totally abandon his national-establishmentarian approach. In this respect, he reflects a dual stance that was common among Moroccan Jews in regard to their reception in Israel—fierce criticism along with profound identification. Therefore, he concludes the ballad with a tolerant message that offers the possibility of forgiving the Ashkenazim, his brethren, via economic compensation for the collective emotional damage done:

> My son, tell your sons how your brethren the Ashkenazim made your parents suffer, they did not pity us / they called us "Moroccan knife-men" and diddled us / Tell it all, and Golda with the big nose, may their innards burn for having repressed us / for no reason and with no excuse, they never loved us / Tell about Dudu Topaz [an ethnically insensitive comedian], who called us chahchahim / Tell about Haim Hefer, the stupid poet who spoke about the mofletta [a thin crêpe traditionally eaten at the Mimouna] and began to ridicule us / for [our] solidarity desires , our Torah, and our culture .... / Tell about the tenement apartments, one room and bath and charging rent to those wretches / We paid for fifty years and they still brutalize us / They sell us the same flat / You need a law in this country: they should give us the flat as compensation for our suffering and their abuse / Maybe we'll forgive them; when all's said and done, they are our brethren Israel.
>
> B'ni Saper lebanayikha, kama savlu horeikha me-ha'ashkenazim aḥayikh ma ḥananu alina,/ Li z'aw me-Moroko s'akin ka'anu yitfalelu alina./ Saper al kol devar u-Golda mula'at al-m'naḵer yanod lehom nar p'lḳbar, li ka'anu yikarrhonna / Saper al Dudu Topaz l'ẓaḥaẓaḥim sh'munā / Saper al

> Ḥayim Ḥefer, al'meshorer l'ḥamar 'alā muflata ka yehader, / u-b'dara ye'ir beinah,Wl` kiruv levavot u-Torah ul`tarbut di'alnā / Saper al ha-shikhunim, ḥeder u-sherutim / u-s'khar dira mis'kanim ḥamishim 'am khllsnā
> Ve-'od met'akhzrim, ota ha-dira yabi'wah lina / Tzarikh ḥoq b'medinah; yitnu ha-dirot fi l'matnah, k'pitzu'i al maḥnana u-wali duzo alina, / Ulay neslaḥ lahem sof sof Yisra'el kh'wanā.

The spatial narratives in Mwijo's political ballads reflect a sociopolitical process that played out between the 1980s and the "aughts," centering on the erosion of the Israeli national-establishmentarian ethos and the emergence of problematic social phenomena such as ethnic separatism, radicalism, and political polarization. Mwijo, as an informal representative of the Moroccan immigrants, expresses in his ballads the radicalization that the newly landed were undergoing due to the ascendancy of post-Zionist and critical political and intellectual currents that challenged Israel's moral legitimacy. In addition to the traumatic memory of the immigration process and the cultural clash with the old-timers, the sense of insult reflected in Mwijo's political ballads impacted the Moroccan Jews' spatial immigration narrative. For all that, Mwijo leaves room in his political ballads for messages of solidarity that urge listeners to heal the ethnic rift between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim.

Conclusion

The first group of Moroccan Jews who immigrated to Israel, from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, emanated largely from weak populations. Its immigration process began with a traumatic experience precipitated by push factors that included religio-political persecution and existential threat. The immigrants' reception in Israel triggered harsh disillusionment due to loss of material and symbolic resources that allowed the mainstream establishment to steer them to the country's geographic and social periphery. Their encounter with their hosts evolved into a Kulturkampf due to an integration policy that urged them to disengage from their culture, coupled with stigmatization by the receiving society.

The result was an injurious cycle in immigrant-host interaction: alienation that exacerbated the trauma of immigration, trauma that induced immigrants to secede from the local culture, secession that intensified their socio-spatial marginality, and marginality that impeded their cultural adjustment. In response, the troubadours' scene and the Azulay family's cultural entrepreneurship through its recording labels preserved the immigrants' musical and linguistic culture. Thus they amplified their listeners' alienation and disconnection from the Israeli cultural mainstream, and round and round.

The foregoing analysis of Mwijo's political separatism between the 1980s and the "aughts" reflects the processes that gradually reshaped the Israeli political arena and the Moroccan immigrants' movement within it. The troubadours' scene crystallized upon the reception of the first wave of migrants, concurrent with the eruption of cultural angst among their hosts and escalation of the immigrants' stigmatization. These trends gathered strength because the Scene helped to reclaim their loss of symbolic resources and fashioned Moroccan immigrant communities as culturally autonomous ones on the Israeli periphery. Despite this, and in view of the power of the national-establishmentarian ethic and tendency to solidarity of thought that Mapai (Labor) dictated in Israeli's first decades—even though the troubadours composed critical political ballads about Israel—the cultural scene that formed on society's margins did not give rise to radical voices.

The second wave of immigration in the early 1960s heralded a change in the consciousness of Moroccan immigrants in Israel. In view of the socioeconomic and cultural differences between them and the different extent of their dependency on the state, these immigrants saw the cultural confrontation with Israel differently. Namely, while the first-wave immigrants tended more to conformism, those who followed were more critical. About a decade after Mwijo reached Israel in the second wave, relations between Moroccan immigrants and the Israeli establishment crossed another dramatic inflection point amid the social turmoil of the 1970s that upended Israeli politics. On the basis of the offense and frustration that the immigrants felt due to their spatial relegation to the periphery, their marginalization, and their social distress, the politicization and radicalization of the Kulturkampf with the fledgling Israel that received them escalated. In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, Mizrahi-oriented political parties and movements that saw traumatic Kulturkampf as their main electoral resource began to form.

Although each had different political aspirations, political parties and movements like Likud, Shas, Tami, and the Rainbow put the trauma of the Mizrahi immigration to political use.

In the four decades that followed the political dramas of the 1970s, the Mizrahi immigrants have gone through a revolution of self-awareness and accumulation of socio-historical knowledge about their experiences in the Islamic lands and in Israel. During these years, radical Mizrahi intellectuals who identified with the Israeli political Left established infrastructures of research knowledge about Israel's encounter with the Mizrahi immigrants and took command of the public discourse related to it. Influenced by postcolonial thinking, they developed radical critical post-Zionist narratives that accused Israel of deliberately relegating the Mizrahi immigrants to the socioeconomic fringe and dispossessing them of their original culture. On the basis of criticism that originated in Mizrahi politics and, more intensively, in the radical Mizrahi discourse, a sentiment emerged atop which a significant electoral resource among the Mizrahi immigrants was constructed. Populistic use of this sentiment by parties on the political Right such as Shas and Likud, coupled with historical emotions of insult and frustration, expedited the radicalization of the immigrants on the Israeli social fringe.

Mwijo's political ballads reflect the processes that Israeli society has undergone in the field of ethnic struggle from its inception to recent years. Considering himself an agent of the Moroccan Jewish memory, Mwijo memorialized the trauma of immigration and bequeathed it to posterity. The patterns of memory and the spatial narratives that he sketched and revealed in his ballads, however, are also instructive of changes in the Israeli public discourse and the radicalization of processes among the Moroccan immigrants. The spatial partitioning and the cultural profiling that he presents in his ballads reflect a transition from a national-establishmentarian approach and an inclusive and pro-solidarity orientation in reference to the immigrants' insult and spatial exclusion to a radical approach that reflected political polarization trends in Israel at large. This radical stance, predicated on the logic of the radical Mizrahi discourse, was typified by a dichotomous and separatist spatial differentiation, on ethnic grounds, between "us" (Mizrahi, "Second Israel," periphery) and "them" (Ashkenazi, "First Israel," center). Farther on, Mwijo gave direct expression in his ballads to his affinity for the Israeli political Right, reflecting the impact of its leaders' populism and

polarization in blunt language and mirroring his hostility to the Ashkenazim and the parties of the political Left.

Mwijo was active in Israel for more than five decades as a troubadour who ferried around the country among Moroccan immigrant communities and disseminated narratives before audiences who identified their socioeconomic position on the Israeli periphery in his songs. As time passed, he branched out to digital media for this purpose and thus broadened his community of listeners dramatically. It is hard to estimate the impact of Mwijo's ballads on the Moroccan immigrants in Israel. However, the abandonment of the national-establishmentarian paradigm and the transition to populistic and polarized models, reflected in his ballads, took place concurrently and may indicate regression in the acculturation of the immigrants who participated in the troubadours' scene. These immigrants, like Mwijo, experienced years of cultural and economic marginality and frustration in a hostile society. As a result, they identified Israeli society as a threat and tended to withdraw from it, for example, by preserving their original language and partitioning the geographical sphere in status and economic contexts. This made them easy prey for the influence of mutually opposed self-serving forces: the political Right, which invoked the immigrants' frustration populistically in order to infect them with radical ethnoreligious outlooks, and post-Zionist actors who instilled perceptions born in the political Left.

The assimilation of these mutually exclusive ideas among the Moroccan immigrants created an emotional dualism toward Israeli society in this population group: critical and radical alongside national-establishmentarian and moderate. This approach is reflected in Mwijo's ballads which, despite crude and separatist lyrics and hurling of ethnic accusations at the ("Ashkenazi") Israeli establishment, attest to a recurrent motif of forgiveness that leaves room to bridge the tensions and heal the emotional wounds of the Moroccan immigrants' reception in Israel. Mwijo's oeuvre offers a multidimensional and dual perspective for study of the freighted cultural encounter between Israel and the Moroccan immigrants and stresses the dualism of the latter, which allows ostensibly clashing values to share a common habitat.

Fig. 1. Illustration by Zohar Gannot, 2025.

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Keywords: Troubadours, Political Radicalization, Spatial Exclusion, Post-Zionism, Radical Mizrahi, Marginality

How to quote this article:
Haim Bitton, "Spaces of Exclusion, Sounds of Resistance and Radicalization: Emotional Cartographies in the Ballads of Cheikh Mwijo," in "(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East," eds. Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15942

Emotionally Dividing Baghdad: Spatial Memories of the Farhud throughout the Iraqi Jewish Diaspora

by *Tsionit Fattal-Kuperwasser*

Abstract

On 1–2 June 1941, an anti-Jewish pogrom known as the Farhud took place in Baghdad, claiming a toll of 179 Jews murdered, thousands wounded, multiple women raped, and much property looted. This article tracks the accounts of two memoirists—Jews born in Baghdad who reconstructed their experiences of the Farhud from their subjective perspective in their biographical present in London. Through these agents of memory who documented their individual and collective memories, I show that the story of the Farhud and the Jews' emigration from Iraq can be told in many different contexts. This contrasts with the many historiographic studies that deal with political aspects of the Farhud and, in this context, stirs debate among historians about the circumstances of the mass exodus of Jews from Iraq and addresses the manner in which the consciousness of the Farhud and its place in the collective memory in Israel are shaped.

Introduction

Meer Basri's and Violet Shamash's Autobiographical Present in London

The Farhud in the Memoirs of Violet Shamash and Meer Basri

The Significance of the Farhud and the Extent of Its Influence on the Writers
The Experienced Space
Spatial Description of the Riot
The British and the Farhud

Conclusion

Introduction

In April 1941, a pro-Nazi and anti-British military coup was staged in Iraq against the monarchic regime, ending with the appointment of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani as Prime Minister. The coup was supported by the Iraqi nationalist movement, which was influenced by Nazi ideology and sought to eradicate the British presence in Iraq. In the course of May, as British and German-supported Iraqi forces battled each other, incitement against and harassment of Jews increased as the anti-British forces portrayed them as collaborators with the British. By the end of May, the Iraqi army was defeated and the leaders of the coup fled the country. On June 1, 1941, Regent 'Abd al-Ilah returned to Baghdad and the British forces remained on the outskirts the city.

Anti-Jewish riots began that morning, after police and soldiers of the defeated army attacked a Jewish delegation returning from the reception of Regent 'Abd al-Ilah. The assaults took place in the Karkh area, on the west bank of the Tigris River, and spread to the streets and the Jewish neighborhoods on the east bank of the Tigris, in the area of Rusafa, and continued until the afternoon of the following day. The rioters murdered, raped, mutilated organs, desecrated synagogues, committed robbery, and looted large amounts of property from Jewish-owned homes and shops. The pogrom took place with the knowledge of the Regent and the British and was stopped on the afternoon of its second day, only when it spread to commercial centers outside the Jewish-populated areas. Among the rioters were soldiers, police, schoolchildren, and members of paramilitary youth movements, along with Bedouin and incited mobs.[1]

The term *Farhud* was adopted by the wider international community, as well as both Arabs and Jews, to describe these riots against the Jews. In the colloquial Iraqi vernacular, the word denotes looting and robbery[2] but does not capture the

[1] Zvi Yehuda, *The Jews of Babylonia in the Second Millennium CE* (Or Yehuda: Babylonian Heritage Center, 2013), 215-221.

[2] Salim Fattal, *An Idol in the Temple of the Israeli Academy* (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 2010), 36 [in Hebrew]. The word comes from the Kurdish language and means brutal terrorism. During the reign of Nizam Pasha, the Ottoman governor of Baghdad in 1910-1911, soldiers looted shops because they had not been paid their salaries. The looting operation was called a *farhud*.

intensity of the atrocities that occurred during those two days, which also included murder and rape. It is unclear when the term was first used.[3]

On 7 June 1941, a government commission of inquiry was established to investigate the events. The panel's report, shelved at the time and published years later,[4] describes the sequence of events and the neighborhoods affected, especially the densely populated and poor quarters in the old area of Baghdad. The commission set the total number of fatalities at 110 Jews and Muslims, neither differentiating between the population groups nor explaining the circumstances of the Muslims' deaths. The Jewish community counted 179 Jews murdered, thousands wounded, women raped, and homes, synagogues, and shops looted.[5] The governmental commission traced the carnage to Nazi incitement and propaganda.

There are no precise figures on the size of the Iraqi Jewish population in 1941. On the basis of data from the 1947 census, it may be estimated that at least 70,000 Jews lived in Baghdad at the time of the riots, the vast majority lived in the old part of the city and several thousands in the new neighbourhoods built in the mid-1930s. Those who lived in the new neighbourhoods belonged to the upper and middle classes while many of their family members continued to live in the old neighbourhoods. Jews accounted for more than 10 percent of the city's population.[6]

The Farhud is an extraordinary event in the collective memory of the Jewish community in Iraq. Many studies have been written about its background, turn of events, and outcomes on the basis of archival documents, oral testimonies,

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[3] Khathem Habib, *Yahoud al-Iraq wal Muwatana al-Muntaza'a* [Iraqi Jews and the Renovation of Citizenship] (Italy: Almutawassit Books, 2015), 362. During the Farhud, the looters sang "Oh what good the Farhud brought us, we wish every day would be Farhud."

[4] The committee's report was shelved and was first published in Abd al-Razzaq al-Hasani, *Al-Asrar Al-Khafiya fi Harakat Al-Sana 1941 Al-Tahririya* [The Hidden Secrets in the Liberation Movement of the year 1941] (Sidon: 1964), 246-256.

[5] Abraham Hayim Twena, *Dispersion and Liberation: The Pogrom in Baghdad*, part 6 (Ramla: Geoula Synagogue Committee, 1977), 45 [in Hebrew].

[6] There were two censuses in Iraq in the first half of the twentieth century: by the British in 1919 and by the Iraqi government in 1947. According to the 1919 census, the number of Jews in Baghdad was estimated at 50,000 out of 250,000 residents. According to the 1947 census, Baghdad's population was of 666,024, of whom 531,705 were Muslims (82.3 percent), 77,542 Jews (12 percent), 35,722 Christians (5.5 percent), and 1,106 other (0.2 percent).

memoirs, and newspaper reportage from the period.[7] Many historiographical debates have turned on questions that remain of interest even today regarding the circumstances of the Farhud, its impact on relations between Jews and Arabs in Iraq, and the extent of its influence on the mass exodus of Jews from Iraq between 1950 and 1952.[8]

In this article, I intend neither to reconstruct the events of the Farhud nor to discuss the historiographical debate over the incident. My intention is to show how the story of the Farhud and the Jews' emigration from Iraq can be told in many and varied contexts by the agents of memory themselves and those in their surroundings—Jews from Baghdad who experienced the Farhud and recounted their experiences in subjective memoirs in their autobiographical present in the countries where they chose to settle after leaving Iraq. The meaning they imparted to past events in their memoirs will help us understand the extent to which these events affected the course of their lives and their perception of identity and self-consciousness.

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[7] Hayyim J. Cohen, "The Anti-Jewish Farhud in Baghdad, 1941," *Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no.1 (1966): 2-17; Elie Kedourie, "The Sack of Basra and the Farhud in Baghdad," in *Arabic Political Memoirs and Other Studies,* ed. Elie Kedourie (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1974), 283-314; Harold Paul Luks, "Iraqi Jews During World War II," *The Wiener Library Bulletin* 30 no. 43-44 (1977): 30-39; Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012), 100-141.

[8] For further discussion: Yehuda, *The Jews of Babylonia*, 211-232; Zvi Yehuda, *The Agonies of Redemption: The Expulsion of the Jews from Iraq* (Or Yehuda: Babylonian Heritage Center, 2021), 38-56 [in Hebrew]; Shmuel Moreh, "The Pogrom of June 1941 as Reflected in the Literature of Jews from Iraq in Israel," in *Hatred of Jews and the Farhud in Iraq,* eds. Shmuel Moreh and Zvi Yehuda (Or Yehuda: Babylonian Heritage Center, 1992), 187-210 [in Hebrew]; Fattal, *An Idol in the Temple,* 13-82; Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: Nationalism, Religion and Ethnicity* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2003), 147-207, esp. 154-155 [in Hebrew]; Sasson Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004) [in Hebrew]; Nissim Kazzaz, *The History of Iraqi Jews in Modern Times 1800–1974* (Tel Aviv: Association of Jewish Academics from Iraq, 2024), 313-348 [in Hebrew]; Ella Shohat, "Making the Silences Speak in the Israeli Cinema," in *Calling the Equality Bluff: Women in Israel,* eds. Barbara Swirski and Marilyn Phyllis Safir (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991); Mark R. Cohen, "Historical Memory and History in the Memoirs of Iraqi Jews," *Mikan, Journal for Hebrew Literary Studies* 11 (2012): 110-137; Ester Meir, "The Leadership of the Yishuv and the pogrom against the Jews of Baghdad," in *Hatred of Jews and the Farhud in Iraq,* eds. Shmuel Moreh and Zvi Yehuda (Or Yehuda: Babylonian Heritage Center, 1992), 139-148 [in Hebrew]; Ester Meir Glizenstein, "The Pogrom against the Jews of Baghdad, June 1-2 1941," *Pe'amim*, 8 (1981): 21-37 [in Hebrew].

Cultural scholars and geographers demonstrate a dual cultural and emotional attitude toward places by using the terms "sense of place" and "sense of placeness."[9] These terms are relevant in the current case study because of its complexity. The dual attitude toward a place—close and warm feelings coexisting with detachment and alienation—solidifies under circumstances of disaster, as we see in this case study. Research into memory shows that memories of places and situations are shaped by the immediate surroundings and social atmosphere of the places in question. It also reveals the importance of agents of memory as shapers of historical and spatial narratives.[10]

Among the dozens of memoirs written in Israel, the United States, England, Canada, the Netherlands, and Australia by authors who were born in Baghdad, I choose to present two works produced during the 1990s in London.[11] The authors are similar in terms of age, socioeconomic status, ideological perceptions, and place of residence during the Farhud; they differ in their gender, the time and circumstances of their emigration from Iraq, their goals, and the language they used in their writing. I focus on writers residing in London mainly to create a distance from the influence of the Israeli discourse and the linkage between the Farhud and the Holocaust. Moreover, neither of the two writers chose to immigrate to Israel, even though members of their families had settled there.

The first memoirist is the poet Meer Basri (1911-2006), who was also the last head of the Jewish community in Iraq. He left Iraq in 1974 and spent four months in

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[9] Yi-Fu Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective," *Geographical Review* 65, no. 2 (1975): 151-165; David Seamon and Jacob Sowers, "Place and Placelessness, Edward Relph," in *Key Texts in Human Geography*, eds. Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchin, and Gill Valentine (London: Sage, 2008), 43-51.

[10] Aviad Moreno and Haim Bitton, "The Moroccan 'Yizkor Book': Holocaust Memory, Intra-Jewish Marginalization and Communal Empowerment in Israel," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 23, no. 2 (2023): 261-283; Kobi Peled, "The Theatre of Memory: Direct Speech in Palestinian Oral History," *Memory Studies* 13, no. 4 (2020): 633-648; Kobi Peled, "The Witness and the Archive: Between Two Memory Cultures—The Discourse between Written Testimonies from Zionist & Israeli Archives and Palestinian Oral Testimonies," in *Testimonianze e Testimoni nella Storia del Tempo Presente*, ed. Gabriella Gribaudi (Florence: Editpress, 2020): 111-122.

[11] Meer S. Basri, *Life's Journey from the Banks of the Tigris to the Valley of the Thames: Reminiscences and Thoughts* (Jerusalem: Association of Jewish Academics from Iraq, 1992) [Arabic]; Violet Shamash, *Memories of Eden: A Journey through Jewish Baghdad* (Surrey: Forum Books Ltd, 2008).

the Netherlands before arriving in London. He published his memoirs in Arabic in 1992 at the age of eighty-one. The second memoirist is Violet Shamash (1912-2006), who left Iraq several months after the Farhud for India, then to Mandatory Palestine — or the Land of Israel (as she called it), and on to Cyprus, finally settling in London in 1965. She began writing her memoirs in the 1990s and continued doing so for twenty years. Her book-length memoir was published in English posthumously in 2008.

The findings of my research show that the two authors described their reconstructed experiences in the Farhud differently, despite their similarities and the similar space in which they experienced the Farhud. The reasons for this trace mainly to their perception of their own place in the environment and to the goals and target readerships of their memoirs. In this article, I do not focus on gender differences in the memoirists' writing styles. If that were my purpose, I would have to examine more memoirs by Baghdadi immigrants of both sexes who recounted the Farhud and reference the theoretical literature on women's writing, including that of women who were at the heart of wars and violent conflicts. A future study comparing the memoirs of Jews from Iraq who emigrated to different places and comparing their works diachronically and synchronously would yield a multiplicity of contexts in which the experience of the Farhud is described, not limited to the historiographical discourse that typifies the published literature on the Farhud thus far.

Meer Basri's and Violet Shamash's Autobiographical Present in London

The process of remembering, says the sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, is collective in nature. Individuals reconstruct their past within the social group that they inhabit in the present.[12] Accordingly, this article examines the way the writers retrace the events of the Farhud from their subjective perspective in the present. To achieve this, I describe the autobiographical-present analyses offered by Violet Shamash and Meer Basri from their place in London and investigate their attitude

[12] Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 12-125.

toward Iraq, the country in which they were born and were forced to leave, before I analyze the way they reconstructed the Farhud events in their memoirs.

Meer Basri's book opens with a biblical quotation—"Love your neighbor as yourself"[13]—and a poetic quotation from Ibn al-Arabi, a Muslim philosopher and mystic (1165-1240 CE): "Love is my religion and faith."[14] These quotes represent Basri's universal worldview, in which all human beings are seen as equal, without barriers and cultural differentiations: "I believed in man, just as I believed in God, and I lived in brotherhood with members of all other religions and sects. For me, there is no difference between the believer and the atheist—I ask only for goodness, love and justice for them."[15]

Basri's book is written mostly as a bildungsroman that introduces us to his personal development and the construction of his identity as a poet, a scholar, and a broad-minded, cultured, and humanistic man. To this end, he integrates his poetry into his memoirs and often describes his close relations and cultural encounters with intellectuals, writers, poets, and journalists of all ethnicities in Iraq and elaborates on his travels around the world as a representative of the Iraqi government.

The memoirist admits to no tension between the particular and the universal, between being Jewish and being a man of the world: "I grew up in an open atmosphere, adhering to moral values, religious but not fanatic. Since my youth I have acquired knowledge from French free-thinkers. [...] I read the world's most important books in Arabic, Hebrew, French and English, and I have broadened my horizons and thought."[16] The particular and the universal exist cohesively in his being: "I lived within my heart the cries of the prophets, the wisdom of philosophers, the poetry of poets, and the experience of scientists."[17]

From his base in London, Basri continually affirms his affiliation with Iraq and emphasizes his roots there by describing a family history that goes ten generations back and the collective history of a Jewish community 2500 years old.[18] He retains his affinity for Iraq and establishes continuity with the world from which he came

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[13] Leviticus 19:18.

[14] Basri, *Life's Journey,* translated from the Arabic (all translations from Arabic are by the author).

[15] Ibid., 226.

[16] Ibid., 169.

[17] Ibid., 227.

[18] Ibid.

by renewing his ties with hundreds of Jewish and non-Jewish friends who settled in London.[19] He also corresponds with friends from Iraq and meets in London with visitors from Iraq, including politicians.[20]

Despite his Iraqi connections, he looks at the country through humane lenses and opts to express his disappointment with Iraq, which he was forced to leave in 1974 due to its legitimized oppression and exploitation of its citizens: "I dreamed of a perfect state with justice at its feet and good for all."[21] On a personal level, he criticizes Iraq for leaving him destitute and stateless after "freezing my assets, my fortune [...] and depriving me of the Iraqi citizenship that my ancestors and forefathers had possessed in this land for nearly 2500 years."[22] Basri does not choose to criticize Iraq due to its treatment of him as a Jew, as seen later with Shamash. On the contrary: he tends to minimize the harm done to him over the years as a Jew, as in, for example, when he was fired from the Foreign Ministry, thrown in prison for no reason, and even when not appointed as Finance Minister.[23]

As for the mistreatment of the Jews in Iraq, Basri distinguishes between the Iraqi people, whom he calls a noble people that was sympathetic to the Jewish people, and the governments that seized power by force and arrested, murdered, and tortured the Jews after the establishment of the State of Israel.[24]

In an exchange of letters with a PLO representative in London in 1976, he describes himself as a refugee in exile from his homeland.[25] In 1982, upon receiving the British citizenship, he writes a farewell poem to Iraq, in which he criticizes the Iraq that abnegated the values of justice and fairness, and congratulates England for respecting human beings, providing its citizens with security, and upholding the values of justice and peace.[26]

Basri writes about his life in London but omits all mention of interaction with British society. Although as an economist he was interviewed extensively in Iraq

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[19] Ibid., 203.
[20] Ibid., 201-203.
[21] Ibid., 227.
[22] Ibid., 195.
[23] Ibid., 32, 91, and 139.
[24] Ibid., 207.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 204-205.

about the Iraqi economy, he never refers to Thatcher's economic policy at the time of his writing or to dispositive political factors in the country. He earns his living by writing commissioned works in English on Arab countries' economies and their corporate-labor laws. However, he also continues to write poems and history books in Arabic, sustaining his creative art in the spirit of Arab culture and expressing his connection to his erstwhile homeland.[27] It is in this light that he summarizes his mental state: "I became a speaker without a stage, a writer without readers, a poet without listeners, and a prophet without disciples."[28]

During this period, Basri is active in international organizations that concern themselves with Jews from Arab countries and tries to promote an international solution to the Middle East conflict through the idea of population exchange. To this end, he sends letters on this matter to world leaders, his friends in the Arab world, and leading personalities in the UK and Israel, and maintains contact with a PLO representative in London. His efforts bear no fruit.[29]

Violet Shamash's memoir focuses on the journey of her life and that of her family through Jewish Baghdad, which the author remembers in the manner expressed in the title of the book, *Memories of Eden*. This journey ended for her with the eruption of the Farhud, which prompted her to leave Iraq in November 1941, five months after the pogrom.[30] When her sister Naima, the last member of her family to emigrate, leaves Iraq in 1970, she pens her final words to her homeland: "Goodbye Baghdad, Farewell Babylon. Adieu Eden."[31]

Shamash does not write in her memoirs about the wanderings she experienced for almost twenty-five years between India, Mandatory Palestine and Cyprus—where she and her family received British citizenship[32]—until she finally settled in London in 1965. Only at the end of her book, in the form of a message to her children and grandchildren,[33] does she briefly refer to having been in London for more than forty years, noting that her adjustment to the city was rapid:

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[27] Ibid., 195-198.
[28] Ibid., 195.
[29] Ibid., 206-211.
[30] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 211.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Correspondence with her daughter Mira, June 27, 2024.
[33] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 223-226.

> On the one hand, many of our community had settled here and we soon started the Gardenia Club,[34] a social place where we could meet, play a game of cards or backgammon, gossip, talk about the old days, sing some old songs, and have a traditional dinner. On the other hand, London provided an anonymity that had been unimaginable before.[35]

Therefore, Shamash not only rebuilds her home in London but also creates continuity between it and her life in Iraq, which ended in 1941. Thus, for her and for Iraqi Jews from similar socioeconomic backgrounds, the Gardenia Club is a kind of social-community framework that revives their old lives in their host country.

Shamash's circle of friends consists of two groups: "Our Community," [36] composed of Iraqi Jews living in London, and "non-Iraqis," her partners at bridge, regardless of their origin and religion. When her "non-Iraqi" friends ask her where she came from, she squirms as she answers due to her hybrid identity. The reaction of friends to her convoluted explanations astonishes her: "'Oh, you're a foreigner?' they would say, as if that explained everything."[37]

Therefore, when later asked about her origins, she replies "I am a foreigner" with no further elaboration in order to avoid complicated clarifications about her identity. After forty years in London, with the aging of Iraqi Jewish immigrants "who remembered and missed the old Baghdad," their ties loosen and the Gardenia Club closes.[38]

By calling on the cultural theory developed by the British anthropologist Mary Douglas,[39] I may argue that Shamash spent her years in London in an Iraqi-Jewish

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[34] "The Cellar Club," *The Scribe* 74 (2001), https://www.dangoor.com/74065.html (accessed June 25, 2025). The Gardenia Club was founded in January 1970 by Sir Naim Dangoor with forty members.

[35] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 25.

[36] Shamash does not specify whom she means by "our community." Is it the Jewish community or the Iraqi community in London? In Iraq, she lived amid the Jewish upper class. Therefore, I assume that she is referring to the community of immigrants of the Iraqi Jewish upper class.

[37] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 225.

[38] Ibid. According to correspondence with David Dangoor on April 30, 2024, the Gardenia Club closed on February 24, 2005.

[39] Mary Douglas, *A History of Grid and Group Cultural Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2006).

émigré community "enclave" whose existence depended on its members' remaining there and not being drawn to assimilation into the "central community"—the new society in England. According to Shamash, the Iraqi-Jewish émigré community in London aged and did not maintain its continuity because its future generations showed no interest in the culture of the past, which the émigrés tried to preserve through their meetings at the Gardenia. Accordingly, the "enclave" crumbled, as Shamash attests: "One by one, all remaining links to our old life are vanishing."[40]

Iraq— "the world that was and is no more"—is the central axis of both memoirs, on which the authors express their belonging and connection and create harmony between their Jewish and Iraqi affiliations. Many members of their families emigrated to Israel but both writers chose to base themselves in London. The narrative line of their writing describes the rupture and disintegration of their old world and the way they try to create continuity with their past in present-day London.[41]

For Basri, an admirer of the era of monarchical rule, the rift is reflected in the loss of Iraqi values that occurred when the dictators took over in the wake of revolutions and replaced human rights with oppression and exploitation. For Shamash, the rift began with the Farhud due to the mistreatment of the Jews and continued with the physical erasure of what Baghdad used to mean for her.

Basri seems to have succeeded in creating a new life for himself in England, even if during his first period in London he had to engage in commissioned writing and translation to support his family. Later, over the years, he describes traveling with his family around the world as evidence of his return to the good life to which he was accustomed. He recounts his life by looking at it through optimistic glasses: "I can say that my life was and still is beautiful, deep and full with many ways and paths."[42] Although he established his life in London, he writes his memoirs in Arabic, intending not to give meaning to his loss but rather to influence the way his life will be immortalized in the consciousness of readers and future generations

[40] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 225.

[41] Based on an analysis of the subject by the historian Guy Miron regarding memoirs of German Jews: Guy Miron, *German Jews in Israel: Memories and Past Images* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004), 168-205 [in Hebrew].

[42] Basri, *Life's Journey,* 226-227.

in Iraq—a liberal who believed in every human being and someone who was seen as an educated and a ground-breaking poet.

For Shamash, her Baghdad no longer exists and the closure of the Gardenia Club signals that her life, like the lives of the other adults in the Jewish community, has come to a halt. She ends her book, however, by expressing the hope of building a new world in lieu of the one that has been destroyed: "It was my Baghdad, my native land where I grew up. Now it has been replaced almost altogether. Ninety percent of it has been erased like chalk on a blackboard and a new story is written."[43]

Therefore, Shamash, unlike Basri, infuses meaning into her writing about the loss of the world that was. She writes her memoirs in English for her children, who, unlike her, have integrated into the new society, and also for her grandchildren who cannot speak "our Arabic"[44] so that they will know who they really are and be aware of their roots.[45]

The Farhud in the Memoirs of Violet Shamash and Meer Basri

The Significance of the Farhud and the Extent of Its Influence on the Writers

Basri's and Shamash's roles as memoirists, described above, influence not only the content of their writing but also the meanings they try to impart in reference to the Farhud events that both experienced. By examining these meanings, I may clarify the extent to which these events affected the course of their lives and their perception of self-identity and self-consciousness[46].

The chapter on the Farhud appears in the first quarter of Meer Basri's memoir[47] as part of a continuous chronological account of his life's journey that began in Baghdad and continued in London. He places strong emphasis on his own actions as the factors that influenced and shaped his life and marginalizes the impact of

[43] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 223.
[44] Ibid., 225.
[45] Ibid., 226.
[46] Miron, *German Jews in Israel*, 36.
[47] Basri, *Life's Journey,* 59.

external circumstances. In his writings, it is clear that the Farhud neither left an impression on him nor changed his perception and the course of his life. Titling the chapter "Sad Events," Basri describes the riots but does not use the nominative *Farhud* in association with them. He describes the sequence of events succinctly and summarizes them as a "tragic incident" during which "over two hundred Jews were killed [and] houses and commercial stores were robbed."[48] By describing the crimes thus, he reduces them to mere murder and robbery and leaves some of them out of the narrative.

Basri is not affected by the Farhud and does not perceive it as a formative event and a watershed moment in the lives of Jews in Iraq. Therefore, sketching the retrospective story of his life and that of his community, he centers on a consciousness of continuity that begins ten generations back and ends with his departure from Iraq in 1974, more than three decades after the Farhud. He also chooses to describe the days following the riots as days of joy and prosperity that manage to erase the "Sad Events":

> The United Kingdom armies flooded Iraq, businesses flourished and the economy prospered. Three of those involved in the harassment of Jews were proven guilty and hanged in Bab al-Sharqi. Thus, the events of the past month were long forgotten, and the Jews resumed trading and profiteering with great vigor, as if nothing so terrible had ever happened.

In his account of the "Sad Events," Basri also tells the story of Hajj Taher Muhammad Salim in the compassionate and painful terms that befit one of Baghdad's dignitaries, who died of heartbreak over the pogroms against the Jews.[49] Violet Shamash starts her memoir on her birthday and describes it as an "unmitigated disaster" for her parents, "a calamity" similar to the coincident sinking of the *Titanic*.[50] She concludes her book at the age of twenty-nine with her permanent separation from the country of her birth following the Farhud,[51] and adds a chapter about the departure from Iraq of her sister, the last member of

[48] Ibid., 60.
[49] Ibid., 59.
[50] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 1.
[51] Ibid., 211.

the family to leave, in 1970.[52] Between these points in time, Shamash describes the cycle of her life in Iraq as intertwined with disasters preserved in the collective memory: just as the *Titanic* collided with an iceberg on her birthday and descended into the depths of the ocean, so was her Edenic life in Iraq shattered by the Farhud. Her memoir is characterized by an evolving narrative structure in which she describes her life, her family's life, and the Jewish community in Baghdad until the coup of Rashid Ali al-Gaylani in April 1941. This event was followed by a turning point in the attitude toward the Jews that culminated in the Farhud, which Shamash views as "the beginning of something terrible. For us, the Jews of Baghdad, it was to bring about our ultimate exile, a trauma that saw the oldest community in the diaspora virtually liquidated at a stroke."[53]

Thus Shamash, unlike Basri, places the Farhud at the center of her personal story and that of Iraqi Jewry—a formative event that changed the course of her life, that of her family, and that of the Jewish community in Iraq ten years later. She begins her memoir by stating that Saddam Hussein's authoritarian regime, which she witnessed when he fell from power in 2003, was created from the ashes of the Farhud. She still trembles, she notes, when she thinks about the gravity of Iraqi Jewry's plight and is grateful to be one of the lucky survivors.

Following the Farhud, her personal confidence as a Jew was undermined and she lost hope of continuing to live in a place where manifestations of cruelty and terror against Jews were on the rise. Therefore, despite attempts by relatives to change her mind, she chose to leave Iraq together with her husband and two daughters. In this context, it should be noted that, on the one hand, the situation of insecurity and despair encouraged Iraqi Jews to leave Iraq after the Farhud, as Shamash did. On the other hand, it prompted young members of the Jewish community to mobilize for political activity with the Zionist and Communist underground in search of hope and security.[54]

To obtain an exit visa, Shamash's husband, David, who was liable to the draft at the time, faked his age. Shamash justifies this move by emphasizing the Jewish part of their complex identity: "Being Jewish, how could he possibly fight for Arab

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[52] Ibid., 222.

[53] Ibid., 187.

[54] Kazzaz, *The History of Iraqi Jews*, 349-366.

causes after the Farhud and the baiting of previous months?"[55] This statement belies the harmony of Jewish and Iraqi identity that Shamash presents in reconstructing her past. Namely, while continuing to emphasize her connection to Iraq and seeing it as her homeland, she now views Iraq as an Arab state, implying that it is no longer the state of its Jews and that, therefore, Jews should not die for it. A similar conclusion was adopted by young Jews who joined the Zionist movement after the Farhud, unlike those who supported the Communist movement. However, while Zionists saw the solution for the Jews in Israel and Communists in Iraq, Shamash spent a quarter of a century searching for a new home other than Baghdad until finally settling in London.

Unlike Basri, Shamash describes the Farhud in her memoir as a collective and personal traumatic experience that continues to influence her: "The brutality and terror of those two days of [the] Shavuot [festival] would be forever seared on our collective consciousness, and I shudder even now as I write these lines."[56]

In her book, she makes sure to detail the crimes committed during the Farhud, which she discovered by reading research studies: murder, rape, amputation, ripping open the bellies of pregnant women, arson, and looting. Therefore, she explains that the term *Farhud,* attributed to the pogroms, fails to reflect what really happened, and labels the events in the singular as a "pogrom."[57] By doing so, she borrows a term clearly identified with the Jewish-European space and imposes it on the urban space of Baghdad, where the Farhud took place.[58]

The Experienced Space

Violet Shamash and Meer Basri, born before World War I, affirm their belonging to Baghdad, where they were born, and describe this affiliation by reporting their

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[55] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 213.

[56] Ibid., 208.

[57] Ibid., 199.

[58] See, in this context, the historian Aviad Moreno's reference to the crystallization of a semantic field, such as the use of the word *pogrom,* that charges the academic and public discourse in Israel on Jewish immigration in the Middle East with a sweeping meaning of injustices and hostile relations between Jews and Arabs, without analyzing the circumstances and historical context in which the concepts were created. Aviad Moreno, "Elimination, Displacement, Emigration: The Semantics of Aliyah from Arab Countries in the Academic and Public Discourse in Israel," *Zion* 1, no. 4 (2020): 107-125.

families' lengthy history in the city. Basri was well planted in the local Arab society and surrounded by members of Jewish and non-Jewish high society who loved poetry and literature, encountering them in cultural and social circles in Baghdad and beyond. Shamash, as a woman, had fewer interactions with the surrounding Arab society, especially after her marriage. She rubbed shoulders mainly with members of the upper class of the Jewish community. The title of her book, *A Journey through Jewish Baghdad*, also attests to the connections she maintained.
At the time of the Farhud, both memoirists were living in Bataween, a new neighborhood built in the 1930s on farmland in the southern suburbs of Baghdad, on the east bank of the Tigris (the Rusafa area). Houses there were built in a modern European style, in contrast to the crowded Jewish neighborhoods in the old area of Baghdad. Jews shared the quarter with Christians and Muslims.[59] There is no precise estimate of the population of the new neighborhood but it appears to have numbered several thousand.[60] Basri was single at the time; he moved into the neighborhood with his family in 1937.[61] Violet and her husband David moved there in late 1940, about six months before the Farhud.[62] According to the government's investigation report, the rioters left Bataween unscathed. Basri reinforces this claim, noting that the area was not harmed thanks to the guard of the deputy commander of the police station, a Jewish person named Naji Tchachak.[63] Avraham Twena reports in his diary that he reached Bataween after 4:00 p.m. on the first day of the Farhud and saw cafés packed with Jews. By 5:30 p.m., the cafés emptied-out, after the customers learned about the atrocities done to Jews who had been taken off buses in the Bab al-Sheikh area, a Muslim neighborhood on Ghazi Street, between Bataween and the old quarters.[64]

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[59] Naim Kattan, *Farewell Babylon: Coming of Age in Jewish Baghdad* (London: Sovenir Press, 2005), 24-25.

[60] Correspondence with Nissim Kazzaz, April 1, 2024.

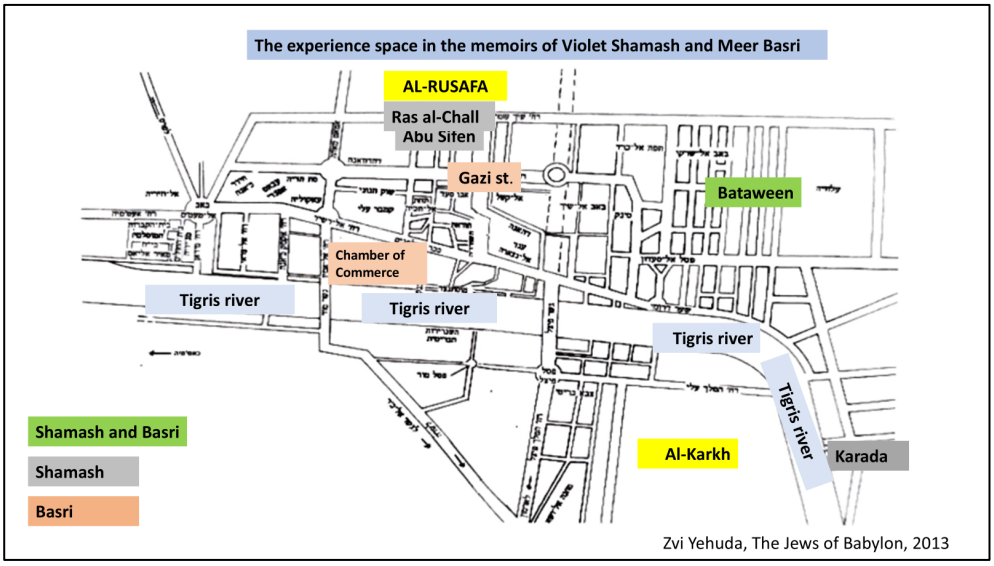
[61] Basri, *Life's Journey,* 10.

[62] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 196.

[63] Basri, *Life's Journey,* 59.

[64] Twena, *Dispersion and Liberation,* 21. According to Professor of Modern Arab Literature Sasson Somekh, who also lived in Betaween during the riots, the neighborhood was not harmed. He describes standing behind the curtain of his home and witnessing Bedouin carrying the loot after having "robbed the Jewish neighborhoods and took [the loot] to the dilapidated shacks where they lived." Somekh, *Baghdad Yesterday,* 104.

Basri anchors his memories of the Farhud in four locations within the urban space of Baghdad, all on the eastern bank of the Tigris in the Rusafa area. The first is the Bataween, where he lived. The second location is on the way to his workplace, its exact place not specified. The third location is his workplace, the Chamber of Commerce, near the main street, Al-Rashid, parallel to the Tigris. The fourth location is on Ghazi Street, where he did not stay during the riots; this street connects the new neighborhoods to the old ones. In addition, Basri notes that the British forces stopped on the outskirts of the city; in this case he does not mention the exact location. He does not elaborate on the riots that took place in the Jewish neighborhoods. Therefore, part of his mental map of Baghdad is blackened.
Shamash anchors her memories of the Farhud in her neighborhood of Bataween—at home and in its public spaces—and in areas where she did not experience the Farhud, such as the commercial center of Baghdad (she offers no exact description of the place), in her parents' home, the Karada neighborhood, and the Jewish neighborhoods of the old area. Therefore, Shamash's mental map of Baghdad highlights many areas in the Rusafa region, unlike Basri.



Spatial Description of the Riot

Basri distances the riots from the Bataween neighborhood, where he lives, by noting that no incidents took place there and by reporting having heard gunfire and cries for help coming from a distant location that he does not specify.[65] This description, relating to the evening of the first day of the pogroms, is told in a distant and emotionless manner even when it turns out in retrospect that Jews were actually murdered there.

Basri's personal experience of the Farhud takes place only on the second day of the riots, outside his neighborhood—on his way to work at the Chamber of Commerce.[66] He does not specify the distance from his home to the bureau or whether he walked or drove there, instead focusing on describing the people he met on his way to work that day: "On the way, I saw the mob carrying stolen property. One of them looked at me with eyes wide open as I was passing through a narrow alley. I quietly returned a similar look to him. Then I thought, had I trembled in front of him, he would have concluded that I was Jewish, and would have injured or killed me."[67]

Basri describes a threatening public space for Jews, where he must pretend to be Muslim to preserve life and limb. In the same breath, however, he reports his encounter with the mob with equanimity, without criticizing what one would expect him to criticize not only as a Jew but as an Iraqi patriot and a humanist who believes in equality among all citizens.

When he arrived at work, Basri reports, "I was sitting in my office [and] the Muslim officials and the janitors said, 'Why did you come today, don't you know that security is undermined and that robberies and murders are taking place?' I went home accompanied by a policeman."[68] He adds that his brother, who worked for the Finance Ministry, and the other Jewish officials were taken home in armed police cars in the evening.[69]

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[65] Basri, *Life's Journey,* 50-61.

[66] The Iraqi authorities approved only Passover, Rosh Hashana, and Sukkot as official Jewish holidays on which employees in the public sector were allowed to absent themselves from work.

[67] Basri, *Life's Journey,* 60.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Ibid.

Basri's Muslim colleagues reflect what he was unaware of: the public sphere has undergone a change in the past twenty-four hours and has become dangerous for Jews. Here, too, he describes his conversation with his friends with equanimity and does not express criticism or resentment that he, as a Jew, must be confined to his home and absent himself from work, unlike his Muslim colleagues. That he, his brother, and the other Jewish bureaucrats return home by police escort highlights the extent to which the public sphere has changed and become unsafe for Jews.

He also adds Ghazi Street, which is located outside his neighborhood and workplace, to his memorial space for the Farhud. He does so not to commemorate the crimes committed against Jews who were dragged out of their cars on the afternoon of the first day of the riots, but rather to express appreciation along with sadness toward Sheikh Taher Muhammad Salim, who died of heartbreak due to the attacks on Jews, and to criticize the policemen who withheld their assistance from the Jews.[70]

Basri, whose worldview is humane and universal, reconstructs the experienced space of Baghdad and the events of the Farhud under the influence of the moral values reflected in the biblical commandment with which he begins his memoir: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Calling on these values, he mentally divides the people in the Baghdad area into two groups according to their attitude toward the Jews during the riots: humane people who fiercely defended their Jewish neighbors and the mobs, supported by police and soldiers from the defeated Iraqi army, who took over the streets of Baghdad and indulged in the evils of murder and robbery. Basri expresses closeness toward the first group, mentioning by name and lavishing praise on some of its members. A case in point is "Hajj Tahar Muhammad Salim from Baghdad, a humane man active in charitable institutions and assisting in charity and goodness projects."[71] Basri finds it important to emphasize that these were not a mere few individuals: "There were many like him who defended their Jewish neighbors courageously."[72] Basri expresses distance and even revulsion toward the second group by describing it collectively as "the mob." Nor does he mention their religious affiliation. To validate his statements,

[70] Ibid., 59.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

Basri characterizes them on the basis of a saying by Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib, the most important figure among the Shiites after the Prophet Muhammad: "The common people join after every croaking and do not seek the light of knowledge."[73]

In his personal experience, he also mentally divides people into two groups: those whom he considers a threat—the mob, engaging in looting and murder as a collective group; and those who cared about him, whom he calls a group of good humane people who also have a religious identity: "Muslim officials and janitors." Basri faced exclusion from the public space and was unable to work that day. However, he does not internalize the shrinking physical space and defines his spatial identity by calling on his universal worldview. Therefore, he divides his mental map between a space of rescue and compassion where there are good people and a threatening space inhabited by bad people. His feelings about these spaces range from compassion and appreciation to contempt and loathing but not fear.

Violet Shamash's description of the Farhud consists of jigsaw-puzzle pieces of personal and collective memory based on testimonies, stories told by friends, and reports from the community's archives—designed to form a complete picture for posterity, as indicated by the purpose of her writing.[74] She describes the events in the order of their occurrence and adds disturbing clues of what is to come. These premonitions help her to reconstruct the past and reveal her emotions from her contemporary perspective.

The Farhud, Shamash reports, took place mainly in her neighborhood, Bataween, where she found shelter, first in the house of her husband's family and later in the house of her Muslim neighbor. She adds to her account other spaces that experienced riots, of which she learned later from testimonies of family members,

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[73] Ibid. Based on a hadith (a report of the saying, actions or approval of the Prophet Muhammad. it is a key source of Islamic guidance, second only to the Quran) in which Ali ibn Abi Talib notes that there are three types of people: clerics, scholars who study so as not to be ignorant, and the masses. The last-mentioned mindlessly follow anyone who calls them, like a herd. This is an example of Basri's knowledge of Shi'ite writings as well. See the hadith "Ali's will to Kamil ibn ziyad," Alukah, uploaded August 14, 2014: وصية علي رضي الله عنه لكميل بن زياد (alukah.net) (accessed July 8, 2025).

[74] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 201.

such as the Karada neighborhood southeast of Bataween and other Jewish quarters in the old part of Baghdad to the west.

In Shamash's book, we are exposed to a greater range of emotions than we are in Basri's. Shamash opts to describe her feelings in context and commensurate with the circumstances of her exposure to the events of the Farhud, and expounds on how they are influenced by various elements of her identity: an Iraqi patriot, a Jew, a woman, a married woman, and a mother.[75]

Shamash launches the chapter on the disturbances known as the Farhud by describing the curfew, the life in hiding, and the darkness to which all Iraqi Jews were subjected during the month prior to the Farhud and during the war between Iraq and Britain.[76] As a Jew who often describes the life-cycle in her memoirs and the Jewish calendar as part of the same world that no longer exists, she notes for the sake of contrast that this month, the one that precedes the Shavuot festival, should have been a month of joy, recreation, and picnics in nature.[77] She also valorizes the victory of the British forces as an act of divine redemption.[78]

On the eve of the Farhud, she describes the following feelings: "I felt very good. After a month of fearing for our lives, it was marvelous to be on my feet, savoring the fresh air and the freedom, when only such a short time ago it had seemed that we [were] doomed."[79] At the same time, however, she drops disturbing clues about future events into her accounts of joy: "But there was danger in the air, a palpable feeling that something was not quite right."[80]

The next day, the first day of Shavuot, Shamash is invited in the afternoon to celebrate the holiday at the home of her husband's family nearby. It was to be a

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75 Emma Zohar, "Feeling Communists: Communism, Emotions, and Gender in Interwar Polish Jewry," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 21, (2020): 38-56. Zohar, basing herself on Frevert, writes that "The common approach in the field of History of Emotion emphasizes the importance of processes of learning emotions. The lingual expression of certain feelings has no meaning, the meaning of emotions derives from the specific cultural-social and political circumstances in which it was expressed." Frevert Ute, "The History of Emotions," in *Handbook of Emotions*, eds. Lisa Feldman Barrett, Michael Lewis and Jeanette M. Haviland-Jones (New York: Guilford Press, 2016), 49-65.

76 Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 195.

77 Ibid., 197.

78 Ibid., 195.

79 Ibid., 196-197.

80 Ibid., 198.

festive family gathering, different from the one in the past month, when kin gathered together out of fear and a shared fate. Shamash happily accepts the invitation and goes with her husband and their eldest daughter, leaving her infant daughter at home with two caregivers and staff without hesitation. Here, too, she threads disturbing clues about future events into her walk to the family home: "We were blissfully unaware of events about to unfold."[81]

To heighten the tension, she adds that when they arrived at the house, they were horrified by the sound of exploding fireworks. As she wondered about the nature of the noise, the phone rang and on the other side was the doorman of the family's trading house. She did not hear what the guard said, but the expressions on her husband's brother Aaron's face made everyone anxious and quiet. Shamash adds that her mouth went dry, her ears were sealed, and her thoughts went to her baby daughter, the two caregivers Farridja and Malka, the teenage cook Shemtov, and the two Kurdish guards at her home. She concludes: "Something dreadful was happening, the start of the two days of Farhud,"[82] foretold by the doorman about the mob's attempt to break into the company's warehouses.

This conversation, instigated from the outside, transformed the atmosphere at home from festival joy to anxiety. Consequently, Shamash's feelings also changed, but because of her thoughts about her baby daughter, she understands what is expected of her at such a time: "In my anxiety I forced myself to think clearly and not to faint."[83]

The family decided to stick together, as they had during the month before the Farhud, and to have her husband David bring the baby to them. Shamash dramatically describes what ensued: the moment David opened the door, a car pulled up in front of him. Her husband, she notes, was preoccupied with his worries, so he did not notice that the driver's face and the car were stained with blood. It was another witness from outside who apprised them of the atrocities committed against Jews in downtown Baghdad. He advised her husband not to go outside and to find other ways to get his daughter to safety. Shamash reacts with helplessness and anger: "Safety? What safety? We were trapped!"[84]

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[81] Ibid., 199.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid., 201.
[84] Ibid., 203.

Despite the feeling that the "outside" had trapped them inside the house, Shamash does not stagnate as does her husband. Instead, she sips some water to douse the fear in her voice and asks the caregiver over the phone to bring the baby without exposing her to the harsh reality: "All the time. I wanted to shout my panic. It took all my strength to convince Farridja calmly and patiently, being careful not to even hint at what was really happening lest her own panic communicate itself to the rest."[85]

Shamash also asks to bring the eldest daughter's nanny because she is afraid of leaving her alone as a woman with the male staff. Due to her stress and anxiety, she loses her sense of time: "After what seemed like a lifetime," the caregiver arrived with the baby, accompanied by the nanny.[86]

The account thus far indicates that the flow of information to the house came from the outside and caused a change in the feelings of Shamash and those inside. When the caregivers arrived, Shamash uses literary technique to reflect the emotions among those at home through the caregivers' eyes. The latter, arriving from another home, are unaware of what is unfolding; even when they leave, they remain oblivious to the dangers outside because the disturbances are taking place elsewhere. Thus, the information to which the caregivers are exposed when they enter the house changes their emotional state from not knowing to realizing that they are in existential danger: "They immediately sensed the menace all around and realised how critical the situation was."[87]

After the baby and caregivers arrive, they block the door with furniture and cover the windows with rugs. By doing so, they fortify themselves against the outside world. They also isolate themselves from all contact with the outside by refraining from using the phone for fear of wiretapping, and then they go downstairs to hide in the dark and stuffy basement. Thus, Shamash produces a cyclical description that links the Jews' current situation, in which the family lived in hiding and darkness, with that in the month preceding the Farhud.

As the babies cry in the gloom of the basement, the adults have to find a way to satisfy their needs without revealing themselves, so they turn on the radio softly,

[85] Ibid.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.

hoping that the poor light would pacify them.[88] The family's huddling in the dark basement indicates emotions associated with seclusion, suffocation, and diminishing mental and physical space.

Even though they are hiding in the lowest part of the house, the voices of women lamenting the murdered manage to penetrate the walls of the fortified building from the Jewish neighborhoods in the old area, dismaying those in the basement and elevating Shamash's sense of helplessness and frustration: "We were all sitting in the dark waiting ... for what? For our turn, for a solution? Trying to think of some safer place to hide? Wondering what to do if...?"[89] To emphasize the direness of their situation, she writes that after feeding her infant daughter, the baby went to bed like an angel as the adults endured the hardest night of their lives. The calls for help emanating from the old Jewish neighborhoods blur the boundaries between these neighborhoods and the house in Bataween, combining them into one Jewish space and a destiny shared by all.

Shamash's descriptions suggest that while she is in emotional tension between the need to exercise restraint and attentiveness to her daughters' immediate needs on the one hand, and her fears and anxiety on the other, her Baghdad, which she once depicted as paradise, is transforming before her eyes into "a city without police, a paradise for thieves and murderers."[90]

On the second day of the riots, just after dawn, Shamash and her family took refuge in the home of their Muslim neighbor, Abdel Razaq Hilmi, whom she describes as noble-hearted.[91] Other family members found shelter in another Muslim neighbor's house. Thus, the spatial experience drove the Jews from their homes and united them with other Jews in Muslim-owned houses.

The transition from a Jewish home to a Muslim one also created a change in the diarist, from fear and helplessness to a sense of security and protection. Shamash describes Hilmi's courage as he was forced to wave his two pistols and drive away the crowd—the "angry crowd"—that had gathered in front of his house. She adds another layer to her neighbors' humanity from her perspective as a mother by

[88] Ibid., 204.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid., 205.

noting that Hilmi's wife, although shocked by the situation and sheltering 150 Jews in their home, never stopped asking if she needed anything for the baby.[92]

As Iraqi soldiers took control of the rioters when the latter began looting Muslim neighborhoods, Shamash describes a change in the Jews' situation from existential threat accompanied by fear and anxiety to lack of food accompanied by hunger. Again, Shamash found a solution by sending her cook to fetch food from their home, which they later shared with the children.[93]

Like Basri, Shamash draws a distinction between the rioters who harmed Jews and the Muslim neighbors who defended them "It was a kindness that none of us will forget. Lives were in danger. But Jewish-Muslim friendship won."[94] However, unlike Basri, who characterizes the group of rioters under the collective name of a mob, she specifies who the rioters are: an organized group of policemen, soldiers, masses of Bedouin, residents of slums, and Kataib al-Shabab's youth group.[95]

In general, one would expect Basri and Shamash, who felt themselves integrated into Iraqi society and believed in Muslim–Jewish fraternity, to explain the change in attitude toward them in their memoirs. Basri presents the Farhud as an unexpected turning point: "I did not believe that such a massacre could have taken place in Baghdad in the twentieth century, since the Jews had lived in this country quietly, calmly, understandingly and in cooperation with the Muslims for many centuries."[96] He also points out that those who harmed the Jews were mobs and provides a religious explanation of their character by citing a hadith from the Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib. Shamash provides psychological explanations for this misconduct and blames the change in attitudes toward Jews on the penetration of external ideas such as Nazism and Arab nationalism, which, she says, "spread like a contagious disease and disrupted the balance in Muslim-Jewish relations."[97] In this context, she accusatively notes the anti-Jewish incitement of the Mufti Hajj Amin Al-Husseini and Younes Bahri, leading to an atmosphere in which the Muslim majority was willing to believe anything, fanning their anger.[98]

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92 Ibid., 205-206.
93 Ibid., 207.
94 Ibid., 206.
95 Ibid.
96 Basri, *Life's Journey,* 60.
97 Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 224.
98 Ibid., 199-200.

Shamash goes so far as to point out that the official records counted large numbers of non-Jews among the victims of the Farhud, "including rioters, security men and Muslims who came to the defense of their Jewish neighbors." [99]

Shamash goes beyond describing her personal experience by integrating the information she gathered about what had taken place at the focal points of the riots in the old Jewish area, stressing the poor neighborhoods, especially Abu Sifen and Ras Al-Chall, where Jews and Muslims lived side-by-side.

She chooses to describe the crimes against Jews in the first-person plural, "we," seeing herself as part of the Jewish collective that was harmed by the pogroms: "Now we were being killed openly in the streets. Looting by the Bedouin and remnants of the army and police turned into a full-scale pogrom."[100] She also tells the story of her own parents' house in the Al-Karada neighborhood, distant from the city center. Her family was spared when the rioters were deceived into thinking it was inhabited by Muslims.

In contrast to Basri, who focused only on murder and looting during the Farhud, Shamash adds detail on torture, amputation of organs, forcible removal of Jewish passengers from buses, vandalization of Torah scrolls, and torching of synagogues, homes and shops—bringing evidence in support of her claim.[101]

Shamash also elaborates on abuse of women: raping women, including pregnant ones; ripping open their bellies; attacking homes where pretty Jewish girls were known to live; dragging girls in the street by their hair and cutting off their arms to steal their bracelets. She notes that men saved their daughters by throwing them off balconies into the arms of friends and neighbors and that some girls saved themselves by fleeing across rooftops to neighboring houses.[102]

Shamash's descriptions of violence against Jewish women, especially in the poorer neighborhoods, correspond with the historian Orit Baskin's research. Baskin expands on the subject in a paper dealing with gender aspects of the Farhud, the socioeconomic implications of the Farhud on women, the efforts of women in the community to help victims, and the difficulties the patriarchal Jewish community

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[99] Ibid., 207; Fattal, *An Idol in the Temple,* 27. Fattal states that there is no information on Muslims who died defending Jews.

[100] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 202.

[101] Ibid., 201-202.

[102] Ibid., 202.

faced in dealing with rape victims especially, since this was taboo in 1940s Iraqi society.[103]

The British and the Farhud

The British military forces in the area were deployed at the entrances to Baghdad but did not enter the city. As a result, Basri's spatial experience omits their presence. In Shamash's mental experience, however, the British, are both present and absent.

Both memoirists point out that the British could have prevented the riots had they intervened. Basri expresses his frustration and disappointment with the British for abdicating their moral duty by standing aside and not helping the Jews: "The British army could have sent a small force to patrol the streets of Baghdad, driving the mob away without using weapons against them, and restoring security to its previous state. But the British Ambassador, [Kinahan] Cornwallis, refused to bring the army into the city."[104] At the same time, he comes to the defense of Iraqi government officials, claiming that they were helpless in the face of the governmental vacuum and were unable to prevent the riots.[105]

Shamash intensifies her account of the helplessness she and her family felt by providing a vivid description of the outbreak and duration of the Farhud itself—the lengthy wait and anxious anticipation for the British to restore order and bring about personal security.

On the eve of the Farhud, Shamash notes: "The British were back and the month of Rashid Ali was over."[106] By putting it this way, she expresses hope that with the reinstatement of British rule in Iraq, the danger to the Jews will be removed and normalcy will return. Later on, still before the Farhud, she inserts disturbing hints into her writing about what is to come and looks forward to the return of the British: "There was danger in the air. [...] There was still no sign of any British soldiers. Where were they?"[107]

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[103] Orit Bashkin, "The Farhud of Saida: The Jewish Women in the Farhud—Surviving, Reconstructing, Heroines," *The New East* 62 (2023): 141-164 [in Hebrew].

[104] Basri, *Life's Journey,* 60.

[105] Ibid.

[106] Shamash, *Memories of Eden,* 197.

[107] Ibid., 198.

On the first day of the riots, still unaware of the morning and afternoon outbursts of violence, Shamash reports hearing the sound of fireworks exploding but allays her fears: "We had assumed the British were back in control, and all looking forward to some law and order being restored to our lives."[108] At the end of that day, now aware of the riots in the public sphere through testimonies that had reached her, she expresses her frustration: "And still, there was no sign of the British as Baghdad burned."[109]

On the second day, she stops expecting the British to arrive because her Muslim neighbor has saved her and her family and Prime Minister Jamil al-Midfa'i, whom she praises for being known for his humane attitude toward the Jews, has managed to restore order and security to Baghdad in the afternoon.

Conclusion

In light of the features that Meer Basri and Violet Shamash share, one would expect their accounts of the Farhud to be similar. However, the different ways in which they experienced the sequence of events influenced the meaning that each attributes to the Farhud in their autobiographical present. It seems that their goals in writing their memoirs as well as their different readerships, worldviews, personality traits, genders, and other complex facets of their identity all have tremendous effects on their story of the Farhud. The events of the Farhud imposed themselves on Shamash and traumatized her even as she wrote her memoir. Contrastingly, both the Farhud and the exodus from their homeland did not loom in this manner on Basri, who describes himself as one who looks back on life with satisfaction and optimism.

In her book, Shamash describes a spatial experience of the diminishing, paralysis, suffocation, and seclusion of her nuclear family together with other family members inside a dark basement. This experience, both physical and mental, instills in her a communal sense of fate with all Jews living in Baghdad. This collective consciousness also makes her realize that to break free of the space that

[108] Ibid., 199.
[109] Ibid., 205.

has closed in on her as a Jew, she must leave Iraq permanently. For this reason, she begins her memoir by portraying herself as a lucky survivor of the Farhud. However, while Shamash displays a wide emotional and descriptive range reflecting in the broad and detailed account of the space, Basri is minimizing his spatial descriptions, opting to only mention places that directly involve him or those dear to him. Basri describes a spatial experience of exclusion and inability to go about routine life but frames this experience as a temporary one that leaves no mark on him. As a result, his universal worldview does not change, and he does not feel the need to leave Iraq as Shamash does.

To conclude, these differing accounts by two people from such similar backgrounds highlights the importance of memoirs as tools for understanding the meanings of historical events for those who lived through them. Furthermore, these memoirs aid our ability to gain a cumulative understanding of the impact of historical events on the collective memory, complementing historical analysis.

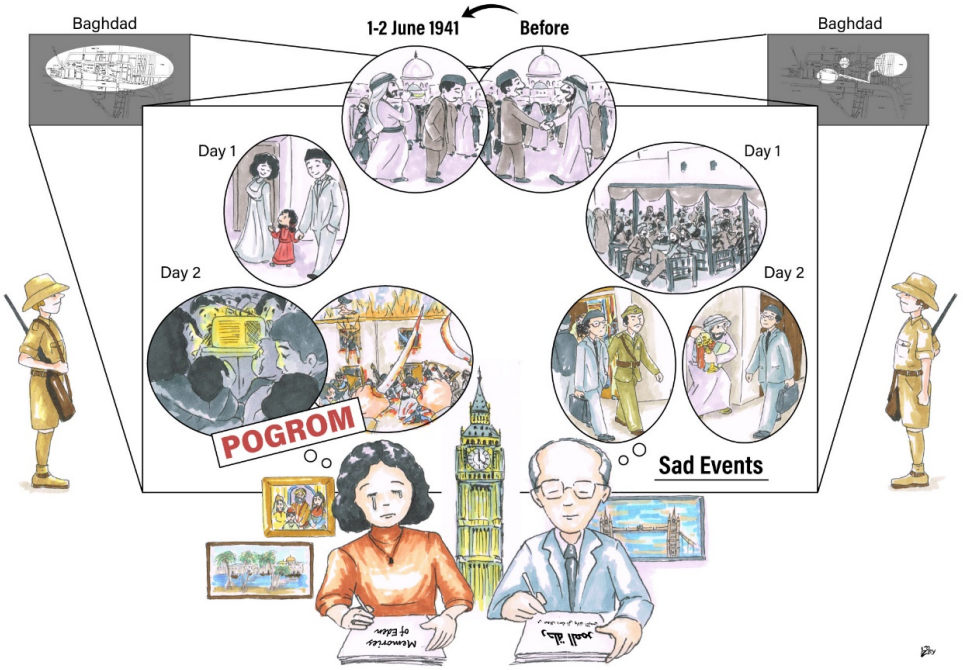

Fig. 1. Illustration by Zohar Gannot, 2025.

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Keywords: Farhud, Iraqi Jewish Memoirs, Collective Memory, Personal Narrative, Emotional Ties to Place

How to quote this article:
Tsionit Fattal-Kuperwasser, "Emotionally Dividing Baghdad: Spatial Memories of the Farhud throughout the Iraqi Jewish Diaspora," in "(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East," eds. Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15944

Teaching at a Lebanese AIU School in the 1930s: Rebecca Goldman's Path from Kalisz to Beirut

by *Magdalena Kozłowska*

Abstract

This paper explores the microhistory of Rebecca Goldman, a Polish Jewish woman born in Kalisz who, after studying at the École Normale Israélite Orientale in Versailles, relocated to Beirut in 1935 as a teacher for the Alliance Israélite Universelle. Drawing extensively on her correspondence and educational reports preserved in the AIU archives, the article investigates Goldman's interactions with and perceptions of the local Jewish community in Beirut. Rebecca Goldman's narrative encapsulates the tensions of cultural identity experienced by Eastern European Jews navigating new socio-political environments. The paper also emphasizes how her Polish background and French educational formation created a significant cultural disconnect that affected her integration into the Lebanese Jewish community, leading to conflicts and misunderstandings. By examining Rebecca Goldman's personal journey, this research contributes to broader discussions on the emotional landscapes of Jewish migration, identity formation, and the intricate interplay between personal narratives and collective histories.

Introduction

The Researcher's Challenges

Poland: A Generation in Motion—Jewish Youth Movements and Reform Pedagogy

France: Identity, and Cultural Adaptation Between East and West

Lebanon: Navigating Expectations and Reality

Conclusions

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Introduction*

Among the reports sent to the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) headquarters in Paris from teachers in Beirut in the interwar period held in the AIU archives, one is particularly striking and seems to be at odds with the organization's policy of the time. It was written by Rebecca Goldman. Writing about the 1936 school year, she commented:

> Zionist sentiment is almost non-existent in the hearts of the Jewish youth of Beirut. Living a quiet, middle-class life in peace with the Muslims and Christians, they think little of cooperating with the Palestinian youth [the Jewish youth in Mandatory Palestine], who pulsate with enthusiasm and zeal. One example among a thousand is proof of the indifference of the local youth towards the Zionist movement. A Palestinian recently came to Beirut and showed his friends a picture of the Tel Aviv port. The picture elicited a sarcastic smile from them. True, it is only a hundred-meter pier, but it is a valuable acquisition obtained at a high price, which did not move the local youth at all.[1]

As I looked at this document, several questions arose: Who was Rebecca Goldman and what prompted her to communicate such statements? How did her journey as a teacher unfold? How did she navigate interactions with the local community? This paper focuses on the correspondence between Beirut teachers and the AIU in the quest to unravel the threads of Rebecca Goldman's journey and illuminate the broader discussion on the emotional landscapes of Jewish migration and the intricate interplay between personal narratives and collective histories. I argue that Rebecca Goldman's narrative encapsulates the tensions arising from the identity-forming impulse against the backdrop of her birthplace and the subsequent uprootedness she experienced. The archetypical, mythogenic, contextualized place

*This research was funded by the National Science Center, Poland, under grant no. 2021/43/D/HS3/00437. The author would like to thank Natalia Aleksiun and the "Communities and Mobilities" research hub at the Azrieli Center for Israel Studies at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev for their valuable feedback.

[1] Moscou E 06.08 (Liban, Beyrouth), item 8, Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) Archives, Paris.

of birth represents more than just a person's geographic origin; it represents a formative cultural and historical identity that is both potent and emblematic.[2] However, as Rebecca transitioned to new environments—first to France and later to Beirut—this once deeply significant place of birth was transformed and reconstituted within the framework of her subjective practices and experiences as she navigated new geographies and social contexts.

The Researcher's Challenges

While trying to reconstruct Rebecca's story, I managed to contact her son. Owing to her premature death, he could only provide me with his mother's identity card from France. In 1933 the French Prefecture Seine-et-Oise issued an identity card for Rebecca Goldman.[3] This is furnished with a photograph of a smiling young woman looking confidently into the camera. Her attire, characteristic of the time, features a bow neck blouse of a style fashionable in the early 1930s.

This snapshot captures not just a moment in time but an emblematic expression of the hope and determination that must have spurred Goldman on as she embarked on a transformative journey. The document provides a genealogical roadmap, tracing her roots back to Kalisz, where she was born on November 26, 1915, to Isaac, a shoemaker, and Cypa (née Sieradzka) from Warta.[4] Kalisz became part of the Second Republic of Poland after its 1918 restitution. At some point, Goldman moved to Paris in order to enroll in the AIU seminar for teachers.

Thus I learned that Goldman belonged to a generation characterized by Kenneth Moss as the "unchosen people."[5] Moss argues that the transformations of the 1920s in Poland, while fostering the assimilation of Jews, also led many to the disillusioning realization that a promising future within the country was unlikely. During this period, a sense of hopelessness prevailed and a growing perception of

[2] Karolina Koprowska, *Miejsce urodzenia jako uwikładnie* (Warszawa: Instytut Badań Literackich, 2024).

[3] Picture of Rebecca Goldman's identity card, Serge Doubine's private archive, Paris.

[4] Birth certificate of Simcha Goldman, entry 204, Akta stanu cywilnego Okręgu Bożniczego w Kaliszu 1916, Archiwum Państwowe w Kaliszu, Kalisz.

[5] Kenneth B. Moss, *An Unchosen People: Jewish Political Reckoning in Interwar Poland* (Cambridge-London: Harvard University Press, 2021).

danger took root among the Polish Jews, fundamentally shaping Poland's Jewish political culture and identity. The existential uncertainties and perceived threats experienced in the 1920s and 1930s played a pivotal role in the transformation of the Jewish community's collective psyche and identity in Poland.

How did this context shape Rebecca Goldman's life and her trajectory from Kalisz to France? It is noteworthy that the decision for a woman to emigrate was an unusual occurrence, given the prevalent inclination of parents to dispatch their sons rather than their daughters to foreign lands.[6] The uniqueness of Goldman's path lies in the interplay of personal agency and societal expectations. By choosing to attend École Normale Israélite Orientale (ENIO)[7] to train as a teacher, she was likely defying both community and family gender assumptions. Her identity card reveals that Goldman was in the process of honing her skills, as it lists her occupation as "student" (*étudiante*). Thus, the document serves as evidence of her educational journey, which was to lay the foundation for her future role as an educator. Adding a linguistic layer to her identity, the document bears her signature, introducing us to the Yiddish version of her name—Ryfka Goldman, the version which must have matched whatever documents she presented to the French authorities. This linguistic choice is not a mere formality, it is a cultural assertion, a reaffirmation of her connection to her cultural heritage. At the same time, her records held in the AIU archives reveal that she faced linguistic challenges in navigating the French educational landscape. As her superiors later recalled: "The Polish-born teacher barely spoke French when she was accepted in Paris…

[6] Interestingly, Agnes Katalin Keleman in her PhD dissertation shows that according to university documents, the typical *numerus clausus* émigré from Hungary was the upwardly mobile son of a Jewish small-scale merchant. However, contrary to common expectations, female students who migrated did not come from higher social or more urban backgrounds than their male counterparts, Agnes Katalin Keleman, "*Peregrination* in the Age of the Numerus Clausus: Hungarian Jewish Students in Interwar Europe" (PhD diss., Central European University, 2019), 115.

[7] At first, the Alliance's teaching corps was primarily composed of young men from Jewish schools in France. However, as the network expanded, recruiting sufficient teachers from France, especially women, became a challenge. In response, the best graduates from Alliance schools in the Middle East and North Africa were brought to Paris for training before returning home to teach. In 1867, the École Normale Israélite Orientale (ENIO) was established in Paris to train male teachers. A separate facility for female teachers was acquired in Versailles in 1922. Until then, the girls involved with the AIU studied at the boarding schools of Madame Weil-Kahn and Madame Isaac or in the École Bischoffsheim in Paris.

and did not pass her school-leaving examinations until the end of her third year at Versailles."[8]

Goldman's biography must also be examined through the lens of the East European Jewish diaspora experience in France. Many of the Eastern European Jews who came to France like Rebecca sought to recreate familiar elements of their Jewish life within an unfamiliar new context. Although the French capital was markedly different from the cities they had known in Eastern Europe, these Jewish immigrants managed to carve out spaces that felt like home.[9] The Parisian East European Jewish culture of the interwar period was centered around a network of religious and nonreligious institutions, which operated independently from the local French Jewish ones. Additionally, the Yiddish press played a significant role in maintaining cultural continuity and community cohesion.[10]

Navigating Rebecca's story as a researcher who lacks specific biographical details about her activities either Poland or France presents a unique challenge. While I am familiar with the historical context of these regions, I had only fragmentary evidence, inference, and broader socio-political narratives from which to piece together her experiences. Understanding Poland's socio-political climate and France's cultural milieu during her time provides valuable context, yet the absence of direct accounts requires cautious extrapolation about Rebecca's actions and motivations.

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[8] Letter from Esther Penso, October 16, 1947, AM Liban E021 G, unpaginated, AIU Archives, Paris.

[9] Nick Underwood, "Aron Beckerman's City of Light: writing French history and defining immigrant Jewish space in interwar Paris," *Urban History* 43, no. 4 (2016): 618-634; 621.

[10] Paula Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 78-79. In contrast, for many Sephardi Jews the connection with France was hardly coincidental. Sephardi Jews had intimate cultural ties with the republic, which they emphasized. Many of them were alumni of Franco-Jewish schools, most of which were run by the AIU, and as a result, on their arrival in Paris, they were already fluent in French. They kept their own institutions but also tended to mingle into local French organizations. France became the new heartland of the Sephardi world, especially in the 1930s. Robin Buller, "Ottoman Jews in Paris: Sephardi Immigrant Community, Culture and Identity, 1918–1939" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2021).

Poland: A Generation in Motion—Jewish Youth Movements and Reform Pedagogy

Goldman's formative years were shaped within the socio-political milieu of the multilingual Second Republic of Poland, where she grappled with the myriad challenges and solutions to Jewish problems offered by Jewish organizations and political parties. This contextual backdrop provides a nuanced understanding of the emotional landscapes that influenced her later perceptions, choices, and desires. We know little about Goldman's childhood and youth in Poland. In particular, we do not know if she shared one of the important aspects of collective experience of Polish Jews of her generation—membership in a Jewish youth movement. The prominence of Jewish youth movements in interwar Poland played a pivotal role in shaping the ideological, cultural, and political mentalities of this generation, especially among those less connected with the traditional style of life. Within this context, Zionist youth movements emerged as a one of the dominant forces, channeling the aspirations and frustrations of young Polish Jews into structured frameworks of activism and self-education.

Young people's enthusiasm, idealism, and uncompromising attitudes were perceived to make them ideal vessels for promoting and implementing social ideas. Political movements saw young people as a resource to be nurtured and molded.[11] Youth movements served as alternative homes for members of this generation. The youth was seen as the main driving force behind the new ideas. This turn of the political forces toward the younger generation was not unique to Jewish organizations, or to Poland. From the latter half of the nineteenth century onward, a wide range of activists and institutions had turned their attention in this direction. Their aims varied: some sought to mold young people into model citizens; others, on the contrary, wanted to forge them into revolutionaries. Undoubtedly, however, they all began to recognize the strength and potential in young people.[12]

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[11] Tara Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls: National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

[12] John Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770–Present* (Academic Press: New York 1974), 95-183; Kathleen Alaimo, "Shaping Adolescence in the Popular Milieu: Social Policy, Reformers, and French Youth, 1870–1920," *Journal of Family History* 17, no.4 (1992): 419-438; Jürgen Reulecke, "The Battle for the Young: Mobilizing Young People in

Jewish political parties operating in interwar Poland were no less focused on youth than any others, in keeping with the spirit of the times. Youth movements became "a state within a state," a space where young people could find themselves. They not only conducted political agitation, but also offered informal education, organized entertainment, held summer camps, etc. This gave young people an alternative to what they saw as the traditional world of their home. As young people come of age, they often revolt against the prevailing order and the family; youth organizations were an arena for the eternal battle of the generations. As Ezra Mendelsohn phrased it: "For young Polish Jews, particularly in the 1930s, joining a political youth movement was the norm, the expected thing to do."[13] Like the political parties, the Jewish youth movements varied in their ideologies and social contexts.[14]

The membership numbers of the various organizations are difficult to estimate precisely, as their leaders probably exaggerated their statistics. We also know that their numbers were constantly fluctuating, and young people often skipped from one movement to another.[15] Nor is it easy to find synchronic information on all the organizations, which is why making comparisons of specific years is no small challenge. There is essential information to be gleaned from the estimates released by the movements themselves in their own publications, though even here we should remain suspicious.[16] Examining these numbers, however, we can clearly see

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Germany," in *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany, 1770–1968*, ed. Mark Roseman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 92-104; Derek Linton, *Who Has the Youth, Has the Future: The Campaign to Save Young Workers in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

[13] Ezra Mendelsohn, *The Jews of East Central Europe between the World Wars* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987), 48.

[14] For more on motivations for joining youth movements in interwar Poland: Kamil Kijek, *Dzieci modernizmu: Świadomość, kultura i socjalizacja polityczna młodzieży żydowskiej w II Rzeczypospolitej* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2017); Daniel Heller, *Jabotinsky's Children: Polish Jews and the Rise of Right-Wing Zionism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Magdalena Kozłowska, *Świetlana przyszłość? Żydowski Związek Młodzieżowy Cukunft wobec wyzwań międzywojennej Polski* (Krakow–Budapeszt: Austeria, 2016).

[15] Kijek, *Dzieci modernizmu.*

[16] According to summaries prepared by the organizations themselves, 10,000 young people belonged to Tsukunft in 1933, while in that same year, ha-Shomer ha-Tsair counted 30,226 activists, Bnei Akiva around 20,000, Betar 33,422, and Frayhayt 10,000. The data for a similar period gives other movements as follows: Gordonia 7,000 (1930), Tseyrey Agudas Yisroel 10,000 (1931), and

which organizations were the most popular. If we were to sum up their membership counts, Zionists of all stripes would constitute an overwhelming majority.

One important factor that drove young people to join these movements was the urge to study and gain knowledge. Although the possibilities for self-education offered by youth movements were highly political, this was not perceived as something negative.

It is also worth noting that Jewish formal education in Poland at the time, both in Zionist and non-Zionist school networks, was undergoing reforms inspired by German and Austrian pedagogical thought. These reforms were influenced by the ideas of "new education" or "reform pedagogy," which had emerged as a response to the rigid, over-intellectualized schooling of the nineteenth century. While not a uniform movement, reform pedagogy brought together various trends under a shared commitment to rethinking education. At its core, the new pedagogy redefined the role of the child from a passive recipient of knowledge to an active co-participant in the educational process. These progressive ideas strongly influenced the creators of the new Jewish schools in Poland, as seen in both contemporary debates among educators and the innovative methods applied in various institutions. While the peak of these educational reforms came in the interwar period, their theoretical foundations had been developing since the early 20th century.[17]

Yugnt 10,000 (early 1930s). "Der yugnt-bund 'tsukunft' oyfn 4-tn tsuzamenfar fun Bund," *Yugnt veker* 2 (1933): 3; for ha-Shomer ha-Tsair, *Misparim*, "Ha-shomer ha-tsair: iton ha-bogrim shel histradrut ha-Shomer ha-Tsair" (February, 1934): 44; for Bnei Akiva, Baruch Yechieli, *Akiva: Tenuʿat Noʿar Tsionit-Kelalit: Ṣemiḥatah, Hitpatḥutah u-Leḥimatajbi-Shenot ha-Shoʿah* (Tel Aviv: Moreshet, 1988), 76; for Betar, Isaac Remba, *Shnatayim: Din ve-Ḥeshbon shel Neṣivut Beitar be-Polin mi-Shenot 5692–5693* (Varsha: Futura, 1934), 3; for Frayhayt-Dror, Eli Tzur, "Dror," in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, ed. Gershon Hundert (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 429-430; for Gordonia, Tzur, "Gordonia" in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*, http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Gordonia, accessed March 30, 2025; for Tseyrey Agudas Yisroel, Gershon Bacon, *The Politics of Tradition: Agudat Israel in Poland, 1916–1939* (Jerusalem: Magness Press 1996), 135; for Yugnt, Bina Garncarska-Kadary, *Di Linke Poaley Tsiyon in Poyln biz der tsveyter velt-milkhome* (Tel Aviv: Farlag I.L. Perec 1995), 329.

[17] Anna Szyba, " 'Czy można zniszczyć kopiec mrówek?' Nauka przyrody w szkołach Centralnej Żydowskiej Organizacji Szkolnej (1921–1939). Teoria i praktyka," *Kwartalnik Historii Żydów* 268, no. 4 (2018): 744-745.

France: Identity, and Cultural Adaptation Between East and West

Paris between the wars was a meeting point for three Jewish communities with differing statuses in and relationships to France. There were the French Jews, who were local and highly acculturated, largely middle-class, and enjoyed a political equality unparalleled in Europe; Jewish migrants from Eastern Europe (mostly artisans and petty merchants); and Jews from the Middle East and North Africa, including Algerian Jews who, while not technically migrants due to their citizenship status granted by the Crémieux Decree of 1870, were nevertheless part of the broader MENA Jewish community in the city. Thus, the Parisian Jewish population that Goldman encountered upon her arrival from Poland was grappling with the challenges of integration, identity preservation, and community building. For Rebecca, these challenges were likely personal as well as communal. Her education at the ENIO was not just academic. It would have surely exposed her to the complexities of Jewish life in this major European metropolis.

Paris was the dream destination for thousands of migrants, including many Jews, who hoped to resettle after World War I, especially after the introduction of immigration quotas in the US in 1921. In the mid-1920s, one in ten Parisians was a migrant.[18] In France, 75% of all the Jews naturalized between 1924 and 1935 lived in Paris or its suburbs.[19] They tended to live in groups by country of origin, and sought to recreate the communal structures and atmosphere of the countries they had left by retaining, particularly in the early stages of their adaptation, their original lifestyles and customs.

Thus, Goldman's exposure to Frenchness was not a simple process. She belonged to one of the communities of Jews on French soil who considered themselves European and citizens of the "Western" world, although their position was ambiguous, especially in the eyes of the "native" Jews and even the other Jewish migrant group—arrivals from the Middle East and North Africa. These differences in perception and experience highlighted the fluid and shifting nature of meta-geographical concepts such as "the West" or even "Europe." For Rebecca,

[18] Clifford Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: The Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 29.

[19] Hyman, *The Jews of Modern France*, 68.

these boundaries must have been particularly palpable. As a first-generation Eastern European Jewish migrant in France, studying at the AIU seminar alongside classmates from the Middle East and North Africa, she was constantly navigating these complex cultural and social landscapes.

When Rebecca relocated to France, she enrolled at the ENIO to train as a teacher. While migration from Poland to France was not unusual, her decision to attend the ENIO, the Alliance teacher training school, was uncommon for a young Jewish woman from Eastern Europe in the early 1930s. Founded in Paris in 1860, the Alliance aimed to advocate for Jewish rights globally and support Jews facing persecution. Its mission included promoting what it perceived as Jewish emancipation and security, as well as moral progress, particularly through education; assisting Jews in need; and fostering publications aligned with these goals. Inspired by liberal ideals and the principles of the French Revolution and civic rights, its founders envisioned universal Jewish emancipation and believed progress could ensure that antisemitism and persecution would eventually be eradicated. The organization gradually came to focus its efforts on Jewish communities in North Africa and the Middle East.[20]

The selection of future teachers was a rigorous process, and the preferred students the top graduates from Alliance schools. Their curriculum included a diverse range of subjects such as French, English, history, geography, arithmetic, physics, natural history, drawing, calligraphy, biblical studies, Hebrew, singing, and physical education. The Alliance's teacher training curriculum sought a balance between "modern education" and traditional Jewish learning. Central to the organization's mission was the goal of "westernizing" education, transforming students into advocates for its modern values.[21] The schools' graduates were often cast in the role of *de facto* ambassadors for modern Western civilization, which sometimes brought them into confrontation with local Jewish traditions in North Africa and the Middle East. Despite these challenges, the ENIO and its counterpart for women were successful. Their graduates became influential figures in the Jewish world of the Middle East and North Africa.

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[20] Aron Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims: Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Modern Times* (Seattle: University of Washington, 2003), 7-15.

[21] Ibid., 34-36.

Adepts from Eastern Europe like Rebecca were rather the exception than the rule in this milieu, and they likely faced additional linguistic obstacles. As Aron Rodrigue demonstrates, between 1869 and 1925, only 2 of the 156 female graduates of AIU seminars who became teachers originated from regions within the current borders of Poland.[22] Rebecca, therefore, was one of a very small group of Eastern European Jewish women who ventured down this unique educational path. Her academic education therefore entailed not merely the acquisition of knowledge but also integration into a new cultural and social framework that was vastly different from that of her roots.

As mentioned above, at the time of Rebecca's arrival in France, the Jewish population in Paris was grappling with the challenges of integration, identity preservation, and community building. This would likely have exposed her to the complexities of Jewish life in this European metropolis. Even living in Versailles, on the outskirts of Paris, Rebecca would have likely encountered diverse Jewish communities. The French capital at this time had a Jewish immigrant population of 200,000. This tended to be underestimated by the native French Jews, who assumed the number to be about 100,000. In reality, however, recent migrants represented two-thirds of the Jewish population in France, estimated at 300,000 people.[23] The 150,000 Ashkenazi Jews constituted the majority of the migrants. Those Eastern European Jews who chose France as a destination usually did so because they had been rejected by other Western countries.[24] Sephardi migrants were a smaller group, but still relatively significant among the French Jewry of the time. Some of the immigrants perceived France as a temporary halt, expecting to travel on to the United States. Jacques Biélinsky, an editor for *L'Univers israélite* (Jewish Universe), a popular traditionalist French-Jewish weekly, referred to them as "birds of passage" in the process of "transmigration."[25]

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[22] Ibid., 50. Rodrigue notes that these are not firm figures but are complete enough to give a good indication of the countries of origin of the Alliance teaching body.

[23] Jérémy Guedj, "Les Juifs français face aux Juifs étrangers dans la France de l'entre-deux-guerres," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 78 (2009): 43-73. On the previous wave of migration to France during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Nancy L. Green, *The Pletzl of Paris: Jewish Immigrant Workers in the Belle Epoque* (New York: Holmes and Meir, 1986).

[24] Rosenberg, *Policing Paris,* 29.

[25] Guedj, "Les Juifs français face aux Juifs étrangers."

Attending classes, Goldman immersed herself in the French language and culture, which constituted a critical aspect of her "Frenchification." The previously mentioned identity card is the only document she signed as "Ryfka"; all other documents bear her signature as "Rebecca." On the other hand, it is worth highlighting, that her school, unlike the AIU boarding schools girls attended before 1922, was located not in Paris but in Versailles, and outings were infrequent. Although the teachers were recalled by graduates as "competent," and many had even retired from the French École Normale Supérieure, they must have also seemed "too old." The French-born director, Henriette Antebi, was remembered as someone who "could push severity into cruelty."[26] An important note in Rebecca's experience is that Antebi opposed the Zionist views of Mathilde Levy-Haarscher, the first director of the AIU school for girls in Jerusalem.[27] Thus Goldman was likely aware of the ideological tensions the Zionist ideas stirred within the AIU network.

Lebanon: Navigating Expectations and Reality

Rebecca Goldman's experience as an AIU teacher in Beirut reveals a disconnect between her self-perception as an educator and the perspectives of her superiors, colleagues, and some members of the local community. This gap is evident in the stark contrast between her detailed teacher's reports, which reveal her pedagogical efforts and modern educational approaches, and the critiques from the school supervisors. Central to this discord was the process of Goldman's adaptation to the cultural and social milieu of Lebanon, a challenge compounded by her preconceived notions and "mental maps" shaped by her upbringing in Poland and

[26] Frances Malino, " 'Adieu a ma Maison': Sephardi Adolescent Identities, 1932-36," *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 131-144; 141.

[27] Karene Sanchez-Summerer, "To 'strengthen Mediterranean resistance'? Albert Antebi and the porous boundaries of cultural identification in Ottoman Jerusalem (1896-1919)" in *The Social and Cultural History of Palestine Essays in Honour of Salim Tamari*, ed. Sarah Irving (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2023), 39.

her training in France.[28] These perceptions, informed by the flourishing Zionist youth movements and educational ideals of interwar Europe, clashed with the realities of the Lebanese Jewish community. This dissonance not only shaped her professional struggles but also seem to have framed some of her critical evaluations.

After completing her studies in Versailles, Rebecca Goldman, like all AIU teachers, was assigned to work at one of the organization's schools. Her initial letter to the board of Alliance, dated August 5, 1935, indicates that the location she was sent to, Beirut, was not her desired destination. In this letter, she requested a transfer to Haifa (referred to as Caiffa) and suggested that she be replaced with her colleague Sonia Levine. Presumably, she had already built up an image of a place in Mandatory Palestine in her "mental map," and during the evaluation process, when she found herself in unfamiliar Beirut, Haifa seemed like a place she knew and understood better.[29] The suggestion regarding the switch with another teacher indicates that there were other girls of Ashkenazi origin among her close friends from the AIU seminar (those, as noted above, were rather rare in those circles), suggesting that they likely formed a cohesive group due to their shared cultural background. Levine herself, born in 1917 in Teheran[30] to a family of migrants from Białystok who later moved to Mandatory Palestine, shared similar experiences to Goldman, being from a minority group in Middle Eastern Jewish milieux, and possibly was also Zionist-leaning.[31] Goldman argued that teaching mathematics in the final year of primary school, as she had been assigned, was beyond her capabilities.[32] However, it is also plausible that she simply wanted to move to Mandatory Palestine, where the environment was more familiar to her than in Lebanon (or at least she thought it was). Subsequent correspondence supports the validity of this hypothesis. Her request was rejected, and she

[28] I use the term "mental map" as understood by Peter Gould and Rodney White, that is: "invisible landscapes that people carry in their heads." Gould and White, *Mental Maps* (New York: Routledge, 2002), v.

[29] Ibid., 1-6.

[30] Moscou 100-1-55/20, AIU Archives, Paris.

[31] "Sonia Levine family history records," Ancestry, accessed March 30, 2025, https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/person/tree/52340809/person/26877879336/facts.

[32] Moscou E 06.08 (Liban, Beyrouth), item 21, AIU Archives, Paris.

remained in Lebanon her entire life, with a brief interlude when she worked in Damascus.

Letters written by Rebecca Goldman in the interwar period show that she did not fully know how to interpret the community she encountered and the different hierarchies she experienced. Beirut had emerged as a major Levantine port city in the nineteenth century, its Jewish community forming within the context of nineteenth-century colonial expansion. The city was unique: the only port city in the eastern Mediterranean to become the capital of a modern state while maintaining both its economic position and heterogeneous character long after the Ottoman Empire's collapse. The Jewish population of Beirut grew significantly, from a few hundred at the beginning of the nineteenth century to 2,500 in the 1890s and 3,500 by the 1920s. By the end of the mandatory period, its Jewish population had increased to 5,022.[33] Unlike in Alexandria, another Middle Eastern Jewish metropolis at the time, Beirut's Jewish population growth was primarily due to migration from the Syrian interior, especially from Mount Lebanon and Damascus, though a small number of families came from other Ottoman cities like Baghdad, Istanbul, Salonica, and Izmir. By World War I, the community also included a small number of Ashkenazim who had fled persecution in Russia.[34] In the late 1920s, Beirut's Jewish community included a broad middle class of salaried employees, clerks, petty merchants, and a few professionals, with a small wealthy class paying the community *arikha* (assessment) tax. However, up to 20 per cent of the community remained in the lower class.[35] The three main ethnic groups—Arab Jews, Sephardi Jews, and Russian Jews—did not mix well, each living separately within their family and business spheres, as noted by Yomtov Semach, who served as the Alliance school director from 1905 to 1910.[36] Rebecca would thus likely have mixed primarily with the Russian Jews in her private contacts. Indeed, in 1939 she informed the Alliance board that she was to marry Ashkenazi Ariel Doubine, a teacher at Collège de la

[33] Tomer Levi, *The Jews of Beirut: The Rise of a Levantine Community, 1860s–1930s* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012), 78.
[34] Ibid., 47.
[35] Ibid., 48.
[36] Ibid., 81.

Sagesse.[37] Her professional life nonetheless involved intensive contact with Alliance teachers and pupils who were not necessarily of Ashkenazi origin.

Goldman's first report sent to Paris, for the 1935-1936 school year, gives a thoughtful examination of the challenges she faced and the strategies she employed to keep her students engaged. As an educator, Goldman emphasizes the essential role of students' vested interest in the educational process, and acknowledges the difficulties posed by their diverse personalities. She discusses the psychological intricacies of capturing the attention of thirty to forty students with varying temperaments and interests, noting that the modern classroom setting, with its increasing student numbers, presented different challenges than the more focused environments of preceptors like the ancient Isocrates, who set up his own school of rhetoric at the Lyceum, and the royal French tutor, Fénelon. Goldman advocates for a nuanced approach, where teachers must actively engage students by tapping into areas that resonate with their feelings or ideas. Through vivid examples, such as connecting geography lessons to local landscapes and experiences, she highlights the importance of adapting teaching methods to the students' interests and the local environment.[38] This seems to be a unique approach in Alliance's schools, where studying often "did not lead to the adoption of the culture and language of the surrounding society but resulted in an increased orientation toward a distant civilization"—namely the French one.[39] Goldman candidly admits to difficulties making certain subjects, like French grammar, interesting to students who were, in her eyes, primarily concerned with their grades. She addresses the need for teachers to recognize and gradually strengthen students' attention spans, especially in the case of those with "lower mental energy levels." The report also touches on the delicate balance between demanding attention and respecting the need for breaks and relaxation as part of a child's

[37] Moscou E 06.08 (Liban, Beyrouth), item 3, AIU Archives, Paris. Ariel Doubine after WWII, in the 1950s and 1960s, served as a member of the committee responsible for the administration of the local school, Talmud Torah Selim Tarrab, as well as on the community's cultural and social committee, which shows that he was clearly a person well integrated and accepted by the community. What is more, he may have influenced Rebecca, since the couple did not emigrate. Kirsten E. Schultze, *The Jews of Lebanon: Between Coexistence and Conflict* (University of Sussex Press: Brighton, 2001), 102-103.

[38] Moscou E 06.08 (Liban, Beyrouth), item 12–13, AIU Archives, Paris.

[39] Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860–1925* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1990), 119-120.

learning process. Furthermore, Goldman acknowledges the impact of external factors, such as insufficient lighting or uncomfortable seating, on students' ability to focus. In her analysis, she contends that a teacher's deep understanding of children's natures, and constant adaptation of knowledge to their interests are key factors in sustaining their attention. Her pragmatic suggestions, including potential curriculum adjustments and allowing brief moments for relaxation, reflect a keen awareness of the complexities involved in effective teaching. In essence, Goldman's report provides a valuable contribution to the ongoing discussion about effective pedagogical strategies and reflects the modern pedagogy she was likely exposed to in both Poland and France.

Interestingly, the 1947 supervisor's account of Rebecca Goldman's work, then Doubine, provides a contrasting perspective to the educator's own report. The supervisor, Esther Penso, describes Goldman's initial challenges in the AIU environment, including language barriers and health issues during her training in Paris, and suggests that she struggled to meet expectations in Beirut.[40] Penso accuses Goldman of mistreating students:

> she was given a position in Beirut, where she completely disappointed us. Mrs. Doubine had no patience with her pupils in Beirut, and abused our girls, who are generally very gentle in their manner. Parents of the pupils complained about Mrs. Doubine's attitude and some parents withdrew their children from the school.[41]

The supervisor's portrayal of Goldman's lack of conscientiousness and the need for close supervision is in stark contrast to the educator's own reflections on teaching methodology and efforts to engage students. While Goldman's report emphasizes the challenges of maintaining student interest and offers pedagogical insights, the supervisor's document paints a picture of a teacher who faced difficulties in multiple aspects of her role, including interactions with students and their families, as well as meeting the expectations of her superiors. The supervisor's account points to a disconnect between Goldman and her students, evidenced by

[40] Letter from Esther Penso, October 16, 1947, AM Liban E021 G, unpaginated, AIU Archives, Paris.
[41] Ibid.

complaints from parents and a subsequent transfer. She was also accused of sending older girls to clean her house: "On Fridays and Saturdays one or two of the students would spend the day in her house in turns, sweeping, washing, or running errands. The parents complained and begged me not to say anything to Mrs. Doubine, because they feared 'repression' from her."[42] Penso's harsh description of Rebecca raises questions about whether this stemmed from Rebecca's replication of the teaching methods she had experienced in Versailles or from potential personal and cultural misunderstandings between the two women. Rebecca's own marginalized perspective may have led her to misinterpret the new environment she had entered, resulting in conflicts. Her understanding of the society she lived in was undoubtedly influenced by her place of birth and further shaped by her experiences in France.

In her report dated December 24, 1936, Goldman stated:

> Beirut is in crisis, like many European countries. However, the Jewish youth in those distant countries is very active and fights for moral and social problems. Many direct all their efforts towards the Jewish cause and cooperate spiritually and materially in the realization of a dream that might put an end to the persecution and desires to exile the wandering Jew. There is no visible effort here towards alleviating these moral and social problems or furthering the ideal of the rebirth of the Jewish nation.[43]

Her harsh evaluation was clearly shaped by her background and in particular the culture of the flourishing youth movements in interwar Poland. She continued: "On the whole, the Jewish youth in Beirut do not pursue any specific goal. Nevertheless, they pass their time quite pleasantly. Afternoon dances and family gatherings are frequent. Here, the main entertainment of the young is playing cards."[44] What she observed, as studies by Alon Tam on Cairo suggest, was that

[42] Ibid.

[43] Moscou E 06.08 (Liban, Beyrouth), item 8, AIU Archives, Paris.

[44] Moscou E 06.08 (Liban, Beyrouth), item 9, AIU Archives, Paris. Her words are echoed in the 1941 memorandum written to the directors of the Zionist Organization in Jerusalem by Zionist activist Yosef Sneh, in which he wrote on Jewish youth in Lebanon and Syria: "When it comes to dancing organizations which to our regret exist in Damascus, Beirut, and Aleppo, there is not much to say. These are rotten youth, all they strive for is to dance and to be in the moment. They are as

new urban spaces such as dancehalls and coffeehouses were crucial to modern middle-class formation and socialization, serving as settings for recreation, entertainment, and the performance of class identity. This was the typical Middle Eastern style of doing politics and being involved in the socio-political life of the time.[45] Only two years after relocating from Europe, she appeared to misinterpret these cultural codes. Goldman's narrative shows that her letters could be seen as written by an *implicated subject* as understood by Michael Rothberg, that is: a "participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles."[46] Additionally, it is striking that she not only misread the Beirut Jewish community but also wrote her letters in opposition to the stated objectives of the Alliance, which promoted equal rights, emancipation, and integration of the Jewish minority in its host society.[47] She concluded the letter with bitter words which once again revealed her position as a person looking at the Middle East through the lens of concepts she had known from Poland and possibly France:

> What will Beirut's Jewish youth be like? Their future is not difficult to predict, if judged by the past. If they were able to remain idle while blood boiled in their veins in Palestine, they will continue to lead the peaceful and easy life the East offers, not feeling the need to fight for ideals.[48]

The orientalized community of the Beirut Jewish youth is here contrasted with the Zionist Jewish youth from Eastern Europe, who served as a role model, as they managed to settle in Mandatory Palestine and fight for their ideals.

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distant from the Hebrew culture and the language as East to West." Yosef Sneh memorandum, November 26, 1941, S25\1964, p. 3, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem.

[45] Alon Tam, "Between 'Ḥarat al-Yahud' and 'Paris on the Nile': Social Mobility and Urban Culture among Jews in Twentieth-Century Cairo," *Jewish Social Studies* 28, no. 2 (2023): 203-237; 225.

[46] Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019), 1.

[47] While the Paris central committee of the Alliance remained officially opposed to Zionism, there was a growing acceptance of initiatives such as Hebrew secular education among local actors, reflecting a shifting on the ground. Schultze, *The Jews of Lebanon*, 49-50.

[48] Moscou E 06.08 (Liban, Beyrouth), item 10, AIU Archives, Paris.

The sense of difference was mutual, as Goldman was received in the school as an outsider. In 1937 the director of the AIU in Beirut, Élie Penso, wrote of her: "She is a young teacher with good intentions, but her general knowledge is quite limited. Mrs. Penso closely supervises her and gives her advice. However, Miss Goldman is certainly not equal to her colleagues in Beirut."[49] No other teacher assistant received such negative remarks in the document. In the same document, Penso described the students as "eager to learn," praising them for having "mastered the French language and culture, and some of them give the impression that they were born in France."[50] He wrote also proudly of the Jewish community of Beirut that: "it is now perfectly organized" and that "it can serve as a model for neighboring communities."[51] The categories and concepts he used to describe the youth were better tuned to the AIU board's expectations but also reflected his position within the organization. Last but not least, his worldview was shaped in different socio-political terms.

Conclusions

Despite Goldman's efforts to engage students and adapt to her new environment, her reports and observations reveal a significant disconnect from the local Jewish community's socio-cultural dynamics. Goldman's (Eastern) European perspective, shaped by her life experiences in Poland and France, clashed with the Middle Eastern context, leading to her critical view of Beirut's Jewish youth and their perceived lack of Zionist sentiment and social activism. Her letters reflect an inherent bias, influenced by her Polish-Jewish background and the ideological currents of her upbringing and her formation in the French Jewish seminary. This bias likely contributed to her difficulty in fully understanding and integrating into the Beirut community, which had its own distinct historical and cultural trajectory. Rebecca Goldman's narrative illuminates the complexities of European Jewish identity in transit, which remained relatively static despite the new locales during the interwar period. Her journey from Kalisz to Versailles, and eventually

[49] Moscou E 06.14 (Liban, Beyrouth), items 134, AIU Archives, Paris.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Moscou E 06.14 (Liban, Beyrouth), item 135, AIU Archives, Paris.

to Beirut, encapsulates the tensions between carrying cultural baggage, understanding the meaning of certain concepts, and adapting to new socio-political environments. From her early life in interwar Poland, marked by the disillusionment of Jewish youth seeking alternatives, to her unique path as a student and teacher within the AIU network, Rebecca's experiences reflect both personal agency and the broader historical forces at play. Her struggle to navigate new cultural landscapes underscores the enduring influence of her formative years in Eastern Europe. The significance of her birthplace continued to inform her sense of self, even as she adapted to new environments. This duality of belonging and alienation highlights the complexities of identity formation amidst displacement. Unlike most papers in this issue, which focus predominantly on Middle Eastern perspectives, this article emphasizes how the Middle East shaped the emotional landscapes of outsiders who encountered it. Rebecca Goldman's experiences serve as a compelling example of how external observers' emotional frameworks and preconceived ideas influenced their interpretations and interactions within Middle Eastern Jewish communities in the interwar period.

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Keywords: Alliance Israélite Universelle, Interwar Period, Polish Jews, Beirut, Youth, Jewish migration

How to quote this article:
Magdalena Kozłowska, "Teaching at a Lebanese AIU School in the 1930s: Rebecca Goldman's Path from Kalisz to Beirut," in "(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East," eds. Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15947

Mapping Moral Paths:
The Spiritual Geography of Moroccan Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli

by *Aviad Moreno*

Abstract

This essay offers a new reading of narratives of Jewish migration from the MENA region drawing on the preface to Tumat Yesharim (Jerusalem, 1989), a biblical exegesis by Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli (spelled Eli-Qrabli). A Moroccan-born adherent of the (Anti-Zionist) Lithuanian Haredi Musar movement, Elgrabli engaged deeply with a tradition that emphasized ethical self-discipline. Composed in Israel of the 1980s, his autobiographical narrative charts a spiritual journey from Meknes to Jerusalem—through Europe and the Americas—in contrast to the singular path to the Holy Land that is often affirmed. As I argue, Elgrabli's writing resists both Zionist cartographies that privilege Israel as an endpoint and the inward-facing, self-isolating path to perfection that the Musar model promotes. Instead, his journey exemplifies a diasporic spirituality rooted in displacement, divine providence, and ethical calling—a cartography animated not by destination but by personal transformation and ability to become a moral compass for the Sephardi grassroots. By weaving together Sephardi memory, Musar discipline, and geographic multiplicity, Elgrabli offers a unique model of mental maps. His account challenges dominant narratives of origin and return, presenting instead a layered map of spiritual becoming—rather than homecoming.

Introduction
- *Conventional Mental Maps of Jewish Migration*
- *Motion and Emotion*
- *The Case Study and its Historical Background*
- *Israeli Sephardi Haredism*

Between the Personal and the Communal
- *The Point of Departure*
- *The "Ark" Metaphor: From Static Maps to Mobile Spirituality*

New Geographical Hierarchies on a Spiritual Journey
- *Morally Deficient Secular Israel and the Saintly Diaspora*

Revisited East–West Dichotomies

From the Personal to the Communal
Back to Earth, back to Morocco
To the Holy Land
"The Chosen One"

Conclusion

Introduction*

> With the advent of Zionism and the moral deterioration that began to surge through the [Jewish] nation [as a result], I decided to travel to the Holy Land...[1]

Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli's epigram, quoted from his preface to *Tumat Yesharim* (Jerusalem: 1989), a commentary on the Pentateuch, serve as a gateway to an intricate exploration of the inherent religious dimensions of the journeys and landmarks of Moroccan Jewry's emigration to Israel. As a Moroccan-Jewish adherent of the anti-Zionist, Lithuanian Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) Musar movement, Elgrabli's narrative inherently challenges entrenched assumptions about Jewish migration motives and the dominant national narrative of *'aliyah* (lit. "ascent" = Jewish immigration to Israel), which frames this act as an epic collective return to the Promised Land.

However, as I argue in this study, Elgrabli's recounted journey from Morocco to Jerusalem goes well beyond critiquing Zionist cartographies. As a hybrid religious figure, he reclaims legitimacy by portraying multilayered geographies of lived, divinely guided experience. His account becomes a creative act of self-formation—a fusion of fragmented religious traditions into a coherent mental map shaped by a distinctive Haredi imaginary with a Moroccan twist. To better understand how

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* I am grateful to Yuval Haruvi for bringing this source to my attention. I also wish to thank Noah Gerber and Eliezer Hayoun for their valuable feedback on the subsection in this essay, titled *Israeli Sephardi Haredism.*

[1] Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli, *Tumat Yesharim* (Jerusalem: Unknown publisher, 1989), 2.

his narrative departs from conventional frameworks, the next section surveys dominant models of Jewish mobility and sacred geography. This will lay the groundwork for analyzing the affective and theological meanings attached to space in Elgrabli's writing and in the broader Haredi discourse.

Conventional Mental Maps of Jewish Migration

From the nineteenth century on, narratives of Jewish migration that saw 'aliyah as chiefly a spiritual act acquired a new perspective that was both secularized and nationalized. Zionism, the new Jewish ideology of the nineteenth century, first advocated by the Ḥoveve Tsiyon movement—forerunners of the wave of immigration known in Zionism as the First 'Aliyah—emphasized the religious and messianic significance of settling the Land of Israel by working its soil. The principal aim of this new ideology was to recast the identity of the "exilic Jew," who had ostensibly focused his aspiration for emancipation solely on spiritual and ritual religious life, by reinstating the identity of the "biblical Jew," who holistically combines the spiritual and material in their religion.[2]

Thus, coupled with the emerging ideologies of Jewish renewal, 'aliyah was perceived in Zionism not just as a spiritual ascent or pilgrimage but also as a viable ultimate "solution" to the "Jewish Question," that is, the underlying reasons for the physical persecution of the Jews in exile. In the field of Jewish studies, the dominant historical framework from the nineteenth century onward has explained the migration of Jews, particularly from Eastern Europe to the United States, as a movement away from oppression in their lands of residence and toward salvation in their new and modern emancipatory homelands.[3] Similarly, scholars who have studied the migration of Jews from Muslim lands have focused on the broad processes of decolonization that swept the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region after World War II, resulting in the establishment of ostensibly oppressive Islamic nation-states—a key contributing factor in the decline in these

[2] Amir Mashiach, "Redemption, Settlement, and Agriculture in the Religious Teachings of Hovevei Zion," *HTS Teologiese Studies—Theological Studies* 77, no. 4 (2021), https://doi.org/10.4102/HTS.V77I4.6516; Menachem Keren-Kratz, "Satmar and Neturei Karta: Jews against Zionism," *Modern Judaism* 43 (2023): 52-53.

[3] Scott Ury, "Migration as Redemption: The Myth and Memory of Jewish Migration from Eastern Europe to the New World," *Jewish Culture and History* 20, no. 1 (2019): 6.

Jewish communities' living conditions that helped spur their subsequent emigration from these home countries.[4]

Powered by the mainstream Zionist nationalist conception of migration, these communities' mass 'aliyah was often facilitated by active "rescue operations" led by Israel. In this telling, persecution of Jews in exile was perceived as a logical meta-account that explains their collective motivation to leave. Curiously, these meta-accounts and concepts that portrayed migration as a meta-historical phenomenon, encapsulating entire histories of nations and communities as they did so, often employed "botanical" metaphors to articulate the intricate relationship among nations, earthly space, and mobility. Migration was frequently rationalized by metaphorically "uprooting" entire communities from their "places of origin" and then symbolically "replanting" them in new national soil.[5] Such conceptions were often embedded in sketches of all-inclusive geopolitical maps that depicted unidirectional "mass" population movements from the one region to another—"Muslim lands" to the Land of Israel in the case at hand.

[4] See, for example, Ya'akov Meron, "Why Jews Fled the Arab Countries," *Middle East Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (1995): 47-55; Malka Hillel Shulewitz, *The Forgotten Millions: The Modern Jewish Exodus from Arab Lands* (London: Cassell, 1999); Levana Zamir, *The Golden Era of "the Jews of Egypt" and the Mediterranean Option for a United Middle East* (Haifa: University of Haifa, 2008); Lyn Julius, *Uprooted: How 3,000 Years of Jewish Civilisation in the Arab World Vanished Overnight* (Elstree, Hertfordshire, UK: Vallentine Mitchell, 2018).

[5] Aviad Moreno, "Hisul, ʿakirah, hagirah: Ha-semantika shel ha-'aliyot' me-artzot 'Arav ba-siaḥ ha-akademi ve-ha-tziburi be-Yisrael" [The Semantics of Jewish Migration from Arab Countries in Israel's Academic and Popular Discourses], *Zion Quarterly* 95 (2020): 107-125 [in Hebrew].

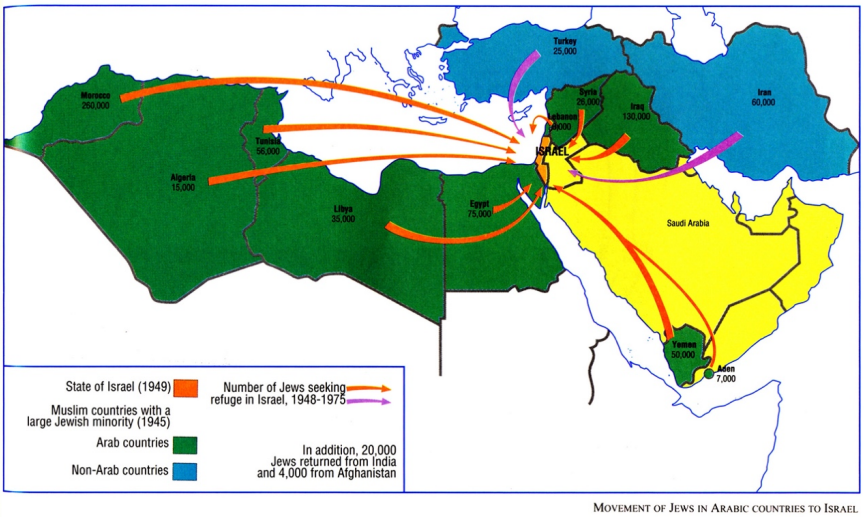

Fig. 1. Geopolitical map of "Movement of Jews in Arabic Countries to Israel", https://commons.princeton.edu/mg/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/MG-Movement_of_Jews_in_Arabic_Countries_to_Israel.jpg.

The conventional style of migration portrayal aligns well with common rationalizations in the broader field of migration literature, at least since the late nineteenth century, when Ernest George Ravenstein formulated his Laws of Migration. The prevailing perspective in this method centered on the impact of regional economic disparities as the fundamental determinants of migration. A dominant *neoclassical* economic theory rationalized migration by tracing it to *push* and *pull* factors. In recent decades, however, this meta-view has faced substantial criticism due to its narrow focus on economic rationality. A migration-systems theory, for example, has emerged as a more comprehensive framework, surpassing its predecessors, which were based on simple economic considerations, by also taking account of social and cultural factors such as social networks and institutions that may shape seemingly "irrational" migration decisions.[6]

Against the backdrop of growing criticism of monolithic national meta-narratives of migration motivations, a wide range of scholars of MENA Jewish migration have pointed at more nuanced rationalizations of emigration in each community and time period across the MENA region and beyond, paying particular attention

[6] Karen O'Reilly, "Migration Theories: A Critical Overview," in *Routledge Handbook of Immigration and Refugee Studies,* ed. Anna Triandafyllidou (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 4-6, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003194316-2.

to historical and regional contexts as well as to more personal motives.[7] The conceptual shift away from "flat" depictions of migration largely paralleled fundamental changes in geographers' perspective on the relationship between space and human mobility or, to be more precise, how space and mobility are experienced and narrated by migrants in real time as well as in retrospect.

Motion and Emotion

In the 1990s in particular, notable scholars such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Henry Lefebvre began to recognize the inherent constraints of conceptualizing geography solely as a two-dimensional canvas against which intricate tapestries of historical occurrences unravel.[8] Increased attention to the constructed, imagined, and dynamic natures of geographical settings led to the emergence of new categorizations. Prominent among them are the categories of *space* and *place*: While *space* depicts the absolute, physical, and tangible aspects of land, *place* pertains critically to the *intangible emotional* and *cultural* dimensions that attach subjective meanings to specific loci on the ground. By its very nature, therefore, place, according to this approach, is a dynamic construct of the human imagination.[9]

The *spatial turn*, as academics christened this new approach, was part of a broader academic shift within the humanities that reflected the increasing scholarly awareness of the dynamic nature of culture and language as they shape, rather than

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[7] For example, Piera Rossetto, "'On pensait revenir à la fin de l'été': Le départ des Juifs de Libye en 1967, entre rupture et continuité," *Diasporas* (Toulouse) 27 (2016): 95-104, https://doi.org/10.4000/diasporas.450; Aviad Moreno, "Beyond the Nation-State: A Network Analysis of Jewish Emigration from Northern Morocco to Israel," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52 (February 2020): 1-21; Bat-Zion Eraqi Klorman, "Yemen, Aden and Ethiopia: Jewish Emigration and Italian Colonialism," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 19, no. 4 (2009): 415-426, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186309990034; Menashe Anzi, "Yemenite Jews in the Red Sea Trade and the Development of a New Diaspora," *Northeast African Studies* 17, no. 1 (2017): 79-100, https://doi.org/10.14321/nortafristud.17.1.0079.

[8] See works cited by David J. Bodenhamer, "Narrating Space and Place," in *Deep Maps and Spatial Narratives,* eds. David J. Bodenhamer, John Corrigan and Trevor M. Harris (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015), 7-26.

[9] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); Thomas F. Gieryn, "A Space for Place in Sociology," *Annual Review of Sociology* 26 (2000): 465 and 476.

merely represent, human history.[10] This evolving critical discourse also reconfigured fundamental concepts in our understanding of the complexities of human migration. Consequently, the conventional dichotomy of *moving* and *staying*, once a central point of departure, has been supplanted by more nuanced perspectives on time–space trajectories, including dynamic life-paths and experiences among other factors.[11]

Relatedly, an *emotional turn* in the humanities has dictated that the significance of emotions in shaping dynamic human experiences and human interpretations of the world be rigorously explored rather than simply analyzed through a biological lens.[12] In migration studies, the emotional turn provides another valuable framework within which the journeys of migrants may be comprehended not only as physical movements but also as profoundly emotional experiences that may even align with spiritual awakening.[13] In this regard, the emotional turn also plays a significant role in understanding how migrants retrospectively recollect, narrate, and reimagine their past trajectories and geographies for social and cultural aims.[14]

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[10] Barbara E. Mann, *Space and Place in Jewish Studies* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), 19-20.

[11] Gunnar Malmberg, "Time and Space in International Migration," in *International Migration, Immobility and Development: Multidisciplinary Perspectives,* eds. Grete Brochmann, Kristof Tamas, Thomas Faist and Tomas Hammar (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 21-48. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003136125-2.

[12] Stephanie Olsen and Rob Boddice, "Styling Emotions History," *Journal of Social History* 51, no. 3 (2018): 476. Building on this turn, Ben Prestel, for example, underscores the significance of collective emotional experiences in shaping the social and cultural dynamics of urban environments: Joseph Ben Prestel, *Emotional Cities: Debates on Urban Change in Berlin and Cairo, 1860–1910* (New York-Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 476.

[13] Amalia Campos-Delgado, "Emotional Geographies of Irregular Transmigrants' Journeys," *Migration Studies* 9, no. 2 (2021): 179-195, https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnz029; Johara Berriane, "Religion in Spaces of Transit: African Christian Migrant Churches and Transnational Mobility in Morocco," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 41, no. 4 (2020): 424-441, https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2020.1778653

[14] Nancy Foner, "Migration, Location and Memory: Jewish History through a Comparative Lens," *Jewish Culture and History* 9, no. 2-3 (2007): 150-162, https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2007.10512082; Anastasia Christou, "Narrations of the Nation in Mobility Life Stories: Gendered Scripts, Emotional Spheres, and Transnational Performativity in the Greek Diaspora," in *Gendering Nationalism: Intersections of Nation, Gender, and Sexuality in the 21st Century,* eds. Jon Mulholland, Nicola Montagna and Erin Sanders-McDonagh (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 299-314. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-76699-7_16

Thomas DeGloma's examination of *narratives of awakening* provides a complementary perspective that may enrich the analysis of the case studied here. In his study, which underscores the interplay between individual and collective memories, he posits that personal, *transformative journeys* articulated within spiritual or religious frameworks contribute significantly to shaping a community's identity and sense of belonging. DeGloma's concept of narratives of awakening suggests that stories about mobility constitute a crucial medium with which moral concerns may be expressed. They give individuals a structured framework that helps them navigate between "right" and "wrong" and between "justice" and "injustice" through imagined spaces.[15] The sharing of such narratives—even in retrospect, several decades after the recounted events occurred—enables individuals such as those in Haredi communities to position themselves as role models who inspire others to adopt a similar worldview.

The approach championed by DeGloma, as I would argue, is instrumental in understanding Elgrabli's narrative about his retrospective retelling of his spiritual odyssey —marked by a transformation from a state of "falsehood" to one of "truth"—as he recounts his departure from Morocco and his subsequent voyage through an imagined geography.

Leveraging the theories and ideas discussed above, below I explore the emotional odyssey of a Jewish migrant from Morocco to Israel and the related "mental maps" elicited by his emotional reflections on that journey. To be sure, the emphasis here is not on tracing the decisions that ultimately led him to migrate but rather on unraveling the personal narrative behind his motivation to migrate. Thus, the analysis unveils a distinct cognitive division of space that challenges the conventional geographic dichotomy of "origin" and "destination" communities as commonly described in popular accounts of Jewish migration to Israel.

[15] Thomas DeGloma, "Toward a Cultural and Cognitive Sociology of Autobiography," *Sociological Theory* 33, no. 1 (2015): 3-4, 13.

The Case Study and its Historical Background

Tumat Yesharim, a commentary on the Pentateuch divided into weekly portions, authored by Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli in 1989 in Jerusalem after he had settled in Israel, provides important insight for my analytical approach.

Elgrabli traversed a rich tapestry of locales in his odyssey, finding profound spiritual significance in each. From his birthplace in Meknes, Morocco, a city steeped in Jewish religious tradition, he journeyed to Marseille, France, initially landing in a Zionist training camp before finding refuge at the Novaredok yeshiva in Fublaines, near Paris. From there, he traveled to New York and, after a short sojourn, took off for Buenos Aires after having been offered a position as a ritual slaughterer and a promise of a match for marriage. Unfortunately, his connection flight through Caracas, Venezuela, ended in a catastrophic crash that he somehow survived. Requiring medical care, however, he endured a hospital stay in Montevideo, Uruguay, where his miraculous survival made him a media sensation. Intent in continuing carrying out his assignment, he traveled to Buenos Aires, where he found purpose in his work and embraced his Sephardi roots. His subsequent return to Morocco illustrated his commitment to the needs of his hometown community, where he embraced his mentorship roles by teaching at the Talmud Torah (boys' religious school) of Wazan and supervising inspection of the Jewish dietary laws in Casablanca. Ultimately, his journey culminated in his arrival in Jerusalem, a deliberate choice that reflected his deep spiritual connection with the heartland of Judaism. Elgrabli's unwavering faith throughout his travels transcended geopolitical boundaries and linear movements, thus guiding him toward enlightenment and leadership, while his experiences shaped his understanding of the divine presence in his life.

To be sure, much of the account of Elgrabli's meanderings in *Tumat Yesharim* reflects the author's early embrace of the Jewish Musar Movement, in which he imbibed the teachings of Rabbi Yosef Yoizel Horowitz, the "Alter [Elder] of Novaredok." In its quest for ethical perfection, the Musar Movement, rooted in Lithuania, dedicated itself to a form of Torah study that deemed the Talmud to be too "rational" and, therefore, unable to generate a deep, emotional attachment to Jewish spirituality. The movement emphasized instead ethical and moral

pedagogy, with a specific focus on character development and perfection of personal virtues. Although it shared the emphasis on emotions and criticism of Talmudic studies with Hasidism—another mystical Jewish current that swept through Eastern Europe from the eighteenth century onward partly in response to Jewish enlightenment and modernization—the two groups otherwise espoused essentially opposing views.[16]

The Musar Movement aligned with a wider Haredi opposition to Zionism and the national 'aliyah project, promoted by organizations such as Agudas Yisroel, which had been established in Kattowitz (Katowice) in 1912 to counter the Religious Zionism trend led by the Mizrachi Movement. Key tenets of the Haredi opposition include the belief that the return to the Land of Israel should be driven by religious motives alone rather than nationalistic ideas and the conviction that establishing a Jewish state before the advent of the Jewish Messiah contravenes the divine will.[17]

Interestingly, these developments in European Jewish history had more than a local influence in the modern era; they were grounded in much broader political, demographic, and cultural shifts that swept the Jewish world and manifested in various forms. In nineteenth-century France, for instance, prevailing narratives of solidarity between European and "Oriental" Jewries, such as those propagated by the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), divided the Jewish world between distressed collectives facing anti-Jewish persecution and developed ones responsible for the well-being of their afflicted brethren.

In the post-World War II era, as Israel and the Americas emerged as the demographic and cultural foci of world Jewry, the American Jewries assumed responsibility for newly distressed fellows, including those in Israel as in need of extensive external support. This hierarchical perception of the Jewish world prompted efforts by American organizations such as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee ("the Joint") to facilitate the migration of Jews, Zionist or not, from MENA countries

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[16] Clemence Boulouque, "Abraham Unbound: The Prefiguration of the Unconscious in the First Generation of the Musar and Hasidic Movements," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 14, no. 2 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1163/1872471x-bja10015.

[17] Keren-Kratz, "Satmar and Neturei Karta," 52-76.

to Israel and the West.[18] In 1948–1968 specifically, more than 70 percent of Jews who migrated from Asian and African countries chose Israel as their destination.[19] By the early 1970s, approximately 80 percent of the 300,000 Jews who resided in Morocco in 1948 had immigrated to Israel in two main waves: about 160,000 from 1948 to 1956 and another 113,000 from 1961 to 1971.[20]

While Elgrabli's journey out of Morocco should be framed within the broader context of the mass departure of Moroccan Jews during the 1950s and 1960s, his retrospective narrative should also be considered in light of the infiltration of European Haredi ideas into his native Morocco. After its founding in 1912 in Kattowitz, Agudas Yisroel developed a Haredi version of the "civilizing mission," aiming to "rescue" Jews in Islamic lands—especially in areas influenced by the AIU—from secular modernity. Rooted in the belief that only European Orthodoxy could withstand Western secularism, this mission reshaped Torah education, lifestyle, and dress in line with Ashkenazi norms.[21]

Despite the transnational aspirations of the Orthodox counter-modernization project, the Haredization of Jewish communities in the MENA region was far from uniform. In some places, efforts to reshape local Jewish life in line with European Haredi norms encountered significant resistance from entrenched communal structures and cultural sensibilities. The Orthodox ideological system often struggled to fully adapt to the sociopolitical and religious dynamics of MENA societies, where the authority of local sages (*hakhamim*) and communal leaders remained strong. In particular, many communities refused to accept the Ashkenazi Orthodox notion of halakhic exclusivity, which tended to reject alternative religious traditions as illegitimate. The result was a fragmented map of receptivity and resistance, where Orthodox institutions such as Agudas Yisroel or

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[18] Aviad Moreno, *Entwined Homelands, Empowered Diasporas: Hispanic Moroccan Jews and Their Globalizing Community* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2024), 93-94.

[19] Sergio Della Pergola, "Sephardic and Oriental Jews in Israel and Western Countries: Migration, Social Change, and Identification," in *Sephardic Jewry and Mizrahi Jews vol. XXII*, ed. Peter Y. Medding (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 12-14.

[20] Michael Laskier, *Israel and Aliyah from North Africa 1948–1970* (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2006), 523-524 [in Hebrew]; Yaron Tsur, *A Torn Community: The Jews of Morocco and Nationalism 1943–1954* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2002), 23 [in Hebrew].

[21] Yaacov Loupo, *Metamorphose Ultra-Orthodoxe Chez Les Juifs Du Maroc* (Paris: Harmattan, 2012), 34, 80-87, 90-104, and 112.

emissaries like Rabbi Halperin found more fertile ground in some cities than others.[22]

In Meknes, Elgrabli's birthplace, Haredi education expanded through the joint efforts of Eliezer Berdugo and Rabbi Ze'ev Wolf Halperin, an Agudas Yisroel emissary. United by concern over the secularizing effects of French colonialism and the AIU's influence, they established in 1912 the Em ha-Banim school network as an Orthodox alternative. In just one year, the community built a twenty-five-classroom school, thanks to grassroots fundraising led by Rebecca Toledano and other local women. The school combined Torah and Hebrew instruction with French-language secular studies to prepare students for life under colonial rule.[23]

After World War II, Haredi proselytizing movements—particularly New York's Chabad Lubavitch and elements of the Lithuanian yeshiva world—actively recruited Moroccan students, contributing to the formation of a transnational network of Moroccan yeshiva students abroad. In France, prominent Haredi yeshivot such as Bet Yosef in Fublaines (near Paris) and Hakhme Tsarfat in Aix-les-Bains (near Lyon and Geneva) actively enrolled numerous youths from Morocco. The yeshiva in Fublaines attracted a student body whose members, mainly aged twelve and over, followed the Novaredok ethicist method. Among Moroccan Jews, however, to whom the Novaredok method was generally less appealing, the students at the yeshiva in Fublaines were exceptions. In Rancy, located near the French–Swiss border, a "Torah center" was founded in 1967 by rabbis of Moroccan origin, notably the Toledano family of Meknes. Rabbi Baruch Raphael Toledano, the paterfamilias, played a key role in the establishment of the yeshiva, drawing on connections from his studies in Gateshead, England.[24]

Starting in the immediate post-war period and continuing for about the next four decades, Jewish emigrants from Morocco also migrated to the UK. In this migratory wave, Moroccan students arrived to pursue their studies in Orthodox

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[22] Nissim Leon, *Harediyut raka: Hithadshut datit be-Yahadut ha-Mizrah be-Yisra'el* [Soft Ultra-Orthodoxy: Religious Renewal in Oriental Jewry in Israel] (Yerushalayim: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 2010), 25-27 [in Hebrew].

[23] Ibid.; Eliezer Bashan, "Hevrat Em ha-Banim be-Maroqo," in *Isha ba-Mizrah, Isha mi-Mizrah,* eds. Tova Cohen and Shaul Regev (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2005), 128-139 [in Hebrew].

[24] Itzhak Dahan, *From the Maghreb to the West: Moroccan Jews among Three Continents* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2022), 40-41 [in Hebrew].

yeshivas and other educational institutions across England, predominantly in yeshivot like Torat Emet and Etz Chaim in London, Netzach Yisrael in Sunderland in Northeast England, and Yeshivat Bet Yosef in Gateshead, which Itzhak Dahan describes as the Harvard of the Haredi world in Europe.[25] However, because most Jewish institutions in Morocco were Francophone due to their operations under the French protectorate, most students from Morocco found yeshivas in France more attractive than those in the UK. Rabbi Aharon Monsonego, the pioneer Moroccan student at Aix-les-Bains in 1946, played a significant role in populating these yeshivot in the 1960s and 1970s by actively facilitating the recruitment of students for yeshivot in Europe, with particular emphasis on Aix-les-Bains. From the 1950s to the 1980s, around 4,000 of the estimated 5,000 youth from Morocco who migrated to these Haredi institutions chose Aix-les-Bains.[26]

Israeli Sephardi Haredism

Given that Elgrabli's book was written in Jerusalem in the late 1980s, it must be also read in the context of the post-1948 evolution of Israeli Haredi society. Since then, most of Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox society had continued to adhere to the pre-state Agudas Yisroel (pronounced Agudat Yisrael in modern Israeli Hebrew) approach of accommodating Zionism, balancing ideological wariness with strategic engagement. While upholding the traditional Haredi view of the secular Jewish state lacked as devoid of theological legitimacy, leading figures such as Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz ("the Hazon Ish") proposed a subtle reorientation: rather than outright anti-Zionism, Haredim in Israel should aspire to create an enclave culture fortified by formerly East European yeshivot as "the caves and deserts of our generation," and Torah study as the true enabler of Jewish survival.

This idea, later institutionalized in the concept of a "society of learners" (*hevrat lomdim*), treated the state as a means to an end or an instrument of Divine providence, lacking theological legitimacy, for rebuilding Torah.[27] In other

[25] Ibid., 217.
[26] Ibid., 65-66.
[27] Ibid., 213-215.

words, the Haredi mainstream in Israel gradually accepted the state as a practical framework within which Torah life could flourish—ushering in what scholars such as Benjamin Brown term "ex post facto" legitimacy.[28]

Tactical political participation by Agudat Yisrael in Israel's first government coalition, however, was short-lived. In part, this was due to the movement's own modestly successful efforts in enrolling children of Yemenite migrants to Israel in 1949–1950 in what would soon become its own independent school system and in leading yeshivot. The party's return to a coalition presence, in Menachem Begin's Likud-led government in 1977, was emulated by the Shas Party in 1984 to secure religious autonomy for the Sephardi-Haredi population while maintaining ideological distance from Zionism. Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the party's leader, offered a distinct form of pragmatism: while rejecting the state's redemptive status (*athalta de-ge'ula*) as affirmed by the National Religious, he saw it as a vehicle to elevate Sephardi Torah culture. [29] Despite opposition from Ashkenazi leaders such as Rabbi Elazar Menachem Man Shach—who dismissed Zionism as a failed modern project while also suspicious of attempts by "Torah true" (viz. Haredi) Sephardi attempts to enter politics on a national level—Shas carved out a middle path, upholding Torah authority while engaging the state in practical terms.[30]

Meanwhile, in Israeli yeshivot, "Lithuanian Sephardim" inspired by the example of Yemenite recruits back in the 1950s had also internalized the yeshiva-centered worldview and the strict behavioral codes of Ashkenazi Haredi society, even as they remained marginalized and excluded from its leadership and social prestige.[31] By the early 1980s, resentment over this exclusion combined with spiritual revivalism generated a grassroots movement seeking to "restore the crown to its

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[28] Benjamin Brown, *Trembling at the Word of the People: Haredi Critique of Israeli Democracy* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2012), 40-41.

[29] Nissim Leon, *Harediyut raka*, 22-29; Yaacov Lupo, *Shas de-Lita: ha-hishtaltut ha-Lita'it 'al talmide ha-yeshivot ha-Marokayim* [Shas of Lithuania: The Lithuanian takeover of Torah scholars from Morocco] (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2001), chap. 3.

[30] Benny Brown, *Madrikh la-hevra ha-Haredit* [A guide to haredi society: beliefs and sectors] (Jerusalem: Keter, 2001), 217-220.

[31] Benny Brown, " 'From a Negligible Minority to a Rising Force': Three Formative Events in Post-1977 Haredi History," in *New Trends in the Study of Haredi Culture and Society*, ed. David N. Myers, and Nechumi Yaffe (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2023), 179-202; Brown, *Madrikh la-hevra ha-Haredit*, 122-123; Nissim Leon, "The Ethnic Structuring of 'Sephardim' in Haredi Society in Israel," *Jewish Social Studies* 22, no. 1 (2016): 130-160.

past glory" (*le-hahzir atara le-yoshna*)—a slogan that guided the creation of an independent pan-Sephardi Haredi network of institutions represented politically by Shas.[32] Under the spiritual leadership of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef—himself a product of the Sephardi Haredi Porat Yosef yeshiva yet critically engaged with halakhic discourse and norms due to his own highly successful three-decade career in the Israeli rabbinate—Shas adopted the norms of Haredi Judaism while projecting a uniquely Sephardi halakhic and cultural voice.[33]

Sociologically, the emergent Sephardi Haredi sector differed from its Ashkenazi counterpart by remaining more socially inclusive of deviance from Halakhic norms. While Ashkenazi Haredim often formed insular, endogamous communities, Sephardi ultra-Orthodoxy maintained ties with the broader MENA Jewish public and offered a "soft" brand of ultra-Orthodoxy of rabbinic and yeshiva elites committed to religious stringency but more flexible in communicative style and culturally resonant with traditionalist non-Haredi Jews. This development, as Nissim Leon argues, should not be seen merely as an imitation of Ashkenazi Orthodoxy but as a contextualized response to the dislocation and marginalization experienced by immigrants from Muslim countries in Israel.[34]

Despite these broader developments that shaped the emergence of Sephardi Haredism in Israel, Elgrabli's writing stands out as a deeply personal act of ideological mediation that provides this overall trend with a unique twist. His narrative reflects a conscious spiritual synthesis crafted from diverse and often conflicting sources of authority and inspiration. As his odyssey unfolds globally—from Meknes to Europe, the Americas, and finally Jerusalem—Elgrabli constructs a religious identity that is at rooted in traditional Sephardi pietism and religiosity yet also "upgraded" by exposure to the Musar-infiltrated Lithuanian yeshivot that were already striking roots in Morocco. If one may judge by his text, Elgrabli is neither a typical "Novaredoker," nor a direct disciple of either the ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi Rabbi Shach or the latter Sephardi counterpart turned antagonist, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Ovadia Yosef praised Elgrabli's work for its ability to "lezakot

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[32] Leon, *Harediyut raka,* 22-29.

[33] Brown, "From a Negligible Minority," 190-192; Nissim Leon, "Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the Shas Party, and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process," *The Middle East Journal* 69, no. 3 (2015): 379-395.

[34] Leon, *Harediyut raka*, 35-40; Leon, "The Ethnic Structuring," 138-140.

et ha-rabbim," or to bring merit to the public —a quality aligned with his broader philosophy of Shas's religious activism.[35] Yet, paradoxically, he is embraced for similar reasons by the most extreme elements of Jerusalem's Haredi world, including Rabbi Moshe Halberstam of the Eda Haharedit, a leading figure in the ultra-radical anti-Zionist Ashkenazi world, whose approbations were typically reserved for those deemed unassailably pious and ideologically pure.[36] In his endorsement he refers to him in a similar manner as one who brings merit to the public. Among those who endorsed him are also Rabbi Shalom Messas, who represented a moderate Moroccan tradition rooted in communal leadership and halakhic leniency where appropriate[37]; and the inclusion of Rabbi Yehuda Yosef and the Sephardi rabbinical court of the Eda Haharedit—an enclave that has historically distanced itself from both Shas and the Zionist rabbinate—further underscores the unusual breadth of rabbinic legitimacy that Elgrabli was able to cultivate.[38]

Most notably, Elgrabli's distinctiveness and unique contribution are represented in his ability to reframe the elitist and self-isolating Musar tradition for a broader audience. Drawing on the Novaredok tradition's emphasis on ethical self-cultivation, he is seemingly perceived as one who brings Musar to the people—transforming a discipline once reserved for elite yeshiva students into a spiritually resonant message for wider Sephardi communities. As I show in this study, this identity is reclaimed by Elgrabli to shape geographical metaphors of mobility and space.

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[35] Nissim Leon, "'Zikui ha-rabbim': Ovadia Yosef's Approach toward Religious Activism and His Place in the Haredi Movement within Mizrahi Jewry," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 22 (2007): 150-168; Leon, "Rabbi Ovadia Yosef," 379-395.

[36] Menachem Friedman, "The Haredi (Ultra-Orthodox) Society—Sources, Trends and Processes," in *The Jewish Communities of Israel: Transition and Change*, eds. Ezra Kopelowitz and Raymond C. Rosen (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1991), 169-170.

[37] Zvi Zohar, "The Sephardic Halakhic Tradition in the 20th Century," *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 22 (2007): 130.

[38] Leon, *Harediyut raka*, 45–46; Aviezer Ravitzky, *Messianism, Zionism, and Jewish Religious Radicalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 221-222.

Between the Personal and the Communal

The Point of Departure

Elgrabli's narrative begins by affirming the merits of his hometown:

> I was born in the city of Meknes, a city of sages and scribes. They say about the [biblical] verse "From Zion the Torah will go forth" that [it actually means]: from Meknes the Torah will reach all of Morocco and its surroundings. All who sought the crown of Torah would bring their sons to Meknes, because there were the yeshivot in which they study God's Torah day and night.[39]

In this opening statement, Elgrabli portrays his birthplace as a spiritual epicenter renowned for its religious scholarship, imbuing its geographic space with profound dedication to learning and interpretation of the Torah.[40] Continuing to infuse the narrative with personal connections, the rabbi associates the landscape with his own religious upbringing, highlighting individuals who played pivotal roles in the childhood stage of his spiritual journey.

From its inception, Elgrabli's narrative repeatedly intertwines his personal, biographical growth with his spiritual advancement, as a Jew from Meknes. Describing his bar-mitzva celebration, he elaborates on the local custom at large: "In the evening, they would rent a large car and all the children of the family, as well as all the friends, would drive around the city to make the bar-mitzva boy happy."[41] This vivid account of his bar-mitzva, a significant rite of passage in Jewish tradition celebrated at the age of thirteen, marks much more than a tell of a regular transition from childhood to adulthood. In *Tumat Yesharim*, this tale is recounted in order to portray Meknes as a bastion of piety—a spiritual point of origin where such celebrations are treated with profound reverence, thereby

[39] Elgrabli, *Tumat Yesharim*, 1.

[40] This study often involves detailed examination of the text, its laws, and its ethical teachings, as well as commentary from scholars. It's a central practice in Jewish religious and intellectual life.

[41] Elgrabli, *Tumat Yesharim*, 1.

reinforcing Elgrabli's authority as a hybrid scholar capable of bridging disparate, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, religious worlds.[42]

Missing in these depictions and others, however, is a detailed portrayal of the cityscape; it does not mention any actual street names, specific sites, or even the Jewish neighborhood, the *mellah*, which is most likely the epicenter of the narrative. It also overlooks the significant demographic shifts and the dramatic changes in interfaith relations that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, which seem irrelevant to the self-fashioned spiritual landscape Elgrabli constructs.[43]

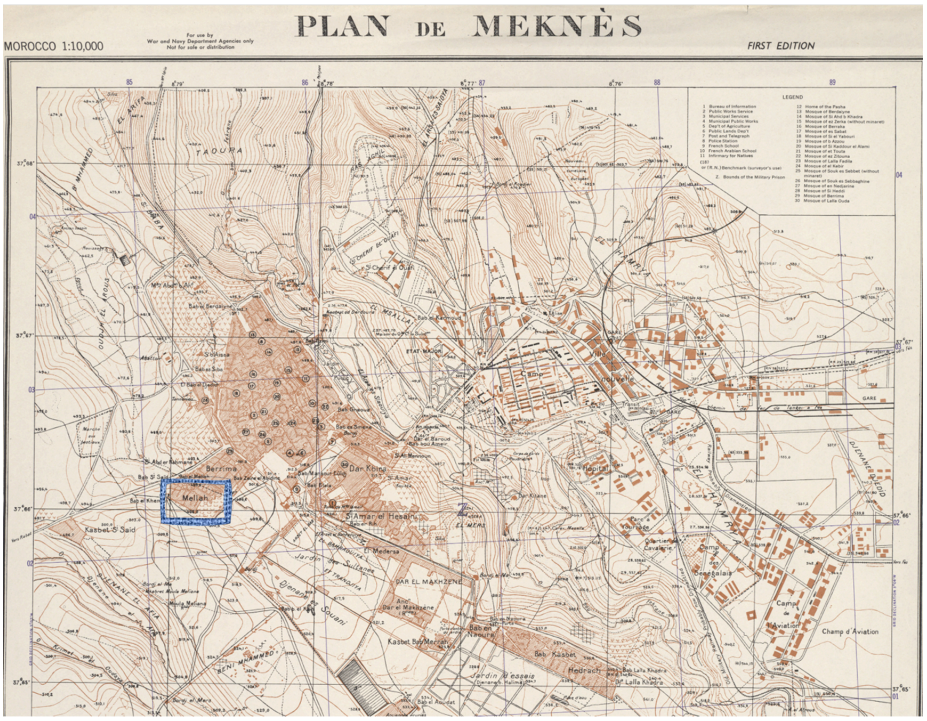

Fig. 2. The Mellah of Meknes within the greater cityscape, https://maps.lib.utexas.edu/maps/ams/morocco_city_plans/txu-oclc-6547943.jpg.

Continuing with the biographical theme of his narrative, Elgrabli reports the significant role of his parents, in particular, in the way he attaches additional spiritual meaning to his Moroccan hometown: "When I reached the age of eleven, my parents bought me a *tallit* [prayer shawl] and a set of *tefillin* and made me a

[42] For a comparable description of Novaredok that may have influenced Elgrabli's writing: Aharon Mirsky, *Novaredok: Brethren and Journey* (Jerusalem: Ratner, 2014), 53-56 [in Hebrew].
[43] Tsur, *A Torn Community*, 27-32.

bar-mitzva celebration, because it was customary [in Meknes] not to wait until the age of thirteen [...]."[44] His mother, Hannah, whom he reverently refers to as "my teacher," emerges as a woman of exceptional virtue and kindness.[45] Elgrabli fondly recounts how she would assemble a basket of food and task him with delivering it to specific individuals in need, be they widows or the impoverished, irrespective of the distance involved—or, in his own words, "the near and the far." This phrase—beyond exemplifying his mother's charitable nature—underscores how religious benevolence transcended both physical distance and familial ties to evolve into a symbol of his own roots in Meknes as a Moroccan center of Torah learning. These depictions, among others, mark the first "station" in his journey—a journey not confined to the physical realm of Meknes but rather extending into spiritual and emotional spaces as *point of departure* for his global journey.

The "Ark" Metaphor: From Static Maps to Mobile Spirituality

Deeply rooted in the customs, traditions, and values of his family and community, Elgrabli guides the reader through a series of geographical locations outside his Moroccan hometown, each symbolizing a spiritual hub on a global map. Included among them are sites in France, England, the United States, Argentina, and Israel that are known to him mainly because of their yeshivot.

In his narrative, Elgrabli personalizes geographic space by linking cities and towns not only to acquaintances and relatives but also to their religious significance. In doing so, he cultivates the image of a tightly knit world of saints—figures who embody his revered international religious network and lend additional spiritual coherence to his journey. The city of Bat Yam in central Israel, for example, is mentioned only as the home of Rabbi Zion, who generously lends Elgrabli religious books. When he refers to Gateshead, a town near Newcastle in northern England, he mentions it merely as the place where his relative, Rabbi Shimon Bitton, lives. To establish Bitton's relevance to his spiritual account, Elgrabli remarks that he was considered an *'ilui* (prodigy) in the local *kollel* (yeshiva for married men).[46]

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[44] Elgrabli, *Tumat Yesharim*, 1.

[45] Ibid., 2.

[46] Ibid., 1.

There was a time in the 1850s when the Newcastle Jewish community hosted German Jewish immigrants who had reached England to enhance their economic status and social mobility. By the 1980s, however, as Waterman and Kosmin emphasize, the voluntary concentration of Jewish communities in specific urban areas in Gateshead had created typical Haredi enclaves that prevented social assimilation.[47]

Fig. 3. The United Kingdom, https://www.whereig.com/united-kingdom/where-is-gateshead-uk.html.

More broadly, the Lithuanian yeshiva world was rooted in the historical context of East European Jewish modernity, expressed by the rise of Jewish emancipation and Haskalah (the Jewish Enlightenment), the later emergence of socialist tendencies, and the eventual conceptualization of modern Zionism.[48]

This notion of the yeshiva also resonates in Yoel Finkelman's study, which delves into the multifaceted role of the yeshiva as it transitioned from the East European context to the American one. Despite the differences in its regional and temporal contexts, the yeshiva in America continued to function as a "sacred space" where students could immerse themselves in Jewish learning while being shielded from

[47] Shlomit Flint Ashery, "The Litvish Community of Gateshead: Reshaping the Territoriality of the Neighbourhood," in *Spatial Behavior in Haredi Jewish Communities in Great Britain,* ed. Shlomit Flint Ashery (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020), 62 and 65-66, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-25858-0_6.

[48] Ashery, "Litvish Community," 62-63; Shaul Stampfer, *Lithuanian Yeshivas of the Nineteenth Century: Creating a Tradition of Learning* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012).

external influences. Moreover, particularly in the American context, yeshivas sought to protect their students from what their rabbis perceived as the threatening environment outside the yeshiva walls. The Beth Medrash Govoha yeshiva in Lakewood, New Jersey, for example, fashions itself as a "total institution" and, as such, limits its students' contact with the outside world as an educational strategy that fosters students' devotion to religious studies.[49]

Similarly, the French yeshiva networks also strived to shield their students from the secular influences outside the walls. In France, yeshivot were typically established in small towns like Aix-les-Bains, far from major population centers such as Paris, Lyon, and Marseille; thus they could shield or isolate themselves from their surroundings in a manner that befit the educational philosophy of the Haredi movements. [50] This defining characteristic of the French yeshivot illustrates their resistance to the perceived excesses of modernity and reflects their day-to-day effort to police boundaries and define identities against the "others" who live beyond their spatial borders.

Drawing on such a notion of space and mobility, while describing his journey to Europe and the yeshiva world, Elgrabli employs the powerful metaphor of Noah's Ark, a concept deeply rooted in the Novaredok philosophy. He quotes the "Elder of Novaredok," Yosef Yoizel Horowitz (1847–1919), who declared the importance of sustaining the yeshiva tradition in France: "[...] Instead of running away and going to *deserts* and *caves* [as monks and prophets would do in biblical times], we should build and found yeshiva seminaries and Torah and moral *tents* to repair and build an ark to defend ourselves against the saboteurs and corrupters [...] The holy yeshivas are the *teva'* [ark] of today." Elgrabli's spatial narrative moves beyond the image of a static spiritual island surrounded by a moral wilderness. Instead, it evokes a sense of movement and the deliberate cultivation of a mobile, temporary fortress—a spiritual tent—where resilience is nurtured within a vast metaphorical desert marked by immorality.

As Elgrabli's account unfolds, he refers to the birthplace of Yeshivat Beit Yosef of the Novaredok school in Bergen-Belsen, Germany, during Nazi rule. After World War II, he explains, this yeshiva relocated to more prosperous locations in France:

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[49] Yoel Finkelman, "Haredi Isolation in Changing Environments: A Case Study in Yeshiva Immigration," *Modern Judaism* 22, no. 1 (2002): 71, http://www.jstor.org/stable/1396734.

[50] Dahan, *From the Maghreb*, 70.

Bayeux, Fublaines, Armentières, and Boussier (sic. Poussier).[51] In this context, he points out that the material conditions of the yeshiva students improved and that they had grown spiritually, marking Paris as a better geographical place for the spiritual mobile "ark" that the yeshiva had become.

This perspective further underscores the dynamic interplay between geography and spirituality in Elgrabli's narrative, far transcending the simple concept of a physical journey from a "place of origin" to a "destination." His mental map—which aligns with his narratives of awakening and his personal pursuit of spiritual growth—is a passage between places, each of which he repeatedly classifies in comparison with the others. In this context, his journey from Morocco to Europe is portrayed not just as a migration to a more "developed" world, as it would in much of the literature on postcolonial migration. Such studies emphasize both the role of the ties between Morocco and its former colonial rulers, Spain and France, in mediating migration to these countries, and the Moroccan immigrants' ability to satisfy demand for low-skilled labor upon arrival.[52] Elgrabli's journey, in contrast, flows in direct correlation with an extension of his spiritual life-journey to new sanctuaries and "floating arks" in a vast secular desert, as I further describe below.

New Geographical Hierarchies on a Spiritual Journey

Elgrabli's mental maps differ significantly from the typical geopolitical maps that depict the migratory flows from Morocco to Europe or to Israel, as explained at the beginning of this essay. In his evolving narrative, rather than portraying his journey out of Morocco as an escape from a hostile Islamic regime as the Zionist meta-narrative might suggest (see the introduction), Elgrabli chooses to depict it as a "rescue" by those of the Torah world from Israel and the ostensible "rescue operation" that Israel launched for the Jews of the "Muslim lands."

In fact, Elgrabli's personal migration story commences with his express desire to carry out the act of 'aliyah, an aspiration fueled by the large-scale 'aliyah that

[51] It is worth noting that all these places, aside from Fublaines, are relatively far from Paris.

[52] Hein de Haas, "Morocco's Migration Experience: A Transitional Perspective," *International Migration* 54, no. 4 (2007): 44-45.

followed the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. This section of the preface, however, clearly reveals his alignment with anti-Zionist ideologies, which appear to stand in tension with the support he received from figures like Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who was known for a more pragmatic approach to the Zionist state. To avoid criticism of his "birthplace" community in Meknes, which would clash with the basic image of the city as a place of piety, he details how, in fact, he faced opposition from the leaders in his hometown when attempting to immigrate via Zionist networks. According to Elgrabli's narrative, his community perceived Zionism as a threat to their religious identity and practices. As Elgrabli writes, Rabbi Baruch Toledano, a prominent figure in his city and a key player in the creation of the Em ha-Banim school, opposed the secular Labor Zionist parties, Mapai, which enjoyed political hegemony in Israel at the time, as well as the pro-Soviet opposition party, Mapam. Despite the opposition that he faced, however, Elgrabli shares with the reader his unwavering determination to immigrate to Israel. His narrative features clear self-criticism of his behavior during the initial stages of his spiritual journey, blaming a moment in his "innocent" journey at the tender age of fourteen.[53]

Only with this biographical anecdote, which contrasts with his subsequent emigration from Morocco, can Elgrabli continue to describe his gradual "ascent" to a higher spiritual hub on his way out of his country of birth. His decision to depict Morocco as a sphere of secular Zionism and his travel to Marseille, France, where the Zionist training camp is based, mark a significant turning point in his Bildung. As he makes his way to the Zionist training camp by train—again, a moving object—a chance but miraculous comment by an Ashkenazi religious passenger prompts him to abruptly toss a Zionist novel that he was reading from the moving train. This act symbolizes the most significant moment of awakening that he experienced during his spiritual journey.

Interestingly, Elgrabli's account of his journey in his new country, France, is interspersed with detailed descriptions of the country's landscapes. As he makes his way from the Lyon train station to the nearby yeshiva, for example, he reports his climb up a steep hill with a heavy suitcase, which probably symbolizes—beyond any concrete memory of the physical landscape of the Lyon region—a

[53] Elgrabli, *Tumat Yesharim*, 2-3.

spiritual effort to attain a new and higher spiritual level, as this may be interpreted given the context of his plot. Just as space and landscape are dynamic in his account, so, too, are the people who inhabit them. For example, Elgrabli specifically mentions the aid he receives from a gentile whom he encounters on the way to the yeshiva as he hauls his heavy luggage up the steep incline. In this telling, the gentile appears for a reason: he is an agent of the divine providence that Elgrabli receives along his journey. The narrative weaves together multiple references to real locations, presenting them as signs of divine intervention—meant to reassure readers that his unusual life journey was guided and affirmed not only by a broad spectrum of rabbinical authorities but also by Heaven itself.[54]

Morally Deficient Secular Israel and the Saintly Diaspora

Elgrabli's narrative of his journey in France not only challenges the secular Zionist meta-narrative of redemption from exile, it also aligns partly with the distinctly anti-Zionist ideology of the Novaredok yeshiva and the broader Musar movement. In accordance with Jewish tradition and the Talmudic passage known as the midrash of the Three Oaths, the Jewish people was sworn not to engineer mass 'aliyah and not to rebel against the nations, which, in turn, were sworn not to mistreat the Jews too badly. Thus, the Jews must remain in exile, even if under harsh conditions, and patiently await their divinely delivered redemption. Those who see this midrashic injunction as binding halakha (rabbinical law) also believe that the steadily growing numbers of non-observant Jewish immigrants to Israel are desecrating the Holy Land, rendering it unsuitable for redemption. In his account, Elgrabli is drawn to one of the Haredi groups that affirms this doctrine most adamantly, Neturei Karta. To demonstrate Neturei Karta's approach, this group reached out to the PLO in 1988, participating in anti-Israeli demonstrations among other things. Acknowledging this support, Yasser Arafat even announced the appointment of a Neturei Karta member as a minister in the government he was about to establish.[55]

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[54] Ibid., 2.

[55] Keren-Kratz, "Satmar and Neturei Karta," 4, 10, and 16-17.

Elgrabli expressly embraces the Neturei Karta idea in the body of his exegesis more than in the introduction to it.[56] Elgrabli, continuing his story, finds himself engaging with the Neturei Karta network, a new system that connects him to the Holy Land in a way that he had not anticipated when he was aspiring to leave Morocco. He begins to read *HaHoma* (The wall), the group's bulletin, immersing himself in its viewpoints. His engagement with *HaHoma* represents another turning point in his spiritual journey to the Holy Land, as he twines it with his personal spiritual development.[57] Strikingly, this story—steeped in the rhetoric of one of the most radical anti-Zionist factions—is presented to a readership in Jerusalem through a work endorsed by prominent mainstream Sephardi rabbis.
This paradox highlights Elgrabli's unique ability to navigate between conflicting ideological realms, not only moving among them but also weaving them into a coherent narrative that frames his diverse experiences as spiritually and theologically meaningful. In doing so, he offers his readers a model of hybrid piety—an account that makes sense of contradiction by presenting it as providentially orchestrated spiritual growth. This approach, however, highlights Elgrabli's framing of space as divided between realms of piety and secularity, rather than along the more conventional national distinction between Israel and the Diaspora. This division of space opens the door to a new hierarchal categorization of moral space in the continuation of his story about the yeshiva in Lyon.

Revisited East–West Dichotomies

At the time in question and even today, Zionist emissaries and Israeli leaders often portray MENA Jews as a wholly "traditional" society unaffected by secularization or modern ideologies. Seeing this collective as a "backward" "Oriental" Jewish civilization, traditional and old-fashioned Zionist narratives propagated the idea that Europe-oriented Israel bears responsibility not only for the physical rescue of Moroccan Jews but also for their personal and collective cultural advancement.[58]

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[56] Elgrabli, *Tumat Yesharim*, 165.

[57] Ibid., 3-4.

[58] Yaron Tsur, "Carnival Fears: Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel," *Journal of Israeli History* 18, no. 1 (1997): 101-103.

Paradoxically, the modernization processes that the MENA Jewish communities experienced became crucial in highlighting the role of their European Jewish brethren in spiritually "rescuing" them from Western colonialism as they "accommodated modernity." The reasons for such openness became the topic of scholarly debate. Zvi Zohar, a prominent participant in this debate, argues that Sephardi rabbis exhibited a more flexible and accommodating approach to modernity than did their Ashkenazi counterparts, as Sephardi halakhic responses were diverse and not uniformly Orthodox. Zohar attributes this flexibility to the "classical Jewish-Spanish cultural tradition" that Sephardi Judaism inherited from the medieval Muslim-Arab world, which valued the integration of non-Jewish knowledge. This tradition, rooted in the Geonic period (sixth–eleventh centuries CE), allowed for the eventual resurgence of secular studies in Jewish education, particularly in the late nineteenth century as schools in the Middle East, Jewish and other, allowed sacred and secular curricula to mingle.[59]

Conversely, Benjamin Brown argues that the *hakhamim* (rabbis) of the East adopted responses to modernity that were no less Orthodox or reactionary than were those of their European counterparts. In other words, according to Brown, the perceived tolerance in Eastern traditions did not stem from an inherent cultural disposition but rather reflected differing degrees of exposure to European modernity, shaped by geographical and political circumstances.[60] These views reflect earlier ideas developed by Agudas Yisroel and other Haredi Jewish movements in Europe, which posited that Jews in the MENA region were not initially exposed to modernity to the same extent as were their counterparts in

[59] Zvi Zohar, "Orthodoxy Is Not the Only Authentic Halakhic Response to Modernity: Sephardic and Ashkenazic Religious-Halakhic Cultures Are Different," *Akdamot* 10 (2001): 139-151. On Zohar's approach see also Yuval Haruvi, "The 'Long History' of Sephardi Rabbinic Moderation in Israeli Academic and Public Discourse," in *The Long History of the Mizrahim*, eds. Aviad Moreno, Noah Gerber, Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, and Ofer Shiff (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2021), 165-185 [in Hebrew]. For another critique of Zohar's position, see Harvey E. Goldberg, "Sephardic Rabbinic 'Openness' in Nineteenth-Century Tripoli: Examining a Modern Myth in Context," in *Jewish Religious Leadership: Image and Reality*, ed. Jack C. Wertheimer (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2004), 69-71.

[60] Benjamin Brown, "Scholars of the East and the Religious Zealotry: Points for Reexamination," *Akdamot* 10 (2001): 289-324 [in Hebrew]; Benjamin Brown, "Varieties of Orthodox Responses: Ashkenazim and Sephardim," in *Shas: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives*, ed. Aviezer Ravitzky (Tel Aviv: Am Oved and Rabin Center for Israel Studies, 2006), 64 [in Hebrew].

Christian Europe. As colonial expansion increasingly brought European modernity to these regions, however, the belief evolved that European rabbis had to intervene in order to train local Jewish communities to resist as they should.[61]
Elgrabli's spatial division echoes some of these perceptions. Against the backdrop of his experiences at the French Yeshivat Bet Yosef, he delves into a deeper understanding of "true" Judaism and the notion of ascent." In his view, though his hometown in Morocco indeed offered familial piety, it lacked the "advanced *musar*" ("ethicalness" as understood by the Musar Movement) he found in France.[62] In this context, therefore, moving to the Ashkenazi-dominated religious surroundings of France was seen in and of itself as an ascent and an advancement in Torah learning at the expense of his commitment to his origin community well after he found his path to the Ashkenazi Haredi realm.
In France, Elgrabli continues to harbor aspirations of ascent to the next spiritual station. His narrative unfolds with his meaningful encounter with the head of Yeshivat Mir of Brooklyn. This meeting catalyzes his move to the United States and the base of Yeshivat Mir. Upon arriving in America, Elgrabli opts to adjust not to the broader American society but to the Yiddish-speaking Jewish enclave in New York. There, Elgrabli is introduced to a new network, the Satmar Haredi community, known for its severe anti-Zionist stance. To attain full engagement in the yeshiva's classes, he dedicates himself to learning Yiddish, viewing this linguistic adaptation as a necessary step toward saintly upward mobility. His unwavering dedication to his studies and the values of his new yeshiva led to his attainment of a teaching certificate after three years, as he emphasizes in his story. This phase in his spiritual advancement, however, is not his last stop.
In the final part of his narrative, Elgrabli's account of spiritual ascent highlights his spiritual evolution as a contingency of his ability to adapt to new and improved religious environments. He underscores the importance of mentorship along his journey as he navigates from one spiritual hub to the next. In this context, Elgrabli

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[61] Moshe Bar-Yudah, ed., *Halakhah and Openness: The Sages of Morocco as Poskim for Our Generation* (Tel Aviv: Center for Education and Culture of the Histadrut, 1978) [in Hebrew]; Malka Katz, "Religious Zionism and Mizrahi Immigrants, between Positive and Negative Labeling: A Case Study from the First Years of the State," in *The Long History of the Mizrahim,* eds. Aviad Moreno, Noah Gerber, Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, and Ofer Shiff (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2021) 145-165 [in Hebrew].
[62] Elgrabli, *Tumat Yesharim*, 11.

attempts to demonstrate that the journey is not merely a personal one but also a voyage that entails the important step of returning to his hometown Moroccan community. At this point of the story, his main goal is, in fact, to gain recognition and legitimacy as a leader who was divinely chosen to lead—perhaps due to his hybrid character of being a well-trained scholar of a Moroccan origin. I demonstrate this presently.

From the Personal to the Communal

Back to Earth, back to Morocco

While Rabbi Elgrabli's journey overlooks concrete elements of space and time such as specific dates and townscapes, it does feature multiple anecdotes from the material world. His narrative illustrates how his spiritual journey is facilitated by a network of esteemed agents who help him move physically, perhaps as part of his attempt to showcase his acceptance in a global Torah world. For example, he recounts, in his encounter in France with the head of Yeshivat Mir, the letter of invitation that the latter gives him, a *sine qua non* for his obtaining a visa to the United States. Continuing, he reports that the yeshiva dean and a wealthy philanthropist subsidize his travel expenses, enabling him to journey from France to America and to continue to compose his narrative of awakening. Thus, Elgrabli's spiritual journey and his physical migration are deeply intertwined, facilitated by religious networks that grant him social prestige. The international Haredi community that funds his journey is portrayed as effectively substituting for the Zionist network that Elgrabli had initially joined in Morocco to begin his journey out of the country.[63]

His interactions with two famed Hasidic personalities, the Satmar Rebbe and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, further underscore this point. Both rabbis provide not only spiritual guidance but also practical assistance including financial support, a fact Elgrabli chooses to stress. Thus, the Satmar Rebbe subventions Elgrabli's travel expenses and the Lubavitcher Rebbe instructs a follower to honor a promise of

[63] Ibid., 6.

financial aid.[64] It is worth noting that Yeshivat Mir in Brooklyn, unlike its counterpart in Aix-les-Bains, maintained a strictly anti-Zionist stance. During the 1950s, owing to the efforts of the philanthropist Yitzhak Shalom and Rabbi Abraham Kalmanovich, approximately 100 young Moroccan Jews made their way to the yeshiva for studies.[65]

In a surprising twist as the text winds down, Elgrabli's Moroccan origins reappear and are shown to play an important role in his journey, as his ascent is marked by his ability both to give back to the community and to seek personal growth in the spiritual world and its earthly networks. His acquired expertise in kosher poultry slaughter according to the Moroccan rite was a highly sought-after skill in the Sephardi community of Buenos Aires, his next stop after New York. Unlike the Yiddish that he acquired for the American leg of his journey, in Argentina his ability to speak Spanish—as a descendant of a Sephardi community from northern Morocco—enabled him to easily connect and interact with the Spanish-speaking Jewish community in Buenos Aires. In this phase of his personal development, as he helps others to maintain Jewish life, he deems himself to have reached an advanced stage of his trajectory.[66]

Although his narrative seems to describe a linear ascent from lower, less spiritually developed places to higher sanctuaries, Elgrabli's connection to his Moroccan community not only remains firm but is in fact a strong aspect of his advancement. Leveraging his newfound position within the Ashkenazi Haredi world, he actively advocates for his community back in Morocco. One notable example is his initiative to write to the Chief Rabbi of Morocco, asking in effect for matchmaking assistance in order to facilitate connections for single young men in his new Haredi community who are searching for suitable partners.[67]

Gabriel Elgrabli's journey is a testament to the power of local networks to facilitate personal growth and promote community service. Before his wedding, Rabbi Monsonigo, the director of Ozar ha-Torah Haredi Ashkenazi education system in Morocco, has already arranged a teaching position for Elgrabli at the Talmud Torah of Wazan, Morocco. This position not only helps him earn a decent living;

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[64] Ibid., 7.
[65] Dahan, *From the Maghreb*, 145.
[66] Elgrabli, *Tumat Yesharim*, 9.
[67] Ibid., 10.

it also allows him to continue giving back to the community that he had left as an "innocent" and immature teenager. As the account continues, Elgrabli moves to Casablanca two years later, where he continues his service as a ritual slaughterer and a supervisor of kosher food preparers.

To the Holy Land

Elgrabli's spiritual journey and geographical migration are intricately interwoven, each location providing a unique and dynamic spiritual experience that continually shapes his story of spiritual Bildung. Once again, the Holy Land—Eretz Israel—emerges as a site of profound importance in Elgrabli's spiritual cartography. It is not merely a geographic destination but a sacred locus of elevation and self-realization. Within his narrative, the Land of Israel functions as a spiritual axis that enables his continuous ascent and deepening of religious identity. Ultimately, it is Jerusalem—deliberately chosen for its symbolic position at the heart of his spiritual map—that becomes the stage upon which he returns, now transformed into a more refined and seasoned religious figure, capable of guiding and inspiring others. When his parents decide to consummate their 'aliyah, Elgrabli accompanies them. However, instead of settling with his parents and sisters in Nahariya, a town on the far northern coast of the country, he deliberately chooses to establish himself in Jerusalem, the spiritual heart of Judaism. His approach to the Holy Land is also reflected in his attitude toward his living conditions. In contrast to his reference to the importance of his material assets while he lived in France, when he considers selling his Jerusalem apartment to find a better one, his wife reminds him of his "apartment" in heaven, implying that the spiritual significance of their home far outweighs its physical attributes.

"The Chosen One"

Elgrabli's account of his youthful journey out of Morocco is a testament to his unwavering faith and the belief in divine intervention or oversight that guides his life. His journey, marked by significant events and encounters, is seen as miraculous, reinforcing his image as a divinely chosen mentor. The narrative includes references to moving objects such as trains and airplanes, symbols of

globalization and modernization that convey him on his miraculous journey through a secular world. These modes of transportation symbolize change, movement, and progress, taking him from one stage of his life to the next and facilitating his personal and spiritual growth.

Elgrabli's journey is not only about his personal spiritual growth, it also involves his role as a person who can give back to the community. In another instance of closure, his spiritual journey affects his own family network. His travels do not end with his settlement in Jerusalem; they serve instead as a starting point for his brother, Yosef. Initially, Yosef attends the Aix-les-Bains yeshiva in France, which is populated by mainstream Moroccan students. Guided by Elgrabli's advice and likely inspired by his spiritual journey, however, Yosef moves to the Novaredok yeshiva in Fublaines, near Paris, thus beginning his own spiritual and personal journey among hierarchical religious "arks." As Elgrabli's narrative ends, his experiences and decisions not only shape his own spiritual understanding and growth but also influence those around him, particularly his family. This act of mentorship underscores his role as a spiritual leader who is chosen to guide others on their spiritual paths.

Elgrabli's journey is characterized by challenging experiences that test his faith and resilience and catalyze his spiritual growth. One such experience is the fire that destroys his Jerusalem apartment. Though it could have been a moment defined by despair and doubt, Elgrabli interprets it through the lens of faith as a divine decree and an opportunity for spiritual growth. Another significant challenge is the antisemitic assault he experiences in Paris, a moment that could have shaken his faith or made him question his religious identity. He stands firm in his beliefs, however, and refuses to be intimidated or deterred by the bigotry he has met. These challenging experiences, while difficult, catalyze Elgrabli's spiritual growth in his awakening narrative from wrong to right.[68]

[68] Ibid., 11.

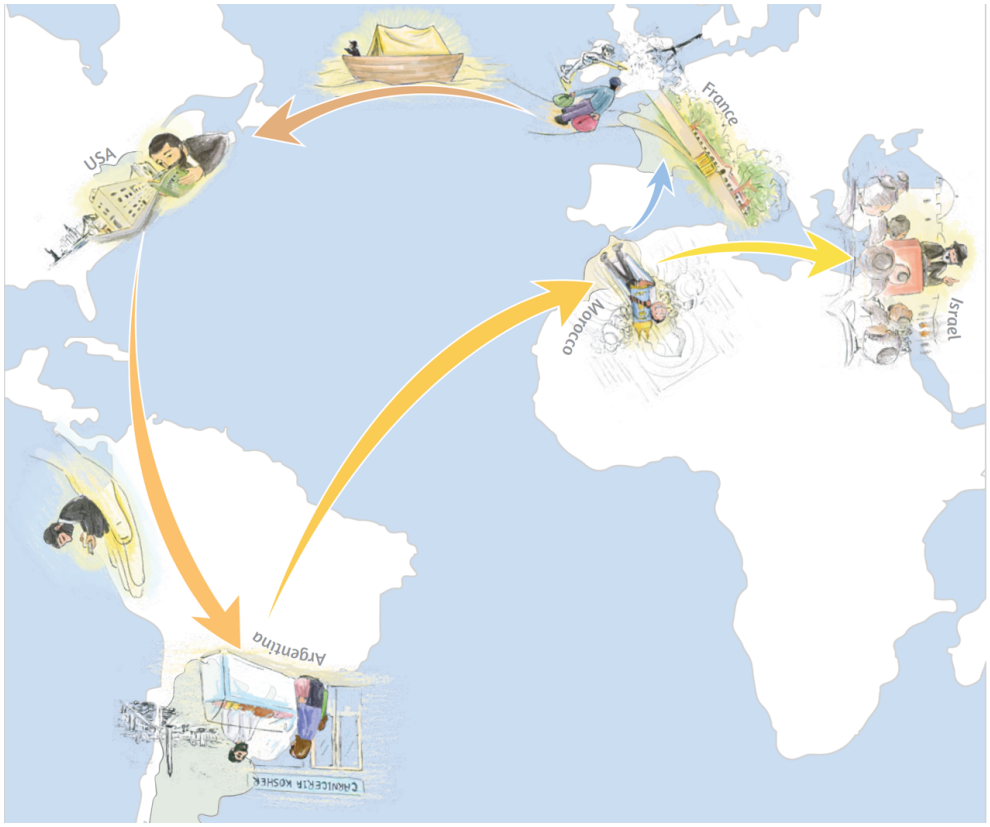

Fig. 4. Fragments of Elgrabli's journey on a map of the world. Illustration by Zohar Gannot, 2025.

Conclusion

Despite the broader developments that shaped the emergence of Sephardi Haredism in Israel, Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli's writing stands out as a deeply personal act of ideological mediation. His narrative reflects not merely the absorption of prevailing Haredi frameworks but a deliberate spiritual synthesis, drawing from diverse and often conflicting sources of authority. As his journey unfolds—from Meknes to Europe, the Americas, and finally Jerusalem—Elgrabli constructed a religious identity that is at once rooted in traditional Sephardi pietism and enriched by immersion in the Musar-infused world of Lithuanian yeshivot. He is not easily classified: neither a classical Porat Yosef Sephardi nor a typical product of the 1980s Sephardi-Lithuanian synthesis; neither a Novaredoker nor a direct disciple of Rabbi Shach or Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. Yet he is paradoxically embraced by some of the most ideologically rigid circles, including the radical stream of the

Eda Haharedit, who refer to him as a *mezakeh et ha-rabbim* (one who brings merit to the public). His endorsements from figures as ideologically diverse as Rabbis Ovadia Yosef, Shalom Messas, and Moshe Halberstam, underscore his unique status as a boundary-crossing religious mediator.

This hybrid position reveals what might be called a "theological diplomacy"—an ability to inhabit contradictory religious worlds without collapsing their boundaries. As a ritual slaughterer and a preacher rather than a traditional Talmudic scholar, Elgrabli circumvents institutional hierarchies while earning widespread rabbinic approbation.

From this perspective, Elgrabli's recounted trajectory from Meknes to Jerusalem lies in reframing the elitist and inward-facing Musar tradition as a message for the spiritual enrichment of the people. Drawing from both the Novaredok emphasis on ethical discipline, and his Moroccan origins he retools Musar for broader audiences—offering them as he moved from one location to the other a spiritual roadmap that is rigorous yet culturally resonant.

In outlining his hybrid identity, Elgrabli constructs a complex moral map that charts a path between seemingly opposing realms. From Meknes to the Ashkenazi yeshiva world of Western Europe and the U.S., and back to the global Moroccan community, each stop adds to his spiritual credentials and reinforces his self-fashioning as a "chosen one. His story is a tale of spiritual tests and divine encounters, each marking a phase in a transformative journey. As he recounts it, the countries he traverses become less important than the sacred spaces and figures he engages—saints, yeshivot, and holy writings that map a transnational world of divine connection. Ultimately, Elgrabli's narrative challenges dominant metanarratives of migration and identity in Jewish modernity, as well as the spiritual geographies of the anti-Zionist Ashkenazi Haredi world. Its hybrid nature offers an alternative mental map—one that connects distinct centers and weaves them together to create new geographical imaginary tailored for his readers and audience.

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Keywords: Sephardi, Awakening Narratives, Musar Movement (Novaredok), Morocco, Israel, *Haredi* anti-Zionism, Migration Narratives

How to quote this article:
Aviad Moreno, "Mapping Moral Paths: The Spiritual Geography of Moroccan Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli," in "(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East," eds. Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15949

"From Egypt and Back": Alternative Collective Memories among Egyptian Jews in Israel

by *Alon Tam*

Abstract

An analysis of the content and membership profile of the Facebook group "From Egypt and Back," one of the biggest and most active groups of Egyptian Jews, in or out of social media, reveals the alternative that it has created to the dominant narrative in Egyptian Jewish collective memory, particularly in Israel. Whereas the dominant narrative has glorified the bourgeois, Frenchified, urban life of Egyptian Jews, "From Egypt and Back" has given voice to lower-middle-class and lower-class Jews and their experiences of Cairo, in particular. Its members have created a different mental map of Cairo that features its non-bourgeois neighborhoods, immersed in Egyptian-Arabic culture. This has generated high feelings of nostalgia, whose role as an emotion that affirms identity and cultural heritage, one that connects group members to their parents and family, and creates a community, will also be explored.

Introduction

City, Social Class, Dispersion, and Collective Memory among Egyptian Jews

"From Egypt and Back": Memories from Below

Conclusion

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Fig. 1. Illustration by Zohar Gannot, 2025.

Introduction

This article offers a deep analysis of the Facebook group "From Egypt and Back" (Yetzi'at Mitzraim ve-be-Hazarah, in Hebrew, which can also be translated more literally as "The Exodus and Back"), including an analysis of its content, membership profile, and operation. With more than 10,600 registered members as of September 2024, it is one of the biggest groups of Egyptian Jews, in or out of social media. It is also one of the most active groups dedicated to Egyptian Jews on social media, with sometimes more than a dozen posts each day, thus justifying our attention.[1] Based on the posts and comments in this group, as well as on interviews with its creator and administrator, I will argue that it has created an alternative to the dominant narrative in Egyptian Jewish collective memory, as it has developed since the middle of the twentieth century, particularly in Israel. Whereas the dominant narrative has glorified the bourgeois, Frenchified, urban life of Jews in Cairo or Alexandria and their contributions to Egypt, as a backdrop to their expulsion, "From Egypt and Back" has given voice to lower-middle-class

[1] "From Egypt and Back," https://www.facebook.com/groups/1528403684101271. All references to Facebook pages and posts in this article were last accessed on September 15, 2024.

and lower-class Jews and their experiences of Cairo, and to a lesser extent, also Alexandria. Its members have created a different mental map of Cairo that features its non-bourgeois neighborhoods, immersed in Egyptian-Arabic culture. This alternative mental map and the attachment to the Arabic language, and even to contemporary Egyptian culture, also manifest and generate high emotions. As a salient feature of "From Egypt and Back," I will explore the role of nostalgia as an emotion that affirms identity and cultural heritage, that connects group members to their parents and family, through space and custom. This analysis will rely on heavily contextualizing the contemporary activity of "From Egypt and Back" in the social and cultural history of Jews in Egypt.

This article, then, aims at contributing to several scholarly conversations, first and foremost, to the study of Egyptian Jews. There are only a handful of works that examine Egyptian Jews as a diasporic community, or its collective memory. Joel Beinin's classic monograph on the dispersal of Jews from Egypt also traces the social history of those who settled in Israel and the United States during the first years after migration, and Racheline Barda did the same for Egyptian Jews in Australia.[2] Much more relevant to the present study are Dario Miccoli's and Michèle Baussant's works. Miccoli's recent monograph *A Sephardi Sea* compares three diasporic Jewish communities, from Egypt, Algeria, and Libya, who settled in Israel, France, and Italy. It focuses on these communities' nostalgia literature, associational life, and internet activity, and expertly examines them together as *lieux de mémoire*, using Pierre Nora's famous concept.[3] Baussant's articles tackle such issues as the links between autobiographical and historical memory, refracted through the experience of migration and displacement, or heritage making among Egyptian Jews in the diaspora, from an ethnographic and anthropological point of view.[4] Both Miccoli and Baussant focus primarily on Jews who came from

[2] Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Racheline Barda, *Egyptian-Jewish Emigres in Australia* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011).

[3] Dario Miccoli, *A Sephardi Sea: Jewish Memories Across the Modern Mediterranean*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2022).

[4] Michèle Baussant, "'Seeing the voices': Egyptian Jews from one shore to another," *Conserveries mémorielles* 25 (2022); Baussant, "'Who Gave You the Right to Abandon Your Prophets?' Jewish Sites of Ruins and Memory in Egypt," *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC*, no. 16 (2019), doi: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/1298; Baussant, "Heritage and Memory: The Example of an Egyptian Jewish Association," *International Social Science Journal*

bourgeois families in Egypt and the kinds of memories that they have produced, as well as the role that those memories have played in building a diasporic community and identity, either in France or in Israel. Although very much aware of their bourgeois background in Egypt, Miccoli and Baussant have not focused on social class as a force, as a category of identity, that shaped their commemorative narratives after migration, and they have not considered alternative narratives produced by Egyptian Jews from lower-class background who did not participate in the major commemorative activities organized by bourgeois-background Egyptian Jews in the diaspora. By focusing on lower-class Egyptian Jews, their memories, the mental maps of the places that they left, and the emotions that they expressed, this article both builds on, and fills in, the gaps in Miccoli's and Baussant's groundbreaking works.

A brief note on terminology, theory, and methodology is warranted here. First, in the long and rich scholarly debates on the definition of social classes, I adhere to the view that social class is defined by *both* economic criteria, *and* cultural practices, or habitus, as the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu termed it. I also acknowledge that the category "middle-class" had, in historical reality, many gradations within it, and therefore I use the term "bourgeoisie" to refer to the "upper-middle-class," and especially to the urban culture, or habitus, that it dictated, and that many of the lower classes aspired to, or tried to emulate. In particular, I make the distinction between the bourgeoisie, or upper-middle-class, and the lower-middle-class, since most members of the Facebook group which is the focus of this study, belonged to that lower-middle-class, or even to the lower, or working, class.[5]

62, no. 203-204 (2011): 45-56; Baussant, "Aṣlak Eh? De Juif En Égypte à Juif d'Égypte," *Diasporas* 27 (2016): 77-93; Baussant, "Un territoire disparu: quels acteurs en gardent la mémoire ? L'exemple des Juifs d'Egypte" in *Ethnographie de la mémoire, de Villeurbanne à Valparaiso: Territoires, terrains et échelles d'observation,* eds. Michèle Baussant, Marina Chauliac, Sarah Gensburger, and Nancy Venel (Nanterre: Presses de l'Université de Paris Ouest, 2018), 153-170.

[5] For a pioneering study of the Egyptian middle-class: Lucie Ryzova, *The Age of the Efendiyya: Passages to Modernity in National-Colonial Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). I differ, though, from Ryzova, who defines the middle-class solely in cultural terms, in that I highlight the intersection between cultural and economic factors. Alon Tam, "Between 'Ḥarat al-Yahud' and 'Paris on the Nile': Social Mobility and Urban Culture among Jews in Twentieth-Century Cairo," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 28, no. 2 (2023): 203-237.

Second, in the long and rich scholarship about collective memory, this article follows the idea of competing memories promoted by historians such as John Bodnar, while highlighting the intersections between such competitions and social class, as defined above. In so doing, I offer here a distinction between *official memory*, *hegemonic memory*, and *alternative memory*. All these concepts build, of course, on the understanding reached by sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs, and others, that individuals remember, organize, and interpret memories only in a particular social context, and that such memories transform a social group into a *memory community*.[6] Later historians have acknowledged the existence of several collective memories in a single memory community, and asserted that different groups within a single community develop different and sometimes competing collective memories that perceive that community's past, traditions, heritage and heroes in different ways. These dynamics, in turn, result in a struggle to achieve hegemony for one of the collective memories, or narratives, while marginalizing or even "forgetting" others. There is a direct correlation between the success of one group to propagate its collective memory, and its central position in the cultural and/or political power structure. But whereas Bodnar associated official memory with the commemorative acts of the state, and vernacular memory, to use his term, with the commemorative acts of non-governmental organizations, I extend this idea almost entirely to the non-governmental level.[7] I consider the commemorative narratives produced by bourgeois-background Egyptian Jews through their associations, events, publications, and websites, to be the *hegemonic collective memory* of Egyptian Jews, and the memories told by members of "From Egypt and Back," who come from a lower-class background, to be an *alternative collective memory*. I contrast and compare them, and also discuss their interactions with the official memory promoted by the State of Israel. Thus, I complicate Bodnar's bifurcated theoretical model that focused only on state and non-state actors, by exposing the existence of a marginalized memory community within a larger one, that in itself is not a state actor, but is in constant process of negotiation with the state, sometimes echoing the official memory it

[6] Maurice Halbwachs, *La Mémoire Collective*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).

[7] John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

promotes, and sometimes countering it. The same process of negotiation repeats itself within the Egyptian Jewish memory community, where the bourgeois one becomes the hegemonic memory, and the lower-class one becomes the alternative memory. Since Halbwachs taught us that the collective memories of the past are always about the concerns of the present rather than the accuracy of historical realities, I will also contextualize the memory that "From Egypt and Back" produces within the socio-economic realities of its members, both in the past and in their present. By contrast, a full description of the official (state's) collective memory, and of the hegemonic (bourgeois) one among Egyptian Jews, is beyond the scope of this article, especially as they have been studied by Miccoli, Baussant, and others.

Third, as a salient feature of "From Egypt and Back," I also explore the relationship between, or intersection of, the emotion of nostalgia, and collective memory work. How has this Facebook group generated nostalgia? What was its role in creating this Facebook group, and what role does it have in the social bonds formed between members of the group? What role does nostalgia have in shaping the collective memory created by them? As historian Agnes Arnold-Forster recently showed, nostalgia has a long medical history: it once was considered by European medical establishments as a life-threatening mental illness, affecting, for example, homesick soldiers.[8] But even today, when nostalgia is no longer commonly associated with mental illness, and is even co-opted to sell goods and policies, it still often harbors a negative connotation of longing to a past that is no longer there, and perhaps never was, a notion of being stuck in the past, unable to move on. This article, however, shows how the particular collective memory created by "From Egypt And Back" has produced nostalgia as an affirming emotion, one that brings solace and even joy to its members, an emotion that builds community, and connects people to places and culture.

Finaly, this article is informed by methods used in the burgeoning field of digital ethnography, although it is not one as such. Methodologically, it is based more on a textual analysis that aims to examine the narrative created in the collective memory of "From Egypt and Back." To do so, I analyze the posts and comments by members of this group, in their aggregate. I have been following this group

[8] Agnes Arnold-Forster, *Nostalgia: A History of a Dangerous Emotion* (London: Picador, 2024).

closely since 2018, and for this article, I also performed research on its content since its creation in 2015. It is set as a "visible" but "private" group on Facebook, which means that anyone can find it, but can only see posts and participate if their membership application is approved by its administrators. I, therefore, do not cite the names of members who post in this group, in order to protect their expectation of privacy, and I describe the kinds of different content posted in the group only on the aggregate. In special cases, I describe, without quoting, specific posts by date, as representative examples of the content in the group. In addition, I interviewed Doron Sakal, the creator of the group, and Levana Levi, its administrator, in August of 2024, in order to gain insight into the operation and profile of the group. It should also be noted that the very nature of the platform makes its content ephemeral: posts and comments can be deleted, either by their authors, the group administrators, or Facebook itself, which can also make it difficult to retrieve posts. Such a close reading of this content is aimed at contributing to the growing scholarly interest in social media as a major actor in collective memory and heritage making, and in community and diaspora building.[9]

In what follows, I will first offer a brief account of the social and urban history of Jews in Egypt, particularly in Cairo, of their dispersal, and the making of what I call their hegemonic collective memory, in order to give context to the following content analysis of "From Egypt and Back."

[9] On digital ethnography, see: Robert V. Kozinets, *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online* (London: Sage, 2010); Christine Hine, *Virtual Ethnography* (London: Sage, 2000); Arturo Escobar, "Welcome to Cyberia: Notes on the Anthropology of Cyberculture [and Comments and Reply]," *Current Anthropology* 35, no. 3 (1994): 211-231. On digital diasporas: Anna Everett, *Digital Diaspora: A Race for Cyberspace* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009); Jennifer M. Brinkerhoff, *Digital Diasporas: Identity and Transnational Engagement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On collective memory and social media: Jowan Mahmod, "New Online Communities and New Identity Making: The Curious Case of the Kurdish Diaspora," *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2019), 34-43; Bruno Góis, "Connected Colonial Nostalgia: Content and Interactions of the Retornados e Refugiados de Angola Facebook Group" in *The Retornados from the Portuguese Colonies in Africa: History, Memory, and Narrative,* ed. Elsa Peralta (London-New York: Routledge, 2021), 284-304; Tamar Ashuri, "(Web)sites of Memory and the Rise of Moral Mnemonic Agents," *New Media and Society* 14, no. 3 (2011): 441-456.

City, Social Class, Dispersion, and Collective Memory among Egyptian Jews

Although boasting millennia-worth of history, the Jewish community in Egypt as we know it in the middle of the twentieth century was only about a century old. According to conservative estimates, some 5,000 Jews lived in Egypt in 1840. A century later, by 1947, that number had skyrocketed to 65,639.[10] This 13-fold increase was the product of a large-scale Jewish migration from across the Middle East, North Africa, the Mediterranean, and Europe. The motives were mostly economic: Egypt's economy grew exponentially (albeit not in a linear way) since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the success of its cotton industry, and foreign investment fueled by the arrival of British colonialism in the 1880s. Jews also belonged to a major population shift that accompanied Egypt's urbanization. Economic growth and state consolidation prompted large-scale migration from the countryside to Egypt's two main cities, Cairo and Alexandria. As a result, Jewish communities in smaller towns and villages across the Nile delta were all but gone by the interwar period, when about 90 percent of Jewish Egyptians lived in either Cairo or Alexandria.[11]

Most Jewish immigrants to Egypt, as well as Jewish internal migrants, succeeded in integrating into the country's emerging middle class. Historians estimated that as much as 60 percent of the Jewish community in the interwar period was middle class, while some 10 percent were elites, or very rich, and the rest were lower class or poor (lumpenproletariat). Middle-class Jews were mostly merchants or commercial agents, retailers, bureaucrats, administrators, salespeople, craftsmen, and professionals. To reach the middle class, many Egyptian Jews took advantage of the favorable investment and business climate facilitated by British colonialism, though only a few profited directly from it. Egyptian Jews deemed modern education, especially in French, to be paramount for upward mobility. Jewish

[10] Gudrun Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914–1952* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989), 10, table 1. The number for 1840 is an estimate, while the one for 1947 is from the Egyptian census. Most experts agree that this is an undercount, and that Jewish Egyptians in the middle of the twentieth century numbered around 80,000; members of the community put that number at 100,000. Be that as it may, it is clear that their numbers grew exponentially during that century, due mostly to mass immigration rather than natural growth.

[11] Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, 8-68.

families and the organized community invested great resources in education, the ticket to securing coveted administrative jobs (*employé*). This was all the more important since even one middle-income salary could provide a middle-class lifestyle for an entire family. But as crucial as education, bureaucratic employment, and business were, Egyptian Jews also relied on other social and cultural strategies to gain entry into the Egyptian middle class.[12]

One of those major strategies was internal urban migration from old neighborhoods to the new and modern ones that had been rapidly constructed around them since the middle of the nineteenth century in all major cities around the Middle East. In Cairo, Khedive Ismail (r. 1863-1879) is usually credited with initiating a building spree following the economic boom of the 1860s, and with building a "new city" outside the "old" one that would be nothing less than "Paris on the Nile." Thus, the new neighborhoods he commissioned west of old Cairo were fitted with wide, straight boulevards, squares, French and Italian architecture, a park, a modern opera house, theaters, even a circus. Another wave of urban expansion, even greater in scale, took place between the 1890s and 1920s. The new neighborhoods created new social realities. One was class division: whereas rich and poor lived together in old Cairo, the city's westward expansion created a playground for the aristocracy and the rich. But Egypt's economic boom also allowed the emerging middle-class to move into these neighborhoods, while the upper class relocated farther west toward the Nile, eventually skipping over to its western bank, now known as Giza. By the 1920s, class division was inscribed onto Cairo's new map: the old city was inhabited by the lower classes and the poor, many of whom were recent migrants from around the country, while new neighborhoods were populated by the middle class. The upper class built their villas on the banks of the Nile or in other suburban areas.[13]

Data from the Egyptian national censuses of 1907, 1937, and 1947 reflect geographic trends in the distribution of Jews in Cairo in the first four decades of the twentieth century. First, they show that the total number of Jews living in

[12] Ibid., 36-58; Dario Miccoli, *Histories of the Jews of Egypt: An Imagined Bourgeoisie, 1880s-1950s* (London-New York: Routledge, 2015).

[13] Jean-Luc Arnaud, *Le Caire, mise en place d'une ville moderne, 1867–1907: des intérêts du prince aux sociétés privées* (Arles: Sindbad-Actes Sud, 1998); Mercedes Volait, "Making Cairo Modern (1870–1950): Multiple Models for a 'European-Style' Urbanism," in *Urbanism: Imported or Exported?*, ed. Joe Nasr and Mercedes Volait (Chichester: Wiley-Academy, 2003).

Cairo more than doubled between 1907 and 1947, from 20,281 to 41,860, respectively (the latter being around 63 percent of Jews living in Egypt at the time, according to conservative estimates). Second, the data show where Jews in Cairo were concentrated: while the Jewish population in Cairo's old neighborhoods shrank, it increased in intermediate neighborhoods and grew exponentially in new ones. These numbers include both Jews who moved out of old Cairo and Jewish immigrants who settled in the city's new districts from the start. In old Cairo, Jews had been concentrated in Ḥārat al-Yahūd (the Jewish Quarter, in Arabic), the only Jewish neighborhood popularly identified as such. Until the late nineteenth century, most Jews, rich and poor, lived there, where most synagogues were located. Like other main urban areas of old Cairo, Ḥārat al-Yahūd was not separated from Muslim and Christian quarters and, consequently, was never exclusively Jewish.[14]

As for the new neighborhoods, census data show that by 1947, around half of all Jews living in Cairo were concentrated in the districts of al-Wayli and ʻAbdīn. Al-Wayli bordered old Cairo to its west and included the well-known neighborhoods of Daher and Abbasiyah, home to most Jews in the district. Most new synagogues, built in the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, were located there, as were new Jewish schools, yeshivot, community offices, and the Beit Din. The new district of ʻAbdīn was located farther southwest of old Cairo, toward the Nile, and not only did it include its namesake, the new Khedival palace of ʻAbdīn, but also parts of the swanky ʼIsmaʻiliyyah neighborhood, later known as Downtown Cairo, or Wusṭ al-Balad in Arabic. Dominant narratives in the collective memory of Egyptian Jews usually invoke Downtown Cairo or the richer suburbs of Heliopolis to the northeast of the old city, and Maʻādī to the southwest. But census data clearly show that the Jewish population in new neighborhoods was split almost evenly between ʻAbdīn and al-Wayli, meaning that there were at least as many Jews living in lower middle-class Daher and ʻAbbasiyah, closer to Ḥārat al-Yahūd, as there were Jews living in the upper middle-class Bab al-Luq in Downtown Cairo, for example.[15]

[14] Tam, "Between 'Ḥarat al-Yahud' and 'Paris on the Nile'."

[15] Ibid.

The sharp dichotomy between Ḥārat al-Yahūd, Daher and Abbasiyah, and the even more affluent neighborhoods and suburbs, was central to the ways that Cairo's Jewish middle class imagined its own middle-classness. In the Jewish Egyptian press of the 1930s and 1940s, both in French and in Arabic, middle-class writers described Ḥārat al-Yahūd in classist and bleak terms, in order to move middle-class readers to action on behalf of the Ḥārah and its poor inhabitants. These newspapers described it as poor, backward, dilapidated, diseased, smelly, and religiously traditional. Such descriptions were later repeated in personal memories of Jews from the bourgeois neighborhoods even after they migrated to Israel and elsewhere.[16]

Jews were forced to leave Egypt, in one way or another, in waves that followed three major wars between Egypt and Israel, in 1948, 1956, and 1967, the most significant of which occurred in 1957. About half of them eventually settled in Israel, while the other half dispersed all over the globe, with France, the United States, and Brazil being the most significant destinations.[17] One could assume that the memory of this dispersal—indeed dubbed by some as the "Second Exodus"—would mar the memory of Jewish life in Egypt before it, as happened with other displaced communities, including Jewish ones. But with very few exceptions, this has not been the case. Invariably, Egyptian Jews in Israel, the United States, and France, have been remembering Jewish life in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century as a "Golden Age," or "La Belle Époque." This narrative motif has served to emphasize how abrupt, and shocking, was "the expulsion," as they have termed it, rather than a natural climax of a history of oppression and escalating tensions between Jews and Muslims.

In that framework of collective memory, expressed through memoirs, fiction, magazines, exhibitions, and conferences, Egyptian Jews have emphasized their various contributions to the Egyptian economy, culture, and social life. But most of all, they have produced memories of a very bourgeois life, a dolce vita. They

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[16] Ibid., 216-220. For the persistence of such descriptions of Cairo in the memory of Egyptian Jews in Israel: Liat Maggid-Alon, "The Jewish Bourgeoisie in Egypt in the First Half of the Twentieth Century: A Gender and Family Perspective" (PhD diss., Ben Gurion University, 2018) [in Hebrew].

[17] Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*; Michael M. Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt, 1920-1970: In the Midst of Zionism, Anti-Semitism, and the Middle East Conflict* (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

have remembered the modern new neighborhoods that were built in Cairo and Alexandria in European style; shopping at the high-end Cicurel or Chemla department stores; frequenting famous coffeehouses like Groppi and La Parisiana; or going to French schools like the Lycée Français. They have reminisced about social or sports clubs, from very elite ones, such as the Maʿādi Sports Club, to middle-class Jewish ones, such as the Maccabi clubs (sports were a very middle-class, and new, leisure activity). They have remembered going to the cinema, and watching French, American, and Egyptian films in Arabic; and they recalled summer vacations on the Mediterranean, especially at the high-end Ras al-Barr resort.[18]

All of these places are located in the new neighborhoods of Cairo (and Alexandria); Ḥārat al-Yahūd has not been featured among them in the hegemonic collective memory of Egyptian Jews after their dispersal. This is not a coincidence, of course: it is evident that those who have been doing the remembering came from the same social group—namely, the Jewish bourgeoisie—that while still in Egypt had depicted the Ḥārah as a "dump" in a discursive way that established their own, newly achieved, social status. Only when asked about it, bourgeois Jews in Israel would again emphasize how removed they were from the Ḥārah: they asserted that they usually had not set foot in it—except maybe to buy matzos for Passover—or that they had nothing in common, socially or culturally, with the "people from the Ḥārah," and would not mix with them.[19]

As collective memory always serves the interests of the present rather than truly depicting the past, there was another reason for emphasizing the bourgeois life back in Egypt, even after they left it. Starting life all over again, essentially as refugees, meant a sharp downward mobility for most middle-class Jews from Egypt, wherever they ended up at, especially in Israel. Therefore, emphasizing middle-class social and cultural capital, in the absence of real economic one, was a way to assert self-worth in face of adversity, to build collective identity, and to

[18] Miccoli, *A Sephardi Sea,* 64-120.

[19] Maggid-Alon, "The Jewish Bourgeoisie in Egypt in the First Half of the Twentieth Century."

mark future life goals, especially for the younger generations. It was one strategy among several to regain that middle-class social status.[20]

The advent of social media platforms helped to democratize the public discourse around Egyptian Jewish collective memory, and enabled the denizens of Ḥārat al-Yahūd to finally have a voice. With very few exceptions, they have not usually participated in the traditional ways of manufacturing collective memory, such as writing books, making films, creating exhibitions, or even participating in activities of communal associations, such as the Association of Egyptian Jews in Israel, and similar organizations in France and the United States. Therefore, social media platforms such as Facebook provided them with an outlet for their memories, which have hitherto been confined to oral storytelling among family and friends.

The plethora of Facebook groups are a relatively new actor on the collective memory scene: at least a dozen groups of Jewish Egyptians have been active since the 2000s. Some of them are associated with existing groups and associations outside of social media, and members of other groups clearly come from the Jewish Egyptian bourgeoisie. They have reproduced the same hegemonic bourgeois narrative of La Belle Époque through posting vintage photographs and short videos of streets and buildings in the (now old) "new" neighborhoods of Cairo: stating that they remember those places associates them with European-style bourgeoisie. Such images also underscore the fact that the world depicted in them is "frozen in time," belongs to a bygone era: by the twenty-first century, those streets and neighborhoods, such as Downtown Cairo, have fallen themselves into disrepair, and are now considered old and outdated, remnants of a European colonial past. Those bourgeois Jews, now living in France or Israel, are content to identify with those places, in order to distance themselves from Arab culture and identity.[21]

"From Egypt and Back": Memories from Below

[20] Liat Alon, "Class Performativity, Modernity and the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi Divide the Jewish Urban Middle Classes of Egypt in Israel 1948-1967," *Journal of Israeli History* 40, no. 1 (2022): 43-60.

[21] Miccoli, *A Sephardi Sea*.

Doron Sakal, an educator and independent researcher of Egyptian history, created "From Egypt and Back" in 2015. Born in Egypt in 1954, he left it for Israel, with his family, in 1965, because his Egyptian-born mother (whose family migrated to Egypt from Jaffa) also held a Tunisian passport, and was ordered to leave Egypt, along with all Tunisian citizens, when the two countries broke relations. His Egyptian father, whose ancestors migrated from Syria, had a button workshop and a button store in the Mūskī, an intermediate area between the old and new neighborhoods of Cairo, and he was also the gabbai in the Pahad Yitzhaq (Kraim) synagogue, located in the Sakākīnī area of Daher, where the family also lived. Socio-economically then, the Sakal family was a lower-middle-class family at best. Although Doron studied at French schools (which included Arabic classes), by the 1950s he grew up in an Arabic-speaking home and environment. Overall, Sakal has unusually vivid memories, for his young age at migration, and very fond ones, of his home and school, the synagogues in Daher and Abbasiyyah, the shops in the Ḥārah, and the streets of those neighborhoods. He remembers growing up with other Jewish friends and families, saying he was not aware at the time that most of the Jewish community in Egypt had already left.[22]

Levana Levi, the administrator of "From Egypt and Back," was born in Cairo's Ḥārat al-Yahūd in 1960, and lived there until she left Egypt with her family in 1970. Her father and uncle had a variety shop in the Ḥārah, and their ancestors migrated to Cairo from the town of Banhā in the Nile Delta, where they had lived for generations. Although Banhā is a city, it is nestled in the rich Delta farmland and has historically been known for crafts and the cultivation of attar, and Levi described her father as a "fallāḥ," (peasant in Arabic). Her mother, on the other hand, was born and raised in Daher to a family of migrants from Lebanon with an Italian/Greek and Sephardi backgrounds: she was educated in French schools, and spoke Ladino with one of her older relatives. Levi says that her mother suffered from the social downgrade she had to endure when moving from Daher to the Ḥārah upon her marriage. She endeavored to teach her children French, and she took them to visits and excursions through Daher, the swanky neighborhoods of Cairo, and the Mediterranean. Overall, however, Levi's socioeconomic

[22] Interview with Doron Sakal, by the author, August 28, 2024.

background can be determined as lower-class. Her father was imprisoned for almost three years when the 1967 war with Israel broke out, like all Jewish men in Egypt, and it hit her mother and siblings hard economically: they had to get by on the gains from selling her father's shop. The family left for Israel soon after his release. Levi does not remember many other Jews in the Ḥārah, or a bustling Jewish life, when she grew up there, not even within her own family. She does remember her family being harassed by non-Jewish neighbors when the 1967 war started. But her most vivid and fond memories are the sights, smells, and sounds of the Ḥārah streets, and the fun she had with her mother on the excursions out of the Ḥārah.[23]

Sakal created "From Egypt and Back" as a way of serving his parents' memory, of satisfying his growing interest in the Jewish history and culture of Egypt, and of preserving Jewish Egyptian heritage for future generations. For Levi, who is also an administrator in other Facebook groups of Egyptian Jews, "From Egypt and Back"—which is her favorite group—is a way to rekindle and relive her childhood memories, to reconnect with Egypt, and to find community.[24] Sakal shared his thoughts about the purpose of the group in a post from 26 September 2021, and the group members who commented on it agreed with him enthusiastically, while expressing Levi's feelings as well. They emphasized that even though they left Egypt, Egypt has not left them. They expressed great nostalgia for their childhood's Egypt, as well as pride in their Jewish Egyptian heritage, identity, and customs. They also emphasized the importance of recording their memories as a way to transfer that heritage to their children.[25]

Sakal and Levi have a strict "no politics of any kind" policy, not Israeli, not Egyptian, nor any other politics. They do not allow any offensive discourse that involves racism, misogyny, any other kind of hatred, or personal attacks, and they also do not allow any posts or comments that are not relevant to the topic of Jews in Egypt. These policies are aimed at keeping "From Egypt and Back" as a non-toxic space, and a welcoming, enjoyable, one. Sakal and Levi do not pre-approve posts in the group, but they do monitor every one of them and remove any post

[23] Interview with Levana Levi, by the author, August 27, 2024.

[24] Interview with Sakal; Interview with Levi.

[25] "From Egypt and Back," September 26, 2021.

that they deem to be against their policies; occasionally they also removed members from the group, whom they felt crossed the line repeatedly.[26]

Sakal made explicit efforts in the past to enlarge the membership of the group: in a post from 23 November 2020, when the group already had around 7,000 members, Sakal called on them to invite more: members responded that they already invited their families and friends—including friends who regularly meet in a little Israeli coffeeshop (Kiosk)—and that they also publicized the group on their own personal Facebook pages. They emphasized how much they enjoyed the group, though some cautioned against preferring quantity over quality of members. Others wished for in-person meetings, and someone mentioned a large and successful meeting that took place in Bat Yam around 2015, an Israeli city south of Tel Aviv where many Egyptian Jews had settled. In March 2021, one member even suggested an organized trip to Egypt. Although when interviewed, Sakal and Levi said that regular, large, organized, in-person meetings have not yet materialized, they did say that they personally knew some of the members, and that small personal meetings must occasionally occur.[27]

The posts mentioned above certainly indicate a continuum from the virtual to the real world, and an eagerness to make real-world connections and experiences. "From Egypt and Back" has certainly provided a platform to make such connections: a post from 26 October 2020 about someone who was trying to assemble their family tree garnered some 230 comments, in which group members found family ties to one another, or other connections based on a shared origin, such as family hailing from Banhā. In another post from 14 February 2016, one member told how he found family ties based on Sakal's father's connection to the Kraim synagogue in Daher. His story prompted enthusiastic comments about finding personal connections and roots through a Facebook group: one member even wondered, poignantly (and rhetorically), where was this Facebook group when she needed it most after migrating from Egypt to Israel. She continued by posting a poem she wrote in Hebrew about her feelings of uprootedness upon migration, about her feeling of belonging to Egypt but not being wanted there, and about feeling estranged in Israel.[28]

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[26] Interview with Sakal; Interview with Levi.

[27] "From Egypt and Back," November 23, 2020; Interview with Sakal; Interview with Levi.

[28] "From Egypt and Back," October 26, 2020; "From Egypt and Back," February 14, 2016.

It is evident that most active members in "From Egypt and Back" share Sakal's and Levi's background. A post from 14 December 2020 asked explicitly about the geographic origins of group members, assuming that most were from Cairo or Alexandria: 144 comments confirmed that assumption, specifying that most came from the Cairene neighborhoods of Ḥārat al-Yahūd, Daher, or Abbasiyyah; other members stated they came from the smaller cities of Banhā, Ismailiyah, Port Said, or Ṭanṭā. These and other comments also indicated that group members were barely teenagers when they left Egypt with their families, but that they did so after the principal wave of migration in 1957, like Sakal and Levi. It is also evident that most members migrated and settled in Israel, not only from the stories that they share, but also from the sheer fact that the "working language" of "From Egypt and Back" is Hebrew. I will elaborate below on how this shared geographical, chronological, and linguistic background differs from the one shared by the hegemonic voices in Egyptian Jewish collective memory, and how it produces alternative narratives.[29]

These differences, which are ultimately class-based, are also manifested in the real-life attitude of group members toward the Association of Egyptian Jews in Israel, the principal vehicle for Egyptian Jewish hegemonic collective memory in Israel. Posts about the annual meeting ("congress") of the Association, that Miccoli had investigated, have usually elicited congratulations and interest from group members, but also surprise at not hearing about it in advance ("was it a secret meeting?!," exclaimed one commenter).[30] This reveals the limits of the Association's outreach, which are partly caused by practical issues, such as the management of its outreach, which is based on a voluntary mailing list, or the practical difficulties of older and less mobile Egyptian Jews who do not live in central Israel to commute to those meetings. But there are other obstacles as well: Sakal mentioned rivalries between the Tel-Aviv-based Association and other, non-formal, groups of Egyptian Jews in other cities in Israel; he also expressed some disappointment—not entirely merited—from the limited scale of the Association's activity in promoting Egyptian Jewish heritage compared to similar associations of other Jewish communities from the Middle East and North Africa.

[29] "From Egypt and Back," December 14, 2020.

[30] "From Egypt and Back," June 22, 2023.

Moreover, Levi also indicated a certain feeling of social uneasiness in meetings of the Association, a feeling that people like her do not belong there.[31]

The social and cultural background of the administrators and members of "From Egypt and Back" shapes its content as well. Its most conspicuous feature is its immersion in, and great affection for, spoken Egyptian-Arabic language and culture, even though the "working language" of the group is Hebrew. Both its administrators and members frequently post questions about the meaning of specific phrases and proverbs in spoken Egyptian Arabic of the mid-twentieth century, badly transliterated in Hebrew characters.[32] Conversely, they also ask how would one say something in Arabic.[33] Moreover, respondents often insert many Arabic phrases in their Hebrew-language comments. Posts in written Arabic exist but are rare, and use of Modern Standard Arabic (fuṣḥa) is even rarer. These posts about, or with, Egyptian spoken Arabic are highly popular, and garner enthusiastic and loving responses, judged by the tenor of the comments and emojis.

This interest, and use, of spoken Egyptian Arabic are a very powerful contrast to the hegemonic collective memory of Egyptian Jews. The latter highlights French language and culture, both in the language used in most Facebook groups of Egyptian Jews, as well as in their stories and memories told in gatherings, and even in families. This linguistic divide is, of course, class-based: these were bourgeois Jews, or Jews aspiring to be bourgeois, who studied in French-speaking schools back in Egypt, who spoke French with friends and family, and took part in the Frenchified urban culture of Cairo or Alexandria. By contrast, Jews who have remained immersed in Arabic language and (urban) culture came from lower-middle-class socioeconomic background at best, and/or left Egypt in the 1960s, when Arabization and Egyptianization (in terms of driving all those deemed as "foreigners" out of the country) were already in full swing. To be sure, bourgeois Egyptian Jews have also been attentive to a few aspects of Egyptian-Arabic culture, mainly to film and music, and they do post samples of it in their Facebook groups. But this affinity only emphasizes the fact that privileging French—to the point of often falsely denying knowing Arabic—has been a performative act designed to be

[31] Interview with Sakal; Interview with Levi.

[32] Post on "From Egypt and Back," September 21, 2024.

[33] Post on "From Egypt and Back," February 20, 2024.

considered bourgeois, both back in Egypt, and more importantly, after their migration to Israel, where Egyptian Jews faced an anti-Arabic cultural and social environment.[34] By contrast, the Egyptian-Arabic culture of "From Egypt and Back" raises the alternative voice of those Egyptian Jews who were not thoroughly Frenchified and bourgeois, and is also a part of the alternative mental map of "the other Jewish Cairo or Alexandria." Nowadays, already settled in Israel for decades, and not having to worry anymore about an anti-Arabic cultural bias, members of "From Egypt and Back" are comfortable voicing their visceral love for Egyptian-Arabic culture. It also enables them to reconnect with contemporary Egypt more easily, as we shall see below.

Another salient feature of "From Egypt and Back" is the specific neighborhoods that have been conjured in its posts. These are dominated by Ḥārat al-Yahūd, Daher, and Abbasiyyah in Cairo. In a typical post from 5 December 2016, group founder Sakal coaxed its members to recall businesses in the Ḥārah: in 86 responses, they enthusiastically and affectionately remembered small shops and artisans, such as the ironer, the baker, a Fūl (fava beans) and Taʿmiyyah (Egyptian falafel) itinerant seller, or a variety store, while naming specific streets, stores, and people.[35] Similar posts had group members recalling a specific fruit tree where they used to play as children, or the Odesh (an Egyptian-Arabic pronunciation of the Hebrew word Qodesh, meaning a sacred endowment), which was the special Social Center that the Cairo Community Council opened in the Ḥārah in 1945.[36] Other posts had group members reminisce about schools, and of course, about the synagogues, which their families frequented regularly, usually coming from

[34] On the bourgeois, Frenchified, hegemonic collective memory of Egyptian Jews in Israel, promoted through the Association and other platforms: Miccoli, *A Sephardi Sea*; Maggid-Alon, "The Jewish Bourgeoisie in Egypt in the First Half of the Twentieth Century"; Alon, "Class Performativity." For a study of a Jewish Egyptian association in France (Association Pour la Sauvegarde du Patrimoine Culturel Juif Égyptien): Baussant, "Heritage and Memory." For a description of the use of French among bourgeois Egyptian Jews vs. Arabic among lower-class Egyptian Jews: Deborah A. Starr, "Sensing the City: Representations of Cairo's Harat al-Yahud," *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History* 26, no. 1-2 (2006): 138-162.

[35] "From Egypt and Back," December 5, 2016.

[36] "From Egypt and Back," September 28, 2015. On this particular Social Center and its role in the social history of Cairo's Jews: Alon Tam, "Sephardi Jewish Philanthropy in Cairo during the First Half of the 20th Century," *Diasporas: Circulations, Migrations, Histoire* 42 (2023), https://journals.openedition.org/diasporas/14396.

nearby Daher or Abbasiyah. These two neighborhoods frequently come up on their own right in the various posts of group members, often accompanied by old, or recent, photographs.[37] All these posts, it should be noted, are about outdoor places, or exterior of buildings: descriptions of interiors, and one's emotional attachment to them, are rare in Egyptian Jewish memory work, both in this Facebook group, and in general. One unusual post, however, from 6 January 2018, shared a well-written text, previously published in print, reminiscing about the author's childhood home in the Mūskī, longingly describing every room in great detail, including smells and sounds.[38]

Group members also post and comment enthusiastically about their itineraries in the city, such as the way in which they used to walk to school, or the different tramway lines and routes that they used to take, with their itinerant sellers. For example, in a post from 27 April 2016, one group member asked—in the present tense—what people thought about taking a stroll through Cairo, as if they were back in school again, exams were over, and the Passover and Shām al-Nissīm holidays were about to start. He suggested walking through the Azbakiyyah Gardens, going for a picnic in al-Qanāṭir (a day trip north of Cairo where a few branches of the Nile meet), or taking the train to Cairo's Zoo. He also suggested going to the movies in Cinema Realto, Victoria, Rivoli or MGM; going to Giza and the pyramids; or just walking around the famous Qaṣr al-Nīl Bridge, on foot or in a horse drawn buggy. Enthusiastic responders added more recreational destinations in Cairo and its environs, such as al-Asmāk Gardens, or the suburb of Helwan, and reminisced about the food they had eaten on such excursions.[39]

The mental map created by such posts and memories stand in sharp contrast to the one crafted in other Facebook groups, websites, or *lieux de mémoire* of Egyptian Jews. The latter usually highlight the more affluent and swankier neighborhoods (for the mid-twentieth century) of Downtown Cairo, Maʿādī, or Heliopolis, as well as the high-end coffeeshops like Groppi, or department stores like Cicurel, the sporting clubs, and the Mediterranean resort of Raʾs al-Barr. They rarely mention the Ḥārah, Daher, or Abbasiyyah, and rarely from personal experience: for example, a post from 30 August 2024 about the Ḥārah in the

[37] "From Egypt and Back," May 9, 2021.

[38] "From Egypt and Back," January 6, 2018.

[39] "From Egypt and Back," April 27, 2016.

Facebook group "Jews of Egypt" gave a well-written informational text about it, but it was clearly based on some encyclopedic source.[40] In sum, the focus of "From Egypt and Back" on the other, lower-class, neighborhoods and places in Cairo is an obvious outcome of the different socio-economic origin of the group's active members. Their memories create an alternative, fresh, spatial imagination of Jewish Cairo in the middle of the twentieth century, one that differs in its social class and urban culture. There does not seem to be, however, differences in the level of emotional attachment to places between the two groups, if such things are measurable at all.

Members of "From Egypt and Back" seem to seek a connection to contemporary Egypt. A post from 27 August 2024 shared a short video titled, in Arabic, "Tram Station al-Qāʿid Ibrahim, June 2024" from another Facebook group called, in Arabic, "Alexandria, My Beloved." It was shot on 17 June 2024, in an obviously spontaneous way by a private person, with no professional editing. The video was shot on a train leaving from al-Qāʿid Ibrahim tram station, showing a beautiful boulevard in the romantic twilight hours, with people laughing and smiling on the train.[41] This video, and others like it posted in this Facebook group about Cairo or Aswan, stand in contrast to the usual postings in other Facebook groups and other websites, in several ways. Usually, Egyptian Jews have posted still photographs of places in Cairo or Alexandria, which were mostly original black and white photographs from their own personal or family collections, dating mostly to the 1940s and 1950s. The places photographed were either interiors or exteriors of homes, schools, synagogues, clubs, or just iconic buildings in either city.[42] They also posted stock photographs of iconic buildings or street scenes from that time.[43] Such photographs are quintessential memorabilia that conjure an image of a grand past, frozen in time, a bygone era that will never return. By contrast, videos and photographs such as the train video, or, for another example, a Youtube video posted on 12 August 2024 of a guided tour through the contemporary Cairene neighborhood of Heliopolis (Maṣr al-Jadīdah) with its

[40] "Yehudey Mitzraim" [Jews of Egypt, in Hebrew], August 30, 2024, https://www.facebook.com/groups/1977349779216211.

[41] "From Egypt and Back," August 27, 2024. A video shared from the Facebook group "Iskandiriyyah Habibti" [Alexandria my Beloved], https://www.facebook.com/alexhabebti.

[42] See, for one example, a post on "Yehudey Mitzraim" from February 2, 2024.

[43] See, for one example, a post on "Yehudey Mitzraim" from February 4, 2024.

mosque, church and synagogue, are not only distinguished by their movement, and by their colored vivacity, but also by their contemporality.[44] The image they conjure is not of an "Egypte d'Antan," Egypt of Yesteryear (a name of a well-known website which had professionally curated such images), but of contemporary, living, Egypt.[45] The Facebook group members are expected to recognize the places depicted, the tram station and the boulevard in Alexandria, or the neighborhood streets and monumental buildings in Heliopolis, and reconnect to Egypt. This is not a nostalgic connection, but rather a rekindled, living, (re-) connection to Egypt.

Other examples of the group's interest in contemporary Egypt are posts of viral videos or memes, recently produced by (Muslim) Egyptians, in Arabic. To be sure, "From Egypt and Back" has its fair share of posts about film or music stars from the 1940s and 1950s, such as singer and actor Abd al-Ḥalīm Ḥāfiẓ or comedienne Mary Mounib, complete with extracts from films or shows, in still or video form.[46] Such posts are very common in other Facebook groups of Egyptian Jews as well, which is a testament to a shared culture between all classes and groups of Egyptian Jews, and between them and non-Jewish Egyptians. However, in "From Egypt and Back," it is common to see posts with performances of lesser-known singers from mid-twentieth century like Fatma Eid, and more importantly, posts with recent viral videos or memes from Facebook, Instagram or even TikTok.[47] These might be about women taking Arabic singing classes, female beauty care, recipes, and most commonly—jokes, especially of the husband-wife variety.[48] They are all in contemporary Egyptian Arabic, even in slang, and they are obviously produced by young non-Jewish Egyptians for a non-Jewish Egyptian audience. Such posts indicate a continued interest and even immersion in contemporary Egyptian culture, which is not typical to other online groups and websites of Egyptian Jews; it is not typical of immigrants in general, whose cultural immersion tends to be frozen, or cut, at the point of migration.[49]

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[44] "From Egypt and Back," August 12, 2024.

[45] "L'Egypte d'Antan," accessed July 10, 2025, https://egyptedantan.net/egypt.html.

[46] For example: "From Egypt and Back," March 14, 2023.

[47] For example: "From Egypt and Back," August 22, 2024.

[48] For example: "From Egypt and Back," November 29, 2023; "From Egypt and Back," July 6, 2024.

[49] "Yehudey Mitzraim."

This interest in, or affinity to, contemporary Egyptian culture also put the migration stories of members of "From Egypt and Back" in another perspective. The narrative in the Egyptian Jewish hegemonic collective memory in Israel has emphasized the "Golden Age" of Jewish life in Egypt in order to stress the abruptness of the community's expulsion under Nasser, highlighting the mass arrests, property sequestrations, and deportations. They also belabor the successes and contributions of Egyptian Jews in Israel after settling in it, while sidelinin—though not erasing—the difficulties of migrating and integrating into Israeli society. This has been a strategy aimed at entering the Ashkenazi-dominated Israeli middle class, thus regaining the social status they had in Egypt.[50] By contrast, members of "From Egypt and Back" have posted and commented about their memories of daily harassment by their Muslim neighbors when tensions between Egypt and Israel flared, or wars, especially the 1967 one, broke out. They tell of shouting and cursing in the streets and schools, usually calling them "Ṣahyūnī" (Arabic for Zionist) as a curse word, which, as children, they were not even sure what it meant. They tell of fellow Egyptians shouting "Ṣahyūnī" in front of their parents' shops, or even throwing garbage or rocks at them, warning passers-by that the Jewish shopkeepers will send their money to Israel. Few also mention physical attacks on Jews in the streets, as well as the mass arrests in 1967, which were much bigger in scale, longer, and harsher than the arrests in 1957 or earlier.[51] While it is impossible to extrapolate from a number of posts in a Facebook group about the true scale and pattern of such events in historical reality, the members of "From Egypt and Back" still give a voice to the historical phenomenon of everyday, low-level, violence that is usually absent from the hegemonic collective memory of Egyptian Jews, and, indeed, from the historiography about them. It might be that everyday violence against Jews had increased around and after 1957—this needs further research—which might explain why Jews who left Egypt later remember it more prominently; but it also attests to the great proximity of Jews in the Ḥārah, Daher, or Abbasiyah to Muslims and Christians. Be that as it may, narrating this kind of violence in twenty-first-century Israel is also enabled by the official collective memory that the Israeli state has been pushing in the past couple of

[50] Miccoli, *A Sephardi Sea*; Maggid-Alon, "The Jewish Bourgeoisie in Egypt in the First Half of the Twentieth Century"; Alon, "Class Performativity."

[51] For example: "From Egypt and Back," February 25, 2024; "From Egypt and Back," May 24, 2016.

decades, the one that highlights Muslim violence and expulsion of all Jews from the Middle East and North Africa.[52] It by no means constitutes a reason to doubt the veracity of individual testimonies about everyday violence, but it does point to the complex relationship between official and hegemonic collective memories, and individual, or alternative, ones.

A few posts and comments in "From Egypt and Back" also describe the migration process out of Egypt. They do not discuss why their families had stayed in Egypt for longer than most of the community, perhaps because, as children, they were not privy to their parents' considerations in this regard. Nevertheless, they all consider it to be an involuntary uprooting from Egypt, like those who had to leave Egypt before them. Leaving after 1957 apparently meant that those Jews had some more time, usually weeks, to organize for departure, and could take with them some more personal effects than was previously allowed. One group member told the story of her departure at age seven in a post from 6 August 2016: she remembers her parents' preparations for leaving, usually consisting of arranging papers, selling property, packing, and saying goodbye to Jewish friends only. The routes of migration were the same as before: her family took a ship to Greece—in 1957, Jews leaving Egypt took ships to either Greece or France—and she remembers seeing the white and blue flag, not of Israel, but of Greece, when the ship approached the shore. She also remembers her elation when finally arriving in Haifa on another ship from Greece.[53]

Other posts and comments in "From Egypt and Back" also discuss the difficulties of settling in Israel after migration. Sakal himself sometimes prompts group members using his own experiences: in a post from 1 March 2016, he asked members about changing their names to Hebrew ones after migrating to Israel; in another post from 27 June 2016, he asked members how their parents adjusted to new everyday technologies after arriving in Israel—many responded that they were better off materially, or had more conveniences, in Egypt than in Israel. One group member in particular, with a literary talent and obvious writing experience, posts about the hard time she had in adjusting culturally and socially in Israel, and

[52] Menashe Anzi and Lior Sternfeld, "Leaving with No Return? Memory and Historiography in Israeli Society," *Dvarim* 14 (2021), 97-104 [in Hebrew].

[53] "From Egypt and Back," August 6, 2016.

talks about her identity crisis, and feelings of being uprooted from Egypt.[54] Migrating to Israel in the 1960s usually meant that these Egyptian Jews escaped the notorious experience of the immigrant transit camps (Maʿabarot, in Hebrew), but many were still settled in the low-income, socioeconomic and geographic periphery of Israel: Levi's family, for example, was settled in a lower-income neighborhood of Beer Sheva, then only a developing city. She remembers her neighbors in the building, Frenchified Moroccan Jews, looking down on her family, considering them "fallāḥīn" (peasants, in Arabic), thus replicating the same attitude that Ashkenazi Jews had toward Moroccan and other Middle Eastern Jews.[55] Beyond the anecdotal memories, however, in general discussions, members of "From Egypt and Back" usually express their gratitude and happiness about migrating to Israel, stating it was the best decision, even compared to other Egyptian Jews who migrated to other countries and made fortunes there, since those Jews just exchanged one Exile (Galut, in Hebrew) for another. While there is no way, or need, to cast doubt on the genuineness of such broad statements, they do echo standard Israeli and Zionist meta-narratives, which are also shared with all groups of Egyptian Jews in Israel. In contrast, the more personal, isolated and unscripted, anecdotal memories discussed above reveal more nuanced experiences of integrating into Israeli society.

What do the fond memories of growing up in Egypt, the proximity to lower-middle-class, or even low-class, Muslim Egyptians, the immersion in Egyptian Arabic culture, and the interest in contemporary Egypt, all mean for the possibility of going back to Egypt? After all, the very name of this Facebook group is From Egypt—and Back? Sakal says he has been asked many times about his unusual choice for a name—most similar Facebook groups have generic names, such as "Jews of Egypt"—and what he meant exactly by "... and Back." He says that by "Back," he meant a trip down memory lane, not a physical return, although he, and many Egyptian Jews, have returned to Egypt as tourists at least once.[56] In March of 2021, one group member even tried to organize a trip to Cairo. Many responded to that post with an enthusiastic interest, while many others had

[54] "From Egypt and Back," March 1, 2016; "From Egypt and Back," June 27, 2016; "From Egypt and Back," April 8, 2022; "From Egypt and Back," October 4, 2015.

[55] Interview with Levi.

[56] Interview with Sakal.

practical reservations: some still had concerns about the COVID situation in Egypt, others had safety concerns, and many pointed out that Egypt has stopped issuing tourist visas, in recent years, to most Israeli passport holders who were born in Egypt, with no official explanation. Only a few rejected the idea of going back to Egypt, stating that this chapter in their lives is closed, or that Egypt has radically changed for the worse, indicating that they were only interested in revisiting their childhood utopia.[57] Levi, however, has been living, breathing, and loving all things Egyptian, and actual trips to Egypt are a must for her: there are days, she says, that her spirit is in some place or another in Egypt. Her attachment to Egypt is a whole body and spirit experience: when she travelled back there, the first thing she did was to breath in Egypt's winter smell. For her, going back was not only about visiting her childhood places, but also all the touristic places she has never been to. To those who still harbor reservations, she says that she had simply forgiven the Egyptians for what they did to her father—not forgotten, but forgiven; she still loves Egypt, despite, or even with, all its flaws and changes for the worse. She admits, though, that her passion for Egypt is not mainstream: even her siblings do not share her attitude. For her, she says, even going back to live permanently in Egypt is not completely out of the question, given the right circumstances.[58] In any case, most, if not all, active group members were very happy with the virtual trip down memory lane that the group has been offering.

Conclusion

The Facebook group "From Egypt and Back" has created a different mental map of Jewish Egypt from the one usually evoked by the hegemonic voices in the collective memory of Egyptian Jews in Israel. The latter highlight the swanky modern neighborhoods of Cairo and Alexandria, their grand, European-style, coffeehouses and department stores, the colonial-style sports clubs, the Lycée Français, the new and big synagogues, or the Mediterranean resort of Ras al-Barr, a favorite summer vacation spot for bourgeois Egyptian Jews. By contrast,

[57] "From Egypt and Back," March 29, 2021.
[58] Interview with Levi.

members of "From Egypt and Back" have reminisced about the old streets of Ḥārat al-Yahūd and its environs, with their little shops, itinerant peddlers, and old synagogues, or about the newer streets of lower-middle-class Daher and Abbasiyah. They remember the Jewish community schools, the city's parks, and bridges over the Nile, where they used to picnic or stroll. They remember a lot of movement, walking around, or taking the tramway around the city. Their Cairo is immersed in Egyptian-Arabic language and culture, not a French, or even Franco-Arab, one. Some have even noted Egyptian cities and towns other than Cairo or Alexandria as where their families originated from.

The different mental maps are class-based. It was important for bourgeois—or bourgeois-aspiring—Jews in Cairo and Alexandria to immerse themselves in the modern, bourgeois, urban culture of the early to mid-twentieth century, often dubbed as cosmopolitanism, in order to claim their newly achieved social status. It was no less important for them to advertise, sometimes embellish, that past, once they had to migrate to Israel and endure a socioeconomic downgrade. This socio-cultural construct entailed a process of othering directed at "our poor Jewish brethren" in Ḥārat al-Yahūd, Daher, and Abbasiyah, who became targets of rescue missions, but also kept at a social distance. Some subaltern Jews protested this image of the Ḥārah once they settled in Israel, stating the obvious fact that by the 1940s it was already fitted with modern amenities as well, and was never a closed ghetto, but others, like Levi, agreed with that image and reiterated the social hierarchy even between the Ḥārah and Daher.[59] In any case, once in Israel, lower-class Egyptian Jews did not have a real chance to speak about their Cairo in the platforms managed by formerly-bourgeois Egyptian Jews. It was only the advent of online social media in the twenty-first century that opened a space for them to remember their own Egypt, thus democratizing Egyptian Jewish collective memory. To be sure, "From Egypt and Back" did not overhaul the narrative advanced by the Association, and did not turn the social power structure within the Jewish Egyptian community in Israel upside down, because the group members lack the financial means, the manpower, the organizational knowhow, and the connections to do what the Association does. But its creators do espouse

[59] Maggid-Alon, "The Jewish Bourgeoisie in Egypt in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," 52-53; Interview with Levi.

the same vision as the Association, namely to remind, collect, and preserve Jewish Egyptian heritage, and to pass it on to the next generation. This makes "From Egypt and Back" a space for an alternative collective memory, a platform where the proverbial subaltern can speak, and hence its invaluable importance.

In practice, "From Egypt and Back" also provides a great emotional outlet for its members. The nostalgia for their childhood's Egypt, as well as the discovery of contemporary Egyptian culture, give them a palpable joy, which they repeatedly and explicitly express in their posts and comments. This nostalgia is a way to reconnect with their parents who passed away, and to seek comfort and affirmation of their identity and cultural heritage. They also share traumatic memories of being harassed and driven out of Egypt, which are somewhat different in content from the ones retold in the hegemonic Egyptian Jewish collective memory. So far the volume of such traumatic memories does not outweigh the amount of fond childhood memories or interest in Egyptian Arabic culture. This indicates, then, that the Israeli state's drive to focus the collective memory of Middle Eastern Jews on the trauma of the expulsion from Arab Lands has not yet shifted the focus of the collective memory of the "From Egypt and Back" membership, as it did the Association's efforts, although most members would probably agree, if prompted, with the narrative promoted by the state.

The nostalgia stirred by "From Egypt and Back" has not yet led to any political action. It is impossible to discern any prevailing political opinions in the group, or make any connection between the kinds of memories and emotions expressed by group members and their political stances, precisely because the group administrators ban and expunge any political discussion. A random anti-Ashkenazi comment that escaped the vigilant editorial eye of the group administrators might be an indication where some members stand in the Ashkenazi-Mizrahi historical strife within Israel, but it is impossible to draw any general conclusions from it. The group and its members are even absent from the politics of the Egyptian Jewish diaspora: they have not been involved in the public attempts of Association leaders to pressure the Israeli government to secure compensation for their lost property in Egypt; and they have not taken any action or express any opinion regarding the efforts to preserve and renovate synagogues and cemeteries in Egypt, as leading Egyptian Jews in Israel, France, and the United States have. A couple of posts about these issues indicate the lack of interest, and

perhaps even lack of sufficient knowledge, about them among group members. Of course, the prohibition on political discussion is a political act in itself, which is aimed at providing a safe space for the production of collective memory. However, as discussed above, this lack of involvement and interest even in Egyptian Jewish politics is also an outcome of social and political marginalization of members of "From Egypt and Back" in Israeli society generally, as well as an outcome of their estrangement from the Association and its activities. The kind of nostalgia, then, expressed and produced in "From Egypt and Back" is not the kind that undergirds any political action, or political critique, but is rather nostalgia as emotion, one that produces and affirms a sense of identity, cultural heritage, and comfort.

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Keywords: Egypt, Mental Map, Nostalgia, Facebook, Lower-Class, Bourgeoisie, Israel

How to quote this article:
Alon Tam, " 'From Egypt and Back': Alternative Collective Memories among Egyptian Jews in Israel," in "(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East," eds. Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15951

Between the Tower of Babel and the Eiffel Tower: Fantasy and Trauma in Naïm Kattan's *Farewell, Babylon*

by *Hadas Shabat Nadir*

Abstract

Naim Kattan wrote Farewell, Babylon *in 1976 in French, and it was published and translated first into English in 2005. This Novel is a memoir by Naim Kattan that recounts his experiences as a Jewish teenager in 1940s Baghdad, just before his departure to France. The book explores Iraq's multicultural society and the political and social tensions that led to the decline of the Jewish community's status. Kattan wrote his memories of Baghdad about twenty-five years after he left it, after establishing himself in his new home in Montreal, Canada, where he became a respected French-Canadian author. To a large extent, his identity as a French-Canadian infiltrates the Jewish-Iraqi-Arab story and reshapes Baghdad. this article traces the mental map at the core of Kattan's work: how Kattan shapes his memories of Baghdad 30 years later. The article argues that the depiction of Jewish existence in Baghdad and Kattan's experience of adolescence emerges between the lines of the Tower of Babylon as represented by the Eiffel Tower—as fantasy, desire, and potential redemption. The Baghdad space, in a certain sense, exists as a mirror image to the space of Paris in the tension between fantasy and trauma.*

Introduction

The Wish for Jewish Life in Baghdad

The Desire for a Jewish-Arab Culture in Iraq

Between the Tower of Babylon and the Eiffel Tower

The Zionist Movement and the Establishment of the State of Israel as a Subterranean Space

Baudelaire of Baghdad

Introduction

At the opening of Naïm Kattan's book *Farewell, Babylon* there is a picture of Kattan against the backdrop of Baghdad's landscape. Kattan, dressed in a European suit and tie, sits on the ground next to a palm tree whose crown is not visible in the picture. He holds a book in his hands and smiles at the camera. In the background, palm trees and a river can be seen from afar. It seems that this picture captures something of the essence of Kattan's work: the cut-off palm tree, of which only the trunk is visible and not the top, is metonymic of Kattan's childhood in Baghdad. His roots and childhood (signified in the picture by his sitting next to the tree) are planted in Baghdad, but his adulthood, the top of the tree, was cut off in prematurely. Kattan left Baghdad during his adolescence. The palm tree does not cast shade upon Kattan; it does not protect him from the sun; rather the European suit protects him from the scorching rays. The suit, the book, and Kattan's direct gaze at the camera signify the gaze from Baghdad to the West. The gaze reflects a longing for another space.

Naïm Kattan (1928-2021) wrote *Adieu, Babylone. Mémoires d'un juif d'Irak* (Farewell, Babylon. Memories of a Jew from Iraq) in 1975 in French, and it was published and translated first into English in 2005.[1] This memoir novel is a memoir by Naïm Kattan that recounts his experiences as a Jewish teenager in 1940s Baghdad, just before his departure to France. The book explores Iraq's multicultural society and the political and social tensions that led to the decline of the Jewish community's status. The narrator, a reflection of Kattan himself, portrays Baghdad as a vibrant yet deeply conflicted city—one that embodies both a rich, complex identity and an increasing sense of alienation. He is drawn to modernity and French culture while simultaneously facing the growing exclusion and oppression of Jews. Through his memories, he captures the tension between his longing to belong and the inevitability of departure. Kattan reconstructs the

[1] Naïm Kattan, *Farewell, Babylon: Coming of Age in Jewish Bagdad* (Boston: David and Godine Publisher, 2007). There is an Italian translation as well: Naïm Kattan, *Addio Babilonia* (Lecce: Manni Editore, 2010).

Baghdad of his youth as a lost world—one that exists only in memory yet continues to shape his identity long after his move to Paris.

The book has never been translated into Hebrew, nor have any of his other works. Kattan's place is almost absent from Hebrew literature. It seems that even in his complex, multi-faceted identity as a Jewish-Iraqi-French-Canadian, Kattan managed to bypass Israel entirely, and perhaps it is no coincidence that he has never been recognized in Israel, by researchers specializing in Mizrahi literature and history.

Kattan was born in 1928 in Iraq, and in 1947 he received a French government scholarship to study at the Sorbonne in Paris. In 1954, Kattan emigrated to Canada and became an important writer in the Canadian national context. He published 27 books of prose, plays, and poetry. In 1990, he was awarded the title of Knight in the National Order of Quebec, and in 2002, he received the title of Knight in the Legion of Honor.[2] Kattan wrote his memories of Baghdad about 25 years after leaving Iraq, and establishing himself in his new home in Montreal, Canada, where he became a respected French-Canadian author. To a large extent, his identity as a French-Canadian, Permeates the Jewish-Iraqi-Arab story and reshapes Baghdad.

The memoir *Farewell, Babylon* is one of Naïm Kattan's most significant works and has received considerable attention in literary research. To date, no literary studies in Hebrew have been dedicated to Kattan, and only a few have examined his work in general. Most articles that focus on his writings explore the complexities of identity in his work. Stephanie Tara Schwartz argues that Kattan does not portray his Arab-Jewish identity as a binary system but rather as a multi-layered hybrid identity. In this sense, he is similar to Shimon Ballas, who maintained his Arab-Jewish identity within the Israeli context.[3] Schwartz compares Kattan's migration experience to that of other Iraqi-Jewish writers, such as Ballas and Sami Michael. According to her, while other writers chose to address

[2] Nasrin Rahimieh, "Naïm Kattan, 'Le Discours Arabe,' and his place in the Canadian literary discourse," *Background, Foreground* Spec. issue of *Canadian Literature* 127 (1990): 32-38. Mary Soderstrom, "A review of *Farewell, Babylon: Coming Of Age In Jewish Baghdad*," by Naïm Kattan, *Montreal Review of Books*, October 1, 2005, accessed June 25, 2025, https://mtlreviewofbooks.ca/reviews/farewell-babylon-coming-of-age-in-jewish-baghdad/.

[3] It is interesting to note that, despite migrating to different countries, Ballas's biography closely resembles Kattan's. He also spent a significant part of his life in Paris and maintained a strong connection to the French language.

migration from a political perspective, Kattan focuses on personal experience, individual memory, and the process of coping with the trauma of separation from Iraq's geographical and cultural landscape.[4] Similarly, Nadia Malinovich's article examines the multi-layered Arab-Jewish identity in Kattan's work.[5] However, in contrast to these interpretations, Reuven Snir argues that Kattan's work does not preserve Arab-Jewish identity but rather serves as evidence of its collapse. According to Snir, this identity eroded due to political events, waves of persecution, and the sense of fear that accompanied Kattan from childhood to adulthood in Baghdad.[6] This article argues that Arab-Jewish identity inherently contains an aspiration for the West.

Kattan's work is unique compared to the literary narratives of his contemporaries. His distinctiveness lies in the way Western culture is reflected through Babylon, marking his path of escape and desire. This narrative differs from other literary narratives of Jewish writers of Iraqi origin. In his article, Itamar Drori argues that Iraq is depicted as a palimpsest in Eli Amir's work: beneath the Zionist layer, Iraq appears as a mythical, "paradisiacal" space from which migration is traumatic. According to Drori, Amir's representations differ from the literary narratives presented by Sami Michael in *A Handful of Fog* and by Shimon Ballas in his short stories—particularly in his novella *'Iya*, which reflects the decline and decadence of family and society in Iraq.[7] In contrast to these representations, Sasson Somekh's *Baghdad, Yesterday* preserves Baghdad, or its *cafés*, as a literary Arab-Jewish bubble. To some extent, Somekh continues this literary preservation in Israel through the Jewish-Palestinian connection.

The picture at the opening of Kattan's book marks the "mental map" in his book *Farewell, Babylon*. Mental mapping reveals how geography and space are not merely physical realities but are actively shaped by human perception, influencing

[4] Stephanie Tara Schwartz, "The Concept of Double Diaspora in Sami Michael's Refuge and Naïm Kattan's Farewell Babylon," *Comparative. Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30, no. 5 (2010): 92-100.

[5] Nadia Malinovich, "Growing Up in Interwar Iraq: The Memoirs of Naïm Kattan and Heskel Hadad," *Journal of Jewish Identity* 12, no. 1 (2019): 19-36.

[6] Reuven Snir, " 'My Iraq Was Lost Forever': Naïm Kattan and the Demise of Arab-Jewish Identity and Culture," *Canadian Jewish Studies* 36 (2023): 160-173.

[7] Itamar Drori, "Babylonia: Fantasy, Complex and Reality: On Eli Amir's Farewell, Baghdad," *Mikan* 17 (2017): 201-224 [in Hebrew].

the way people navigate, interpret, and experience their surroundings. In his book of *The Image of the City*, Kevin Lynch[8] introduces the central concept of *imageability* and explores how people perceive and comprehend urban space. He argues that the way we navigate a city and construct our experience of it is based on a mental image formed from its physical and symbolic features. Lynch emphasizes the importance of a city's *legibility*—that is, how easily its structure can be read and understood. He suggests that a well-structured and recognizable city allows people to orient themselves more easily and develop an emotional connection to their environment. His theory is based on studies conducted in cities such as Boston, Jersey City, and Los Angeles, where researchers examined how residents perceive their surroundings. Accordingly, Shaul Tzionit argues that geography synthesizes scientific knowledge within a concrete spatial context to higher order: in other words, geography is an autonomous discipline.[9]

Geographer Rehav (Buni) Rubin argues that the geographical map changes according to human perception of space. In his book, Rubin illustrates his argument about the changing landscape of the Jerusalem hills.[10] According to him, the cultural landscape of the Judean hills is the result of intensive human activity, presented to us as a combination of natural mountainous scenery imprinted with the marks of human presence and culture over centuries, from ancient times to the present.[11]

Drawing on Piera Rossetto's work, personal memories are examined in the context of space and place.[12] Rossetto argues that these memories reflect personal perceptions of space and place. From these, a deep mapping can be created: a broad view of individual memories that connects subject to space and offers a different perspective on the history of the place.[13]

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[8] Kevin Lynch, *Image of the City* (Cambridge-Massachusetts-London: M.I.T Press, 1960).

[9] Shaul Tzionit, "Homeland Studies or Science Fiction? Kantian Meditations on Description and Theory in Geography," *Horizons in Geography* 86 (2014): 109-134 [in Hebrew].

[10] Rubin Rehav (Buni), *Story Told by the Mountains; Cultural Landscape Through Time* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2018) [in Hebrew].

[11] Ibid., 15-31.

[12] Piera Rossetto, "Dwelling in Contradictions: Deep Maps and the Memories of Jews from Libya," *Ethnologies* 39, no. 2 (2017): 167-187.

[13] Ibid.

This article charts the mental map at the core of Kattan's work. I wish to show the movement present in his work and how Kattan shapes his memories of Baghdad thirty years after leaving Baghdad. The article argues that the depiction of Jewish existence in Baghdad and Kattan's experience of adolescence emerges between the lines of the Tower of Babylon as represented by the Eiffel Tower—as fantasy, desire, and potential redemption. The Baghdad space, in a certain sense, exists as a mirror image to the space of Paris in the tension between fantasy and trauma. I argue that Baghdad and Paris reflect each other in Kattan's book. Alongside, I wish to argue that the Zionist movement and the establishment of the state of Israel simmer throughout the memoir as an undercurrent, altering the dynamics and power mechanism. At the same time, Montreal, as an external space from the reality in the book, penetrates the story, providing a perspective on the writing and portraying Kattan's mental map as one that encapsulates the tension between trauma and fantasy. Kattan's childhood story reveals that fantasy in his work has a dual face: the gaze of the Jewish-Iraqi child longing to be part of Western culture, and at the same time, the fantasy is also the adult Kattan's yearning for an old world that the narrator wishes to revisit. Writing about Baghdad thirty years after leaving Baghdad is a fictional look at the past; the return to Baghdad itself is a renewed fantasy wish that gradually takes shape between the pages of the book. But alongside this dual fantasy, his book also harbors a sense of decay and despair: it is the story of a glorious Jewish community that came to an end in Iraq, the last years of Iraqi Jewry before their departure during the great emigration in 1951. Kattan's depiction of Jewish life in Iraq later shifts to a view of the decline of Paris after World War II. Kattan emigrates to Paris but remains there for only a few years, as he realizes it is not a place for Jews. The collapse of fantasy creates disorientation in thinking about the Orient, disrupting the seemingly solid coordinates, creating a story of multiple layers between Baghdad and Paris that blend into each other.

Baghdad is not just a setting for the story of Arabs and Jews; it holds a hidden history of the Zionist movement and the establishment of the State of Israel. This buried history simmers beneath the surface of words, fueling tensions in the public and political space between Jews and Muslims. Opposite the metaphorical basement, Kattan's immigration to Canada serves as a narrative that is not present in the story itself. The decapitated cut-off tree in the picture at the opening of the

book, marks Kattan's childhood in Baghdad, but it does not signify his adulthood and blossoming. Its crown is absent from the picture, and so in the book, Kattan blossoming in Canada is present-absent in the story itself, but it shapes his story and gaze.

Writing the act of memory itself is both imaginary and oblique. The notion that fantasies is opposed to reality; a completely illusory product of the imagination is inaccurate. Freud argues that reality is not perceived as a problem-free given but as rather is something that is constructed discursively: memory itself is already imaginary and discursive. Fantasy vacillates between reality and imagination, with memories of past events constantly being reshaped according to unconscious desires, to the point where the story is not built from any objective facts, but rather as a complex dialectic in which fantasy plays a central role.[14]

Along these lines, Lacan argues that fantasy has a protective role. In fantasy, the tension exists between the visual vitality of fantasy and the frozen motion (the traumatic halt, the black box) of the traumatic event exists. Fantasy protects and conceals the traumatic scene that lies at its core. Lacan claims that any attempt to reduce fantasy to the realm of imagination is a distorted perception that is beyond repair.[15]

It is impossible to read the narrator's memories solely through the lens of everyday life; these are repeatedly immersed in a longing for the West, for Europe, and for Paris. But the threatening situation for Jews in Iraq during the 1940s, after the *Farhud*[16] (see also Fattal-Kuperwasser in this issue) becomes increasingly difficult.

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[14] Sigmund Freud, *Sexuality and Love* (Tel Aviv-Yafo: Am Oved, 2002) [in Hebrew].

[15] Lacan uses the term "phantasm" to denote an unconscious fantasy and likens the scene of the fantasy to a frozen image on a movie screen: "Just as one can pause the film at a certain point to avoid showing an impending traumatic scene, so too the scene presented in the fantasy serves as a defence that conceals castration, the lack." The phantasm is characterized by a quality of fixation and stillness, writes Evans, but it is important to emphasize that this fixation and stillness are surprising precisely because of the intense movement, which is also present in its full vitality. Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2005) [in Hebrew].

[16] The Farhud is a pogrom that took place against the Jews of Baghdad during the holiday of Shavuot, on 1-2 June 1941. During the riots, 180 Jews were murdered, 1,000 Jews were injured, women and girls were raped, and significant property was looted and destroyed. The event was a collective trauma for the Jewish community, and afterward, Jews felt much less secure in Baghdad. This event contributed, among other factors, to the decision of Iraqi Jews to emigrate to Israel during the large waves of immigration in 1951.

Fantasy repeatedly clashes with reality in Kattan's book. The stories and memories mentioned in the book almost always collapse into themselves or disappear as if they were irrelevant, slowly fading away into the horizon. As the external reality becomes harder, Kattan escapes into realms of fantasy. But even fantasy slowly collapses into itself and fails to fulfill its purpose as an escape route from traumatic reality. Fantasy is marked by "floating signs" that seek to replace it with the everyday reality of Baghdad, but the traumatic experience penetrates everything. The way in which fantasy collapses into trauma echoes the unraveling of meaning, the stories fading into nothingness as a kind of recognition of the reality of nothingness and absence. The book is Kattan's lullaby about Baghdad; it is "a great poem" of one who bids farewell to the place and will never return to it. At the same time, it is a story about the narrator's first steps into the literary world and European culture within the Jewish-Iraqi-Muslim way of life.

The Wish for Jewish Life in Baghdad

Indeed, the writing about Baghdad in 1975, where Jews were no longer a part, is an act of fantasy from the onset. The Jewish quarter and its synagogues are an imagined place; it is a fantasy about a space that no longer exists. This is Baghdad from which the majority of Jews had left in the early 1950s and nearly all the rest by the 1970s,[17] after Saddam Hussein's rise to power. Two events are narrated close to each other at the beginning of Kattan's book: the literary dialogue that took place in the Jewish-Muslim space and the Farhud. These events reveal the

[17] In 1951, 120,000 Iraqi Jews emigrated within a year and a half. The Iraqi government allowed Jews to leave Iraq on the condition that they renounce their Iraqi citizenship. That year, ninety percent of all Iraqi Jews chose to leave Iraq. This wave of emigration ended a community that had existed in Iraq for 2,600 years. This was a community involved in Iraq's economy, society, and culture. After the large emigration, around 10,000 people remained in Iraq, and the number gradually decreased over the years as Jews were later given the option to obtain a passport. In 1969, several Jews were hanged in the town square on charges of espionage against the backdrop of celebrations by Muslims. The small Jewish community lived in fear and a sense of danger, and as a result, in the 1970s, the remaining Jews fled Ira. See: Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, "From Babylon and Eastward: The Jews of Iraq in the Twentieth Century," *Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 71 (1996): 25-53; Dafna Zimhoni, "The Iraqi Government and the Large-Scale Emigration of Jews to Israel," P*e'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 39 (1989): 64-102 [in Hebrew].

foreignness of Jews in Baghdad. Together, they call attention to the way Kattan is writing about an imagined space, one in which Jews are no longer a part:

> Our relationships with the group were steeped in quietude. We were dealing with emancipated liberals and revolutionaries who were working to demolish the walls put up by prejudice and misunderstanding. *A few darts fluttered across this limpid horizon now and then, bringing us back to order. We rejected their stigmata and soon ignore our wounds.* They were merely scratches on our self-respect.[18] [my highlighting]

> Two weeks after the events, the fever of war had passed. I explored the city again, saw that it was marked by its wounds. At the start of the war of liberation, the signs on the stores had been hastily whitewashed. All those who had displayed their modernism with Latin characters printed above their Arabic names had erased with a brush stroke the mark of colonization. No businessman wanted to leave any doubt about how he felt towards the language of the imperialist enemy.[19]

Kattan writes about Bagdad that no longer exists; he realizes that this world is gradually vanishing: "A few darts fluttered across this limpid horizon now and then, bringing us back to order. We rejected their stigmata and soon ignore our wounds."[20] Baghdad after the Farhud (1941), is a space where Jews reduce their presence in the face of rising Arab nationalism. A sense of terror, alienation, and fear pervades the public sphere. Even in the liberal space, cracks appear: Jews must return to the prevalent order and erase the wounds from their bodies. In both spaces, there is no recognition of Jewish existence; instead, there is a long process of reducing the Jewish space within Muslim life in Baghdad. These descriptions at the beginning of the book reveal the alienation felt by the narrator as he brings Jewish life in Baghdad back to life. They touch upon the later knowledge that the reader has—that Jewish existence in Baghdad was completely eradicated.

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[18] Kattan, *Farewell, Babylon*, 13
[19] Ibid., 25
[20] Ibid., 13.

The Desire for a Jewish-Arab Culture in Iraq

The book opens with the narrator's and his friend's desire to be an integral part of Iraqi Muslim literature and culture. In a joint literary meeting between Jews and Muslims in Baghdad, Kattan describes the breakthrough into Muslim culture:

> We got together at the Yassin café every evening making plans for the future based on our day's reading. [...] That evening was marked by unusual note. Nessim spoke in the Jewish dialect. We were the only Jews in the group. All the others, except for Chaldean and an Armenian, were Muslims and this dialect serves as our common language. In Iraq the presence of a single in a group was enough for his dialect to be imposed. [...] Semi-literate Jews always stunted their phrases with one or two Muslim terms when they spoke to other Jews. Borrowing a few words from the Muslims proved that one had dealing with them; that one associated with them and one was not content with the poor company of other Jews. [...] It was unusual then for Nessim to speak in his own accent among so many Muslims [...]. He was speaking to Nazar, Said and others. [...] Nessim persisted, straight-faced. It was as though he were taking special care to choose all the Jewish words that usually got a laugh from Muslims. Imperturbably, he pleaded Balzac's case and talked of his enthusiasm for Stendhal, whom he had just discovered. Like a coward, I chose silence. Still displaying all his enthusiasm for the French novel, Nessim called on me to participate. Finally, he asked me a question directly. It was useless for me to escape. He would persist. I chose a middle course. My words were neither those of the Jews nor the Muslims. I spoke in literary Arabic, the Arabic of the Koran. Then, in a supercilious tone and with contained anger, Nessim corrected me: "You mean" and he translated into perfect Jewish dialect. He compressed his lips in a gesture of hatred. He exaggerated our accent. I could see in his look a mixture of sorrow and commiseration. I was betraying him. I was ashamed to utter in the presence of others the words of intimacy, of home, of friendship. Nessim was forcing me to take a stand against the solidarity of the group.

> I could not reject our common language without humiliating myself. It was no longer the language of friendship, but that of the clan. I listened to myself and the Jewish words stood out in all their strangeness, coldly naked. My sentences were frozen. Before I uttered them, I heard them echo in my ears. I was reciting a lesson I had learned. I slipped in a French word. Nessim, pitiless censor, immediately translated into the Jewish dialect.[21]

In front of a liberal audience composed of Muslims, Armenians, and Jews, Nessim (Kattan's friend) chooses for the first time to deliver his speech in the Jewish-Iraqi dialect, carefully selecting his words. It seems that Nessim's attempt to speak Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic in front of a Muslim audience is an effort that embodies courage, anger, and fear simultaneously. The Jewish-Iraqi language spoken in the presence of Muslims reflects Nessim's desire and fear of establishing a space for a more shared and equal existence between Jews and Muslims in Iraq. Nessim's desire to engage in a Jewish-Muslim dialogue in the public sphere is not only a future aspiration; I argue that his speech also echoes the long history of Jews in Iraq alongside Muslims for 2,000 years. Jewish culture is part of Baghdad, part of the vast Arab culture, from Saadia Gaon, the Babylonian Talmud, to Baghdad at the beginning of the 20th century. Nessim's speech seeks to take the Jewish-Arabic dialect from the limited Jewish space into the public language, thus creating legitimacy for the Jewish existence in Baghdad. Kattan opens his story with this scene, marking the Jews' past wish in Baghdad and his personal childhood wish: to be an equal part of Iraqi culture and Baghdad.[22]

But even during the grand moments of the speech, cracks emerge that undermine the great celebration taking place at the literary event. When Nessim asks Kattan to come to the stage and say a few words, Kattan cannot speak Jewish-Arabic in front of Muslims and instead speaks Muslim-Arabic, occasionally slipping into

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[21] Ibid., 8-10.

[22] In his article, Reuven Snir argues that the national flourishing in Baghdad under British rule and thereafter led to a Jewish-Muslim partnership in liberal and communist circles. Muslim writers frequently met with Jewish writers and engaged in a fruitful creative dialogue. Reuven Snir, "*Jewish-Muslim Relations in the Press of Iraqi Jews," Pe'amim: Studies in Oriental Jewry* 63 (2005): 5-40 [in Hebrew]; Sasson Somekh, *Bagdad Yesterday*, (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuhad, 2004) [in Hebrew].

French. Interestingly, the Jewish-Muslim literary evening revolves specifically around European literature and Balzac's work. The Jewish-Arab partnership here, paradoxically in Iraq, exists only through the gaze towards the West and not through Arabic or Jewish writing in Iraq. What is Balzac's literary role in the scene before us? It seems that Balzac and many other European writers mentioned throughout the work function as a code name, as a wish, as a double fantasy: it is a fantasy of a young boy longing to be part of Iraqi culture, and at the same time, it is a fantasy of a boy who wishes to discover the world and learn about European culture and literature. But this double system also marks the spatial coordinates of Canada: it is also the fantasy of an adult narrator who wishes to return to Baghdad and trace the marks and signs that made him a respected writer in Canada.[23] Just as Hansel and Gretel left breadcrumbs to mark their way back home, so too does the narrator leave the names of European writers between the pages of the book as traces and signs as he returns to sail through the memories of the past. They serve as a protective guardrail that guides the narrator back home to Canada.

Naïm Kattan's story is unique in the Canadian context: he immigrated from Baghdad, which was under British rule for some years and was primarily an Anglophile, yet he chose French. He emigrated to Canada, settled in Montreal, and continued to write in French and to preserve the French language. This occurred against a backdrop of cultural struggles between the dominant English culture and French-speaking groups: French-speaking Canadians and Jews who emigrated from Morocco and chose to preserve French culture. The struggle of the French-speaking, Sephardic Jewish community in Canada was not only against English Canadians but also against Ashkenazi Jews, most of whom sought to maintain the English language.

Thus, the French words to which the narrator escapes are like "small black holes" in the language that reveal the gap between Jews and Arabs. At first, they seem harmless, but gradually the black holes expand and turn into sinkholes that

[23] Roy Orel Shukrun and Aviad Moreno, "Rethinking Moroccan Transnationalism: Sephardism, Decolonization, and Activism between Israel and Montreal," *American Jewish History* 107 no. 2-3 (2023): 659-688; Gerald Tulchinsky, *Canada's Jews: A People Journey* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 427-459. Notably, Kattan received numerous awards and recognitions for his preservation of the French language: in 1984, he was awarded the title of Officer of the Order of Canada; in 1990, he received the title of "Knight" in the National Order of Quebec; and in 2002, he was named a Knight of the Legion of Honor (a significant honor in France).

threaten to swallow the Arabic language into them. The sentences themselves indicate the height to which the story soars, but also its collapse: just like the gap between the high and the low in the picture at the beginning of the book—it seems that even in this rich diglossia, the narrator does not find his voice.

The gap between the reality and the narrator's wish to be part of Arab-Iraqi culture and to integrate into the "new Iraq" after the end of the British mandate, gradually widens throughout the novel. Reuven Snir has shown that Kattan published poems and articles in Iraqi journals in Baghdad.[24] Additionally, Kattan and Nessim chose not to enroll in the Jewish Shamash School, where most Jewish students enrolled (the scholar Sasson Somekh studied at there), but instead, they chose to stay in their day jobs and study at the Muslim school. Their desire to be part of Muslim culture, to know the Quran, to be familiar with the central writers of Iraq, and thus be part of Iraqi culture, is what was within their realm of visibility. Despite the fear that was burrowed in them when studying with Muslims, the two friends chose the school out of a desire to integrate into their Muslim environment.

Two factors, however, change the narrator's worldview and lead him to consider emigration to other places. The first was the aforementioned Farhud; the second was the treatment they received in school: despite Nessim's and the narrator's attempts to be part of Muslim society, they are harassed by students and teachers alike. For example, Kattan describes how they raised their hands when they knew the answers to the teacher's questions, but even though no Muslim student raised their hand, the teacher did not give them permission to speak.[25] Kattan also describes the harassment and violence from the Muslim children towards both of them and the fear of going to school. Kattan and Nessim increasingly feel like outsiders in Baghdad, as if they are not welcomed. The experience of alienation abruptly halts the wish to be part of Arab Muslim society.

Between the Tower of Babylon and the Eiffel Tower

[24] Reuven Snir, " 'My Iraq was lost Forever:' Naïm Kattan and the demise of Arab-Jewish identity and Culture," *Canadian Jewish studies* 36 (2023): 160-173.

[25] Kattan, *Farewell, Babylon*, 114.

In contrast to Kattan's rising sense of alienation in Baghdad, the desire for French culture grows. The French words, spoken at the beginning of the memoir, serve as an escape for the narrator from the complexity of the situation between Jews and Arabs and gain more and more prominence in the story. Thus, French gains more and more power against the backdrop of life in Baghdad.

> Our energy was boundless. We were being crushed by a society that seemed increasingly oppressive, insensitive to our exaltations, to the driving power of our progress. We followed the exploits of the Chinese revolutionaries who were setting an example for us, accomplishing the action we only dreamed of. I had read Aragon's *Le Crève-coeur*, published in Lebanon by the Free French. I translated parts of it into Arabic. His love of France matched my own, echoed it. My chosen country, which would satisfy all my desires, quenched my insatiable thirst. France, wounded and besieged by barbarians, responded to my impatience to sing my own praises of that legendary land, free at last, opening its gates and its arms to those whose lips had tasted the wine of the West and now were waiting for the intoxication it would bring. Lebanon and Syria had just escaped the authority of Vichy, and General de Gaulle's representatives were already in place.
>
> Free-French emissaries had come to supervise our French examinations. [...] I looked avidly at my examiner. He was the first Frenchman I had ever seen. This man was of the race of Molière and Baudelaire. I endowed him with magical powers. Only later did I realize to what extent the oral examination had been one of the most decisive moments in my life. The French delegate, who seemed too young to be serious and who radiated a peculiarly occidental kind of good looks, asked me, without rolling his r's, to explain the Baudelaire poem to him. I could not do it. Patiently my examiner explained the meaning of the word "ostensoir" (monstrance). I discovered through his words that France concealed a thousand concrete details, that she had an everyday life and a religious tradition that escaped me completely, that no book had revealed yet to me. In Baghdad, where there was no one to contradict me, I had acquired an exclusive competence that no one questioned; and now in the presence of this Frenchman, I felt

> ignorant. He was showing me that it was not enough to know the names of a few French writers and to read some of their books. The examiner did not seem to have noticed Aragon's poem. And with reason. He surely was completely unaware of the existence of his great compatriot. Otherwise, he would have been struck by the homage I was paying to the singer of Free France, his own country. I turned the page of my notebook and stuck the page under his eyes, both hesitant and condescending. "Yes. I saw that. It's a nice poem," he said, without the slightest surprise. "You've heard of Aragon, have you?" I asked. "Yes, of course," he said. "He's a friend of mine. But I haven't seen him for years." What was he saying? "Do you mean you actually know Aragon?" "Yes, of course." he replied, laughing. I held out my notebook with a trembling hand. "Will you write your name here, please?" He did so, in all seriousness. I forgot the examination, the poems, even Aragon himself. I was in the presence of a living representative of the kingdom inhabited by people whose names appeared on the first pages of French books. I was no longer listening to distant voices.[26]

The entire passage is enveloped in magic: the French matriculation exam—although Kattan fails the first time—becomes his ticket to Paris and French literature. The joy of seeing a French person for the first time—"like Baudelaire"—is likened to an angel descending from heaven. Like in a dream, the whole reality blurs from the joy of the moment:

> Suddenly Baghdad seemed to burst with a thousand new lights. This deserter from a world that was buried in books had a magical appeal for me. I could not even look at him. He was surrounded by the shadow of my exaltation. I listened to him complain about the oppressive heat.[27]

The lights of the city of Paris are bright enough to illuminate Baghdad: they blend together like an illusion, joined by a kind of dance including both the French

[26] Ibid., 115-117.
[27] Ibid., 117.

person sitting across from him and the great poets of French culture on whom he is now being
tested. What we have here, therefore, is a reality in the status of fantasy, of desire, of wish. In Lacanian terms, this can be described as the tension between the visual-cinematic vitality of fantasy and the abrupt halt of movement, the freeze, just before the traumatic event occurs. In narrative terms, this is merely a possibility, but they succeed in halting the entire reality: this is the power of fantasy. It stops the occurrence, and we are drawn into it, escaping from reality. It is the great power of the pause just before the image continues into the traumatic event.[28]

The narrator's figure is excited, drifting into imagination, it is essentially the Tower of Babylon being written in French, through the works of the great poets of France, and perhaps this is already a Tower of Babylon echoing within it the Eiffel Tower proudly standing tall. But the Eiffel Tower, unlike the Tower of Babylon, does not collapse. It is a tower whose existence remains stable and secure to this day, offering a view of its beautiful and great power from which one feels safe. The French language and its literature are a safe ground to which the narrator can escape and soar high.

In contrast to the Eiffel Tower, the story tells of the collapse of the Biblical Tower of Babylon, gradually being destroyed in the reality of the 1940s in Baghdad. The title *Farewell, Babylon* echoes not only the end of history but the end of the myth of the Tower of Babylon. For example, unlike Sasson Somekh who chose a more realistic title *Baghdad Yesterday*, it seems that the gap between Baghdad and Babylon is the gap between reality and fantasy. The name Babylon echoes the glorious culture of Babylon: The Babylonian Talmud and the extensive Jewish-Babylonian writing. It is also the Biblical Babylon, marking from before both development of Christianity and the rise of Islam until the 1940s. But it is also a Tower of Babylon built from small moments, from Jewish life experiences, from family life events and the narrator's formative memories of Babylon: the book is made up of memories, sometimes unrelated, told but fading into the horizon as they came, with no introduction or continuation. These small memories from Baghdad are like bubbles that the narrator keeps within him, a way of life from childhood that will never return. But they rise higher in his book, becoming a

[28] Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis*, 207 [in Hebrew].

coming-of-age story of the narrator from Babylon to Paris. So, from the Tower of Babylon, the Eiffel Tower emerges, looking at us through the words.

The Zionist Movement and the Establishment of the State of Israel as a Subterranean Space

Beneath the Jewish-Muslim space in Baghdad, another space rumbles below the surface, altering the balance of power on the Iraqi street above. The events of the Farhud lead the Jewish community to establish shelters and basements where they store weapons for self-defense. In these basements, the ideology of the Zionist movement and the return to Israel after 2,000 years of exile also simmer as a possible solution to the situation of the Jews in Baghdad. The Zionist movement in Iraq was a minority movement among the Jews. Members of the movement met in the basements, where they engaged in activities, training, learning Hebrew, and publishing articles. The Zionist movement and the idea of establishing the State of Israel rumble below in the metaphorical basement in Kattan's mental map as well.

In *La Poétique de l'espace*, Gaston Bachelard argues that the basement is a place for subterranean schemes: it rumbles below and drives matters to the surface without us noticing.[29] The basement is the dark entity of the house where fear resides as do stories of both crime and heroism:

> The whole school was in a flurry when one of the final-year students vanished. His unexpected disappearance was distressing to his family and dozens of students. For the man who had taken flight was none other than the founder and high chief of the secret society. He had taken a small fortune with him. For weeks his teams had sacrificed candy and treats to acquire revolvers. But no weapons were seen in anyone's pockets. The leader took refuge in propitious clandestinely. Even if everyone knew and

[29] Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace* 3rd ed. (Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France, 1961), 58-59.

> discreetly paid him the honor due to his rank, no one had the right to reveal a secret which had ceased to be one.[30]

The disappearance of classmates not only affect the relationship between Jews and Arabs, but it also shapes the narrator's mental map. The Zionist movement, and its goal of migration to Israel, is not Naïm's only option. Against the backdrop of differing ideologies, a rupture also occurs in his relationship with his close friend Nessim when the latter joins the Zionist movement. Kattan's mental map positions Israel in the space of the basement, as a symbol of violence, crime, and fear. Not only does he refuse to be part of the movement, but he also believes migration to Israel is not realistic. Kattan repeatedly dreams of French culture and moving to Paris.

Baudelaire of Baghdad

The fantasy of Western culture and Paris does not protect the narrator from the harsh reality of life and the sense of alienation experienced by Jews in Baghdad at the end of the 1940s. The inability to realize the fantasy of Western culture is translated in Kattan's book into a space of duplications, spatial displacements, and sexual fantasies. Towards the end of the book, the narrator describes the filthy reality of prostitution and violence, eventually admitting that what remains from life in Baghdad for him and his friends is merely the desire for women. The sexual fantasy acts as a "floating signifier," a sign that replaces the main fantasy (to Western Culture) with an alternative fantastic system, in this case, a desire for women and sex. However, the very shift of the fantasy into a sexual fantasy signifies the traumatic pause and decay. For example, the narrator and his friends visit an "alternative" brothel located on Al-Rashid Street. At the brothel, they are greeted by three completely naked prostitutes, which seems like the fulfilment of a male fantasy, but it quickly becomes clear it is not; They are all elderly women: one is missing hands, the second is disabled, and the third has only one eye. The

[30] Kattan, *Farewell, Babylon*, 64

three approach the narrator and his friends, with the one-eyed woman touching the narrator's genitals and inviting him to her with seductive words. The language of fantasy shatters to pieces in the face of their dire condition:

> I gave it to him with a great feeling of relief. Someone was going to perform the magic act for us and we would not have come in vain. The only way to restore the image of femininity to these women who had been reduced to objects was to agree to intimacy with them, to share ourselves with them, even if only for a few minutes. Only the onset of desire could make us forget the mud that was spattering and choking us.[31]

What happens here is the monstrosity of fantasy, not its collapse—its distortion into a horror movie. The deformed bodies become a spectacle of horror that emasculates the narrator; little wonder that he walks away with his hands covering his genitals. Baghdad has become a destructive, degenerate, castrating, and traumatic place, leaving not a single good piece of it for the narrator. The situation almost flips on its head; the prostitutes, as objects, as described by the narrator, beg for a loving gaze as a return to humanity. Absurdly and destructively, what turned them into vessels is also what can seemingly momentarily restore their humanity: the response to an act of love with them, to the extent that the narrator himself becomes a vessel for them. In Lacanian terms, this is the act of castration of fantasy, the moment when the movement of memories seeks to rush forward, to repress the situation. It is no coincidence that the narrator moves throughout the scene without pausing for a moment, and moreover, he is pleased when his friend borrows money from him and asks him to take a walk. The scene is, in fact, the distortion of the fantasy itself; the trauma of his life in Baghdad turns into a fantasy of the inherent castration within it.

The placement of this scene is especially meaningful: it is, in fact, the last experience he describes of Baghdad, just before his emigration to Paris. The fact that he does not engage with the prostitute marks both his lack of belonging and his lack of desire to belong. His impotence in front of the prostitute also hints at castration. Kattan's impotence is, in fact, the cut-off palm tree, the severed phallic

[31] Ibid., 174.

symbol, the life that is cut short in a place with no future. It is no longer possible to stay in Baghdad. It is no wonder that the narrator escapes from the space of the prostitutes and seeks refuge from them. This scene best illustrates Kattan's feelings about Baghdad in its final days and the situation of the Jews at the end of the 1940s. The space of the prostitutes is a space of decay and is metonymic of the condition of the Jews. The prostitutes signify death, decay, the end of the community. The old and scarred prostitutes, with mortality and death hovering over them, are metonymic of the ancient Jewish community in Baghdad—a community that once had a glorious past in Iraq but has now become scarred and impotent, with a constant sense of temporality and death hovering over it. During that period, leading up to mass emigration, the arrests of Jews on charges of involvement in the Zionist movement and communism increased. The situation reached its peak when Shafiq Ades, one of the wealthy leaders of the community and well-connected to the Iraqi establishment, was arrested and hanged charged with Zionism. The Jewish community was in great fear and terror due to these events.[32] The Jews conducted themselves like that one-eyed prostitute: one eye open, seeking acceptance, and the other closed, hiding and repressing.

As I mentioned above, Freud notes that memory is always discursive and imaginary, and perhaps through the prostitutes of Babylon, we glimpse the prostitutes of Paris. Baghdad is a city that is sinking for the Jews, just as Paris is a city that is decaying for Baudelaire. Baudelaire, too, refers to the prostitute and death, and they intertwine in a third image of Paris. The Paris of his poems is a city that has sunk and disappeared. In *Les Fleurs du Mal*,[33] Baudelaire describes decadent Paris: sadomasochistic erotica, the great city with all its visions, the prostitutes, the beggars, the throngs of people, the crowded streets, the "artificial paradises" of wine, hashish, and opium—all stand at the center of his poetry. But this poetry of the modern city is also a tortured poetry, and in all the urban images with their depictions of depravity and horror, the tortured soul of the poet is reflected. Beautiful Babylon becomes filthy Baghdad, and perhaps it echoes within it the decadent Paris of Baudelaire. Baudelaire's despair echoes greatly the despair

[32] Nadia Malinovich, "Growing up in Interwar Iraq: The Memoirs of Naïm Kattan and Heskel Haddad," *Journal of Jewish Identities* 12, no. 1 (2019): 19-36.

[33] Charles Baudelaire, *Flowers of Evil* (La Vergne: Double 9 Books, 2002).

of the narrator; there is not a single good piece left for him in Baghdad. The space becomes increasingly violent, narrowing the steps of the Jews. Even the last refuge left to Kattan, the brothel, turns into a spectacle of horror that emasculates the narrator and chokes him. And perhaps Kattan is hinting here that even the move to Paris is not the desired transition—that Paris, too, is a sinking city.
The narrator is left with nothing in Baghdad, and soon he receives a French government scholarship and travels to study at the Sorbonne:

> When the day came for me to leave, a *nairn* was waiting for us at the bus station. We would cross the desert and the next day I would be in Beirut, the first step on the road to the West. A few days more and I would be on board ship, sailing for Marseilles. My whole family was there. The pain of separation was mixed with relief at leaving these walls which were being covered with shadows. I was the first to leave. They were all thinking it without daring to say so. My grandmother was Generous with advice. I must not skip meals; pork would make me sick; fruits must be washed before they are eaten. My mother barely spoke. I recognized myself in her. We avoided looking at one another. Nessim was alone, a little embarrassed. He was not a member of the family but everyone knew that he was, to a great extent, my family. These faces looking at me, moving away from me, which I saw through the window of the bus - they were Iraq - all that remained of it for me. And I hoped I would be able to take away forever, within myself, its last reflection. It had to be so. In that way my childhood would be preserved. I would enter the new world without cutting off a privileged part of it, without dispersing my dreams and memories. The bus was already moving along the dirt road. The sand was enclosing us, extending a curtain, cutting us off from the city which moved farther away in a fog that was ominous and dark. The road was strewn with stones which skipped into the air as the tires squealed over them. Through the tears that poured down my cheeks, I could glimpse the howling dogs that were pursuing us. Now I did not have to throw stones to get rid of them, to protect myself from them.[34]

[34] Kattan, *Farewell, Babylon*, 198.

The dust accompanying the narrator's bus journey is all that remains of Babylon's beauty, of its vast culture, and of the shared life of Jews and Muslims together. This is the thick dust following the collapse of the Tower of Babylon, the dust that remembers the once-beautiful bricks that are now only destruction and ruin. But the dust is also a veil that darkens the final scene, just before the act of magic; it is the veil that blurs the screen during the occurrence of the spell. This is the moment when the book ends, but its conclusion is known to us—Kattan moves to Paris and studies at the Sorbonne. The swan poem here transforms the swan into a beautiful figure, like in *Swan Lake*, where after the spell breaks, the true princess is revealed. The swan poem marks here the beautiful swan, the poet and scholar, who was born from the beauty of Baghdad but also from its dust, which has now dispersed and has revealed the narrator in all his glory. Kattan's childhood and adolescence experiences in Babylon include elements of the French culture and Paris, to which he immigrated from Iraq. The Baghdad space exists, to some extent, as a mirror image of Paris in the tension between fantasy and trauma. Kattan's return to a Baghdad devoid of Jews in 1975—in his memoirs—is itself a fantasy. At the same time, the author revisits his adolescence in Baghdad and his longing for French culture and Paris as a young man. His choice of Montreal as his final residence also marks his place in the Baghdad geography: He avoids choosing a space that is part of Iraq's power map: neither the enemy, the State of Israel nor Britain, the former ruling power (1917-1932). Kattan positions himself outside of Baghdad's power dynamics, thus he is able to remain loyal to the city. His choice of Montreal places him in a Distinctive niche as a Jewish-Iraqi-French-Canadian. This is the mental map of his life, a multifaceted identity with a unique voice in Arab-Jewish literature, as well as French literature.

Fig. 1. Illustration by Zohar Gannot, 2025.

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Keywords: Literature, Jewish Arab Culture, Fantasy, Trauma, Mizrahi Writers.

How to quote this article:
Hadas Shabat Nadir, "Between the Tower of Babel and the Eiffel Tower: Fantasy and Trauma in Naïm Kattan's *Farewell, Babylon*," in "(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East," eds. Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15953

Tunis and Paris Face Off: Images of the Jewish Home and Environment among Tunisian Jewish Francisés Émigrés in France

by *Gilat Brav*

Abstract

During the 1950s and 1960s of the twentieth century, many of the Tunisian Jews emigrated from Tunis to Paris. A significant number of them, especially those educated and raised in francisés environments, experienced difficulties resulting from feelings of loss, displacement, and disappointment, as expressed in the mental maps of their life stories. The study examines memoirs of four men and three women, who were educated and raised in a francisé environment and emigrated from Tunis to Paris during the studied period. It seeks to answer the question: "How do the francisés immigrants in Paris shape the memory of the Jewish home in Tunis, while referring to the space in Paris?" Based on memory and home space theories, the article tries to answer the research question by breaking down home space into Jewish and non-Jewish, and by comparing the home in Tunis with the one in Paris. A main conclusion: the pillar of support changed from the Jewish religious space in Tunis to non-Jewish education in Paris, which decreased the weight of communalism in the immigrant's life.

Introduction

Theory and Methodology

Research on Personal and Collective Memory in Memoir Literature

Defining the domestic space

The Research Corpus

Tunis Space versus Paris Space: Jewish Space

Physical Space

The Internal Jewish Space (Religion and Tradition)

The External Jewish Space (Synagogue and Community Activity)

Tunis space versus Paris space: The Non-Jewish Space

The Enlightenment Space

The Sociocultural Space

Conclusions

Appendix: Tunisian Jewish Memoirs

"Home is a very liquid side of human existence."

—the historian Guy Miron

"Home is body and soul. It is a person's first world."

—the philosopher Gastón Bachelard

Introduction*

As Tunisia's Jewish community left the country in the 1950s and 1960s, about 50,000 Jews who had lived in or near Tunis, chose France as their destination country. About 15 percent of these émigrés held French citizenship after completing secondary studies in French schools or working for the protectorate government that had run the country from 1881 on.[1] It is important to note that French citizenship was granted to Tunisian Jews already at the end of the nineteenth century, according to the naturalization decree from February 28th, 1899. It allowed citizenship to be granted to those who had served in the French

*My thanks to the Center for the Study of the Jews of Spain and Islamic Countries through their Generations at the University of Haifa, who, as a research fellow, gave me access to the research materials and documentation

[1] Doris Bensimon and Sergio Della Pergola, "Structures Socio-Demographiques de la population juive originaire d'Afrique du Nord," in *Les Juifs du Maghreb: Diasporas contemporaines*, eds. Jean-Claude Lasry and Claude Tapia (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1989), 184; Itzhak Dahan, *From the Maghreb to the West: Moroccan Jews between Three Continents* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2022), 26 [Hebrew].

army, to holders of public office whose salary was paid by the French treasury or to those who had rendered special service to France.[2]

Until the French Colonial Power came to Tunisia, most Jews in Tunis lived in the Jewish quarter, the Hara, alongside the Muslims. The majority belonged to the Twansa—the autochthonous—community, which was rooted in the local culture and Jewish tradition. The minority belonged to the Grana (Jews of Italian and Spanish origin who emigrated to northern Tunisia between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries) community and practiced culture and religious customs and beliefs imported from their communities of origin. When French protectorate rule ensued and Tunisia opened itself to the global market economy, social mobility developed that allowed Jews who had amassed wealth to move to European neighborhoods that were considered more prestigious. Coexistence with the Arab population, however, still prevailed in the markets, the street, commerce, and leisure.

In 1952, Habib Bourguiba, leader of the Neo-Destour anti-colonial struggle movement,[3] favored violent struggle against the French authorities. Throughout the process of liberation and during the first decade of independence, the Jews, seen by Muslims as collaborators with the French authorities, were victimized physically and discriminated economically, educationally, and professionally.[4]

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[2] Haïm Saadon and Paul Sebag, *Trends and Changes in North African Jewry in the Modern Era: The Transitional Years: From an Excluded Minority to a Preferred Minority* (Ra'anana: The Open University, 2021), 90 and 317 [Hebrew].

[3] The movement was established in 1934 as the successor of the Destour, itself established in 1920. It opposed French rule in Tunisia and aspired to independent statehood.

[4] Similar state of affairs happened in other Muslim countries during liberation struggles from the French Colonial yoke. One example is Morocco in 1954, when mob—inspired by the liberation movement to attack French targets—vented also against Jewish targets, a situation that immediately pushed Jews to emigrate (as told by the witness Makhlouf Turgeman and Ha'Ets Natan Pirio, *The Tree Gave its Fruit* (Tel Aviv: Bnei Shimon, 2011), 109-110 and 119-120, and appears in: Aviad Moreno and Haim Bitton, "The Moroccan 'Yizkor Book': Holocaust Memory, Intra-Jewish Marginalization, and Communal Empowerment in Israel," *Diaspora* 23, no. 2 (2023): 261-283.

Regarding anti-Jewish discrimination: Charles Haddad de Paz, *Juifs et Arabes au pays de Bourguiba* (Aix-en-Provence: Imprimerie Paul Roubaud, 1977), 26-27 (religious, judicial, and professional discrimination); Claude Tapia, "North African Jews in Bellville," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 16, no. 1 (1974): 5-23; 13 (economic discrimination). View also interviews of M. Bichi and Dr. Gugliemo Levi, in Gilat Brav, *All the Way to France: The World of the Jews who Emigrated from Northern Tunisia to France* (Amazon, 2024), Appendices [Hebrew].

This state of affairs triggered waves of emigration to France that surged whenever the fracas escalated. The first wave occurred in 1954-1956, when Tunisia gained its independence.[5] The second wave occurred in 1961-1963 with the Bizerte Crisis. It began in 1960, when Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba demanded that French President Charles de Gaulle leave Bizerte and he refused. In July 1961, Tunisia laid siege to the French naval base at Bizerte (which was strategically important to the French in their war in Algeria), hoping to force France to evacuate it (Tunisia's independence in 1956 was without Bizerte). The crisis culminated in a three-day battle (July 19-22) between French and Tunisian forces that left approximately 630 Tunisians and 24 French dead. On July 23, the French captured Bizerte. With the outbreak of the war in July 1961, rumors spread among the Arab public that the Jews had betrayed them and the hostility towards the Jews, as a result of which approximately 500 Jews were injured, led to a large wave of immigration to France. After the end of their war in Algeria in 1962, they handed the power in the city back to the Tunisian government.[6] Finally, the third wave occurred in the summer of 1967, during the Six Day War. Each wave delivered thousands of Jews to Paris. By 1967, some 21,000 Jewish émigrés from Tunisia had settled in the French capital.[7]

As these émigrés coped with the challenges of emigration, they experienced nostalgia for their homes in Tunis, a sentiment manifested for many years after emigration in the memorial books that they wrote.[8] Nostalgia, writes Svetlana Boym, is longing for a home that no longer exists, the sentiment of loss and displacement, and a defense mechanism.[9] It tempts us, Boym continues, into believing that the image of home is in fact the home and it builds a bridge between personal memory and collective memory. Following their emigration, Boym notes, emigrants are too busy surviving to allow themselves to wallow in nostalgia; therefore, nostalgia wells up only in memorial books and moves on from there to

[5] Bensimon and Della Pergola, "Structures socio-demographiques," 183.

[6] Colette Zytnicki, "Du rapatrié au séfarade. L'intégration des Juifs d'Afrique du Nord dans la société française: essai de bilan," *Archives Juives* 38 (2005): 84-102; 95; Samya El-Machat, "La crise de Bizerte: 1960-1962," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* 87 (2000): 299-326.

[7] Bensimon and Della Pergola, "Structures socio-demographiques," 183.

[8] The corpus of memoir books written by 1st or 2nd generation Tunisian Jews immigrants to Paris contains at least a hundred books and is growing steadily.

[9] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Hachette, Basic Books, 2002).

posterity in order to strengthen the connection between posterity and the nostalgic pasture.[10]

In contrast to the broad occupation with nostalgia for the fields of the Tunisian past in the memoirs, the living environment in Paris attracts scant mention in the books and appears only for the purpose of comparing the domestic space in the new country with the image of the home back in Tunis. In this article, I focus on this comparison as a way to examine the mental maps that structure memory of the past in correspondence with the reality of emigration in France. By doing so, I ask: How did the francisés émigrés in Paris shape the memory of the Jewish home in Tunis relative to the Parisian space? I argue that Tunisian Jews who were torn from their traditional roots in Tunis, although raised in a French-oriented culture and education system, found it hard to sink roots in the foreign soil of Paris. Their emotional coping with the challenge of integration focused on the nostalgic empowerment of their past, manifested in creating mental maps of the home in Paris as against the one in Tunis, for a dual purpose: to sink alternative roots and to send posterity messages in reference to the Tunisian culture, tradition, and heritage.

Theory and Methodology

The transfer of cultural, traditional, religious, and educational values by Tunisian Jewish immigrants from Tunis to Paris has been examined by several researchers.[11] Additionally, several studies in various disciplines have been written about the image of the home, but none of them deals with Jewish émigrés from Tunisia. For this article, I will particularly consider the works of philosopher Gastón

[10] Ibid., 85-139.

[11] The following are a few examples of academic works: Claude Tapia and Patrick Simon, *Le Belleville des Juifs tunisiens* (Paris: Autrement, 2008); Zytnicki, "Du rapatrié au séfarade"; Brav, *All the Way to France*; Christine Balland Mounier, "Manières de table des immigrés. L'exemple de Juifs tunisiens à Paris," *Diasporas: Histoire et sociétés* 7 (2005): 106-118, www.persee.fr/doc/diasp_1637-5823_2005_num_7_1_1018, accessed April 1, 2025; Laurence Podselver, "Le pélerinage tunisien de Sarcelles," *Socio-anthropologie* 10 (2001), http://journals.openedition.org/socio-anthropologie/157, accessed April 1, 2025; Podselver, "De la périphérie au centre: Sarcelles ville juive," in *Les juifs et la ville*, ed. Chantal Bordes-Benayoun (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Midi, 2000), 78-90.

Bachelard,[12] the historian Guy Miron,[13] the anthropologist Joëlle Bahloul,[14] and the anthropologist Mary Douglas,[15] among others. All of them researched the ways in which various aspects of the mental map of the domestic space in an individual's narrative are instructive of the collective narrative.

Research on Personal and Collective Memory in Memoir Literature

The memoir literature of the Tunisian Jews who emigrated to Paris will serve as the corpus of knowledge of this study. A memoirist's purpose is to mediate between the past and the future so that the personal history of the value, emotional, and ideological messages that they retain will constitute an anchor and a compass for posterity. These messages are influenced by a collective memory that, when passed on by the individual within a community framework, influences the collective memory of the generations to come.[16] These bisymmetrical relations sustain the mental maps of the domestic space. This research postulate leads to an investigation of the implications of the memoirists' mental maps for the image of the domestic space and, by implication, for the examination of their worldview. The study is based on the theoretical models of Pierre Nora and Maurice Halbwachs and the studies mentioned above in the literature review.

Memory, Pierre Nora claims, begins only after a person is displaced from a place that is dear to them. At that moment, the place ceases to be a *milieu* (a physical location) and becomes a *lieu de mémoire* (place of memory).[17] The personal lieu de mémoire intersects spontaneously with other personal places of memory, yielding a collective memory and allowing bisymmetrical relations between the personal and collective memories to take shape. Halbwachs also finds that personal

[12] Gastón Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace* (Paris: Les Presses universitaires de France, 1958).

[13] Guy Miron, *To Be a Jew in Nazi Germany: Space and Time* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2022) [Hebrew].

[14] Joëlle Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory: A Jewish-Muslim Household in Colonial Algeria, 1937–1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[15] Mary Douglas, "The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space," Social Research 58, no. 1 (1991): 287-307.

[16] Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925), 51.

[17] Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Zmanim* 45 (1993): 4-19.

memory is influenced by collective memory[18] but describes the relationship not as bidirectional, à la Nora, but unidirectional; that is, individuals are influenced by their dominant surroundings. According to both scholars, when the lieu de mémoire becomes a mental residue, it is written as a personal memory that reflects a collective memory.

The narrative of personal memory is told from the writer's angle and is subject to the influences of the surroundings and of subsequent memories.[19] It focuses on specific events, messages, and ideas that serve its writer's purpose. Thus, the memory of a Jew who emigrated from Tunis to Paris sometimes centers on their childhood home in Tunis and disregards their lives in Paris because they wish to emphasize their love of the birth country that they were forced to abandon, disregarding the fact that they are living in a place where they feel in exile.[20] This message runs like a crimson thread through the memoir literature of the Jews of Tunisia, such that the memoirists' successors—although they had never experienced life in Tunisia—continue to experience a rooted connection with their ancestors' land of birth, which serves them as an anchor of tradition, heritage, and culture.

This message manifests itself also in memoirs written in other Jewish and non-Jewish diasporic communities.[21]

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[18] Halbwachs, On Collective Memory, 46.

[19] Ibid., 125; Guy Miron, *From "There" to "Here" in the First Person* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2004), 103 [Hebrew]; Amia Lieblich, "On the Craft of Biography," in *Other Matters*, eds. Hanna Adoni and Yitzhak Roeh (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 1997), 31-45 [Hebrew].

[20] Ewa Tartakowsky, "Entre mémoire et histoire: Écrivains d'origine judéo-maghrébine en France: une approche sociologique," *Tsafon* 70 (2016): 61-81; 61.

[21] See for example: Moreno and Bitton, "*The Moroccan 'Yizkor Book'*" [Morocco]; Nissim Zohar, *Ha-Molokhiya shel Imma* [Mom's Molokhiya] (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Sefarim, 2006) [Egypt]; Tahar ben-Jelloun, *The Happy Marriage: A Novel*, trans.: André Naffis-Sahely (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2016) [Morocco]; Assia Djebar, *Children of the New World: A Novel of the Algerian War*, Trans.: Marjolijn de Jager (New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 2005) [Algeria]; Zafer Şenocak, *Gefährliche Verwandtchaeft* (Munich: Babel Verlag, 1998) [German].

Defining the domestic space

The Jewish émigrés' domestic space is typified by two main spaces in which they circulate, one Jewish (internal and external) and the other non-Jewish (Enlightenment and sociocultural relations), represented by a mental map that they create in their memoirs. Such a map is subjective because it represents the émigrés' point of view toward the geographic domain that surrounds them as they experience change in their lives. It gives them continuity in terms of space and time and re-creates the constituent elements of the home, the physical place and space, and allows them to compare their childhood home as they adjust to the new space.[22]

Here I focus on the concept of domestic space. I wish to characterize it in three dimensions: (a) *physical space*—the house and the piece of land on which it sits; (b) *home*—the emotional connection that a person maintains with the family members, close neighbors, and objects, customs, traditions, values, culture, and language that fill the physical space. Writing about this dimension, the geographer Tovi Fenster defines the home is "an emotional space identified with the 'I' and the order in which it reflects the emotional balance."[23] For Jews, writes the historian Guy Miron, home denotes "sites fraught with depth of history and consciousness."[24] It should be noted that some authors, contrarily, ascribe these characteristics to the concept of "space"[25]; (c) *time*—the dimension of time modifies the image of home in two ways: first, in special events that are observed in the domestic space (e.g., festivals) and, second, attitudes, outlooks, and aspirations that one changes over the years and that change one's way of viewing the home.[26] These three dimensions manifest in continual and integrated motion,

[22] Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory*, 28.
[23] Tovi Fenster, *The Global City and the Holy City: Narratives on Knowledge Planning and Diversity* (London: Routledge, 2004), 121.
[24] Miron, *To Be a Jew*, 61.
[25] Patrizia Violi, *Landscapes of Memory: Trauma, Space, History* (Lausanne: Peter Lang, 2017), 13.
[26] Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 25.

as Miron says: "Home is a very liquid place of human existence; it reflects and substantiates identities and values."[27]

The Research Corpus

Of a corpus of writers who documented their lives in Tunisia after emigrating to France, nine memoirists were chosen—six men and three women—who grew up in Tunis between the 1920s and the 1960s. All belonged to the Twansa community who received French education, lived in surroundings that were influenced by francophone language and culture to one extent or another, and emigrated to Paris at different ages in the 1950s and 1960s. Importantly, as far as I know, no memoirs have been written by Tunisian Jewish immigrants who initially settled in renewed community framework neighborhoods such as Belleville.
This set of criteria denotes the spatial complexity with which most of the Tunisian Jewish emigrés to Paris had to struggle in order to define a home.
Below are their biographical details (surnames in alphabetical order):

Berrebi, Franklin: born in the European quarter of Tunis in the late 1940s to a francophone mother who worked as a midwife and to a father of traditional orientation who was unemployed and a compulsive gambler. In Tunis, Franklin attended a French government school and emigrated in 1957 with his parents and one of his brothers to Paris, where the two brothers attended a government school while their three sisters remained in Tunis and lived with their grandparents. Shortly after emigrating, Franklin's father returned to Tunis because he did not wish to acclimatize in French society. He did not reclaim his daughters. Franklin's mother remained with the two boys in Paris and held sewing and white-collar jobs.

Kummer, Ida: born in 1950 in a prestigious part of Tunis and raised in a family profoundly connected with the West and weakly associated with Judaism. Her father was a surgeon; when young Muslim doctors crowded him out, he saw no

[27] Miron, *To Be a Jew*, 108, following Tiina Peil's definition, "Home," in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, eds. Nigel Thrift and Rob Kitchin (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2009), 180.

further place for Jews in Tunisia and emigrated with his family to Paris in 1962. Ida was a scholar of comparative literature.

Memmi, Albert: born in Tunis in 1920 on the edge of the Jewish quarter. In his childhood, his traditional family moved to a building in the European quarter that was tenanted exclusively by Jewish families and had a synagogue next door. He attended an Alliance Israélite Universelle school and went on to the Lycée Carnot French government high school. After World War II, Albert migrated to Paris to study philosophy at the Sorbonne, married a Christian woman, returned with her to Tunis, taught at the Carnot school, and re-emigrated to Paris in 1956 after Tunisia received its independence.

Moati, Henri (Serge): born in Tunis in 1946 in Villa Jasmin, a mansion built by his father, Serge Moati (a journalist, playwright, socialist, and freedom fighter) in the middle of the European quarter of Tunis. He emigrated to Paris in 1957 with his sister Nine after his parents died and was enrolled in a prestigious but antisemitic residential school.

Moati, Nine: born in Tunis in 1937 and emigrated to Paris in 1957 with her brother. In her memoir, her mother occupies the middle of the mental map of the domestic space.

Nahum, Dr. André: born in the Jewish quarter of Tunis in 1921 to a traditional family and moved to the European quarter in childhood. André received his schooling at the Alliance school and the Lycée Carnot. After World War II, he migrated to Paris for medical studies, married a Christian woman, returned to Tunis, worked at a hospital, and re-emigrated to Paris in 1961 during the Bizerte crisis.

Nataf Gmach, Jacqueline Semha: born in Tunis in 1942 to an upper-middle-class family that combined traditional life with exposure to the West. Her father was the dentist Edouard Nataf, a well-known and -regarded personality in Tunis. She migrated to Paris in 1958 and thence to Canada and afterwards to the United States, where she wrote her memoirs.

Taïeb, Dr. Yves: born in Tunis in 1949 in the European quarter to a francophone family. His father owned a glass factory that had been in the family for several generations. Yves attended a French government school. In 1961, his family fled to Paris due to fear of the Muslims; there, Yves attended the prestigious Lycée Voltaire high school and endured antisemitic treatment. He completed medical studies.

Zarca, Bernard: born in Tunis in 1941, emigrated to Paris in the mid-1950s. His father was raised in the Hara of Tunis and invested in acquiring French education and attaining affluence in the European quarter of the city. Zarca shuttled between two houses in the European quarter: one belonging to his biological mother and the other owned by his older sister, whom he regarded as a second mother.

Tunis Space versus Paris Space: Jewish Space

Physical Space

"Only I, in my memoirs from another century, can open the deep wall closet that still retains, for my sake only, the special scent, the scent of raisins drying on the lattice...".[28] Thus Gastón Bachelard describes the way one's childhood home, with its various rooms, is etched into one's soul. The memoirists mentioned above, too, from their homes in Paris, open the wall closet to the reader, the closet preserved deep in their souls, and reveal nostalgically the physical space of the childhood home in Tunis, filled by the mother-character in most cases and by the father-character in only a few.

Mother in the center of the domestic space. Bernard Zarca grew up in the European quarter as a member of an affluent family. It was his mother who filled his world—not only one mother but two: his biological mother, Nelly, and his older sister, Maïsa, each of whom had a house of her own in the European quarter. Nelly lived modestly on a side street off a main boulevard; Maïsa lived on the main

[28] Bachelard, *La poétique de l'espace*, 51.

boulevard. From his place of residence in Paris, Zarca gives a detailed account of Maïsa's ground-floor apartment,[29] a spacious dwelling flooded with light, equipped with a large kitchen and set in a beautiful stone building overlooking a broad boulevard that exited into L'avenue Jules Ferry (even after it was renamed L'avenue de Bourguiba) and onto a public park fenced with centuries-old palm trees. Maïsa habitually sat in an old leather armchair on the balcony, observing the scenery and exchanging greetings with passersby. Bernard often escaped to this house from Nelly's secluded and conservative dwelling.[30] Nelly shared the house with Amima, Aaron's sister, who was childless and therefore adopted Nelly's second son. The house was indeed "a very liquid place," as Guy Miron says. The mental map that Zarca drew teaches us, on the one hand, about his profound attachment to France and, on the other hand, about his yearnings for the unique sensation of being a francophone amid the Oriental ambience of Tunis.

Albert Memmi's home also centered around his mother, a traditional woman who protects her family and appears in every corner that her child occupies within the domestic space, which straddles the seam between local Jewish tradition and heritage and francophone influences—as reflected in its location, on Tarfoun Lane at the entrance to the Jewish quarter. There the large family packs itself into one room and shares the rest of the space and the yard with another family. Memmi, unlike Zarca, finds mother's love with every step he takes at home.[31] At the very beginning of his first book, *The Pillar of Salt*, his mother appears as a protective figure: "My mother would remove the two iron bars that protected our front door against thieves and pogroms."[32]

The Memmis' family life throbbed with joie de vivre and reflected the value of sharing and fraternity that underpinned the community's life and represented its rhythm and spatial and temporal organization.[33] The living space spilled from family to family and so, within it, the kitchen space—partly covered—tumbled from the house into the yard, "the womb of the mother's home," as Joel Bahloul

[29] Ibid., 17-18.

[30] Ibid., 41.

[31] Ibid., 4.

[32] Albert Memmi, *The Pillar of Salt* (New York: Criterion Books, 1955), 4.

[33] The structure of the Arab home and its reflection of the way of life practiced there. View Kobi Peled, *Architecture: The Arab Home as a Social Text* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2012), 28 [Hebrew]; Douglas, "The Idea of a Home," 293-294.

says.[34] Crossing the kitchen lengthwise, one emerged not only from darkness to light but also from domestic scents and sounds to those outside. The kitchen was shared only for preparing food; meals were taken in the privacy of the family room at a round table—the grandfather's sole estate—that stood between the wall, painted in blue-lime, and the beds.[35] The liquidity of home found further expression in the re-use of neighborhood children's clothing, which mothers handed to their counterparts.[36] When Mordechai Benilouche noticed a boy in the neighborhood wearing something that had been his, his mother explained to him that he himself was wearing the clothing of other neighborhood children.[37] This "liquidity," purposed as a vehicle of mutual assistance, symbolizes the unity of individual and collective that had come about. The "liquidity" of the home flowed not only from the interior outward but vice versa as well, in the sense of insecurity at times of pogroms. On these occasions, Muslim masses stormed the Jews' homes and the Jews' only defense was not the door but rather the iron bars installed on it.[38]

In contrast to Zarca and Memmi, those who experienced displacement from homes or parents introduce their mothers at that moment of displacement, which marks the collapse of the home. Thus, Yves Taïeb's mother stands in the center of the home at the moment his family is displaced from the home and its artifacts: the moment at which they have to escape from Tunisia. After setting in Paris, he recalls, with mixed feelings of nostalgia and pride of belonging to the West, the world that crumbled in one stroke before his eyes—a European world enveloped in Oriental atmosphere. He begins his memoir by describing the location of the childhood home on the rue de Marseille 11, in the heart of the European quarter, perpendicular to the Avenue de Bourguiba (formerly L'avenue de Jules Ferry) and parallel to L'avenue de Paris. It is important to note that, for the Jews of Tunis, Jules Ferry—Prime Minister and Minister of Education at the outset of French protectorate rule—symbolizes emancipation and enlightenment after centuries of

[34] Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory*, 41.
[35] Ibid., 4.
[36] Ibid., 63.
[37] Ibid., 9.
[38] Ibid., 253.

ignorance, in contrast to Habib Bourguiba, who epitomizes the return of the benighted years of Muslim rule.[39]

Taïeb spent his childhood in the bubble of the European zone, bounded by the Lafayette quarter and the public park of the Belvédère neighborhood, where his parents took their recreation on Sabbath.[40] Although the author specifies the location at the very beginning of the book, he describes the layout of the apartment and contents of special sentimental value only later, in the context of emigration to Paris.[41] The Jews, most of whom held Tunisian citizenship, were not allowed to take more than one dinar (approx. 500 French francs) and one suitcase per emigrant.[42] Therefore, they had to sell everything they owned for a pittance or surrender it to Muslims. The displacement from the home formed the memory of his mother selling a grand chandelier to a wretched-looking rag seller for pennies.[43]

For Nine Moati, too, the moment of displacement is the point in time when the mother appears at the center of the physical space of the home. In this case, the moment of displacement is her mother's death in Tunis. Moati commemorates her mother's physical presence in every possible way in order to transfer the childhood domestic space to the next generation of women of the family in Paris—including everything this space contains: the things, aromas, flavors, sounds, and touches that make it special and the love and warmth with which the mother fills it. For this purpose, Nine carries her deceased mother's clothing and adjusts them to her size.[44] She also keeps her mother's recipes and Tunisian Arabic sayings so that she can establish physical continuity with the world of the women who had carried this home on their shoulders. When her daughter will be born, Nine says, she will tell her "Tefrachn tfouje, tekbar, touli arroussa, fil karoussa" (grow, blossom, fulfill yourself, and marry in a horse-drawn carriage).[45] She also carries away contents of the apartment after her parents' death so that the next tenants

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[39] Miron, *To Be a Jew*, 18. Renaming a main street denotes a new era.

[40] Yves Taïeb, *L'enfant et la Boutargue: Souvenirs* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015), 15-16.

[41] Ibid., 30-33.

[42] View, for example, Claude Kayat, Mohammed Cohen, *The Adventures of an Arabian Jew* (Oxford: Bergh Publishing, 1989); André Nahum, *Tunis-la-Juive raconte* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2000), 55.

[43] Nora, "Between Memory and History," 30.

[44] Nine Moati, *Mon enfant, ma mère* (Paris: Ramsay, 2006), 142.

[45] Ibid., 36 and 45-46.

will use nothing that belonged to her parents.[46] Thus, in writing her memoirs, Moati uses nostalgia to create a bridge between the personal memory and the collective one.

On August 25, 1955, Franklin Berrebi left Tunis together with his mother, his father, and his youngest brother, and emigrated to Paris. They intended to settle in and then bring over the other siblings. Shortly after they emigrated, however, his father returned to Tunis. He had become estranged from his children and did not see them again. It was at this point, which he experienced as the trauma of displacement, that Berrebi invoked nostalgia to create a mental map of the domestic space in Tunis, with his mother as the pillar of emotional support even though her husband tried to quash her aspirations and personality.[47] In the physical space of the home in Paris, too—a room in a paupers' hotel—his mother is the pillar of not only emotional but also physical and economic support. She gives her offspring a sense of home-ness that affords both privacy (corners to sleep in, corners to apply makeup) and sharing (the kitchen). They share the conveniences and the shower with the other tenants on the floor.[48]

Father in the center of the domestic space. Alone among the memoirists in this corpus, Henri Serge Moati places his father at the center of the physical space of the image of the home in Tunis. Together with his sister, Nine, Henri is torn from his home after his parents' death and his escape. With these events, the home, perched on a hill in the middle of Tunis and overlooking the seashore, became a ruin: "Sometimes the new owners of the house ripped out everything around and rummaged in search for goodies. An atmosphere of the end of the world or, at least, the end of an era."[49] Moati delivers this nostalgic account of a world that collapsed together with the home from the migrant's sense of loneliness. The memory of the home and its centerpiece, his father, Serge Moati— the heroic warrior against antisemitism[50]—draws Moati fils to his roots and thus helps him to surmount the hardships of his adjustment to Paris. Only after he gains mental strength does he turn, in his Le Vieil Orphelin, to comparing the physical space of

[46] Ibid., 143.
[47] Ibid., 18 and 54.
[48] Ibid., 73.
[49] Ibid., 25.
[50] Serge Moati, *Villa Jasmin. Roman* (Paris: Librairie Artheme Fayard, 2003).

the home in Paris— the prestigious but antisemitic Lycée Michelet residential school[51]—with his childhood home in Tunis. The comparison reflects the change that has occurred in the image of the home under the influence of changes in place and the vicissitudes of time.

The Internal Jewish Space (Religion and Tradition)

The roots of the Tunisian Jewish community were engrained in its culinary traditions, which manifested in traditional food prepared in the kitchen and served at the dining table, around which the older generation labored to maintain the family's integrity and rootedness. In Tunis, the rituals of culinary tradition were observed in the community space and in the presence of the extended family; in Paris, in contrast, they unfolded in a space of scant Jewishness and within the narrow framework of the nuclear family, absent the grandparents who had been the family's traditional compass. The émigré, feeling unmoored, nostalgically reconstructs the image of the home as Jewish observances had been honored there. In his imagination, he dresses his childhood home, its inhabitants, and its objects in unique scenes, scents, and sounds that strengthen the connection between him and those around him and the domestic space, and between present and past.[52]
For Dr. André Nahum, the sublime flavor of the couscous that was eaten before the onset of the Yom Kippur fast mingles with the memory of the slaughtered chicken of the kapparot ritual, and the two of them build a bridge between the internal Jewish space and the external Jewish space, and between present and past:

> It was hard to endure the smell of the hot blood. Feathers flew in every direction, making us sneeze and cough. We remained motionless, riveted but feeling disgusted all the same. Mother and Grandma got to work right away. They had to cut, slice, and broil the chickens, knead the mixture, and prepare superb *haboush* with cloves for each of us; its aroma was thought to make the fast go easier. In the afternoon, long before nightfall, after we tasted the glorious High Holiday couscous, we went, my brother

[51] Serge Moati, *Le Vieil Orphelin. Récit* (Paris: Flammarion, 2013), 31-32.
[52] Peter Gould and Rodney White, *Mental Maps* (London: Routledge, 1993), 2; Bahloul, T*he Architecture of Memory*, 29.

> and I, took showers, brushed our teeth, combed our hair, got dressed, put on new shoes, and walked with our father to the synagogue.[53]

Franklin Berrebi also places couscous in the background of the complex and tortuous tableau of his childhood home, comparing the present, in a wretched room in a Paris hotel that he shares with his mother, his brother, and his mother's cousin—fragments of a family—and the past, in which he and his intact family dwell in their home in Tunis. In Tunis, alongside the couscous that festoons the dining table on Sabbath eve and the resplendently dressed family, stands his father in full glory, projecting an atmosphere of sanctity onto the household. He is the same father who caused the family so much sadness, a drunk who humiliated his wife, imposed rigid religious laws on the household, and tore the family apart.[54] In his nostalgic image of the past, Berrebi finds a flicker of light in the gloomy scene of his home in Tunis and uses it to create the illusion of an idyllic family, thus bolstering his morale in the exile that has been imposed on him as a member of a shattered family.

Central in the retrospective image of Albert Memmi's childhood home, too, stands the festive Sabbath table, bearing an opulent bowl of couscous and circled by family members in festive attire and the memoirist's father exuding an atmosphere of sanctity after a week of grueling labor. The picture emerges from mixed sensations of nostalgia and anger toward the father due to Albert's resistance to religious coercion tainted with hypocrisy: his father demands that his children treat the meals as religious events but pays a Gentile to turn off the electricity. The boy picks an acrid argument with his father, on account of which he experiences a profound crisis of faith.[55] Memmi reconstructs the occasion nostalgically because, from his point of view as an émigré in a non-Jewish environment, he understands the importance of communityness and religion, even if he has his criticism, and tries to make repairs.

Similarly, Jacqueline Nataf Gmach rebels against her father and alleges religious hypocrisy. This, however, happens after the family emigrates to Paris and amid another issue: intermarriage, her father refusing to let her marry a Christian. This

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[53] André Nahum, *Partir en Kappara* (Piranhas Éditions, 1977), 27.

[54] Franklin Berrebi, *Tunis, Paris, Ma Mère* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2019), 85-86.

[55] Memmi, *The Pillar of Salt*, 141-142.

quandary was almost nonexistent in the traditional and homogeneous environment of the Jewish community of Tunis. Although in his daily life the Jew interacted with non-Jews, rarely would this connection continue within the home context. In these terms, there was an almost complete sociocultural and religious separation between Jews and non-Jews. The dilemma of intermarriage surfaces when religion and tradition lose their potency as pillars of support and are replaced in this role by Enlightenment (see below). Now older and more mature, Nataf Gmach understands her father's obstinacy and acknowledges the importance of the parents' role as adherents to tradition, and of the young generation's role in heeding them, given the centrality of the values of family and honoring parents in the Jewish heritage.[56]

The External Jewish Space (Synagogue and Community Activity)

Since the religious space among those who lead francophone lifestyle was maintained mainly for the purpose of family gatherings, the space that linked the childhood home and the synagogue is marginal in the émigrés' memory. One may explain this marginality by quoting Albert Memmi, who notes that the synagogue in its current form—a rundown institution relative to the church—turned Jews away from religion.[57] Memmi, the émigré, writes in this vein attempting to weave his personal memory into the collective one and thus help to strengthen the synagogue's status. Importantly, the thirty-two synagogues that populated the cramped area of the Jewish neighborhood demonstrate the profound connection of the Tunisian Jew with religion, even if Memmi criticizes it.

Jacqueline Nataf Gmach, unlike Memmi, forges a strong connection with the synagogue because her father prods her to function in a more masculine manner in society (wishing that she had been born male). Therefore, she takes part in synagogue services as the Sabbath approaches (as the only person in the women's gallery because the other women are busy cooking) and reads aloud from the prayer book as do the men—with emphasis on Sephardi intonation and Judeo-Arabic pronunciation—as the men stare at her as though observing a strange bird

[56] Hillary Selese Liber and Jacqueline Semha Gmach, *From Bomboloni to Bagel: A Story of Two Worlds* (Jerusalem: Gefen, 2014), 66.

[57] Memmi, *The Pillar of Salt*, 51-52.

who does not belong in the traditional landscape. From the point of view of an émigrée in three Western countries—France, Canada, and the United States—Nataf Gmach, much like Albert Memmi, sends a critical message about the social marginalization of women in the community's religious atmosphere and the ban on their participation in life as men's equals.[58]

After their emigration to Paris, the religious space outside the domestic one, with the synagogue at its core, is almost totally erased from the diarists' world.

Sometimes, as Franklin Berrebi reports,[59] parents enrolled their children in Sunday school programs at the synagogue (Merkaz de Montmartre, for example) trying to keep them in touch with the Jewish tradition. The Judaism preserved in these settings, however, follows the tradition of the Ashkenazi majority. Unlike Berrebi, Nataf Gmach—after her father refuses to endorse her mixed marriage—understands her social foreignness and seeks her roots. Thus, she enrolls at the Centre Universitaire d'Etudes Juives (CUEJ), where she receives instruction in Judaism and subsequently takes a combination of Biblical and Zionist studies and bonds with Eretz Israel. Her parents also frown on her connection with Zionism.[60]

Tunis space versus Paris space: The Non-Jewish Space

The Enlightenment Space

From the late nineteenth century on, secularism seeped into Jewish life in Tunis via two French education systems: that of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, its curriculum containing a small dosage of Jewish studies and a much larger dosage of general studies, and that of the French government, offering students in Tunis a curriculum identical to the French. This curriculum was based on the principles of the French revolution, itself influenced by the ideas promoted by the Enlightenment—an intellectual and philosophical movement during the 17th-18th centuries that featured social ideas centered on the value of knowledge by way of rationalism and empiricism, and political ideas centered on the values of

[58] Liber and Gmach, *From Bomboloni to Bagel*, 33-34.
[59] Berrebi, *Tunis, Paris*, 93.
[60] Liber and Gmach, *From Bomboloni to Bagel*, 67-68.

freedom, equality, fraternity, tolerance and morality.[61] The high interest that Jews showed in the European Enlightenment and the French revolution ideas did not arise in a vacuum. They were already exposed to and influenced by the European Haskala movement—through Hebrew newspapers such as Ha-Tsfira, Jewish philosophers such as Maimonides and authors such as Avraham Mapou. This movement aspired to both preserve Jewish uniqueness and revive it culturally and spiritually according to European Enlightenment values.[62]

Many lower- and middle-class Jewish children received their elementary schooling in the Alliance system, which thus became a traditional place of Jewish education in the early ages. Children from more affluent strata enrolled in government schools or French or Italian private schools; thus, they were more exposed to Western currents and drawn away from the Jewish tradition.

Among the memoirists examined in this study, Albert Memmi is the best example of the influence of the Enlightenment space on the émigrés' mindset and course of life. Memmi grew up with a mother who was illiterate, awash in folk beliefs, and disdainful of the importance of modern education; his father, in contrast, was a leather worker who aspired to give his son the modern schooling that he had been denied. Both parents, however, thought it very important to continue upholding religious values and rules, thrusting Memmi into an internal conflict between the values of secularism that underlay the French education system and the religious, social, and cultural values of the home. Memmi's inner struggle impacted the religious space from which he emerged, as manifested in an argument that Albert as a boy had with his father at a Sabbath meal about the meaning of the faith.[63] The clash placed him at a crossroads between choosing the path of Enlightenment or that of tradition and religion. It is true that he chose the former and considered himself a universalist. Still, he did not disengage from tradition, seeing the

[61] Denis Charbit, *The Emancipated Man: Anthology of Enlightenment and of the French Revolution* (Jerusalem: Carmel, 2013), 14.

[62] Yosef Chetrit, "Hebrew National Modernity versus French Modernity: The Hebrew Enlightenment in North Africa at The End of the 19th Century," *Mi-Kedem U-Miyam* 3 (1990): 11-76 [Hebrew]; Tamir Karkason, F*rom Home and Abroad: The Jewish Haskala in the Ottoman Empire in the 19th Century* (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 2024); Lital Levy, "The Nahda and the Haskala: A Comparative Reading of 'Revival' and 'Reform'," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 16, no. 3 (2013): 300-316.

[63] See above: "The Internal Jewish Space (Religion and Tradition)".

integration of universalism and particularism as the way Jews should implement their role as light unto the nations. At this point, it is worth noting that the rejection to folk beliefs was not only by enlightened Jews in Islamic countries but also by members of rabbinic elite. One example is Rabbi Saliman-Menahem Mani (1850 Baghdad-1924 Hebron), who, in his short story "The Valley of the Devils" (1885), a satirical confession of "Saliman", exemplified the fight of Sephardic rabbis against folk beliefs.[64]

For Jacqueline Nataf Gmach, unlike Memmi, studies were an inseparable part of the way of life, even when her family spent vacation on the seashore. In her subsequent life as a senior lecturer, she sketched a mental map in which she sat in a resort area, "shackled" to her homework under her father's heel and peering enviously through the open door at children at joyful play:

> Every day, even Sunday, we have to do our homework before we can play. The door is open and we can see our friends having fun on the beach, but we have to do our homework... We may not complain about the work. We may not ask to go play with our friends. Even pausing to glance at the sea and to observe the fun might result in a reprimand. My papa is very strict. Very, very strict. And we have to obey.[65]

Importantly, Nataf Gmach's domestic space does bond with European Enlightenment. However, she does not replace tradition but rather positions herself at its side.

If so, the Enlightenment space in Tunis was grounded in a high-quality French education system. Given that education was one of the main considerations in emigrating, many members of the community decided to emigrate to Paris because they, or their children, could continue to receive quality education there. The options of education in Paris were two only: the government system or a private school. The nonexistence of Jewish educational environment such as that of the Alliance further weakened the community members' traditional pre-emigration anchor. The role of the school expanded in Paris: it became the pupils' second

[64] Keren Dotan, *Form and its Discontents: Hebrew Mizrahi Writers in Eretz-Yisrael/Palestine in the Turn of the 20th Century* (Haifa: Pardes, 2022), 101-110.
[65] Liber and Gmach, *From Bomboloni to Bagel*, 7-8.

home, both because the youngsters spent most hours of the day there and because it was their space of integration into French society. Furthermore, the gap between the values imparted at home and those given over in school narrowed as parents tried to reconcile their domestic values with those of the surrounding society in order to facilitate their children's acclimatization. For this reason, they viewed manifestations of antisemitism as part of the acclimation process and instructed Jewish pupils to put up with such manifestations in school. This made the Enlightenment space a gear in the transmission from the sociocultural space, outside the community, to the Jewish space—and individuals' acclimatization depended on their ability to keep the three spaces moving in harmony.

The boy Yves Taïeb endured antisemitic manifestations in school and had to satisfy three necessities—to integrate, to maintain his Jewishness, and to excel—in a hostile environment. He wished to prove that he was truly French and that he accepted French values. He wrote his personal memoirs many years after having become a family physician who was immersed in his surroundings and identified with its competitive values. The influence of the collective narrative is well evident in his remarks:

> I was afraid of the unknown and thought only about my studies... When I told them that I had arrived from Tunisia, the first days were very difficult. First, it was two years after the Algeria War. Some of my classmates had seen their brothers wounded and resented anyone who had come from North Africa, and they did not distinguish among the three countries of the Maghreb... but it was no big deal. They asked me if I fetched water from a well or whether I could wash myself or whether there was electricity... Finally, they tired of it after a few days and stopped. They accepted me sympathetically but I wanted more, I wanted them to be aware of what they were for me: French! The real thing! The second matter that helped me a lot were my grades in school. I was first in my class and was respected because I had "come from a foreign country."[66]

[66] Taïeb, *L'enfant et la Boutargue*, 89-90. It is important to note here that according to Taïeb the Maghreb consists of three countries (Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco). Although Lybia is a Magherian country, he excludes it probably because it was an Italian and not a French colony, and

The Sociocultural Space

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Jewish families launched a process of moving from a residential environment adjacent to Muslims to a European one. A popular location was "Le Passage" (Place Anatole France), on the corner of Avenue de Paris and Avenue Roustan. They did this with two goals in mind: to climb the social ladder, and to fit into French society.[67] Centuries of life shoulder-to-shoulder with Muslims, however, could not be erased merely by moving house; some Jews aspired to combine their European (mainly, French) way of life with sociocultural and even ideological cooperation with the Muslims. The latter, however, wished to purge the common space of Jews, as attested in their anti-Jewish pogroms from the World War II era up to that of the Six-Day War. The cruel violation of Jews' personal space by a Muslim rabble prompted Jews to conclude that living cooperatively with Muslims could not be done. Several examples follow:

> Albert Memmi was already active in the socialist movement in Tunis as an adolescent, working arm-in-arm with Muslim activists to create creating inter-ethnic cooperation in establishing an independent Tunisia. Despite the stories he had heard as a boy about Muslim pogroms against the Jews and despite the metal bars that were laid across the door of his home at the approach of evening, he believed that by intellectual discourse Jews could live side-by-side with Muslims in relative safety. The perpetration of pogroms against the Jews of Tunis by Muslim soldiers in the French Army

its Jewry mostly emigrated to Israel and Italy. The origin for the viewpoint that the Maghreb is French goes back to his education in the French governmental system.

[67] The following are three examples of description of the move and explanations: Albert Memmi, *The Pillar of Salt*, 60; Nine Moati, Les Belles de Tunis: roman (Paris: Éditions de Seuil, 1983), 171; Lucette Valensi and Nathan Wachtel, Jewish Memories, trans. Barbara Harshav (Oakland: University of California Press, 1986), 174 [An interview with Georges X and André, regarding a move from the Hara to the European Quarter].

For transcultural comparison regarding the move from the Hara to the European (Italian) Quarter in Tripoli, view Barbara Spadaro, "Remembering the 'Italian' Jewish Homes of Libya: Gender and Transcultural Memory (1967-2013)," *The Journal of North African Studies* 23, no. 5 (2018): 811-833; 812.

> during World War II, however, shattered his sense of confidence and his belief in the possibility of living side-by-side harmoniously. His best friend, Bissor, and the friend's family were murdered in the violence, causing Albert to experience a trauma for which he emigrated to France for the first time—the France that he had carried in his soul all his life, as reflected in his memoirs.[68]

The Kummer family, which tried to establish amicable relations with the Muslim surroundings—to the point of strongly downplaying its Jewish identity—also found itself disillusioned with the idea of coexistence. It happened twice: when Ida Kummer, then a girl, was kidnapped by a Muslim and saved by virtue of an American who had been nearby, and again when her father, a well-known surgeon, was crowded out by his Muslim students when Bourguiba rose to power.[69] The map that Ida draws is one of an upper-class family in the center of social and community life that hurtles to the margins overnight when a change in government changes the system of social values. Those moments of humiliation and fear were deeply imprinted into Kummer's soul, and her father's words, "Jews have no future in Tunisia," resonate inside her whenever she recalls her childhood home.[70]

This vain attempt to integrate into the Tunisian society and being rejected solely for being Jewish is not a unique case. The following is another example: Mr. Bichi was sent as a child to a public school to graduate with Arabic as a main language, in order to integrate into the newly established Tunisian state, but his family understood that Tunisia had no place for the Jews.[71]

Ambivalent relations with the Muslim population are not exceptional, but rather a recurrent pattern across the Islamic world. The following are a few examples:

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[68] Memmi, *The Pillar of Salt*, 253.

[69] Ida Kummer, "La mauvaise affaire: Tunis, Belvédère," in *Une Enfance Juive en Méditerranée musulmane: Textes Inédits*, ed. Leïla Sebbar (Sain-Pourçain-sur Sioule: Bleu Autour, 2012), 195-202.

[70] Ibid., 198.

[71] Mr. Bichi, interview by Gilat Brav, December 9, 2015, interview 44, transcript, Gilat Brav, "The Figure of the Jewish Immigrant from Northern Tunisia to France between the Thirties and the Seventies of the Twentieth Century as Expressed in Memoirs, Testimonies, Journals and Letters" (PhD diss., University of Haifa, 2020); view also: Brav, *All the Way to France, Appendices*.
Brav, *All the Way to France*, Appendices.

Moreno and Bitton show that Muslims in Morocco, on the one hand protected Jews during the Vichy regime and on the other hand attacked them during the riots in 1952;[72] Bashkin shows that at the same time that Muslim men attacked, raped and looted Jews during the Farhoud (1941), Muslim women helped Jewish women;[73] and lastly, Tachjian demonstrates how, the Armenian genocide during World War I was done not only by Ottomans, but also by ordinary inhabitants, who were a moment ago their friends and then—perpetrators and murderers.[74]

Unlike the disengagement of the extra-community social space from the religious space that typified Jewish life in Tunis, in Paris the two spaces interacted. That is, in Tunis Jews could integrate into the French social space while leaving their intra-community roots intact, whereas in France they had to displace themselves. This phenomenon has been also observed by a few researchers, for example: Colette Zytnicki, who observed that the Tunisian Jewish immigrants "suppressed their culture for the sake of a successful integration;[75] and by Patrick Simon and Claude Tapia, who observed that "In the process of social ascension, the Tunisian Jews risked severing their roots, forgetting their origins, betraying their identity."[76]

As a result, in the 1960s Jews from Tunisia experienced high intermarriage rate.[77] The subjects of our study give evidence of this: both André Nahum and Albert Memmi intermarried during their terms of study in France. Given their deep rootedness in the Tunisian Jewish tradition, however, they devoted their lives to commemorating the legacy and history of Tunisian Jewry. One of the issues that both personalities take up in their writings is intermarriage, and their conclusions are different, as I show presently.

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[72] Moreno and Bitton, "The Moroccan 'Yizkor Book'."

[73] Orit Bashkin, "Saida's Farhoud: Jewish Women in the Farhoud – Survivors, restorers, heroines," *Ha-Mizrah He-Hadash* 62 (2023): 141-164.

[74] Vahé Tachjian, "Depicting the Past and its Diversity in the Age of Nationalisms: The Armenian Memory Books (houshamadyan)," *Diaspora* 23, no. 2 (2023): 160-182.

[75] Zytnicki, "Du rapatrié au séfarad," 96.

[76] Simon and Tapia, *Le Belleville*, 143.

[77] Bensimon and Della Pergola, "Structures Socio-Demographiques," 189. It should be noted that the initial acclimatization period in Paris was characterized by a high percentage of mixed marriages among Jewish immigrants from the Maghreb, especially in areas that were sparsely populated by Jews. View, for example: Joëlle Allouche-Benayoun, "Une histoire d'intégration, les Juifs d'Algérie et la France," *Les Nouveaux cahiers* 116 (1994): 69-76.

Memmi devotes his book Agar (1955) to discussion of the intermarriage issue and concludes that life within the framework of a mixed marriage is untenable when set in the rooted environment of one of the spouses. Therefore, living in cosmopolitan Paris allows each spouse to maintain their roots and the other spouse to impart their roots to posterity. André Nahum, in addition to the many books he wrote about Tunisian Jewish folklore and historical personalities, dedicated a book to the problem of assimilation. In his Juifs de France: la tentation de la assimilation (2007), he contends that assimilation is the product both of antisemitism and of an Ashkenazi haredi ("ultra-Orthodox") hegemony that allows no flexibility in religious observance. Therefore, the Jew struggles to integrate into surrounding society and French Jewry is doomed to disappear.

Conclusions

The story told in the memoirs of francisés Jews who emigrated from Tunis to Paris conveys the image of home and its surroundings as a personal memory that interacts continually with collective memory.

From the works examined in our research corpus, which are based on the personal memories of francisés Jews who emigrated to neighborhoods of Paris where they constituted a minority within Christian population, we find the individual in Tunis shuttling between two spaces, one Jewish and the other not. Given the anchoring of the Tunisian Jewish world in religion and tradition, the religious subspace served the domestic space as a pillar of support. The internal Jewish space revolved around the kitchen and the dining table and was orchestrated by women; the external Jewish space centered on the synagogue, foremost a place of social encounter but also an anchor for the creation and continuation of tradition. This space, a meaningful one in Jews' lives, also affected the Enlightenment space, either by clashing with it or in a harmonious flow. The two spaces, the Jewish and the socioculturally non-Jewish, in contrast, moved along parallel paths because each revolved around social life in a different community. That is, whereas the religious space was central in preserving the Jewish way of life in Tunis, the non-Jewish sociocultural space rose to centrality at times of distress, when the buffer that

protected the Jew's world was breached and Jews emigrated to Paris in order to continue their lives there.

Upon their emigration to Paris, francisés Jews aspired to maintain their old-country way of life and integrate into secular life. They managed to do both by stepping into the Enlightenment space, that is, the space in which they acquired—via their French-oriented education—their sociocultural and political values. This space continued to provide important support in creating the Jewish home, but while Jews in Tunis felt secure in that space—because their world was planted in tradition and religion—they "lost their way" in Paris due to the loss of the communityness that had underlay their lives in Tunis. They first experienced this loss in the religious space because they needed a new anchorage in Christian society. Thus, while in Tunis the Jewish space at large was also the community space and individual Jews could exist in it alongside the non-Jewish space, in Paris the familiar religious space contracted and did not ensure communityness. Therefore, Jews strove to create a religious space that would square with living conditions in Paris and often found it in assimilation.

In sum, the image of the Jewish home and its surroundings in the past is an emotional and mental construct that typifies émigrés' nostalgia and allows them to cope with the complex reality of emigration. Central in this image is the Enlightenment space, which built a bridge between Tunis and Paris and thereby allowed Jews to create continuity and adopt a pillar of support for their domestic space in lieu of the Jewish space that had provided this service in Tunis. Thus, the émigrés, despite sometimes "losing their way," could cling to familiar contents and strengthen their grip as they settled into their new space.

Appendix: Tunisian Jewish Memoirs

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Barcelo-Guez, Danielle. *Au 28 rue de Marseille*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2005.

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Halimi, Gisèle. *Fritna*. Plon, 1999.

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Khaïat, Georges. *Sfax... ma jeunesse: roman*. Tunis: Sur Éditions, 1997.
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Rubinstein, Katia. *Mémoires illettrées d'une fillette d'Afrique du Nord à l'époque coloniale*. Paris: Stock, 1978.
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Valensi, Lucette & Wachtel, Nathan. *Jewish Memories*, trans. Barbara Harshav. Oakland: University of California Press, 1986.
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Fig. 1. Illustration by Zohar Gannot, 2025

Gilat Brav focuses her research on the communities of Tunisia and Egypt. The topic of her doctoral dissertation (at Haifa University) is: "The Figure of the Jewish Immigrant from Northern Tunisia to France between the 1930s and the 1970s, as Expressed in Memoirs, Testimonies, Diaries and Letters." Dr. Brav is conducting post-doctoral comprehensive archival research, at Bar-Ilan University, on the topic "Prisoners of Zion in Egypt in the years 1948-1970: The Red Cross as the mainstay of international rescue efforts," under the supervision of Prof. Yaron Harel. She is a research fellow at the Center for the Study of The Jews of Spain and Islamic Lands: Past and Present, at the University of Haifa (headed by Prof. Tamar Zvi) and a member of the research group "Israel: Communities in Motion" at the Azrieli Center for Israel Studies [Ma'ali] at Ben-Gurion University. Dr. Brav's publications include *All the Way to France: The World of the Jews Who Immigrated from Northern Tunisia to France*, and *Between Enlightenment and*

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Keywords: Tunis, France, Emigrés, Home, Spatial Maps

How to quote this article:
Gilat Brav, "Tunis and Paris Face Off: Images of the Jewish Home and Environment among Tunisian Jewish Francisés Émigrés in France," in "(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East," eds. Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15955

Dege Feder, Dancing Mobile Geographies: Ethiopian Jewish Contemporary Dance Migrations in Israel

by *Hannah Kosstrin*

Abstract

Ethiopian Israeli multimedia artist Dege Feder embodies Jewish and African diasporas in her dances. She uses the structures of Ethiopian eskesta dancing as a basis for contemporary experimentation. Feder migrated from Ethiopia to Israel during Operation Moses (1984-1985). Her work determines Israeli contemporary art from an Afrocentric foundation through its East African Jewish migrations. By manifesting the corporeal evidence of her migration and assimilation, her work re-establishes perceptions of Israeli physicalities, culture, and nationalism. This article argues that the migratory aesthetics in Feder's cultural production determine a post-melting-pot conception of Israeli nationhood for mobilizing collective memory and mapping emotional and corporeal cartographies of Jewish diaspora. Her dances and videos Amaweren'ya *(2018),* Rewind/Repeat *(2020), and* Mesnko *(2023) embed Ethiopian memory within the corporeal territory of contemporary Israeli arts. Feder's work establishes an Ethiopian Jewish contemporaneity by refusing binaries between traditional and contemporary aesthetics that have historically sidelined artists of color.*

Introduction

Dancing Mobile Geographies

Contemporary Migrations within Contemporaneity

Affective Dimensions of Migrating Aesthetics: Corporeality and Acculturation

Conclusion

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Introduction

Whose body builds the nation? What does corporeality afford histories of migration and experiences of exile? These questions direct my analysis of the dances and music videos of Jewish Ethiopian Israeli multimedia artist Dege Feder, whose compositions embody Jewish and African diasporas. Feder's work blends the swiftly shimmering, rolling, and bouncing isolations of the shoulders, sternum, and belly of Ethiopian eskesta dancing (Amharic shoulder dancing) with compositional devices like abstraction, deconstruction, and generating movement in service of a dance's theme from Israeli contemporary dance. Her musical compositions similarly expand upon Ethiopian musical structures. As a child, Feder migrated from Gondar, Ethiopia to Israel in Operation Moses (1984-1985), the Israeli government's first clandestine airlift to bring Ethiopian Jews to Israel via refugee camps in Khartoum, Sudan.[1] Her works' elements evidence East African Jewish migrations and determine Israeli contemporary art from an Afrocentric foundation. In this article, I argue that the migratory aesthetics in Feder's cultural production determine a post-melting-pot conception of Israeli nationhood for mobilizing collective memory and mapping emotional and corporeal cartographies of Jewish diaspora.

[1] After Israel's Chief Rabbis determined that Israel's Law of Return applied to Ethiopian Jews—the Sephardic Chief Rabbi in 1973 and the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi in 1975—Israel embarked first on Operation Moses in 1984-1985, which airlifted 7,700 Ethiopian Jews from Sudan who had walked there from northern Ethiopian provinces, and then completed Operation Solomon in 1991, which airlifted 14,400 Ethiopian Jews from Ethiopia's capital city Addis Ababa over three days. Shalva Weil, "Ethiopian Jewish Women: Trends and Transformations in the Context of Transnational Change," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies & Gender Issues* 8 (2004): 73-86; 79. Genetic information ascertained from Israeli expeditions in Ethiopia between the early 1960s and 1970s did not factor into this decision. Nurit Kirsh, "Jewishness, Blackness, and Genetic Data," in *Blackness in Israel: Rethinking Racial Boudaries*, eds. Uri Dorchin and Gabriella Djerrahian (Abingon-New York: Routledge, 2021), 43-57 and 46-48. Instead, it was based on *halakha* (Jewish religious law). Omer Keynan, "Black-Israeli Lives Matter: Online Activism Among Young Ethiopian Israelis," in *Blackness in Israel: Rethinking Racial Boundaries*, eds. Uri Dorchin and Gabriella Djerrahian (Abingdon-New York: Routledge, 2021), 77-90; 78.

As dance and physical culture fostered Israeli nationalism since the British Mandate period,[2] and the kinesthetics of dance choreography offer potential for altering Israeli political conditions,[3] so too does contemporary eskesta embodiment signal multiethnic Israeliness within geographic and emotional cartographies of Jewish migrations from East Africa. Examining population migrations through dance practices is one way to understand how culture migrates because dance practices signal region and syncretism through movement combinations, body part articulations, and temporal qualities. Eskesta remains central to Ethiopian Jewishness, even as the immigrant generations have acculturated into Israeli society and their Israeli-born children have assimilated as Israelis. Ethiopian Jewish immigrants and Ethiopian Israelis practice eskesta as part of community and artistic pursuits. This motion represents what anthropologist Pnina Werbner identifies as "culture as discourse": "Migration thus entails more than cultural transplantation or translocation. It involves acts of cultural and material *investment* and *creativity*."[4] In Feder's work, this material investment manifests in the corporeality of eskesta dancing. Eskesta is a communicative, social practice that forges community through the body;[5] in Feder's process, eskesta inherits choreographic rules,[6] which are parameters for making a theatrical dance based on movements' qualities. Themes of journey and family explicitly tie Feder's work to Ethiopian Jewish experience through competing feelings of peoplehood and exile that have, in turn, marked Israeli society since the founding of the state.[7]

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[2] Nina S. Spiegel, *Embodying Hebrew Culture: Aesthetics, Athletics, and Dance in the Jewish Community of Mandate Palestine* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2013).

[3] Melissa Melpignano, "Choreographing Livability after Oslo: Israeli Women Choreographers and Collective Responsibility," in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewishness and Dance*, eds. Naomi M. Jackson, Rebecca Pappas, and Toni Shapiro-Phim (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 565-588 and 579-580.

[4] Pnina Werbner, "Migration and Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of The Politics of International Migration*, eds. Marc R. Rosenblum and Daniel J. Tichenor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 215-242; 220.

[5] Dege Feder, "Ethiopian Dance: From Traditional to Contemporary," (master class given at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, February 25, 2020).

[6] Dege Feder, "Composing During Covis," (master class given at The Ohio State University via Zoom, March 10, 2021).

[7] For example, Mizrahim excluded from a Euro-Zionist imaginary found exile rather than homeland within the State of Israel. Ella Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 1 (1999): 5-20; 17. This feeling of exclusion repeated in Ethiopian Jewish experience in Israel.

By considering what identifying diaspora through the body instead of through cartography can do for people's feelings of belonging, I contend, we can reevaluate the place of dance in determining diasporic subjecthood within Israel. The 1950s-1970s *mizug hagaluyot* (melting-pot) cultural policy aimed to create a unified Israeli society, which often entailed appropriating, then eradicating, non-Ashkenazi elements.[8] Fifty years after the end of the *mizug hagaluyot* policy and continued migration into Israel, particularly of Ethiopian Jewry, Ethiopian Jewish cultural production contributes to a sense of the Israeli collective. Feder's work demonstrates how contemporaneity functions within global North-South flows of artistic production of MENA Jewry in Israel. By grounding the emotional map of migration within the body, my discussion makes corporeal, temporal, and artistic interventions in this volume's investigations into North African, East African, and Middle Eastern affective migrations.

As a dance historian, I pursue how people's dancing bodies produce culture across historical and regional contexts. This means that people make meaning of their cultural context by performing dances and by watching dance. In this way, the body is a mobile vessel, both in terms of people moving in population migrations and moving their bodies in artistic expression, for navigating memories of mobility. Through archival materials, including press, photographs, and film, paired with ethnographic activities like interviews, observing Feder's company in rehearsal, and taking her classes, I posit the body as a repository of Jewish migratory corporeality that determines Israeliness. To do so, I build on dance theorist Priya Srinivasan's formulation of the "bodily archive," which asserts that people's bodies retain a repository of movement knowledge collected through their embodied experiences.[9] Feder's aesthetics display corporeal diasporism, which is the bodily material evidence of Jewish diasporic cultures, wherein dancing bodies in migration and their shared and unshared racial, ethnic, political, and economic experiences and belief systems determine diaspora.[10] As embodied

[8] Bryan Karle Roby, *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel's Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle, 1948–1966* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2015), 5-8.

[9] Priya Srinivasan, *Sweating Saris: Indian Dance as Transnational Labor* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 67-73.

[10] Hannah Kosstrin, *Kinesthetic Peoplehood: Jewish Diasporic Dance Migrations* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

Israeli cultural production, Feder's dances index how the physical culture of Israel's *edot* (ethnic groups) build the nation.

Feder's choreography is premised on infusing the shoulder articulations of eskesta dancing with the subject and emotionality demands of a given work. Her dances hold within them the history and memory of the journey of migrating from Ethiopia to Israel, referencing a common Operation Moses journey narrative that entwines the sojourn with memory.[11] But even in Israel, where Ethiopian Jews could be said to have arrived "home" to Yorusalem/Jerusalem, the journey is ongoing for Feder,[12] because she reconciles her African diasporic context as much as her Jewish Israeli one. Thus, even as her work maps emotional cartographies through kinesthesia (body knowledge),[13] it also negotiates a relationship to Jewish collectivity and histories of assimilation within the Israeli nation. In the dances I analyze, *Amaweren'ya* (2018), *Rewind/Repeat* (2020), and *Mesnko* (2023), Feder uses the structures of traditional Ethiopian dance and musical forms as a basis for contemporary experimentation. In doing so, she embeds Ethiopian memory within the corporeal territory of contemporary Israeli arts. Encounters with contemporaneity underlined Ethiopian Jews' migration to Israel. As a social condition *and* a set of aesthetic rules, contemporaneity—here, a response to the artistic demands of the global North—determines Feder's participation in the Israeli artistic landscape.

[11] Like Beta Dance Troupe's *Maharo* (1998). See Ruth Eshel, "A Creative Process in Ethiopian-Israeli Dance: Eskesta Dance Theater and Beta Dance Troupe," *Dance Chronicle* 34, no. 3 (2011): 369-375; and Ilana Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari: Making Ethiopian Music in Tel Aviv* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 115-118.

[12] Dege Feder, "Mahol Etiopi Akhshavi," *Mahol Akhshav* (*Dance Today: The Dance Magazine of Israel*), February 2023, 56.

[13] Notably, Ruth Eshel's dance *What the Shoulders Remember* (*Ma Sh'haketafa'im Misparot*), (2007) for Beta Dance Troupe established the eskesta shoulders as the emotional-kinesthetic manifestation of this memory. Ruth Eshel, chor., *Ma Sh'haketafa'im Misparot*, 2006, uploaded by Ruth Eshel, February 5, 2018, YouTube, 18 min., 5 sec., accessed June 25, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UktKfWrqisE.

Dancing Mobile Geographies

As Jewish Ethiopian cultural production, eskesta tracks Ethiopian Jews' migration history through the body as much as through space in an affective migration history. Ethiopian Jews' migration to Israel aligns with a spatial theory of migration that demographer Elizabeth Fussell defines is based in "a multiplicity of social structures that contribute to the emergence and growth of migration systems" with late twentieth-century migrations from the global South to the global North.[14] Different from most contemporary migration patterns of migrants' volition driven by economics or positive selection,[15] Ethiopian Jews' migration to Israel was largely religious, based in a yearning of return (coterminous with antisemitism and famine in Ethiopia) and facilitated by the Israeli government with international partners in the name of an Israeli ethos of *kibbutz galuiot*, or "ingathering of the exiles" (that is, gathering together Jewish diasporic communities living outside Israel).[16] Ethiopian Israelis maintain connections to Africanist cultural flows within Jewish histories of migration layered onto contemporary social conditions. Historian Gabriella Djerrahian has argued that many Ethiopian Israelis tap into pan-African diasporic cultural products like music in order to assert their place within Israeli society as Ethiopian Jewish Israelis.[17] These negotiations follow historical distinctions within Jewish racial categories. In the early twentieth century, racist attitudes of Jewish sociological race scientists gathered Ashkenazim and Sephardim into categories of whiteness

[14] Elizabeth Fussell, "Space, Time, and Volition: Dimensions of Migration Theory," in *The Oxford Handbook of The Politics of International Migration*, eds. Marc R. Rosenblum and Daniel J. Tichenor (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 25-52; 34.

[15] Fussell, "Space, Time, and Volition," 34 and 42-43.

[16] For tensions within this migration history, see Shula Mola, "Ethiopian Immigrants and the Perception of Media," in *A Justice-Based Approach for New Media Policy: In the Paths of Righteousness*, eds. Amit M. Schejter and Noam Tirosh (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 71-85; 71-75.

[17] Gabriella Djerrahian, "The 'End of Diaspora' is Just the Beginning: Music at the Crossroads of Jewish, African, and Ethiopian Diasporas in Israel," *African and Black Diaspora: An International Journal* 2, no. 2 (2018): 161-173.

and defined Ethiopian Jews as specifically *not* Jewish.[18] In response, historian Bryan Roby notes, "in the twentieth century, global Black communities began to shape and reconstruct what it means to be Black."[19] These efforts appear in Israel in the way that, in the words of ethnomusicologist Ilana Webster-Kogen, eskesta corporeally mobilizes Blackness as Israeli citizenship.[20] Webster-Kogen asserts that eskesta is "a prism through which to interpret the entangled workings of the Afrodiasporic, Ethiopianist, and Zionist myths,"[21] that is, Ethiopian Jews experience both being of and estranged from the Afrodiasporic and Jewish diasporic worlds. Feder's work refuses exile by creating Afrodiasporic-Jewish diasporic belonging through her compositional logics that employ both movement aesthetics. Embodying both engenders affective migration.

To address the question of what corporeality affords experiences of exile, I turn to Feder's history and the way she composes movement and music from eskesta's component parts. The aesthetic and compositional blending in her work creates an Israeli theatrical space built on East African migrations that encompasses experiences of self and other. Since 2011 Feder has directed the music group Lela, and since 2013 she has directed the Beta Dance Company in Haifa. The name "Beta" refers to "Beta Israel," the name attributed to the Ethiopian Jewish community. Feder danced in the company under Ruth Eshel's direction since 2006, and before that in Eshel's student company at the University of Haifa called Eskesta Dance Theatre. Feder's Ethiopian-Israeli contemporary practices in her movement technique, music composition, and choreography trace her Jewish and African lived experiences, even when she does not feel fully part of Africa or Israel. She arrived in Israel in 1985 from Operation Moses and was separated from most of her family for months. Her first experiences reconciling Israel's skyscrapers with Gondar's mud-hut structures into her worldview sharpy distinguished Ethiopian from Israeli encounters with contemporaneity in the built environment.[22] Feder

[18] Bryan Karle Roby, "How Race Travels: Navigating Global Blackness in J. Ida Jiggett's Study of Afro-Asian Israeli Jewry," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 27, no. 1 (2022): 1-42; 6-10.

[19] Roby, "How Race Travels," 30-31.

[20] Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*, 104-131.

[21] Ibid., 106.

[22] Dege Feder, "A Journey in Motion," (lecture given at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, February 24, 2020).

experienced an in-between feeling as a teenager. She told the *Jerusalem Post* that "she tried to fit into Israeli society by shaking off her Ethiopian heritage and trying to be like everyone else. 'But that doesn't help you to be a part of Israeli society, escaping from yourself'."[23] The combined alienation and belonging that Feder experiences in Israel because of her migration challenges the myth of Israel as an ingathering of Jewish exiles. Navigating discrimination as a racial minority in a place mythologically for all Jews underlies Feder's work.

In the 1990s, when Feder danced in Eskesta Dance Theatre, she met Ethiopian Israelis who were her age but had immigrated after her, during Operation Solomon (1991). The Eskesta troupe presented a blend of staged Ethiopian folklore practices and contemporary artistic renderings of Ethiopian Jewish cultural themes. Feder's colleagues who made aliyah in the early 1990s were proud of their Ethiopian heritage and did not try to shed it as she had since her childhood.[24] Their pride, and Eshel's group, got Feder interested in her roots that she had neglected since her attempts to assimilate.[25] Tensions within the Eskesta company's legacy related to Israel's concern with uplifting while devaluing cultural practices of its *edot* have underlined Feder's artistic endeavors and their reception.

In Israel, the Ethiopian Jewish community fights discrimination from the Ashkenazi-Sephardi establishment legislatively, socially, religiously, and aesthetically. Markings of skin tone are not the only determinants of difference between Ethiopian Jewry and mainstream Israeli society. Ethiopian cultural differences include, among others, hierarchical respect for elders, allowing events to unfold with gentle temporality (which opposes Israeli insistence on directness

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[23] "Proud of their Roots: Ethiopian Performers Fight for their Place in the Cultural Scene," *The Jerusalem Post*, n.d., n.p., File Name 150121_the jerusalem postlite.jpg, Folder: Dege Feder 0.(7)122, Israeli Dance Archive at Beit Ariela, Tel Aviv.

[24] Aliyah means "going up" or "ascension" and refers to Jewish people immigrating to Israel from the Diaspora. Moreover, pride in Ethiopian culture was common among Jews who emigrated during Operation Solomon. For example, musician Tamar Rada, who immigrated to Israel at the age of four with Operation Solomon, recalled that her family only spoke Amharic at home and her father wanted them to speak perfect Hebrew in public, so that they would both remember their Ethiopian heritage and be fully Israeli. For Rada, see Jessica Steinberg, "Festival of Israeli-Ethiopian Culture Keeps the Beat, Even Online," *The Times of Israel*, December 22, 2020; reprinted in *Capital* (Ethiopia), January 11, 2021.

[25] Dege Feder, "Dege Feder Talks about her Choreographic Work," (lecture given at The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, February 24, 2020).

and speed), and conceiving a day's time as twelve hours related to the passing of day and night instead of twenty-four clock hours.[26] Another point of difference points to rabbinic and non-rabbinic lineages of Judaism that philosopher and historian Sharon Zeude Shalom calls "two opposing models of Judaism."[27] The rabbinic literary canon began after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE. Because Beta Israel were in Ethiopia (where they practiced what anthropologist Shalva Weil calls a Torah-based non-Talmudic type of Judaism[28]) at this moment widely understood as the Jewish people's expulsion into exile, the Beta Israel were cut off from post-Second Temple Judaism in a way that Mizrahim were not.[29] Because of shared diasporic-as-exile histories between Ashkenazim, Sephardim, and Mizrahim, from an Ashkenazi point of view, according to Webster-Kogen, Mizrahim are exotic versions of the familiar, whereas Ethiopians are altogether Other: "Ethiopian rituals, like Ethiopian bodies, are conspicuous in Israel, since they do not conform to an agreed image of Jews or Israelis."[30] The Israeli Ministry of Education's curriculum includes Ethiopian Jewish history, but its application across individual schools is uneven.[31] This process often leads to a double sense of alienation for Ethiopian Israelis—from their parent culture, and from the one into which they are assimilated. Moreover, many Beta Israel *halakha* (laws) were organized orally within Africanist tradition, which differs from Talmudic traditions of written transmission.[32] Some Ethiopian Jewish prayers are maintained through a combination of written and oral

[26] Nigist Mengasha, "Ethiopian Heritage, Culture & History in the Israeli School Curriculum," (paper presented during the online symposium "From Ethiopia to Yerusalem: We Came Bearing Gifts," Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University, July 27, 2021), accessed June 25, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AR7t_iIAALA.

[27] Sharon Zeude Shalom, "Integrating Beta Israel Halakha into Israel's Rabbinic Mainstream," (paper presented during the online symposium "From Ethiopia to Yerusalem: We Came Bearing Gifts," Hebrew University of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv University, July 27, 2021), accessed June 25, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AR7t_iIAALA.

[28] Shalva Weil, "Religion, Blood and the Equality of Rights: The Case of Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights* 4, no. 3-4 (1997): 397-412; 399.

[29] Zeude Shalom, "Integrating Beta Israel Halakha into Israel's Rabbinic Mainstream."

[30] Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*, 125.

[31] Nigist Mengasha, "Ethiopian Heritage, Culture & History in the Israeli School Curriculum"; Noa Shapira and Shula Mola, "Teachers 'Looking into a Mirror': A Journey through Exposure to Diverse Perspectives," *Intercultural Education* 33, no. 6 (2022): 611-629.

[32] Zeude Shalom, "Integrating Beta Israel Halakha into Israel's Rabbinic Mainstream."

practices,[33] reflecting both the Jewish written tradition and the Africanist oral tradition. Due to this and other restrictions against Beta Israel's pre-rabbinic practices, *qesim* (Ethiopian Jewish clergy) do not have the same state-level clerical rights as do Ashkenazi, Sephardic, or Mizrahi rabbis. Israel does not recognize marriages performed by *qesim*, and Israeli law requires either Ashkenazi or Sephardi rabbis to perform all marriages recognized by the state. Tensions from these exclusions surface in Feder's work, through a blend of these traditions that reclaims minoritarian cultural production.

Contemporary Migrations within Contemporaneity

Feder's answer to her national context occurs through her movement practice *mahol etiopi akhshavi* (Ethiopian contemporary dance).[34] The Hebrew word *mahol* indicates theatrical dance. Within the term *mahol etiopi akhshavi*, *mahol akhshavi* is "contemporary dance" that relates to the Israeli theatrical stage within a global context. So, the term itself shows a specific Ethiopian (*etiopi*) Israeli artistic practice while connecting to larger contemporary Africanist flows. It establishes an Ethiopian Jewish contemporaneity by refusing binaries between traditional and contemporary aesthetics that have historically sidelined artists of color. It is also a vehicle to establish home in the body when diasporic circulations otherwise exclude Feder's Ethiopianness as not contemporary or her Jewishness as not of Africa. In Beta Dance Company, she gathers Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian performers to get dual qualities: dancers who danced eskesta since childhood, and dancers trained in concert (theatrical) dance techniques that afford *a priori* reading as "contemporary" who are able to acculturate eskesta into their bodies.[35] That dancers of Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian backgrounds perform Feder's technique

[33] Simha Arom, Frank Alvarez-Pereyre, Shoshanna Ben-Dor, and Olivier Tourny, "The Beta Israel Liturgy: Components and Dynamics," in *The Liturgy of Beta Israel Music of the Ethiopian Jewish Prayer*, Anthology of Music Traditions in Israel, ed. Edwin Seroussi, vol. 26 (Jerusalem: Jewish Music Research Centre, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2019): 1-94; 13. Accessed June 25, 2025, https://jewish-music.huji.ac.il/en/content/liturgy-beta-israel-music-ethiopian-jewish-prayer.

[34] Dege Feder, "Mahol Etiopi Akhshavi," 54-56.

[35] Beta Dance Company rehearsal, Pyramid Art Center, Haifa, Israel, March 18, 2022.

signals a contemporary approach to concert dance that values repetition of a choreographers' specific movement vocabularies in other dancers' bodies.

The label *mahol etiopi akhshavi* at once signals a genre, an artistic methodological affiliation with contemporary concert dance, and a temporal designation that reflects migration. The idea of "contemporary" in dance is constantly under revision, referring alternately to genre, time period, movement vocabulary, qualitative marker, or ethnically-infused label.[36] One aspect of this term's longer history relates to the ways dance critics separated artists—and, by extension, the cultural background their work represented—into self and other. In the twentieth century, American and Israeli culture brokers shared labels of "modern" or "contemporary" (Eurocentric modernity considered unmarked by cultural contexts) valued as high art over "ethnic" (non-white, pejoratively culturally marked, stuck in a mythic past). American influence in the Israeli concert dance scene beginning in the 1950s established channels of shared values in terms of movement characteristics and critical discourse. In Israel in 1971, the Histadrut's (General Federation of Labor) cultural branch established the Ethnic Dance Section distinct from the Folk Dance Section, wherein "folk" was the Ashkenazi nationalist-project Israeli folk dance (*rikudei am* in Hebrew) and "ethnic" was Mizrahi or other non-Ashkenazi-originated dances determined worth preserving as national heritage but not as contemporary practice.[37] In the late twentieth century, the term "ethnic dance" was largely replaced by "world dance" but the colonialist stigma remained.[38] The Israeli dance lineages in modern dance include the German expressive dance that fostered Israeli contemporary dance from the 1920s to 1940s, Yemenite practices since the late 1940s, and American modern dance influences starting in the 1950s. Local Israeli developments in companies like Batsheva Dance Company, Inbal Dance Theater, Kibbutz Contemporary Dance Company, and Vertigo Dance Company since a 1990s artistic turn in Israeli concert dance have created a distinctive Israeli aesthetic. The term "contemporary" in concert dance often refers to these aesthetic properties.

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[36] See, for example, SanSan Kwan, "When Is Contemporary Dance?" *Dance Research Journal* 49, no. 3 (2017): 38-52.

[37] Dina Roginsky, "Nationalism and Ambivalence: Ethnicity, Gender, and Folklore as Categories of Otherness," *Patterns of Prejudice* 40, no. 3 (2006): 237-258; 250-253.

[38] Susan Leigh Foster, "Worlding Dance – An Introduction," in *Worlding Dance*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (Hampshire-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 1-13.

Within the global circulation of concert dance, concomitantly, the term "contemporary" is a way for artists of the global South to respond to the aesthetic and compositional rules of the global North. Dance theorist Ananya Chatterjea defines dancing in a "contemporary" way is "in response to the issues of the day," and that contemporary dance investigations focus on choreographic strategies that push formalistic boundaries.[39] While historically through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the production of the contemporary was restricted to artists from the global North, Chatterjea shows how artists from the global South determine a contemporaneity that answers to the global North while innovating within South-South discourses. She defines South-South contemporary dance as recognizing and embodying

> [...] resonance among artists from Indigenous communities across the world, those living and working in the geographic Third World/global South, and Black and brown artists living in First World/global North diasporas, working from their own local cultural contexts and aesthetic particularities toward self-determined narratives of justice.[40]

Contemporaneity, then, is artists' double refusal to be defined only by their cultural contexts or to fully uphold choreographic methods of the global North.[41] Feder's work for stage and screen exemplifies this double refusal by driving her choreographic experimentation with eskesta logics.

Feder's screendance *Amawenren'ya* (2017), directed by Daniella Meroz, is one example of the way Feder choreographs contemporary work from eskesta elements that manifest her migration history. She composed *Amawenren'ya*'s music and lyrics in Amharic. She collaged eskesta patterns into filmic editing techniques, juxtaposed ancient against modern through the film's setting and through the way she used eskesta, and incorporated performances by her mother, daughter, and herself. Feder explained that she and her family members appear on "the screen as they are—my mother who still lives in the traditional world, my daughter who is

[39] Ananya Chatterjea, *Heat and Alterity in Contemporary Dance: South-South Choreographies* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), xii and 3-4.
[40] Ibid., 28-29.
[41] Ibid., 30.

already a member of a new generation and me as someone who is in the middle—living in the contemporary world but still having a link to tradition."[42] Feder wrote the song when she briefly lived in Germany and tried to get local Israeli news from Israeli outlets. It addresses the media's manufactured duplicity. *Amawaren'ya*, according to Feder, "is a cynical, humorous song [she] composed that is critical of the media world,"[43] wherein "truth was less important than ratings and popularity."[44] Feder's simulacra call truth and fabrication into question while generating long matrilineages through their stirring scapulae and smiles flirting with or shooting cynical glances at the camera.[45]

In the film, digital duplicates of Feder, her family members, and Beta company dancers playfully shift their shoulders back and forth and roll their bellies in different parts of the basin of the Mamilla Pool in Jerusalem. Built during the Second Temple period and once a main aqueduct for the region, the now-dry landscape dotted with arid shrubs features vintage chairs (imported for the film) and is backgrounded by the pool's ancient stone wall.[46] Some points of the film slow down the image, so eskesta's liquid-fast isolations gain an expansive buoyancy suspended in time, and contrast the sharpness of Feder performing in real time. These filmic techniques' juxtaposition presents one example of the way Feder applies compositional tools of abstraction to eskesta vocabulary. Feder's work maintains eskesta's bubbling torso as an undercurrent even when her dances encompass movement vocabulary outside eskesta tradition. And yet, because Feder brings the movement qualities of eskesta into the full body, instead of keeping it in the shoulders, and the dancers (except the elders) don contemporary clothing, more traditional Ethiopian audiences do not consider her work to be

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[42] Dege Feder, "From the Other Side: An Interview with Ethiopian-Israeli Dance Artist Dege Feder," trans. Gur Hirshberg, in *The Oxford Handbook of Jewishness and Dance*, eds. Naomi M. Jackson, Rebecca Pappas, and Toni Shapiro-Phim (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 173-190; 184.

[43] Feder, "From the Other Side," 183.

[44] Ibid., 184.

[45] Dege Feder, chor., *Amaweren'ya*, 2018, uploaded by dege feder, June 25, 2018, YouTube, 4 min, 21 sec., accessed June 25, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kg1fony6Nqc.

[46] Feder, "From the Other Side," 184; David Raphael Lockard, "Tourist Tip #276 Mamilla Pool, an Eerie, Crumbling Treasure in the Heart of Jerusalem," *Ha'aretz*, July 2, 2013. Accessed June 25, 2025, https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/travel/2013-07-02/ty-article/.premium/tourist-tip-276-mamilla-pool-in-jerusalem/0000017f-dc29-df62-a9ff-dcffaabe0000.

eskesta because eskesta is only about the shoulders, keeps the lower body still, and is performed in traditional dress.[47]

Part of the emotional map of Feder's work is the way she experiences its reception. Feder gets caught between predominantly non-Ethiopian concert dance audiences who label the Ethiopianness in her work as "other" or "world dance," and Ethiopian audiences (in Israel and in Ethiopia when she toured there) who perceive her work to be exciting but not Ethiopian because of its contemporary quality.[48] Chatterjea has argued that viewers identifying a dance as "contemporary" means that there are aesthetic markers in the movement tracing to Euro-American histories of modern/contemporary dance and the individuality of artistic voice—that the global stage demands this familiarity with the aesthetic global North—and at the same time culturally marked dancers are expected to stand in for traditional practices.[49] "Culturally marked" refers to dancers who either are presumed to be not of European origin due to their physical characteristics, or their dancing contains elements of non-Western lineages. This spectatorial angle alternately boosts and foils Feder depending on who presents her and what audiences she draws. Feder regularly presents her work on Ethiopian cultural festivals like the Sigdiada (f. 2012) for the Ethiopian Jewish holiday Sigd, and she has premiered many dances at the Hullegeb Festival of Ethiopian-Israeli Art in Jerusalem, where she headlines.[50] She has shown her work at the Pyramid Gallery in Haifa, at Inbal Dance Theater's Interdisciplinary Ethnic Arts Center in Tel Aviv, at solo at events around Israel and those in collaboration with other artists. Though it took longer for her to be presented in contemporary dance venues,[51] she has performed at the Suzanne Dellal Centre for Dance and Theatre in Tel Aviv, Machol Shalem Dance Center in Jerusalem, and the Tmuna Theater

[47] I thank Danny Admasu for this distinction.

[48] Dege Feder, in conversation with the author, February 24, 2020, Columbus, Ohio.

[49] Ananya Chatterjea, "On the Value of Mistranslations and Contaminations: The Category of 'Contemporary Choreography' in Asian Dance," *Dance Research Journal* 45, no. 1 (2013): 7-21.

[50] See, for example, Barry Davis, "Ethiopia for All at the Hullegeb Festival," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 11, 2015, 18.

[51] Ori J. Lenkinski, " 'Jalo' from the Other Side," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 17, 2017. Accessed June 25, 2025, https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/culture/jalo-from-the-other-side-515909; Ora Brafman, "Dance Review – Beta Company: Bug," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 10, 2019, 16; Ori J. Lenkinski, "Beta Dance Troupe Gets Bugged," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 21, 2018, 3.

in Tel Aviv. Feder's dances speak to audiences who recognize their dynamic hybridity.

Contemporaneity is not just about abstraction, responding to the current moment, a manner of composing, or reception. Within it is a sense of global circulation that maintains contact or aesthetic dialogue with the global North while challenging it. Such migrations visible in Feder's *mahol etiopi akhshavi* answer Chatterjea's call "to insist on re-mappings on our own terms"[52] by defining Israeli contemporary aesthetics through eskesta movement qualities.

Affective Dimensions of Migrating Aesthetics: Corporeality and Acculturation

For a dance to look like it participates in contemporary art, specific movements, including the way dancers move in and out of the floor, roll backwards over one shoulder, arch the torso, or crumple the body into a floorbound side fall, uphold the corporeal rules of contemporary dance. Feder's dance *Rewind and Repeat* (2020) displays these contemporary cues.[53] In the dance made in the thick of the coronavirus pandemic (2020-2022), six women fight alienation of the possibilities of a posthuman ecosystem or a postapocalyptic landscape. They punctuate the dance's emotional undertones with shivers at the backs of their necks that send their heads vibrating against a piercing frequency in the soundscore; both together generate a sense of the uncanny. Eskesta cues like these neck articulations undergird *Rewind and Repeat*. Others include insistent chin pecking initiated from the base of the skull, and petite undulations from between the shoulder blades, where eskesta is centered, that send the torso into a forward, contemporary-dance-legible curve. The robotic boops and beeps of Frank Bretschneider's electronic music enhances a sense of alienation that the dancers typify through sharp head punctuations and shoulder shivers. These movements demonstrate assertions in publicity descriptions stating this dance is composed of

[52] Chatterjea, "On the Value of Mistranslations and Contaminations," 17.

[53] Dege Feder, chor., *Rewind & Repeat*, 2020, Confederation House, Jerusalem, uploaded by Beit HaKonfederatzia [Confederation House], December 29, 2020, YouTube, 56 min., 37 sec., accessed June 25, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m7AIoowTMqA&t=2612s.

reconstructed elements of Ethiopian dance.[54] Another example is when the dancers fit themselves into a round clump, rest their head between the next person's shoulder blades, and rise and lower *en masse*, they look like they could be from any number of contemporary dance companies. Yet, their sharp double exhalations of breath that initiate stark double-bounced drops of their bodies toward the floor are a transposition (putting movement originating from one body part into another) of a double-shouldered drop from eskesta dancing.[55] During a break in the music, the dancers' rhythmic clapping and footfalls undergirded by low rhythmic vocalizations emphasize additional Africanist aesthetic elements. These movement markers reinforce that the Ethiopian contemporary signals the ways East African Jewish migrations define, contribute to, and redefine Israeli cultural production.

Within Feder's contemporary compositional strategies, eskesta embodies the intersection and retention of Ethiopian Jewishness amidst Ethiopian Jews' assimilation into Israeli society. The eskesta movement markers in the music video *Mesnko* (2023) spliced in with more general grooving exemplifies this syncretism. Written and directed by Tai Morris, with lyrics in Amharic and Hebrew by Amen Cholé and music and choreography by Feder, *Mesnko* features a multigenerational family gathering to celebrate an elder's birthday.[56] The performers are all members of Feder's family—her mother, siblings, daughter, nieces, and nephews, along with members of her Beta Dance Company. Similarly, to *Amaweren'ya*, the performers' embodiments hold the corporeal memory of three Ethiopian Israeli generations: Feder's mother, who immigrated to Israel as an adult; Feder and her siblings, who immigrated to Israel as children and married

[54] HaBamah, "*Bayit HaKonfederatzia Beta v'Dege Feder"* ("Confederation House, Beta and Dege Feder"), accessed June 25, 2025, https://www.habama.co.il/Pages/Event.aspx?Subj=8&Area=5&EventID=39846; Suzanne Dellal Center, *Dege Feder v'Lihakat Beta – 'Ba'Ima Sheli'* Rewind & Repeat *Sh'nai Mofim* (Dege Feder and Beta Dance Company – *In My Mother, Rewind & Repeat* Two Works), accessed June 14, 2023, https://vod.suzannedellal.org.il/shows/דגה-פדר-ולהקת-ביתא-באמא-שלי-rewind-repeatשני-מופ/.

[55] My analysis here is based on how I learned the double-drop of the shoulders in Dege Feder, "Ethiopian Dance: From Traditional to Contemporary."

[56] Dege Feder, chor., *Mesnko*, 2023, uploaded by dege feder, April 27, 2023, YouTube, 3 min., 41 sec., accessed June 25, 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=orXa5lQ45Ok.

non-Ethiopian spouses;[57] and Feder's daughter, nieces, and nephews, who are biracial and were born in Israel. The dancing and music generate an Ethiopian Israeli space. In *Mesnko*, as in much of her music, Feder incorporates influences from multiple Ethiopian regions.[58] Mesnko (massenqo) is both a single-stringed fiddle and a mode of instrumentation generated by bowing the string that establishes the Ethiopian modal system[59] in much the same way as eskesta establishes Ethiopian embodiment. Massenqo is often used for eskesta dancing.[60] *Mesnko*'s blended sounds layer massenqo and Ethio-jazz with an eskesta rhythmic emphasis on the "one" of the musical phrasing, foregrounding the composition's Ethiopian musical markers.

As the performers groove, spin on roller skates, twirl a lollipop, and braid each other's hair in an apartment decked out in vintage chairs, draperies, fans, fringe curtains, and other sundries, they maintain distinct eskesta movements like pulsing the head side to side, bubbling the shoulders, and sending waves of movement across their torsos. By using the full body for expression and wearing street clothes instead of traditional white robes, *Mesnko* introduces hierarchy into Ethiopian Israeli aesthetics by reading as more contemporary than traditional. Feder's choreographic tactics claim minoritarian Ethiopian Israeli corporeality and make a pluralistic ingathering of the exiles corporeally legible.

Conclusion

I have shown how Dege Feder's compositions of eskesta dance and music in Israeli contemporary art makes Ethiopian Jewish migration to Israel visible through the body. But what, you might be wondering, makes Feder's dances Jewish? Eskesta is a pan-Ethiopian, and not expressly Jewish, dance practice with which the Ethiopian Jewish community migrated to Israel as a Jewish diasporic dance practice. While not all Israeli contemporary choreographers are Jewish, Israeli

[57] Dege Feder, in conversation with the author, March 11, 2022, Haifa, Israel.
[58] Preview of screening of *Mesnko* at Goldmund Books in Haifa. Accessed June 25, 2025, https://eventbuzz.co.il/lp/event/tnyzo.
[59] Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*, 55-58.
[60] Ibid., 107.

contemporary dance is often linked to cultural production of the Jewish Israeli national collective. Feder's work is based in the physical pleasure of the kinesthetic text of eskesta and not in Jewish religious themes *per se*. Yet, Feder's work is thematically based in ideas of family, the collective, or the Operation Moses journey, which mark it with distinctly Ethiopian Jewish experience. Her *mahol etiopi akhshavi* contains this Jewishness within. The question of whether Feder's work is Jewish highlights another one about the Jewish collective in Israel. My assertion that Feder's work builds the nation is at odds with traditional Euro-Zionist Israeli discourses that exclude Mizrahim and Ethiopian Jews from the national collective. My project here tracks, however, with post-Zionist framings that recognize the endurance of Jewish migration and indigenous histories within Israel by acknowledging that Jewish sovereignty in Israel's Ashkenazi-majority hierarchy should not disenfranchise oppressed peoples, including Arab Israelis, Palestinians, Mizrahim, and Jews of Asian and African descent.[61]

Feder navigates generations-old labels of ethnic versus contemporary because critics often label the Blackness in her work as Other. But if Israeli culture is recognizable through Israeli contemporary dance, the compositional tools that determine *mahol etiopi akhshavi* establish it within dually AfroJewish diasporic Israeli cultural production. Since the 1980s-1990s migrations of Ethiopian Jews to Israel, Israeli cultural production has been shaped by these *edot* without acknowledging it. Eskesta is a vehicle for Feder to find home in the body when diasporic circulations exclude either her Ethiopianness or Jewishness. Eskesta is a generational embodiment of Ethiopian Jewishness amidst Ethiopian Jews' assimilation into Israeli society. Without romanticizing the relationship of *edot* to Israel's national collective, the lived archive of Feder's work that manifests the corporeal evidence of her migration and assimilation offers a blueprint for re-establishing perceptions of Israeli physicalities, culture, and nationalism.

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[61] Erez Levon, *Language and the Politics of Sexuality: Lesbians and Gays in Israel* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 21-25; Alisa Solomon, "Viva la Diva Citizenship: Post-Zionism and Gay Rights," *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, eds. Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellegrini (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 149-165; 153-154; Yair Lipshitz, " 'This Is a Historical Israeli Play': Spectatorship, Ownership and the Israeli Localizations of *Salomé*," *Theatre Research International* 42, no. 3 (2017): 257; Ilan Pappé, "Post-Zionist Scholarship in Israel," in *The Struggle for Sovereignty: Palestine and Israel, 1993-2005*, eds. Joel Beinin and Rebecca L. Stein (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 151-161.

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Keywords: Eskesta, Israeli Contemporary Dance, Migration, Corporeality, Ethiopian Jews

How to quote this article:
Hannah Kosstrin, "Dege Feder, Dancing Mobile Geographies: Ethiopian Jewish Contemporary Dance Migrations in Israel," in "(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East," eds. Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15957

Creative Cartography: Transmitting Literature and Knowledge Teaching Eastern European Jewish History

by *Ewa Tartakowsky*

Abstract

The contribution explores an interdisciplinary and creative approach to the transmission of Central and Eastern European Jewish history and culture. In a course at Sciences Po Paris, students were invited to reflect on the circulation of ideas, historical narratives, and cultural dynamics through Olga Tokarczuk's The Books of Jacob. *Creative cartography was introduced as an innovative method that combines academic rigor with artistic expression. This approach encourages students to create maps that represent spaces and narratives through emotions, subjective experiences, and diverse materials. This collaborative and imaginative process aims to deepen the understanding of historical and social phenomena while transforming teaching and learning practices. The dossier includes six articles that engage with all seven "books" of* The Books of Jacob. *It highlights how combining scholarly analysis with artistic practices can deepen understanding and offer new perspectives on the transmission of historical knowledge.*

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Introduction*

How can I engage students in the circulation of ideas, teaching them about the people and topics that comprise the Central and Eastern European Jewish worlds? How can I present the complexity of this social universe, avoiding the simplistic stereotypes of folklore? How can I diverge from the beaten track, proposing a more collaborative pedagogical approach, filled with dialogue and creativity? These were all questions I asked myself in 2024 as I prepared a new course at Sciences Po Paris on Central and Eastern European Jewish history and culture. This course would be taught in English both to regularly-enrolled Sciences Po students as well as exchange students from foreign countries. In fact, my students come from highly varied backgrounds: France, the US, Singapore, Japan, Canada, Great Britain, Ukraine and Spain. Many of them identify as being Jewish themselves and seek to learn more about "their origins."

Preparing this course also coincided with my work towards publishing a book about creative practices in research,[1] itself inspired by my pedagogical experience of introducing creative activities in the classroom: in a different class I teach on political memory, I had my students explore the topic by making comic strips.[2]

At the same time, I was also asked to write an article on Olga Tokarczuk's novel *The Books of Jacob.*[3] The length of the work (over one thousand pages) and the complexity of its narration put me off, so for quite a while the book lay on my bedside table, a reminder of my regret… Finally, I decided to put two and two together and use it for my new class. Turning the novel into required reading finally forced me to read it. In the end, despite how hard it was to read, page by

* This article was translated by Clara Leon-Brown and uses experimental didactics.

[1] Piera Rossetto and Ewa Tartakowsky, eds., *In other words: Opening research to Creative Practices* (to be published in 2025).

[2] Ewa Tartakowsky, "Transmettre en étudiant les objets. Une expérience d'enseignement par la bande dessinée," *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps* 1-2, no. 147-148 (2023): 45-51; 45-46.

[3] All quotes of my students' contributions refer to the following edition: Olga Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob, or A Fantastic Journey Across Seven Borders, Five Languages and Three Major Religions, Not Counting the Minor Sects. Told by the Dead, Supplemented by the Author, Drawing from a Range of Books and Aided by Imagination, the which Being the Greatest Natural Gift of Any Person. That the Wise Might Have It for a Record, that My Compatriots Reflect, Laypersons Gain some Understanding and Melancholy Souls Obtain Some Slight Enjoyment*, trans. Jennifer Croft (London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2021).

page I fell in love with the book. It turned out indeed to be a particularly rich source for pedagogical inspiration.

It must be said that the novel in question was particularly appropriate for the course I planned to teach. Tokarczuk's work allows the instructor to explore Central and Eastern European Jewish history during the whole of the modern period (early and late). In particular, it focuses on the story of Jacob Frank, an eighteenth-century Jewish mystic and heretic. Born in Podolia in 1726, he studied Kabbalah before joining the movement of Sabbatai Zevi, another Jewish mystic and heretic from the previous century. Both mystics declared themselves to be Jewish messiahs; Frank claimed to be Zevi's reincarnation. While Zevi ultimately converted to Islam, Frank converted to Catholicism. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the time was also ripe for their proselytizing efforts. At the time, the Commonwealth of the Two Nations was undergoing major economic, social and political changes. As has so often happened in such historical moments, Jews were blamed for everything that went wrong. They faced blood libel and host desecration allegations, hideous medieval calumnies. Pogroms then followed. Jacob Frank's spiritual moment was a response to this crisis, just as Sabbatai Zevi's movement was seen in response to the pogroms which accompanied the Zaporozhian Cossacks' uprising led by Khmelnytsky in 1648. Frank and his followers were excommunicated from the wider Jewish community, put under *herem* for rejecting the teachings of the Talmud. They were, however, supported by Bishop Dembowski and by a group of Polish nobles who saw them as rife for conversion to Christianity. Despite that fact, after his baptism Jacob was imprisoned in the Pauline Monastery of Jasna Góra—known as the home of one of the most famous Polish icons, the Black Madonna, which has also come to be seen as a symbol of Poland. Freed by the Russian army, who were making war on the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth at the time, Frank and his disciples fled to Brno, then to Offenbach, near Frankfurt am Main. After Frank's death, his daughter Ewa took the reins of his movement, which then petered out following her own death.

While the movement may have ended, nonetheless, Frank's beliefs have, to some extent, survived long past him. His project was not, after all, solely a spiritual one. He aimed for a social revolution. In fact, some of his disciples experienced a major change in their social circumstances: from a low social and ethnoreligious status,

they rose to the ranks of the aristocracy. Mentored and supported by certain Polish aristocratic families following their baptisms, they adopted Polish Catholic names and took on prestigious jobs in Warsaw, the Commonwealth's capital. Frank's teaching also engendered a moral revolution, encouraging free love (although Frank's sexual politics remained male-dominated). Frank's revolutionary mindset was in the context of a belief that the world was ending. Spiritually speaking, the pogroms were a sign of this, as was a comet seen in 1759. Socially, "Frankism" responded to the new outlook of the Enlightenment, demanding equal rights for all, including Jews. Certain scholars, such as Gerschom Scholem, affirm that—in destroying the previous rabbinic order—Frankism paved the way for the coming *Haskalah*, the movement of Jewish modernization and secularization which took place between the mid eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries. Despite the numerous contradictions in his theology and his actions, which were often calculated on making a profit, Frank was a unique leader of messianic currents within Judaism, alongside Sabbatai Zevi and Baruchja Ruso. Through his story, the reader can thus trace that of a certain philosophical and social trend throughout Europe.

Frank's story is also that of a Jewish topography, connected to the wider world. From page to page, Tokarczuk's historical novel introduces us to hamlets, villages, cities and entire regions filled with Christians, Jews, and Muslims, people who speak multiple languages and who are all inter-connected. Here, we are far from the fixed visions of *schtetlech*—Jewish villages lost in time on the old maps of Eastern Europe, closed in on themselves and seen as autarkic. Tokarczuk's Jews trade, travel, marry, and thus move frequently. They also flee persecution and pogroms. With them, they take their goods to sell, their languages, their spiritual beliefs and their ideas. In reading this book, I began to see nearly infinite connections and patterns of circulation that I could share with my students.

And it was precisely this idea of an intimate topography of the Jewish world—of plural topographies—that I wanted my students to engage with pedagogically. I asked them to create a creative cartography. I split my students up into six groups, each of which had to read one of the "books" making up Tokarczuk's work, except for a final group which read the comparatively-shorter first and final "books" together. Each group thus had to read between 150 and 200 pages of the historical

novel, pulling out one or more quotes which they found particularly representative of the wider work, and translate these into creative cartography.

But what, in fact, is creative cartography? While traditional maps are based on physical or administrative landmarks such as buildings, roadways, waterways, place names and borders, creative cartographies are a different way to understand space. They focus on spatial referents which are important or meaningful to an individual or to a group of people. Their object is to reconstitute the way in which these people live, perceive, and occupy their space. This does not mean, however, that traditional representation has no place on this type of map. In other words, it is a question of spatially transcribing qualitative material (such as emotions, affects, memories, lived accounts, mental images, sounds, smells, etc.). Representing space in this way will thus differ depending on the people in question, their personalities and their stories. As a practice, it is particularly well-adapted to depicting micro-spaces or micronarratives. Creative cartography—or creative mapping—can also be used to depict a historical phenomenon and to juxtapose the varied experiences of many different people. In the context of my course, creative cartography allowed me and my students to focus on and unpack the perspectives of Jacob Frank and of his disciples.

I left my instructions deliberately vague. Based on a shorter or longer representative excerpt of a part of the "book" which focused on a microhistory or a microevent (a biographical narrative, a geographical genealogy, a travel itinerary, troop movement on a battlefield or even the blueprints for a house), my students had to create a map, as well as to write a text to accompany it so that the map could be read and understood (as creative cartographies are rarely understandable on their own). They had to explain their choice of representative excerpt in an academic and objective style and they had to describe their map and its legend. My students accompanied their work with an oral presentation on their choice of subject: why did they choose a specific quote over others? Why did they choose to focus on that specific historical phenomenon, story, or biographical narrative? They also had to present their creative process: what discussions did they have before making certain creative choices? How did their map, once initially conceived, get made and re-worked? Why did they choose to make it using one type of material rather than another? Finally, they had to explain their map's

legend. How can we read their map? Why did they choose to present their information as they did?

My students were allowed to use all kinds of materials to depict the narratives, emotions, subjectivities and space: however, this freedom required inventiveness and imagination. The choice could not be simply a practical one; it had to involve reflection. My goal was to lead my students to consciously consider the process of creating their maps, both in what kind of information these would include: interviews, photographs, drawings, literature, poetry, or archival materials; the way that these give rise to emotions, feelings and thoughts; and the materials they would use to depict these: fabric, collage, drawing, etc., as well as the way they would mix all of these themes, concepts, ideas and tools together. Their maps could be multidimensional, in 2- or 3D. They were even allowed to use AI, but had to use it as an epistemological contribution towards building their map. And so, this type of work, depicting academic knowledge via artistic creation requires not only academic rigor but also inventiveness and imagination.

The work which resulted from these guidelines, bears witness to the great investment in time and energy that my students put into their task. They read and re-read long sections of the book—some read the novel in its entirety. Despite what is often said to the contrary, students are both capable and eager to read long, historical and complicated texts. Their work also displayed great levels of reflection and consideration in building their maps: their use of materials, their choice of quotes, and the way they put them together showed both their academic understanding and the way which they made Tokarczuk's work their own. For my own part, I can attest to the conscious intellectual consideration of my students at every stage of creating these hybrid objects. The work also allowed my students to get truly involved in the course, spurring discussions which often went beyond classroom hours. The historical content I taught resonated well with the novel's content, allowing me and my students to move seamlessly between historical source texts and the novel itself, nourishing conversations on choices made by historical figures and placing these within their socio-historical contexts.

Teaching and transmitting knowledge through art and creative processes is one way of using academic thought "in another way." We must recognize that art functions according to its own logics and that we can perceive the world in different ways, via different formats and means, often far removed from the

practices of traditional academia. This type of pedagogy offers a new intellectual approach which both students and teachers can benefit from. Multiple experiments in both social science and the humanities as well as in the hard sciences[4] show that this approach is promising. We can take inspiration from this and use these tools to diversify the relationships between academic disciplines, which are too often siloed away from one another, and the arts.

Book I "The Book of Fog" and Book VII "The Book of Names": Reconstructing the World in Rohatyn

Leo Brown (McGill University/Sciences Po Paris), and *Bradley Brown* (University of California Santa Barbara/Sciences Po Paris).

Our map treats the first and the last books of Olga Tokarczuk's novel, respectively "The Book of Fog" and "The Book of Names." The first one reveals an interconnected world that does not escape antagonisms: that of nobles traveling between their numerous estates, village priests, and Jewish merchants inclined towards Kabbalah. The last one closes the novel: we discover the death, one by one, of Jacob's fellows, the aftermath of the Frankist adventure in Offenbach, the legacy left by all those who participated in it.

It is a representation of the world, including the continents of Europe, Asia, and North America, with the village of Rohatyn, a point of historical and geographical importance at the center. It is in Rohatyn that most of the characters are discovered: Father Benedykt Chmielowski, priest of Firley and dean of Rohatyn; the noble Katarzyna Kossakowska, born Potocka, palatine of Kamieniec, who travels with an elderly lady, Ms Drużbacka; Elisha Shorr, descendant of Rabbi

[4] For one example, the workshop "C'est pas très académique!" ("It's Not Very Academic") as organized by Agnès Villechaise and Morgane Jouaret at the Centre Émile Durkheim (UMR 5116) in Bordeaux (https://www.centreemiledurkheim.fr/les-ateliers-de-recherche/atelier-cest-pas-tres-academique/), the ThermoDanse project, as conceived by the physicist Morgan Chabanon as well as Namiko Gahier and Cosetta Graffione, dancers and choreographers, at the CentraleSupelec and the ENS Saclay, which seeks to understand, modelized and express one's physicality using one's body (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yghHIkjq5N4). Last accessed December 23, 2024.

Zalman Naftali Shorr, a Kabbalist and Sabbatean; his daughter Haya, who will play a prominent role among the Frankists, and her brother Izaak, whose imminent marriage brings together the entire extended family; finally, Iente, the eldest of the family, who, through a magical twist, finds herself between life and death and will observe the world from above throughout the novel.

There are three elements that we are representing in our creative cartography: the vastness of physical space that Rohatyn represents, the spiritual dimension of Rohatyn, and the destruction of Rohatyn and its rebirth in Canada. All these elements are meant to represent the interconnected space, time, languages, and spiritual realms that are packed into Tokarczuk's representation of a small village in eighteenth-century Poland—which has an unexpected level of globalization that rivals even modern times.

Space: Interconnected Places

The map is meant to be read right to left, in the same way Hebrew and Yiddish are read. This direction was chosen because Yiddish is the colloquial tongue used by the main characters of the story and Tokarczuk's pagination of the book was in reverse order, so we thought it would be consistent with Tokarczuk's style to read the map in reverse order from English. The map begins on the Asian subcontinent, showing the regions of modern-day China and India. This is inspired by a quote from Book One: "They sell garlic, herbs, pots full of spices, canisters and jars containing so many seasonings, crushed, ground, or in their original form, like these vanilla pods and nutmegs and cloves. On the shelves, there are bolts of cloth arranged over hay – these look like silk."[5] Cloves and silk were produced in China and India, which is why we wanted to figure these areas on the map to show how Rohatyn is interconnected with these places. We chose to write out the word "cloves" in Chinese characters to depict a language that is interconnected with Rohatyn. Finally, these goods must have been transported to Rohatyn, which is why we added a caravan to show the goods being transported. This also provided continuity to allow the viewer's gaze to move to the next section of the map.

[5] Tokarczuk, *The Books of Jacob*, 883.

In the center of our cartography is the continent of Europe, with a map of Rohatyn at the center. This section was inspired by a quote from Book One:

> First she tries some women holding baskets, but they giggle and run away, speaking Ruthenian, so then she tugs at the sleeve of a Jew in a hat and coat —he tries to understand her and even responds with something in his language, pointing further down towards the river. Then, having lost the last of her patience [...] "Does anyone here speak Polish?" she finally screams.[6]

We attempted to visually represent this quote by showing Rohatyn's interconnectedness with Europe, with the map of Rohatyn directly on top of the rest of Europe. We also illustrated the linguistic diversity of Rohatyn by writing directly onto the map some of the languages that were spoken in Book One, in this instance Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish.

Finally, the map ends with a map of modern-day Canada. This is inspired by a quote from Book Seven: "They have all survived, and in the postwar chaos, most of them manage to emigrate to Canada, where they tell their story, so improbable that few believe them."[7] This final part of the map represents the endpoint of our creative cartography. After the destruction of Jewish civilization and Eastern Europe during World War II, life—especially for the Jewish community—was transplanted to new places such as Canada. This part of the map attempts to represent this. In addition, it is a passage of time since this transplantation takes place after World War II. Thus, this aspect of the creative cartography shows how Tokarczuk included multiple layers of time in her story.

Spiritual Dimension: Heaven and a Tower of Babel

Apart from the depictions of Asia, Europe, and North America, our creative cartography also maps the spiritual dimensions present in Book One. This is inspired by the quote: "'The rabbi is listening to the voices of his elders'."[8] We

[6] Ibid., 871.
[7] Ibid., 27.
[8] Ibid., 876.

viewed it as essential to include in our map because views of heaven and spirituality were as tangible to the characters of the story as continents and landforms—to the extent that people could communicate with those dimensions. To draw the reader's eye up towards heaven, we used an illustration of the tower of Babel. This choice was guided by the fact that the tower is frequently mentioned in the first Book, which is a universal story that is believed by both Christians, such as Chmielowski, and Jews such as Rabbi Shorr. Above the tower, we decided to depict a view of heaven with Hebrew characters. We chose this because it is almost impossible to find illustrations of Heaven in the Jewish tradition. The words in Hebrew we wrote were שָׁמַיִם (*shomayim*), which directly translates to heaven, and פִּרְקֵי אָבוֹת (*Pirkei Avot*) which can be translated as "the wisdom of our fathers" and refers to a title *Ethics of the Fathers*, a tractate of the Mishnah, a compilation of ethical wisdom and moral advice from ancient Jewish rabbis. These two expressions highlight how heaven is represented and a place from which the living derive meaning from.

Fig. 1. Final cartography work.

The Destruction of Rohatyn: Circulation of Times

This section of our creative cartography also deals with Book Seven. It is inspired by the quote:

> In 1774, the library was taken over by the Commission of National Education, and in 1795, after the final partition of Poland, the library was sent in its entirety to Petersburg, by order of Catherine the Great. Having taken several months to make its way, in carts and wagons, it remained there until the First World War. In 1921, the collections were partially returned to Poland, but they burned during the Warsaw Uprising.[9]

This quote recounts how Chmielowski's collection, which he discussed in the first Book, eventually got destroyed. We treated this as a metaphor depicting how much of Europe was destroyed during the wars and how different dimensions of time are connected. To make this we burned a page of Chmielowski's book *New Athens* (1745-1746), to represent how his book was physically burned but so was the civilization that was displayed throughout the story—a Holocaust, the massive destruction of European Jews by the Nazis, in Hebrew "catastrophe" (השואה, *HaShoah*) or in Yiddish "disaster" (חורבן, *khurbn*), whose Greek root "holokauston" (ὁλόκαυστον) literally means "completely burned." The cave shaped like the Hebrew letter *aleph* (א) serves as a symbolic vehicle: it is the one, of which Jakub Frank says that Abraham rests there and that it was miraculously transferred from the Land of Israel, and where, according to his words, he was born as the Messiah, served on 12 October 12 1942, five families from Korolówka, Jakub FranK's birthplace in 1726, to save themselves from the Holocaust. It is the same cave where the body of the all-seeing Yente was laid to rest.

Thus, from right to left, like Hebrew script or life, the thread of time unfolds while its spatial and existential dimensions telescope. Thus, this is on the far left of the map, so it represents the end of the story that we are telling in our cartography.

[9] Ibid., 39-38.

However, on top of this burnt book, we placed a map of Canada to represent how, out of this destruction, a new life emerges. This follows Tokarczuk's pagination of the book: the end of the book is the first page. In this way, the end is also the beginning.

Book II "The Book of Sand": "You are just at the beginning of the road now"

Esther Kay (Sciences Po Paris/Sorbonne University), and *Aurèle Martchouk*, (Sciences Po Paris).

For this creative cartography, we worked on the second chapter of the *Books of Jakob*, entitled "The Book of Sand." This book opens on the description of a caravan of merchants joined by two Jewish characters, Nahman Samuel Ben Levi and Mordechai (Reb Mordke). We follow their journey starting from the moment they meet, and different adventures, such as a wedding, the discovery of Isohar's religious school and their acquaintance with Jacob.
The excerpt we chose to work on follows their journey to Smyrna, the city in which they are supposed to pursue their economic activities as well as their religious and philosophical quest for the Messiah:

> In Lwów, Grzegorz Nikorowicz, an Armenian, operated a Turkish trade—he mostly imported belts from Turkey, but he also dealt in carpets and rugs, Turkish balsam and weaponry. He had settled in Stamboul, to keep an eye on his business from there, and every so often his caravans with their valuable goods would set out for the north, then head back to the south. Anybody could join in with them, not only Christians—anyone who demonstrated good will and had enough money to chip in to pay the caravan's leader and the armed guards. You could carry goods from Poland —wax, tallow, honey, sometimes amber, although that did not sell as well as it once did—and you had to have in addition enough to sustain you on

> the road, and once you got there, to invest in goods to take back with you, in order to earn something off the whole expedition.[10]

The notion of exchanges is central in this chapter. The caravan symbolizes the circulation of goods, but also of information and ideas in Europe. It represents the unfolding of a journey, a process that is both spatial and intellectual. Indeed, it appears that the characters are physically making their way in eighteenth-century Europe, while at the same time progressing spiritually, learning, and discovering. Therefore, the path followed by the merchants is a transformative journey, shaped by the cultural, religious, political and linguistic peculiarities they encounter. This is encapsulated by the moment when Reb Mordke meets his disciple in Busk and declares: "You are just at the beginning of the road now. If you were to travel further down it, you would see the world around us now is already ending [...]. [...] the Messiah [...] is in Smyrna."[11] Nahman concludes: "Mordechai suggested we go south together, uniting business and our search for the truth."[12] This double aim—trade and spiritual quest—is what we have tried to represent on our map, by superimposing three layers.

Goods and Economic Exchanges: "Overlapping panthers, squiggles, tangles, trails"

The first layer is made of goods from the eighteenth century circulating from the Turkish cities of the Ottoman Empire, such as Izmir and Istanbul, to Poland (at the time Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth), territories which shared a long border in the regions of Moldavia and Galicia as suggested in the excerpt already quoted.

We had to go through a long research process for this layer and explored the online collections of museums and antique sellers to find some historically accurate goods traded at the time.

[10] Ibid., 794.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.

Fig. 2. Exploring iconographic sources, work in progress.

On the one hand, we chose to use orange-colored traded materials to represent the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth as orange is the color of amber, coming from the Baltic. On the other hand, we chose to use Turkish materials to underline the connection with the Ottoman empire that had reached its greatest extent at the end of the seventeenth century.

Turkish traditional carpets—kilims—, mentioned many times in the book, are the material we used most often. These Turkish carpets represent the development of the characters' philosophical and religious thought through the journey and more specifically of the concept of *tikkun* (in Hebrew תיקון עולם, reparation, action and improvement of the world). This use of kilims is inspired by the passage about Nahman's writing process: "His writing on the lid of the case set up on his lap, in the dust and discomfort of travel, is in essence tikkun, the repair of the world, mending the holes in its fabric so filled with overlapping panthers, squiggles, tangles, trails."[13] Using a collage of kilims as the first layer of our map seemed appropriate as it would visually evoke this restoration process.

[13] Ibid., 808.

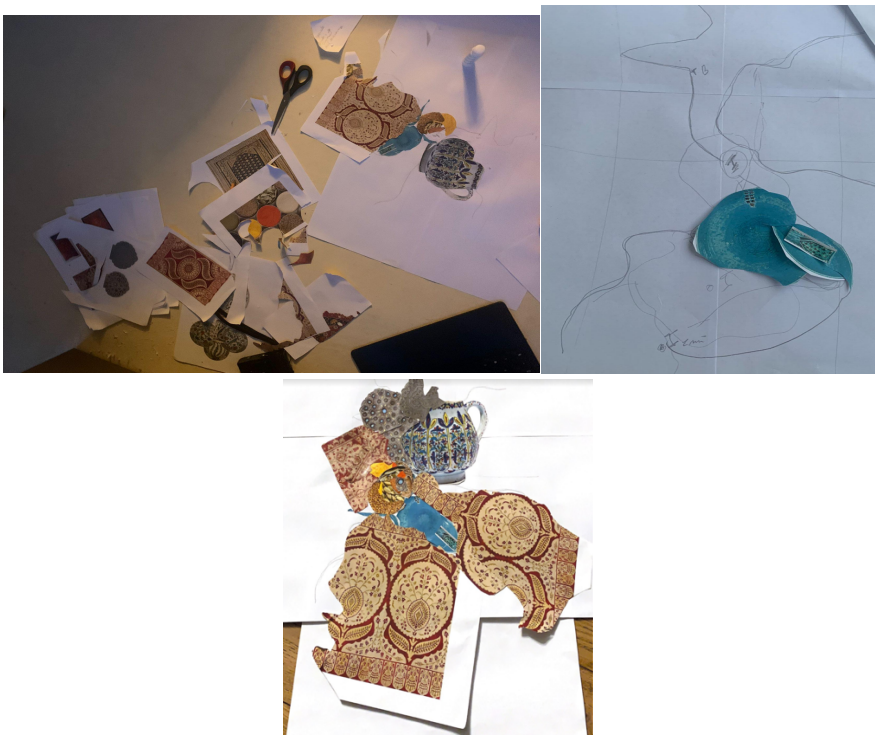


Fig. 3, 4, and 5. Creating the first layer, work in progress.

We then had to define how to cut our paper prints and draw the borders. We chose to start working from a map referenced by the author, *Europa Turchesca* drawn by renowned Dutch cartographer Isaak Tirion (1740). Though the map is not accurate by today's standards, it corresponds to the way Europe and Asia were visualized at the time. We transferred the pattern of the eighteenth-century map onto our prints of kilims and other materials and found that their designs surprisingly fitted the lines of Tirian's map borders rather well. In this way, on our map, one may identify Bulgaria, Moldavia, Macedonia...

Finally, we chose to go further by embracing the characters' perceptions and knowledge of the places they are traveling through. That is why we distorted the scale to give more prominence to cities such as Istanbul, Izmir or Gdańsk, and make them centers of attraction in the map as they were for travelers and traders at the time.

Religious and Political Journey: "Being a great sinner"

The second layer represents how the trip to Smyrna leads to numerous discussions and introspections by our characters on religious, philosophical, and political matters. The first debate between Reb Mordke and Nahman happens near Craiova about the Messiah's role in the human world. Reb Mordke argues that Besht, the founder of Chasidism, and Nahman's former teacher "has understood nothing": "the Messiah must come from the lowest spheres, that he must be sinful sinner and mortal."[14] Reb Mordke relies on the book of Isaiah, written in Hebrew, and that's why we printed the sentence in this language " […] יש למצוא את המשיח בין החוטא."

Reading the old thinkers and transmitting the previous master's heritage is an important part of our characters' intellectual journey. In the same abstract, Reb Mordke gives Nahmman a treatise, *Va-Avo-hayom el Ayi'yin* (*And I Came this Day unto the Foutain*) written by Jonathan Eybeschutz, his former professor. From this point, Nahman feels grateful and included in a broad lineage of intellectuals: "I felt then that I had become the next link in a long chain of initiates that extends across the generations, that begins further back even than Sabbatai, than Abulafia, before Simon bar Yochai, than, than...and on, all the way to the dawn of time [...]."[15]

To illustrate this sense of intellectual lineage, we experimented with the use of AI (chat GPT4). Many content creators, even in the historical and literary field, have been using AI in order to fill up the blank of undocumented history. In our case, using AI was a tentative effort to represent characters such as Reb Mordke of whom no representation is available, to our knowledge. However, the outcome seems underwhelming as the images produced by AI draw on the stereotypes of the global memory of Jewish culture and fail to rely on historically accurate data. Still, it provides an illustration of the notion of intellectual genealogy and perhaps reflects the way readers construct mental images based on cultural, historical and literary collective memory as they process literary texts. It would take more

[14] Ibid., 792.
[15] Ibid., 790.

research to feed the AI tool with more specific material to obtain satisfactory results.

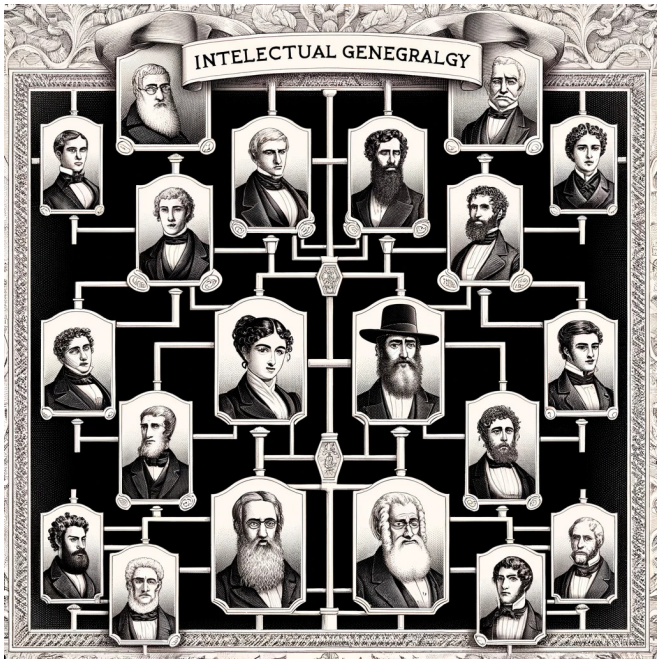


Fig. 6. One of our attempts to illustrate intellectual genealogy with AI.

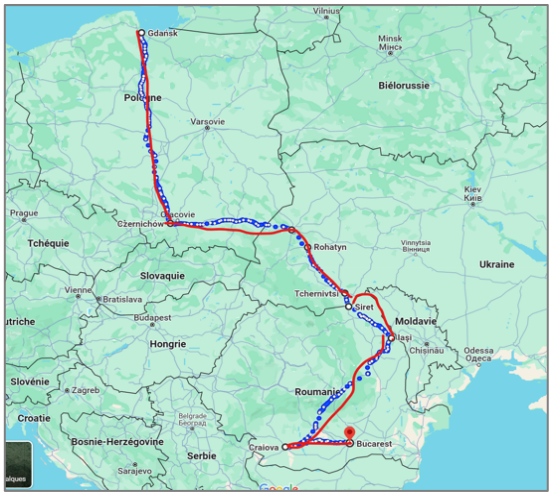
The journey of our characters is also a source of political awakening, especially on the situation of Jews in the region. We tried to represent this through an episode of *The Book of Sand*, when Jakob is applauded for his courage because, at the age of fifteen, he stole the money collected from taxes imposed on Jews. On this occasion, Reb says "You pay because you're Jewish" (in Yiddish: איר באצאלט ווייל דו ביסט א ייד). The quotation epitomizes the questioning of the position of Jews in the social sphere as Nahman and others discuss politics and social inequalities. We copied this short quotation on the map, along with an engraving of Jakob found in an 1895 Polish book by Aleksander Kraushar entitled *Frank and Polish Frankists, 1726-1816: historical monograph* (*Frank i frankiści polscy 1726-1816. Monografia historyczna*).

The Path of Languages: "You are just at the beginning of the road now"

One first challenge in the making of the third layer of our map was to accurately represent the route followed by the merchants from Poland to the Turkish Empire. We had to reconstruct their itinerary by looking for all the locations mentioned in the chapter. The main quote we used is the following:

> This is a caravan that set out a few days ago from Smyrna, heading north through Constantinople, and then through Bucharest. Along the way, it will splinter, and others will join in. Some of the merchants will break off for in just a few days, in Stamboul; they will be travelling through Salonika and Sofia to Greece and Macedonia, while others will continue all the way to Bucharest, some even to the very end, along the Prut to the Polish border, which they'll cross, besting the shallow Dniester.[16]

Those indications were sometimes vague, which is why we had to deduce some steps of the route. Google maps was of valuable help in this process.



[16] Ibid., 811.

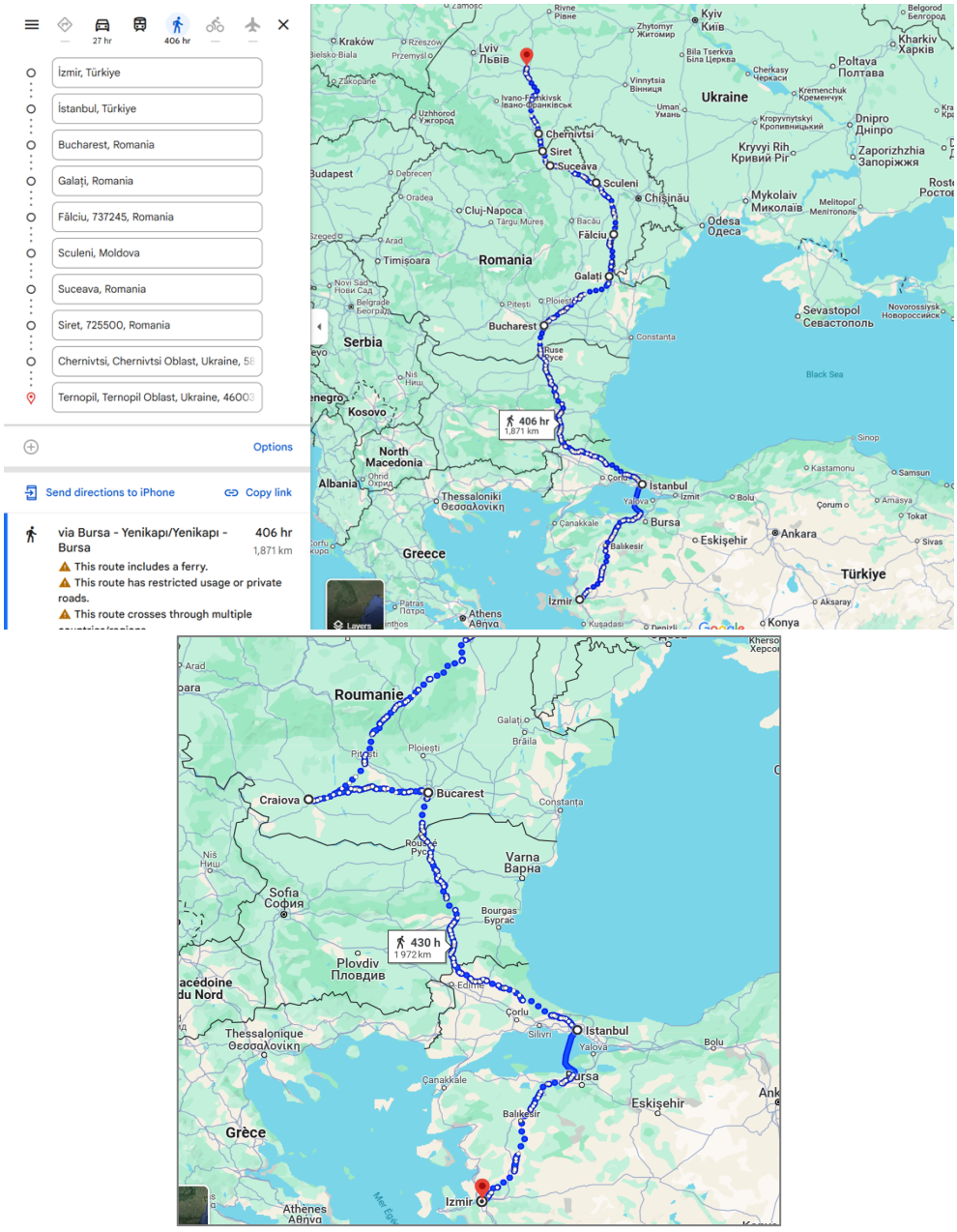


Fig. 7, 8, and 9. Itineraries created on Google Maps.

We decided to materialize the route as a long sentence sinuating on the map, a quote that would embody this idea of a spatial and intellectual journey the characters have been following. The quote previously mentioned[17] seemed to

[17] Ibid., 794.

perfectly fit this idea. It became the path followed by our heroes, like a mantra repeated in their quest for the Messiah.
Besides, we divided this quote into six parts and translated each one into one of the languages found in the book. Then, we hand-copied the six-fold sentence on layer three, making it start and end in Yiddish, to represent the idea of a circulation of knowledge through Jewish communities:

> "You are just at the beginning of the road now" (in Yiddish: איר זענט פונקט אין די אָנהייב פון די וועג איצט);
> "If you were to travel farther down it, you would see the world around us now is already ending" (in Polish: Gdybyś poszedł nią dalej, wiedziałbyś, że ten świat wokół już się kończy);
> "and that is why you see it as if it were untrue" (Români: şi de aceea o vezi de parcă ar fi neadevărată);
> "and you detect not the light from the outside which is false and illusory" (in Bulgarian: и не откриваш светлината отвън, която е фалшива и илюзорна);
> "but rather the light that is internal, that comes from God's own scattered sparks, which the Messiah is to regather" (in Turkish: daha ziyade, mesih'in yeniden toplayacağı, Tanrı'nın kendi dağınık kıvılcımlarından gelen gerçek ışıktır);
> The messiah is coming now, he is in Smyra" (in Yiddish: דער משיח קומט וויסן, ער איז אין סמירנאַ).

Handwriting this long, multilingual sentence was an interesting experience, which put us in the shoes of medieval copyists confronted with diverse alphabets and languages. As found in the description of the city of Rohatyn: "Say one word in a room in Rohatyn and soon it will be carried all around the world, on the paths and roads taken by commercial expeditions, with the help of the messengers who roam the earth incessantly, bearing letters and repeating gossip. Like Nahman Ben Levi of Busk."[18]

[18] Ibid., 785-784.

Fig. 10, 11, and 12. Final layers of the cartography.

It was the first time we worked with creative cartography. This project made us read *The Books of Jakob* in a different way, as it made us more attentive to the duality and interference between geographical space and spiritual thinking depicted in the book. We became aware of some subtleties in the heroes' journey as we had to produce a visual representation of it. A religious or intellectual system is shown to be constantly changing, shaped by debates, discoveries and linguistic or material exchanges. Producing a real paper map provided us with the physical experience of cutting, assembling, layering, overlapping and patching. Those gestures resonated with the intellectual experience of elaborating new ways of thinking, including its tentative aspects, experiments and winding paths.

Book III "The Book of the Road": Challenging Women Empowerment

Luke Jacobson (University of Michigan/Sciences Po Paris), *Nekane Martin Vallejo* (University of Salamanca/Sciences Po Paris), and *Ielyzaveta Pliatsuk* (Central European University Vienna/ Sciences Po Paris).

Our cartography explores the relationship between men and women throughout the third book of Olga Tokarczuk's *The Books of Jacob*. This book centers on Jacob Frank, a Polish Jewish man who claimed to be the Messiah and founded a religious movement called Frankism in eighteenth-century Poland. Specifically, this analysis focuses on the third book in the series, titled *The Book of the Road*. Jacob's perception of norms and morals deviates significantly from the conventional ways of living of his time. Through his Messianic mission, he introduces the reader to his version of "normal," creating an upside-down reality for men, and especially for women.

We wanted to explore how women are treated and what their role is within the story, particularly as they relate to Jacob Frank and his untraditional philosophy. Jacob is far from an ordinary figure within the book, and this might be especially true when looking at his relationship with women. For instance, the views of women at the time were molded by values that preceded what most people call "first-wave" feminism. In today's terms, they would be considered conservative and traditional, where women had less autonomy, and were primarily considered to be caregivers and housewives. Yet Jacob Frank takes a somewhat more liberal view of women, marriage, and sexuality, in certain regards, and this is played out within his religion as well as his general actions. By liberal, we mean untraditional as well as somewhat modern for their time. It's not just Frank, though, who has these views; because he is the leader of a group of people who follow him as the Messiah, there are other people who begin to enact these somewhat liberal positions as well.

This is precisely what we wanted to explore in our cartography. We chose to approach this by taking certain quotes from the book that highlighted or gave insight into the way women were treated or viewed within the small "tribe" of Frankist followers. For instance, we have quotes that highlight the sexual tendencies within the Frankist tribe. In particular, the act of polygamy on the part

of Jacob. We show how he chose to have sex with several of the women who were married to other men, thus shedding light on a very untraditional practice. We chose to use the quotes to trace the physical path that Jacob and his followers took, thus highlighting the importance of geography within the story.

We also decided to separate our exploration of women's and men's views on women, respectively. We also decided to split our cartography into two pages of quotes attached to our map, where we explored men's views on the right, and women's views on the left. We felt the difference in views was extremely stark, and thus merited an in-depth exploration. In this regard, the viewer can turn a page and explore how women viewed women, or how men viewed women. Or, they can flip both pages and explore them in tandem.

Female Empowerment and Disempowerment

Out of the more than fifteen quotes we initially considered for our cartography on the role of women in Jacob's society, we narrowed it down to ten that were particularly significant. As we worked on our final project, space constraints led us to include only eight of these quotes. We categorized these quotes into two groups: those that we thought empowered women, and those that we thought oppressed them.

The first group concerns the disempowering quotes—those undermining, belittling or limiting the role, value and potential of women, and reinforcing stereotypes that contribute to the subordination of women in society:

1. "Although Jacob gives up the light-haired girl in Lwów, Gitla he keeps. In any case, the light-haired one is soon replaced"[19]—The quote suggests that women are interchangeable and disposable, reducing women to objects that can be easily replaced and emphasizing their perceived lack of individuality and value.

2. "An educated woman is the cause of many misfortunes"[20]—This quote states that women's education and intelligence can lead to negative outcomes, which is a demeaning and limiting view of women's capabilities and potential.

[19] Ibid., 642.

[20] Ibid., 635

3. "How did it come about that Hayah [a woman] was granted so much license?"[21]—This quote reflects a patriarchal mindset by asking why a woman, Hayah, has been given freedom or authority, suggesting that women should not have such liberties. It views women as subordinate and questions their right to autonomy and independence.

4. "[...] religious scholars keep their distance from them, for women's inherent connection with the lowest world of matter introduces chaos into the world of the spirit"[22]—In this quote women are portrayed as sources of chaos and impurity in the religious context. It implies a belief in women's inferiority or uncleanliness based on gender stereotypes.

The second group concerns the empowering quotes—that uplift, validate or promote the capabilities, rights and roles of women—sometimes challenge traditional gender norms.

1. "All this mortal Loving is valued too highly [...]. Perhaps only Women have access to it"[23]—This quote empowers women by suggesting that they may have a unique or special connection to mortal love, implying a deeper emotional understanding or experience.

2. "She [Shekhinah] will guide them to the bishop's residence like a mother, like a sister, like the most tender lover who would give up everything just to gaze upon her beloved [one]"[24]—Shekinah is depicted as a nurturing figure, embodying roles of motherhood, sisterhood, and romantic love, empowering women through their caring nature and ability to form deep emotional bonds.

3. "She [Hayah] can be overbearing. [...] Everyone, even her father, fears her quick steps, her shouting when she disciplines the children, when she fights with the man"[25]—The quote portrays Hayah as an assertive and strong woman. While her assertiveness may be intimidating, it reflects her confidence and independence, challenging traditional expectations for women to be passive and submissive.

4. "The women of the true faith are confident and gregarious. They like to flirt, and what Jacob teaches them: that they can forget the Turkish customs dictating

[21] Ibid., 593.
[22] Ibid., 591-590.
[23] Ibid., 621-620.
[24] Ibid., 600.
[25] Ibid., 593.

that they should be shut up inside their homes"[26]—The quote highlights the confidence, sociability, and flirtatiousness of women in the "true faith," empowering them by defying cultural norms that limit them to domestic roles.
Despite several instances of empowerment, the quotes that subjugated or disempowered women were far more numerous. Moreover, some of the quotes that seem to empower women are nevertheless rooted in a stereotyped view of women. For example, there is a common trope within the quotes that women are to be associated with emotionality. This observation underscores the prevalence of attitudes and beliefs that may diminish the role and value of women within Jacob's society.

Rethinking Color Stereotypes

Another component was the choice of colors within the cartography. In many Western societies, blue is stereotypically associated with boys, while pink is associated with girls (for our cartography we used red instead of pink since it is a completely contrary, primary and independent color). In the context of the story in *The Books of Jacob*, women are associated with the color red in the first Book which was derived from the color of their period blood.
Our group deliberately challenged traditional gender stereotypes and associations by representing women with blue and men with red. Thus, we aimed to encourage viewers to rethink and question prevailing societal norms.

Tracing Jacob's Journey

Since the project was called "cartography," we realized that our previous ideas addressed spatial dimensions, but not geographic. Therefore, we decided to include a realistic map as one of the layers for the final draft. Originally, the trace of Jacob's movement throughout the chapters looked like the image on the left. However, this trace did not work with our central character imagery in the middle —it would distract the audience and not work graphically with our concept. It became evident that it needed to be flipped to either side. Eventually we came up

[26] Ibid., 500.

with an idea of flipping it to the left. This is because if one would imagine himself to be Jacob in the starting of his journey (facing North to South)—what we call today Israel would be on the left (if you flip the world map upside down, Israel would be located more left than Eastern Europe).

Upon executing the drawing, we found that a dotted format was the most effective. When two plastic layers are placed one on top of the other, the view can be imperfect, with red sometimes covering blue and vice versa. To avoid adding another layer of abstraction for the viewer, we chose to use dotted lines. Additionally, after careful consideration, we decided not to include the cities in the final map, as they did not significantly align with our concept.

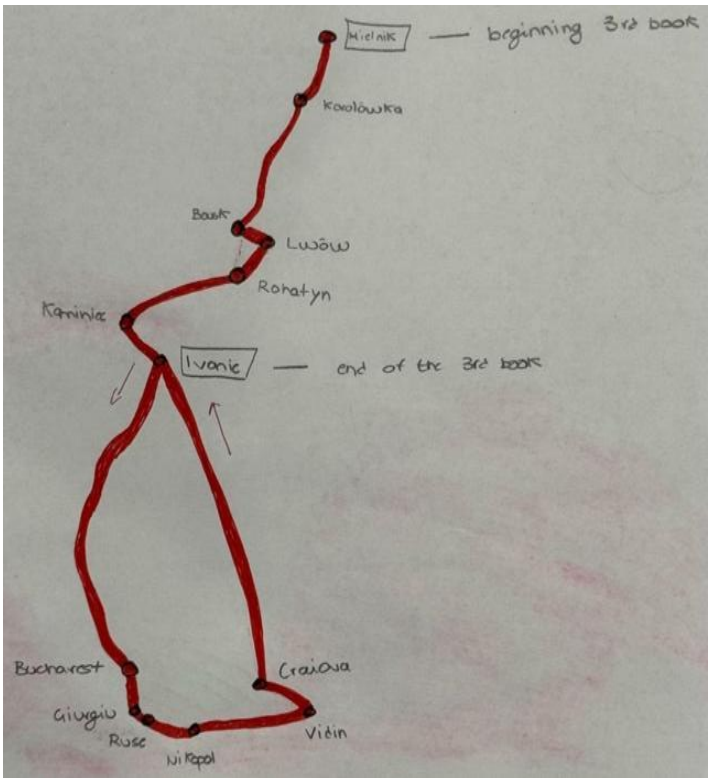


Fig. 13. Tracing a path of Jacob's journey.

Imagining Otherness

Another issue concerned how to represent characters and especially Jacob. We decided to depict him as an alien in the final cartography. That symbolic depiction

represents his being withdrawn from the "normal" perception of the way of life which is accepted by surrounding society. His pose as well as the layout of the rest of the male characters is intentionally reminiscent of the one of Jesus in Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*. We decided that the comparison between Christianity and Jesus to Judaism and Messiah is a relevant juxtaposition. The way we could express it is to unite elements that are inherent to Jacob himself and Christianity, especially that he converted to Catholicism.

Furthermore, Jacob is dressed similarly with a cloth stemming from the left shoulder which strengthens the symbolic depiction. The hat on Jacob's head is a form of traditional Turkish headwear: a fez. The beginning of the third book starts with him and others crossing the border from Turkey to Poland. Furthermore, a lithography was later published of him portraying him in a fez. Thus, the decision was made that the fez would strengthen the audience's understanding that the alien is Jacob.

The rest of the men surrounding Jacob look like they are from the eighteenth century—which was a product of our group debate. It was decided to make the men look as if they do come from the timeframe when the book is unraveling. Moreover, they are wearing clothes that we thought would look like ones of merchant-travelers of the 1750s. Surrounding them are objects like a globe and a compass to further show that the group is relatively open minded for their time. In our view, open minded could correspond to geographical open-mindedness, like a globalized outlook on the world which was revolutionary for their time. With the use of different headwear, we tried not to represent a certain nationality, but instead made it more discrete in where the men came from. Indeed, the followers of Jacob in the story aren't all belonging to a single ethnic/language group. Therefore, thanks to their antennas, they are connected to Jacob.

The women are standing on the sides of the image, keeping distance and not touching the men—just as it seems to be described in the chapters. Even though women had an abundance of physical intimacy with Jacob and their non-husbands, their life seemed to be separated and disconnected from those of the men. The two characters we picked were Hayah (left) and Gitla (right). These two characters worked the strongest with our aspirations to show how women were treated as sexual objects in the third book. We also included quotes that showed how education for women was largely disapproved of, and how they were seen

nearly as servants who served men by doing household chores and fulfilling their sexual desires. Their choice of clothing attempted to make it look as if they were wearing clothes that would be worn in Eastern Europe. The clothing they wore was based upon the descriptions of Gitla and Hayah within the book.

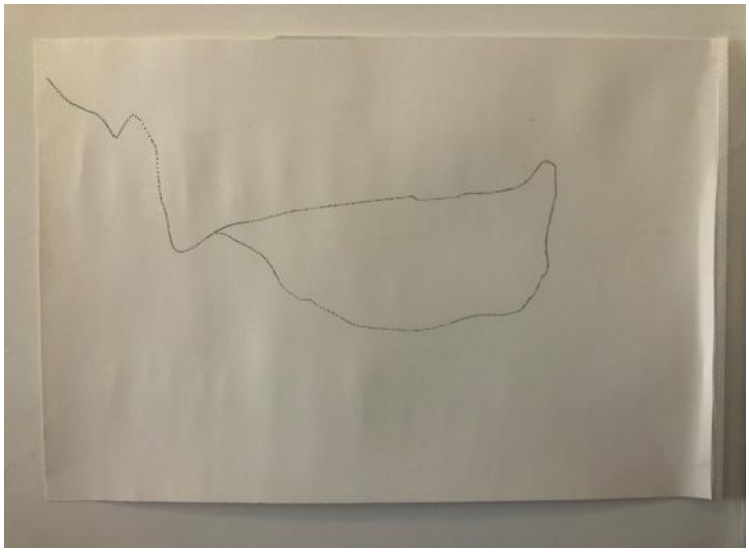


Fig. 14, 15 and 16. Final layers of the cartography.

Our creative cartography explores the nuanced perception of women in Olga Tokarczuk's *The Books of Jacob*. We found that the rhetoric within the unconventional religious movement started by Jacob Frank empowered women in certain ways. Despite this, most of the empowering quotes were in relation to the emotions and affects of the women in the story. Because of this, we felt that they preserve and sustain gender stereotypes. Our use of colors and symbols were most vital in conveying the meanings implied in our work, and the geographical traces of Jacob's movement as well as the portraits of certain characters highlights the intersection between physical movement and ideological shifts. This project not only sheds light on the historical and cultural realities of the eighteenth century, but also allows the reader to critically reflect on contemporary gender stereotypes and societal norms.

Book IV "The Book of the Comet": Under Jacob's Watchful Eye

Lucas King (King's College London/Sciences Po Paris), and *Kio Katayama* (Hitotsubashi University/Sciences Po Paris).

The cartography is based on the part fourth "the Book of the Comet," which follows the transformation of Jacob Frank, a formerly orthodox mystic and now

heretical Jew, into a Polish Christian. The story begins when a comet appears in the sky, visible in a wide range of areas from Europe to China, in 1759. The event is interpreted by Frank and his followers as a sign of the Shekinah descending on Ukraine. The Shekinah is a divine presence, considered to be its feminine aspect. It serves as the motivation for much of the development of Frank's theology going forward, driving his claims to be the reincarnate messiah, and with them his rejection of Judaism.

Comet's Divine Meaning

The project is especially associated with the context summarized by the quotation: "The sages say that the Shekhinah will pass through this hole"[27] As the narration states that "the divine light may pass in order to reach [the world]" through "[the] hole drilled into the heavenly firmament,"[28] the comet holds significance in religious understanding. In fact, the approach of Shekinah reinforces Frank's growing importance and distance from Jewish orthodoxy through his claims to messianic status. With the advancement towards Lwów, Franks' spirituality becomes less obfuscated and, in a sense, less Jewish. His position at the height of creation gradually draws him closer to the ordered, regimented world of catholic Christianity. It should also be noted that Frank, who never reads most of the New Testament, seems to become Catholic for anti-Jewish, rather than pro-Christian reasons—his resentment at rabbinic Talmudic Orthodoxy is seen. His gradual casting off of those traditions is reflected by the increasingly concrete and visual way his faith is portrayed, as the comet, and with it the presence of God and his own elevation, approaches.

Conceptualizing Frank's Perspective

The cartography project is conceptualized from Frank's perspective, since his ambivalent moral conditions make it difficult to objectively analyze the other characters' status. Frank is such a controversial, challenging, and complicated

[27] Ibid., 465.
[28] Ibid., 466.

figure that it should be most informative to make a map based on a reflection of his own relationship to his spirituality. It signifies that the work reflects not only the transformation in Frank's worldview from the ephemerality of mystic rabbinic Judaism to the ordered structures of Catholicism, but also the magnitude of the claims he makes about his own position.

The aim is therefore to portray Franks' own spirituality through the increasingly visual means by which its' portrayed as the eye of the viewer approaches the critical juncture at Lwów, with the maps' other features informed by Frank's own perspective on his spiritual role.

The map is centered in Ukraine and Poland as the areas seem to be where Frank is at the time the comet is observed. The claims which Frank makes about his own place in the order of the cosmos are so consequential that they serve to make the space which he moves through the spiritual center of the world. The map is therefore warped around Lwów, the area in which his status reaches its' apogee, and rather like a heavy object bending spacetime in general relativity, the magnitude of Franks' claims to reflect the effect Frank sees himself as having on the world. It also includes Constantinople as it was the home of Greek orthodoxy and the origin of the Sabbatean tradition Frank was heir to, however the city is squashed against the bottom of the frame by the warping of the map, reflecting the way Frank' emancipated himself from that tradition. The only other place represented on the map is Częstochowa, where Frank was imprisoned, and which served as the spiritual heart of Polish Catholicism.

The comet is placed on the map, a white streak against the maps' black background to place stronger emphasis on the divine influence and illumination. The object makes one remember Franks' initial adherence to and membership in the traditions of Ashkenazi Jewish mysticism by evoking the focus of those traditions on the ephemerality, impersonality, and transcendence of religious experiences. It also consists of Hebrew characters forming the words, in "The sages say that the Shekinah will pass through this hole."[29] The quotation is in Jewish calligraphy. Its abstract esotericism of the artistic form is slightly in conflict with the messianic message contained in the comet's shape. Furthermore, the comet surrounds a *hamsa*-hand, the symbol common in Misrahi Judaism. The hand expresses the

[29] Ibid., 465.

impact of Sabbatai Zevi on Frankism and Franks' own relationship with God. The hand itself is in the style of the drawings which adorn the inside of Eastern European Synagogues to contrast this Sabbatean influence with Franks' own Ashkenazi roots. Since the *hamsa* is an artistic form rather than a distinct symbol, it is filled with two candles, symbolizing Shabbat, the bride of Shabbat and the covenant between God and his people. As the reincarnation of the Messiah, Frank sees himself as the fulfilment of this bond between God and man, and the *hamsa* therefore serves to represent the coming of the Shekinah and with it his elevation. The eventual fulfilment of this promise through Franks' own conversion to Catholicism, or rather his rejection of Judaism, is represented by a version of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa with a drawing of Frank himself in place of the Christ Child. The Shekinah, as already mentioned is often characterized as female, as is the bride of Shabbat, and Frank therefore becomes the product of this feminine divinity in place of Jesus. His replacement of Jesus here also serves to further underline the extent to which his conversion was due to a rejection of the Talmud, rather than his embracing of the Bible.

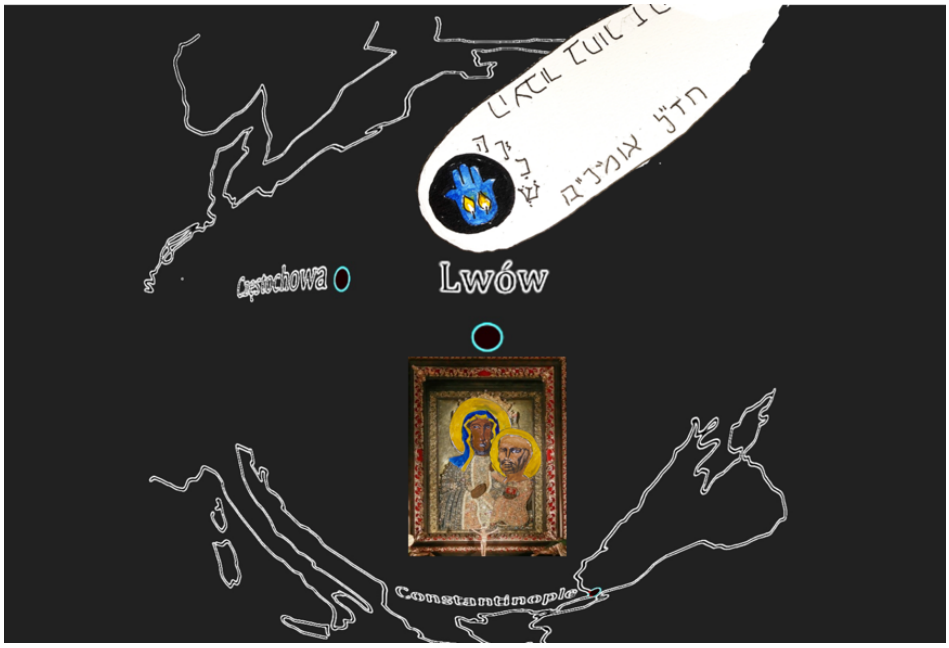


Fig. 17. The final cartography.

The project began to create a cartography map based on the symbolic event of the comet. The work intricately maps Jacob Frank's spiritual journey from Orthodox Judaism to a Christian identity, guided by his interpretation of a comet as divine. The map illustrates Frank's transformation, culminating in his symbolic adoption of Catholicism. The creative idea stresses the inclusion of Jacob's own views into the visual elements; the entire structure is distorted to express his spiritual centre of Lwów. This narrative is successful encapsulating Frank's complex theological evolution amidst broader religious and cultural landscapes.

Book V "The Book of Metal and Sulphur": Bathed in Light

Camylla Wiser (McGill University/Sciences Po Paris), and *Ulfah Irdina Binte Affandi* (National University of Singapore/Sciences Po Paris).

In this book, Olga Tokarczuk portrays the endearing spirit of Jews during the Frankist messianic movement. She aptly contextualizes the Jewish messianic milieu, characterized by mass movements and changes in not only religious terms but also the social and emotional. In chapter fifth, Tokarczuk traces the diasporic lives of Jacob Frank's disciples as Jacob becomes imprisoned. Through her decadent descriptions steeped in religious and spiritual imagery, Tokarczuk was able to capture the monumental feelings of uncertainty, movement of people and their spirit of adaptation in the face of change and negative discrimination by society in a way that frames the narrative as a grand and magical adventure.
The children-like light lamp we designed as a creative 3-dimensional cartography seems to fit perfectly with this theme of dream-like images and feelings of adventure as established by Tokarczuk.

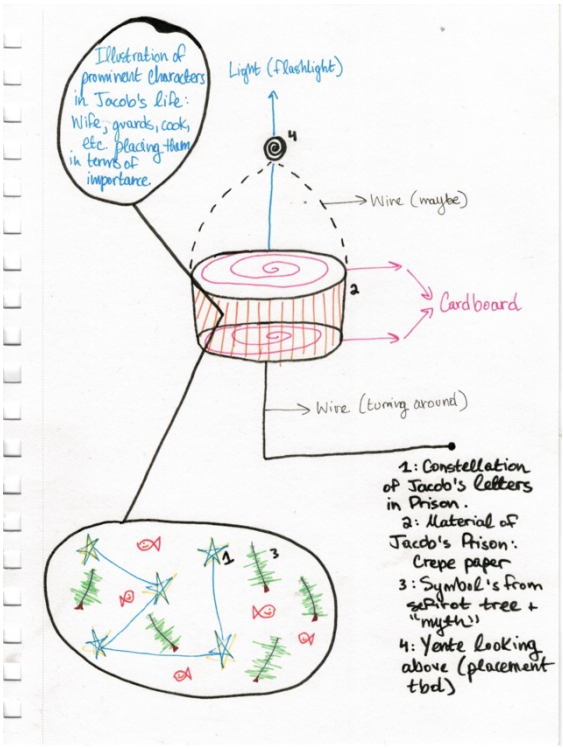


Fig. 18. Sketch of the Lamp-Cartography Project.

Representing Jacob's Enclosure

As Jacob in prison represents an important part of the book, portraying him in these conditions was central for our cartography. We wanted to show how the world around him is changing while he, the most important person in this messianic movement, is immobilized. It is important that this cartography explores how people during this messianic movement negotiate their sociological selves in diaspora, moving to Warsaw, adopting new names and negotiating a new religion and adapting into new lives.

Fig. 19. 3D paper lamp with green "glowing Jacob" on the map of Poland.

The crepe paper symbolizes the prison walls. The 3D aspect of this cartography and the physicality of the crepe paper physically manifests the physical barrier, enclosure and claustrophobia that Jacob feels from the outside while he was imprisoned. But at the same time, the prison walls were also decorated with landscape and greenery because it is supposed to symbolize the world outside of Jacob that is spinning and changing without him.

This cartography forces us to be wholly involved in the experience. By holding the light and spinning the prison walls, one is enraptured into the story, physically involved in the narrative of the book, forced to have a lived experience.

Another important aspect that we highlighted was the idea of Jacob being seen as the green light as when Nahman says to his wife Sofia Jakubowska while comforting as their babies had not survived:

> Don't be afraid. [...] Can't you see that we are all bathed in light, don't you see how all our faces have changed, how we've grown more beautiful? And that light over Jacob? Can't you see it? A green glow. We are all chosen ones now. God is in us, and when God is in person, he is no longer bound by any ordinary rules.[30]

Jacob painted in green creates a "glowing Jacob" effect in our cartography which symbolizes Jacob as a beacon of light that followers of Jacob associate as being a spiritual invigorator and guide. In Nahman's "scraps," we get a privileged insight into Nahman's personal psyche. It is through this, we see Jacob truly in the eyes of his followers. How Jacob is enchanting and appealing to his followers and is seen as someone who brings warmth and light into the dullness of people's hearts. Therefore, it is important to highlight the follower's perspective of Jacob to show how important he is in acting as a spiritual invigorator and guide to all the followers.

To localize Jacob and his disciples in their diaspora, the map of Poland forms the base of this 3-dimensional cartography, Jacob stands in the center of the map, representing him as the fountainhead of this movement.

Using Color, Illustrating Emotions

Our mosaic pattern encompasses Jacob's cell to demonstrate how the emotions of hope, anguish, spirituality, betrayal, and anger surround him through his time in the monastery. They also embody how the letters that are both sent to him, and are received to him carry these emotions to Jacob and his followers. They turn around Jacob always, along with the letters, and his physical and mental state are impacted by these emotions in his cell.

When the light shines through these colors, they morphed into brighter versions of themselves. The colors sometimes blend together, and new colors shine through. This shows how both the happiness Jacob brings to his followers through his letters give them hope, and how these emotions sometimes blend in a mixture of anger and faith. Within their movement, Jacob's followers go through

[30] Ibid., 259-258.

scrutiny and hatefulness by the people around them in Warsaw. However, their emotions blend together when confronting this attitude, and also receiving guidance and instruction from Jacob. This cartography makes audiences understand that emotions that were felt were not linear and clear cut but most of the time complex and mixed. Their lives are turned upside down: however, their faith makes them believe that this must happen for the utopian society to be achieved.

Fig. 20. Mosaic colorful pattern of the lamp.

We opted for the color red to convey Jacob's tumultuous emotions of betrayal and anger, which we deemed pertinent to address at that juncture. Red, with its rich symbolism, evokes notions of blood, sin, vitality, and sacrifice. Blood is an important theme that appears frequently in Tokarczuk's writing:

> [...] a woman dressed as a Jew [...] goes to a local priest and introduces herself as the wife of Wojsławice rabbi. She doesn't say much, only that she overheard that her husband and some others killed a child for Christian blood, as [...] they need blood for their holiday matzah.[31]

[31] Ibid., 275-274.

Here, blood carries significant cultural weight, particularly for Jews of that era, marked by instances of persecution and false accusations of killing Christian children for their blood. Thus, the symbolism of blood not only underscores the vulnerability of the Jewish community but also serves as a poignant reminder of historical injustices and the Jewish lives that were sacrificed during that time. In Jacob's narrative, it serves as a powerful metaphor for the turmoil he experiences, where bloodshed becomes intertwined with feelings of betrayal and the imperative to take action. Yet, amidst its associations with violence and suffering, blood also embodies vitality and life, like in this quote: "If Nahman were here, Jacob would hit him in the face and watch the bloodstream from his nose."[32] Blood shed is seen as a sign of action being done and executed out of the will of emotions: "They freeze, and now you can hear their uncertain, shallow breaths, the roar of the blood in their veins, the beating of their hearts."[33] Therefore, Tokarczuk highlights the function of blood as the medium of life and the vessel that brings vitality and action, deftly infusing the narrative with a sense of resilience and endurance.

We opted for the color green to represent Jacob's green light (as Nahman describes), as well as the feelings of hope and prosperity that Jacob's followers feel when receiving his letters from the monastery. He is seen as almost a shining beacon, guiding his followers towards a utopia like a lighthouse guides ships to the shore. We used the color green in two ways: both in our crepe mosaic pattern (which encompasses Jacob's prison in our cartography), and in the color that we paint Jacob's silhouette (which resides within the prison). We did this to differentiate the emotion from Jacob's light: hope and prosperity is seen in the crepe paper (which circulates as the letters do within the chapter), and Jacob's green light comes directly from within him (as Nahman states).

The color blue represents both spirituality (which is evidently very present within both Jacob and his followers), and anguish (which occurs with Jacob in the monastery). In terms of spirituality, Jacob is seen as the messiah that will bring his followers eternal peace, and they are willing to bear through any hardship that the world brings them to follow him and this radiant outcome. It can be seen as almost a blinding faith, as Jacob stills gives his followers hope, even with ill health and

[32] Ibid., 284.

[33] Ibid., 242-241.

imprisonment. In terms of anguish, it is very present throughout this chapter: from the physical and mental anguish Jacob suffers in the monastery (his malnutrition, overall ill health, and mood swings), to the suffering of Jacob's followers: both because they follow Jacob, and because he himself is in such anguish.
Also, although it is not blue, our wire structure can also symbolize this spirituality and anguish: it is the core base of the events that occur both to Jacob and his followers, and almost serves as incitement for their blinging faith and hope for the future with Jacob as their messiah.

Circulation of Letters, Ideas and People

The letters that are both received and written by Jacob play a big part in our cartography: this is because a big part of our chapter is about the communication between the "messiah" and his people in Warsaw, who cannot communicate with him physically since he is imprisoned. Tokarczuk mentions it many times as in these two quotes: "The boy obediently pulls out four letters. He sees the carefully folded pages with the seal Jacob has made in Warsaw"[34] and "In the afternoon, Roch passes him a letter written in Hebrew in a thick roll like a pack of tobacco."[35]

Fig. 21. Video presenting the circular movement of the cartography-lamp.

[34] Ibid., 299.
[35] Ibid., 296.

The letters show the movement of people from place to place within the chapter: particularly, their movement from Warsaw to Czestochowa and also develops a system in which narratives are communicated in terms of important events: from Jacob's say on who is in power, to tragic events such as the death of his son.
Symbolizing the people receiving and writing the letters as stars serves a dual purpose: 1. To convey them as part of a constellation of narratives that are constantly being intertwined, symbolizing the building messianic force; 2. to represent the described exterior landscape that surrounds Jacob's prison that is discussed further in the next section. To us, it is poignant to show the ambivalence that Tokarczuk conveys when addressing the emotional atmosphere that is embedded in this messianic movement. While the movement gains momentum, the individuals in the Frankist movement assume an increasingly critical role in Jacob's potential success like stars in the consistent cosmos. However, it is also a humbling experience to know that above all, earthly matters all fade into the minutiae—only a speck of dust in the system of other universes.

Symbolizing the Outside World: Sefirot Tree as a Landscape

As mentioned, the exterior of the crepe paper should represent the landscape outside. This juxtaposition between the interior walls of the prison and the exterior outer landscape brings out the fact that while the outside is very beautiful and open to the world, Jacob is trapped in the cell, enclosed by the crepe paper. This spatial irony brings out a sense of sadness and longing for freedom. How can something so beautiful also symbolize something oppressive?
The landscape is also portrayed meaningfully through illustrations of the Sefirot Tree that was shown on a board that belonged to Hayah. The Sefirot Tree is also referred to as the Tree of Life. They represent principles of life and most importantly represent the manner in which consciousness of God is reflected into Human life. As the Sefirot Tree is placed around the exterior of the walls of the light lamp, it represents the values that make up and support the fabric and structure of one's life, ultimately grounding them amidst the chaos around them. And because we are able to see the Sefirot Tree on the outside and observe Jacob humbly on the inside. At times, the Sefirot Tree shadows are reflected upon Jacob,

into the exterior and the interior which reminds us of manifestations of the internal existence of God and that God exists within them and in Jacob.
We wanted to show how sociologically, in times of uncertainty, these are the values that the Frankists try to ground themselves with. The idea of God existing within them gives them a sense of greater purpose and creates a form of agency for themselves. Showing a search to carve a space for one's marginalized self, the desire to survive and succeed.

Being Yente

It is important that we portray their endearing spirits. Even though that period of time was a time of anxiety, it was also anticipation for a new coming of time. Within something so big and tumultuous, we are able to find very humble and ordinary moments of people who are enduring and working and surviving through this time. In the end, like the author describes, this book of Jacob entails a success story of the Jewish people who are able to come out triumphant in society over time. This is portrayed through Yente who "sees the world from above - it is dark, faintly marked by sparks of light, each of them a home."[36]
From Yente's point of view, everything is so small: from the houses people live in, to the hardships they face in their current point of time. She is impartial and just observing, and as she floats up and observes the world from above, she can also see Jacob in his cell from a high and objective viewpoint.
We decided to incorporate Yente in an interesting way in our cartography: the viewer who engages and experiences the cartography now assumes the character of Yente. With this superpower, the viewer can see Jacob's figure from above, in the mosaic prison, with the light emitting from him and changing the colors of the crepe paper. We are therefore privileged with foresight and being able to see everything in the past from the future and how things have changed.

[36] Ibid., 314.

Conclusion

From our reading of this book, especially this chapter, we resonated with the ambivalent emotions of uncertainty, urgency and innocence. We felt that we had to honor this by evoking similar feelings of wonder and adventure that we once had when we were children. Like walking into the toy-shop for the first time and seeing all the hanging trinkets illuminated by lamps of all whimsical shapes and sizes. We perhaps must have felt a sense of grandeur and curiosity but a smallness relative to the world and great uncertainty

Book VI "The Book of the Distant Country": Rotating Circulations of Religion, Power, Social Stratification and... Love.

Hannah Copnick (McGill University Montreal/Sciences Po Paris), and *Salomé Delarive* (Sciences Po Paris).

The sixth part of the book revolves around Jacob Frank's travels to Brunn to be with some of his family. We learn about some of his family members, particularly his daughter, Eva, and their complicated relationship. The book also expands on Jacob's relationships with those around him and his family as well as how everything transpires between them considering his unique personality. Our creative cartography project is a vinyl representing Mosze Dobruszka-Thomas von Schönfeld's wedding to Elke von Popper. This extract seemed interesting to represent for many reasons.

Fig. 22. Vinyl-cartography representing Mosze Dobruszka-Thomas von Schönfeld's and Elke von Popper wedding.

Marriage: A Nexus between Social Strata

Firstly, the wedding appears as the beginning of Mosze-Thomas to a certain notoriety, as he later goes on to run a lucrative business, and becomes a Freemason, which gives him a particular access to important people and resources, for instance, when he is able to loan money to Jacob by means of a small bank he and other Freemasons set up. His character playing an important part in the book, we thought it was interesting to represent an event of his life also as he embodies the social mobility so desired by Jacob Frank.

Furthermore, this part is not only relevant when looking at Mosze-Thomas' life but also when exploring Eva's. Indeed, the young woman is still at the center of this extract even though it tells the story of her cousin's wedding. By having her memory interrupt the narrative of the wedding, the readers are reminded of her character and the crucial role she has in the story. In a sense, this extract gives us a glimpse of Eva's life: followed by memories, and the ones of her mother, she has to do what her father says (in this extract, he chooses who she is allowed to dance with; in the memory she has, she is forced to wear clothes chosen by her father)

while still wanting a normal life, where she can be her own person (as one can analyze her spending time with her cousins, dancing, drinking wine sneakily). Following this importance of Eva, the extract also illustrates Jacob's power, over his daughter but also over the community, as he is a very influential and known man. As seen at a moment in the book, him sitting in the shadows, surrounded by women gives us the impression that even when he is not in the spotlight, his presence is still very significant.

A Vinyl: The Spinning Cycle of Life

Our map covers a wide range of ideas and themes from the section on the wedding between Mosze Dobruszka, also known as Thomas von Schönfeld, and Elke von Popper in the chapter, all put together collage style.

Firstly, the shape and form of our map represents a vinyl which we imagined being a unique way to explore the musical aspect of weddings, and also of the time period of the book. We also chose not to specify any music to allow the reader to imagine it. We wanted to highlight the vinyl as a vehicle of the music per se since music is a large part of wedding celebrations and the circularity of the vinyl represents the circle of life and how life is constantly progressing and moving on. Through the way a vinyl works from outside to inside of the circle, one can also grasp the interest behind this extract: music is played as long as the diamond runs on the colorful part (wedding), but when it gets to the middle (Eva's memory), the music stops. Such as life stopped, as her mother whom she remembers in the extract, music stops when the diamond gets to the middle. The vinyl, though not a technology created yet at that time, is a way for us to represent the modernity of the book. Indeed, the topics of Tokarczuk's book are still relevant in our times, as they were in the last decades: religion, migration and travels, power.

A spiral groove running along the surface of each side also represents a kind of trajectory. But what happens when someone doesn't follow the predetermined groove? Both parts—one in black and white and the other in color – provide elements of an answer. While the black-and-white center represents, as we shall see, the memories of Eva's past life, more chaotic and less organized (the center of a vinyl is not grooved and allows free movement), the colored part depicts a

bourgeois life in society, well-ordered and adhering to well-defined patterns, much like the grooves typically found in this part of the vinyl.
This object is thus both a representation of the music and its omnipresence and of the modernity of the sixth book. The use of the shape of the vinyl for the cartography allows us to represent the Earth. Indeed, even though the Earth is not flat, it is round, such as our vinyl. Through the vinyl turning, and therefore the Earth turning, one can see migrations and Jacob's travels through Europe, the Tokarczuk's book's subtitle being *A fantastic journey across seven borders, five languages and three major religions, not counting the minor sects*. Furthermore, as the wedding takes place in a closed space—the gardens rented—it is hard to project the cartography outside the limits of the gardens. Therefore, we decided to have a finite space. Finally, the cartographic vinyl is bigger than a regular one. This element allows us to represent Jacob as a bigger than life character. Jacob lives his life by his own means and his own rules, putting what pleases him above all. He goes beyond societal norms, helping us give him this title of bigger than life.

Intersecting Memories

The middle portion of the vinyl represents Eva's memories during the wedding celebration. This portion of the cartography is in black and white to demonstrate how our memories can sometimes be seen in black and white for many people as the time that has elapsed since these events happened tends to leave out certain information and key aspects. The black and white also represents a sadness to Eva's memories: "This reminds Eva Frank of herself when she was Esther's age—fifteen—in the dark grey dress her father made her wear in Częstochowa so she wouldn't attract the soldiers' attention."[37] Indeed, she remembers the dress that her father made her wear to make her less attractive to the male soldiers when she was living with him in the Czestochowa monastery where he was imprisoned after his conversion to Catholicism. She also feels a sadness remembering and yearning for her mother. This section of our cartography includes many photos of butterflies. This comes from when Esther Dobruszka told Eva that she is a butterfly: "'You are a butterfly, too,' Esther, the youngest Dobruszka child, says to Eva. This bit of

[37] Ibid., 192.

praise lodges in Eva's memory, and she thinks about it for a long time after."[38] It leads to Eva pondering on that, leading her down a rabbit hole of sad memories of her childhood.

We also included a black and white photo of an eye, which represents the eyes of the soldiers that Jacob was trying to have not look at his daughter in a sexual way, as mentioned before when he gave Eva the conservative dress to wear. The eye is also a way to represent Jacob always looking over his daughter and her life. In the extract but also throughout the book, Jacob looks at his daughter, her actions, her words, and his input on how to live her life are more imposed than suggested. This portion of the cartography being in the middle also represents how Eva feels trapped in her life, constantly being controlled by her own father. Her sadness and memories are being surrounded by the happiness of others and the celebrations of the wedding party, something that feels unobtainable for her in her future. Eva represented in the middle also is a way to represent her feelings for Mosze-Thomas. Indeed, it is mentioned earlier in the sixth book, that when Eva met Mosze-Thomas she felt drawn and attracted to him. Being there, at his wedding, dancing with men that don't attract her could be seen and lived as a form of entrapment.

The outer part of the vinyl cartography represents the celebrations taking place at the wedding. We included photos of more butterflies, not only because they were in Eva's memories but also because they were on display at the wedding. Butterflies are a symbol of growing up and becoming an adult. One can see Mosze-Thomas's wedding as him becoming an adult: "Mosze will become Thomas von Schönfeld;" he is gaining a noble last name, but also his independence. We also included photographs of food, table set-ups, wine, lanterns, and flowers because they were part of the decorations at the wedding and show the happiness that weddings bring as "Aside from the magnificence of the tables, which hold food and enormous bouquets of May flowers, the main attraction is the pavilion, where there is an extraordinary collection of butterflies on display."[39] A reader could also discover "In the evening, when the lanterns are lit in the garden, she [Eva] stands in a group, a little tipsy from the wine…"[40]

[38] Ibid., 193-192.
[39] Ibid., 193.
[40] Ibid., 192.

Symbolizing Colors of Celebration

The mix of colors is moreover a way to represent such happiness. There is not one prominent color in this part, however, some are more present: green, yellow and pink. The green represents nature as, described in the vibrantly imagistic extract, the wedding took place in spring in gardens. The yellow is a way for us happiness and positivity, as well as the sun and light. This element has a double-meaning, sun and light for the month of May, when the wedding takes place, and sun and light that Jacob seems to bring to his followers. Through pink, we aimed at representing love, immaturity and playfulness which represent Eva. Undeniably, the young woman has romantic feelings towards Mosze-Thomas, but other men also express such feelings towards Eva. As for the mouths included in the cartography, they represent the discussions and the tools used to drink the wine. Finally, photographs of wedding rings and other wedding-related photos were included to add to the overall theme of the wedding that this cartography revolves around. The vibrant colors used in the outer ring represent the happiness and vibrance that weddings bring to the guests and families and help to enhance the difference of moods between Eva's memories in the middle and the celebratory outer ring.

This project was a great way to uniquely explore the musical and artistic side of the sixth book from *The Books of Jacob*. Through different challenges while creating the cartography, we are proud to have completed it with deep and hidden messages within it. The sixth book challenged us, with its complex topics that we were not very familiar with. Creating this cartography helped us to understand this different period of time and the stories of Jacob Frank.

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patrimonialization, and the teaching of history. She has notably studied French writers of Jewish-Maghreb origin within the context of post-colonial France. Her current work examines the transmission of Jewish history in Poland since 1989. Tartakowsky is the author of *Les Juifs et le Maghreb: Fonctions sociales d'une littérature d'exil* (PUFR, 2016) and has co-edited several works on contemporary Jewishness, including *Juifs d'Europe: Identités plurielles et mixité* (PUFR, 2017) and *Between Memory and Everyday Life: Jewish Europe Today* (Austeria, 2020).

Keywords: Creative Cartography, Eastern European Jewish History, Interdisciplinary Methods, Knowledge Transmission, Artistic Pedagogy, Olga Tokarczuk

How to quote this article:
Ewa Tartakowsky, "Creative Cartography: Transmitting Literature and Knowledge Teaching Eastern European Jewish History," in "(E)motional Maps: Affective Geographies among Jewish Migrants from North Africa and the Middle East," eds. Aviad Moreno, Piera Rossetto, and Emir Galilee, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15959

A Scientific Defence of Jewish Emancipation in *fin-de-siècle* Italy: Cesare Lombroso's *L'antisemitismo*

by *Emanuele D'Antonio*

Abstract

In 1894, Cesare Lombroso (1835–1909) published L'antisemitismo e le scienze moderne *(*Anti-Semitism in the Light of Modern Science*), the most important among the few thematic books released in* fin-de-siècle *Italy. Himself an Italian Jew, the renowned criminologist tried to build an authoritative defense of Jewish emancipation challenged by European anti-Semitism, by adopting the tools of his social science. The alarming political phenomenon was interpreted through the lenses of his Darwinian psycho-sociological thought, and anti-Semitic racist ideology was rejected in the name of a scientifically 'correct' solution of the anthropological problem of Jewish racial status. This essay focuses on Lombroso's* L'antisemitismo *through an intellectual-biographical approach, which is also attentive to the criminologist's subjective Jewishness. I will regard it as the climax of a decades-long Lombroso's scientific engagement with the Jewish question, by reconstructing the genesis of his ideas on Jewish racial status and on the origins of anti-Jewish hatred well before the 1893 project of the book. Then, I will reconstruct its publication process, its contents and its reception by Italian public opinion, both Gentile as Jewish.*

A scientific apologist

The Semites of Europe

An Atavistic Hatred

At the Origins of an Instant Book

The Judgement of Science

Italian Echoes

Conclusions

A scientific apologist

In 1894, the renowned Cesare Lombroso (1835-1909), a controversial advocate of positivist social science and culture,[1] published *L'antisemitismo e le scienze moderne* (*Anti-Semitism in the Light of Modern Science*), one of the few thematic books released in *fin-de-siècle* Italy. According to the preface,[2] the celebrated criminologist approached the subject with some discomfort, initially finding the question of the legitimacy of "a hatred between peoples" irritating and antithetical to the standards of modern civilization. Nonetheless, socio-anthropological analysis enabled him to resolve the issue, in a manner he deemed both satisfactory and, more importantly, free from "the danger [...] of partiality." Lombroso claimed his objectivity was validated by the fact that he was in alignment with the findings of prominent international "masters" of science, who had studied anti-Semitism from impartially perspectives distinct from his own. His "[righteous] judgment," he asserted, would convince public opinion and be rejected only by "fanatics" who, due to "congenital tendencies" and "instinctive feelings," politicized an "ethnic question"[3] to gain "unhealthy glory." His goal, however, was

[1] The bibliography on Lombroso's science is vast. For a critical review, see Silvano Montaldo, "Lombroso: The Myth, The History," *Crime, Historie & Sociétés / Crime, History & Societies* 22, no. 2 (2018): 31-61.

[2] Cesare Lombroso, *L'antisemitismo e le scienze moderne* (Turin-Rome: Roux, 1894), 5-7 (henceforth 'ASM'). On this book, see Nancy A. Harrowitz, *Anti-Semitism, Misoginy & the Logic of Cultural Difference: Cesare Lombroso and Matilde Serao* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Delia Frigessi, "Cattaneo, Lombroso e la questione ebraica," in *Nel nome della razza. Il razzismo nella storia d'Italia 1870–1945*, ed. Alberto Burgio (Bologna: il Mulino, 1999), 247-264; Emanuele D'Antonio, "Aspetti della rigenerazione ebraica e del sionismo in Cesare Lombroso," *Società e Storia* 92 (2001): 281-309; David Forgacs, "Building the Body of the Nation. Lombroso's *L'antisemitismo* and Fin-de-Siècle Italy," *Jewish Culture and History* 6, no. 1 (2003): 96-110; Roberto Finzi, *Il pregiudizio. Ebrei e questione ebraica in Marx, Lombroso, Croce* (Milan: Bompiani, 2011); Xavier Tabet, "Cesare Lombroso, the 'Blast of Antisemitism' and 'Socialist Neo-Christianity'," in *The European Left and the Jewish Question 1848–1992*, ed. Alessandra Tarquini (Cham: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2021), 53-66.

[3] Lombroso used the word "ethnicity" as synonymous with "race" in biological terms. Since the vocabulary of racial and racist discourses reflect the cultural and ideological constructs of their

not to use rational arguments to persuade unrepentant abnormal individuals but to disseminate the scientific response to an issue he regarded as dangerous to the progress of European society.

Lombroso's investigation aimed to develop a critical understanding of an alarming political phenomenon that, on the eve of the Dreyfus Affair in France, was undermining the process of Jewish emancipation, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Over the course of the previous century, European states had modernized and secularized political citizenship, dismantling centuries-old legal anti-Jewish discriminations. By the early 1870s, Jews, apart from those in the Russian Empire and Romania, enjoyed full civil and political rights and had become full members of modern nations.[4] Their political equality with Gentile compatriots—promoted in the name of egalitarian principles and intended to integrate into national societies a group regarded as partially different and separate—was seen in liberal and progressive cultures as the definitive solution to the Jewish question.

This optimistic assumption, however, was unexpectedly shattered from the 1880s onward by a range of phenomena soon defined as anti-Semitic, which expressed resistance to emancipation.[5] Anti-Semitism, whether ideologically based on religious prejudice or scientific racism, was rooted in the belief that Jewish diversity represented an alien and disruptive force within European nations. Jews, therefore, were to be marginalized—even in the absence of a unified anti-Semitic platform—through policies of exclusion from the political body. Anti-Semitic campaigns, increasingly politically organized, often with mass appeal and sometimes shockingly violent, spread the perception of an ongoing crisis in the emancipatory process throughout the Old Continent. Defenders of

proponents, such terms are typically placed in quotation marks. However, I have chosen to avoid this practice, except when directly quoting, in order to improve the fluidity of the text.

[4] For a long-term historical reassessment, see David Sorkin, *Jewish Emancipation: A History across Five Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[5] Among the extensive bibliography on the subject, see at least Jacob Katz, *From Prejudice to Destruction: Anti-Semitism, 1700-1933* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980); David Nirenberg, *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* (New York-London: Norton, 2013); Steven Beller, *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

emancipation, both Jewish and Gentile, who saw it as integral to modernity,[6] responded to this crisis by questioning its causes and debating possible solutions. The 1894 book represented the climax—but neither the beginning nor the end—of Lombroso's scientific engagement with the Jewish question, initially driven by publicly undeclared, subjective concerns. A social Darwinist and progressive intellectual with a medical background, and a recent adherent to the Socialist Party, Lombroso was, above all, a modern Italian Jew committed to defending emancipation, which he experienced as a supporter of the Risorgimento and as a medical officer in the national army during the height of the Italian wars of independence.[7]

Lombroso's Jewishness, though evanescent, was not irrelevant to his identity. Born in Verona into a wealthy bourgeois family connected to the local Jewish community, Lombroso felt no personal attachment to Jewish religious faith, which clashed with the materialistic worldview he had developed in his youth. This detachment from Judaism distanced him from Jewish institutions in adulthood, enabling him to rationalize an assimilationist vision of relations between Jews and Gentiles in his reflection on anti-Semitism. His advocacy for their "fusion" into the modern world, however, did not render him an "assimilated" Jew—a term historically denoting an individual of Jewish descent fully estranged from his/her Jewishness.[8]

Throughout his life, Lombroso always regarded himself as a member of the Jewish race, to which he felt bound by the biological bond of "the Semitic [blood]."[9] His "ethnic identity," rooted in this racial self-perception, was reinforced by his personal integration into a Jewish family network that saw itself as Jewish and was perceived as such by the outside world. This identity influenced many choices in

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[6] Cristiana Facchini, "Le metamorfosi di un'ostilità antica. Antisemitismo e cultura cattolica nella seconda metà dell'Ottocento," *Annali di storia dell'esegesi* 27, no. 1 (2010): 214-215.

[7] For a biography of Lombroso, despite its somewhat hagiographic tone, see Gina Lombroso Ferrero, *Cesare Lombroso. Storia della vita e delle opere* (Bologna: Zanichelli, 1921).

[8] Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin-de-Siècle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 2001), 8-9.

[9] Cesare Lombroso to Achille Loria, 31 July 1890, Loria Archive, 10: 24.1.1, Archivio di Stato di Torino. On the racial self-representations of emancipated Italian Jews see Carlotta Ferrara degli Uberti, *Fare gli ebrei italiani. Autorappresentazioni di una minoranza (1861–1918)* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2011), 57-65.

his private life,[10] the most significant being his 1870 marriage to Nina De Benedetti, whom he described to a Catholic friend as a "Jewess by birth and even [...] conviction."[11] This marriage, which was celebrated with a religious wedding, confirmed his distinction and transmitted it to his offspring.[12] Lombroso also assimilated a Jewish historical self-consciousness from his kinship system. His awareness of belonging to a minority with a common past, partly distinct from the Gentile past and plagued by long-lasting oppression only recently alleviated through emancipation, occasionally surfaced in his works related to the Jewish question.[13] His assertion of the centrality of Jews in the history of European civilization—an idea shared by his coreligionists but often dismissed by Christian and Gentile cultures[14]—apologetically expressed an intimate conviction rooted in his Jewishness. While his defense of emancipation incorporated several beliefs common within modern Jewish, liberal, or socialist cultures, it was nonetheless intended to be—and indeed was—scientific.

Lombroso's critique of anti-Semitism emerged from his effort to examine the phenomenon critically, using the analytical and interpretative tools of his social science. His inquiry centered on anti-Semitic political actors and their ideology, which he interpreted through the lenses of evolutionary anthropology and delegitimized as alien to modern civilization. Lombroso approached anti-Semitism through his recently developed, utilitarian sociology of political phenomena, assessing such ideologies based on their supposed ability—or inability—to foster social progress, which he believed was revealed by the psycho-

[10] Delfina Dolza, *Essere figlie di Lombroso. Due donne intellettuali tra '800 e '900* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1990), 28-32.

[11] Cesare Lombroso to Ettore Righi, [December 1869], Ms 619: 90.40, Biblioteca Civica di Verona.

[12] On endogamic marriage in the age of emancipation see Barbara Armani, *Il confine invisibile. L'*élite *ebraica di Firenze (1840–1914)* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2006), 214-266.

[13] Michael Berkowitz, "A Hidden Theme of Jewish self-Love? Eric Hobsbawm, Karl Marx, and Cesare Lombroso on 'Jewish Criminality'," in *The Cesare Lombroso Handbook*, eds. Paul Knepper and Per Jørgen Ystehede (London-New York: Routledge, 2011), 253-267; Knepper, "Lombroso's Jewish Identity and its Implication for Criminology," *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 44, no. 3 (2011): 355-369. On the historical culture of nineteenth-century Italian Jews, see Gadi Luzzatto Voghera, *Il prezzo dell'eguaglianza. Il dibattito sull'emancipazione degli ebrei in Italia 1781–1848)* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1998), 157-168.

[14] Cristiana Facchini, *David Castelli. Ebraismo e scienze delle religioni tra Otto e Novecento* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 2005), 123-130.

anthropological character of their proponents.[15] The concept of atavism—central to his Darwinian criminology but here adapted differently from its original criminological articulation—framed his understanding of anti-Jewish actions, whose performers revealed abnormal individualities driven by psychological traits linked to regressive stages of human development.[16]

While distancing anti-Semitism from European civilization, Lombroso—apparently oblivious to its religious forms—scientifically examined anti-Semitic ideology rooted in scientific racism. As a proponent of the racial anthropology that dominated the late nineteenth century, he could not refute anti-Jewish stereotypes outright in the name of anthropological equality or cultural pluralism, as this last approach was simply foreign to the mindset of contemporary practitioners of race science. Jewish anthropologists, however, did not perceive race science solely as a threat to emancipation but also employed it as a tool to build "a new form of Jewish self-[defense]," historically defined by John Efron as "scientific apologia."[17] Lombroso shared in this strategy, countering anti-Semitic claims in various ways, but especially by dismantling—similarly to many European colleagues and coreligionists[18]—essentialist views of Jewish diversity in favor of environmentalist, historically-based ones. Jews were not the disruptive racial outsiders imagined by anti-Semitism but, as proven by modern science, had played and continued to play a highly progressive role in the history of European societies. This position was crucial to celebrating them as purveyors of modernity, and—more politically significant—to reaffirming the legitimacy of Jewish emancipation. While he could not rely on arguments of political egalitarianism,[19] Lombroso effectively re-established the political equality of the Jews on social utilitarian grounds.

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[15] Ernesto De Cristofaro, "Gli anarchici e il delitto politico tra Italia e Francia (1878–1900)," in *Beccaria* 6 (2020-2021): 231-264.

[16] Delia Frigessi, *Cesare Lombroso* (Turin: Einaudi, 2003), 359-360. On atavism, see Silvano Montaldo, *Donne delinquenti. Il genere e la nascita della criminologia* (Rome: Carocci, 2019); Paolo Mazzarello, *Il darwinista infedele. Lombroso e l'evoluzione* (Milan: Hoepli, 2024), 87-101.

[17] John M. Efron, *Defenders of the Race: Jewish Doctors and Race Science in Fin-de-Siècle Europe* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1994), 59.

[18] Mitchell B. Hart, *Social Science and the Politics of Modern Jewish Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 11-12.

[19] On his anti-egalitarian socialism, see Marco Scavino, "L'interesse per la politica e l'adesione al socialismo," in *Cesare Lombroso cento anni dopo,* ed. Silvano Montaldo and Paolo Tappero (Turin: Utet, 2009), 123-124.

This essay examines Lombroso's *L'antisemitismo*, reconstructing its genesis, content, and reception within *fin-de-siècle* Italian culture. The book had a highly stratified structure, being the product—as was usually the case with his works—of a "progressive accumulation" of ideas developed in earlier phases of his scientific engagement with the Jewish question.[20] Accordingly, this analysis traces the formation of Lombroso's principal theses—most notably, his claims regarding the racial equality between European Jews and Gentiles and the atavistic nature of anti-Semitism.

The discussion begins with the "prehistory" of *L'antisemitismo*, exploring Lombroso's earlier ideas, which, while formulated three decades before the book, are crucial to understanding the strong emphasis he would continue to place, in an apologetic key, on the issue of Jewish racial status. The essay then examines his initial attempt to understand anti-Semitism critically in the 1880s, responding to racialist and racist interpretations of the contemporary wave of anti-Jewish agitations. Following an analysis of the book itself and its publication process, I will focus on the question of its reception by Italian public opinion, both Gentile and Jewish.

The study draws on published and unpublished sources, including Lombroso's private correspondence, which was made available online in 2018 by the Museum of Criminal Anthropology at the University of Turin (https://lombrosoproject.unito.it).

The Semites of Europe

In 1873, Lombroso was eager to participate—as he wrote to his friend Isacco Pardo, the chief rabbi of Verona, his Jewish community of origin—in a "polemic [...] against a deputy who scorns the Jewish politicians of Italy."[21] The liberal Francesco Pasqualigo, accused of intolerance by the progressive newspaper *Il Diritto*, had

[20] On the structure of Lombroso's works see Luisa Mangoni, "Eziologia di una nazione," in Cesare Lombroso, *Delitto genio follia. Scritti scelti*, eds. Delia Frigessi, Ferruccio Giacanelli, and Luisa Mangoni (Milan: Boringhieri, 2000), 685-687.

[21] Cesare Lombroso to Isacco Pardo, [post 31 August 1873], P20/9: 10, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jerusalem.

just defended his opposition to the appointment of a Jew, Isacco Pesaro Maurogonato, as a minister in the third Minghetti cabinet.[22] The exclusion of Jews from governmental roles, while conflicting with the principle of equality of Italian citizens of all faiths, was justified by Pasqualigo for reasons of political expediency. He viewed the Jewish minority as a foreign body within the national framework due to its (alleged) separatist religious culture, and claimed their interests might differ or even conflict with those of the Italian state. Outraged, as were many of his coreligionists, Lombroso sought to counter Pasqualigo by constructing—among other arguments—a Jewish-Risorgimento martyrology. He aimed to demonstrate that many Jews had been willing to sacrifice their lives for national unity, motivated by patriotic feelings equal to those of their Gentile peers, thereby proving to the public that they rightfully belonged to the Italian nation. However, for unknown reasons, his apologetic article remained unpublished and perhaps even unfinished.

Lombroso's response to the Jewish question, while inherently political—as evidenced by the Pasqualigo affair—was initially restricted to scientific debates. Following Italian unification, his tenure as a professor of Psychiatry at the University of Pavia, which he obtained in 1863 after earning his medical degree five years earlier, laid the first ideological cornerstone of his later critique of anti-Semitism by postulating the anthropological identity of European Jews and their Gentile compatriots. His early interest in the racial status of Jews stemmed from scientific and politico-cultural stimuli, which were potentially in tension with one other. Since the late 1850s, the young scholar conceived of humanity—in line with mainstream international anthropological thought—as divided into superior and inferior races, differentiated by psychophysical and moral traits shaped by heredity and environment, which in turn influenced behavior.[23] His racial and racist ideas evolved through his critical engagement of polygenist anthropology, which posited the plural origin and inequality of human groups, and through applying

[22] On this episode, see Andrew M. Canepa, "Emancipazione, integrazione e antisemitismo liberale. Il caso Pasqualigo," *Comunità* 174 (1975): 166-203.

[23] Cesare Lombroso, *Questioni sull'origine, l'ineguaglianza, e l'incrociamento delle razze umane. Dissertazione inaugurale [presentata] per ottenere la laurea dottorale in medicina* (Pavia: Bizzoni, 1858). On the initial Italian response to scientific racism, see Edoardo M. Barsotti, *At the Roots of Italian Identity: 'Race' and 'Nation' in the Italian Risorgimento 1796–1870* (London-New York: Routledge, 2021), 199-222.

Darwinian theories—particularly evolution and the struggle for life—to the historical world.[24] Race science became, for him, a tool for speculating on the anthropological history of humankind and for investigating health, socio-cultural, and eventually even political issues.[25]

By the 1860s, Lombroso, while enthusiastically embracing race science, was already concerned about the prevailing image of his coreligionists, which was shaped by transnational scientific networks and viewed through the lens of racial culture.[26] The widespread emphasis on the Indo-Iranian origins of European peoples had negatively impacted Jewish minorities, who at the time were obtaining legal emancipation in most European states. The Aryan discourse, which transferred the linguistic dichotomy between Indo-European and Semitic languages into historical and anthropological contexts, became a pivotal criterion for classifying human groups.[27] Proponents of this discourse defined Jews—due to the affiliation of Hebrew with Semitic languages—as a Semitic population racially distinct in origin from Aryan Europeans. The cultural construct of the "Semites of Europe," while conveying complex images (including some positive ones in Jewish self-representations),[28] more frequently provided scientific legitimacy to old and new stereotypes about Jewish diversity. Several anthropologists argued that Jews possessed physical traits inherited from their Biblical ancestors, many of which were similar to those attributed to Middle Eastern or "Oriental" populations. According to many statisticians, the distinctive characteristics of Jews were influenced by racial immunities and predispositions to specific pathologies.[29] At the same time, historical criticism based on the Aryan myth often downplayed

[24] Silvano Montaldo, "Le début de la pensée raciste de Lombroso," in *La pensée de la race en Italie. Du romantisme au fascisme*, eds. Aurélien Aramini and Elena Bovo (Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2018), 89.

[25] Michele Nani, "Lombroso e le razze," in *Cesare Lombroso cento anni dopo*, 165-174.

[26] Emanuele D'Antonio, "Razzismo, mito ariano e risposte ebraiche fra Italia e Francia, 1867–1873," *Beccaria* 6 (2020-2021): 317-343.

[27] Maurice Olender, *Les langues du Paradis. Aryens et Sémites: une couple providentiel* (Paris: Seuil, 1989). On the Italian case, see Alexander Lenz, *Genie und Blut. Rassendenken in der italienischen Philologie des neunzehnten Jahrunderts* (Paderborn: Fink, 2014).

[28] See, for example, Alessandro Grazi, *Prophet of Renewal: David Levi: a Jewish Freemason and Saint-Simonian in Nineteenth-Century Italy* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2022), 128-129 and 137-138.

[29] Jean-Christian M. Boudin, *Traité de geographie et de statistique medicales et des maladies endemiques [...]* (Paris: Baillière 1857), Vol. 2, 128-142; Giustiniano Nicolucci, *Delle razze umane. Studio etnologico* (Naples: Fibreno, 1857), Vol. 1, 264-265 and Vol. 2, 329-330.

Jewish contributions to the process of civilization. For example, the renowned Orientalist Ernest Renan argued—though not specifically referring to contemporary Jews—that Semitic peoples were incapable of complex intellectual endeavors, their efforts hindered by the primitive theological worldview of their religious cultures.[30]

Although he shared Aryan-rooted stereotypes about Semitism, Lombroso defended European Jews against scientific portrayals of racial difference and inferiority. His refutation was developed fully in an 1871 book, *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore* (*The White Man and the Colored Man*), a popular treatise on the difference and inequality of human races.[31] In this work, which was elaborated over a long period, Lombroso affirmed the monogenetic origins of humanity, tracing them back to an extinct ape, and described humanity's subsequent division into races, which were hierarchically classified based on (pre)judgments of value concerning non-European civilizations. He used the case of European Jews as an example of a transformation in racial status, preventing history from collapsing into mere biological heredity through a Lamarckian-based evolutionism already influenced by Darwinian theory. Lombroso argued that this "strong remnant of the ancient Semitic stock," after immigrating from Palestine, had enhanced its psychophysical, intellectual, and moral characteristics, rising from a "humble primordial stage" to the heights of civilization.[32] This evolution was shaped by a successful, though very painful, adaptation to a harsh, life-threatening new environment compared to the Middle-Eastern one. The Jews had responded positively to the difficulties of cold climates and "continuous, secular persecution," which acted as a Darwinian "selector of the species" by eliminating weaker individuals and strengthening survivors of the massacres.[33] The process, he claimed, fostered traits useful for survival and eliminated others detrimental to it.

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[30] Ernest Renan, *De la part des peuples sémitiques dans l'histoire de la civilisation [...]* (Paris: Levy, 1862). On Renan's controversial views on Semitism, see Regina Pozzi, "Alle origini del razzismo contemporaneo. Il caso di Ernest Renan," *Rivista di storia contemporanea* 195, no. 4 (1985): 497-520.

[31] Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore. Letture sull'origine e la varietà delle razze umane* (Padua: Sacchetto, 1871).

[32] Lombroso, *L'uomo bianco e l'uomo di colore*, 106-117.

[33] On the social-Darwinist understanding of Jewish history, see Hart, *Social Science and the Politics*, 122-123 and 207.

Consequently Lombroso claimed that European Jews were neither physically nor culturally "Oriental"; their biological characteristics resembled those of their "Aryan" compatriots, and throughout history, they had produced numerous "geniuses"—from Isaac Abrabanel to Baruch Spinoza to Heinrich Heine—who had significantly contributed to the progress of civilization.

Thus, Lombroso re-established the anthropological equality between the Semites and the Aryans of Europe by postulating that they were bound in a relationship of racial identity shaped by the historical process. This did not imply absolute homology in their biosocial characteristics, as social statistics compiled by administrative agencies, private institutions, and academic scholars quantitatively demonstrated. Lombroso interpreted those differences—as he explained in a demographic study on the Jews of Verona[34]—as a non-essentialist legacy of the distinct histories of Jews and Gentiles. For example, the mortality rates of his coreligionists were slightly worse than those of Veronese "Catholics," primarily due to the long-term harmful effects of political oppression on Jewish health. While Lombroso did not entirely exclude racial influences, he limited them to the forms of mortal pathologies affecting Jews. Jewish lunatics, for instance, "often" (as stated in a previous essay) exhibited an abnormous religiosity, unconsciously reproducing the attitudes and behaviors of their "Biblical," Semitic forefathers.[35] Nevertheless, contrary to the mainstream international psychiatric culture of his time, Lombroso did not attribute the alleged high frequency of mental illnesses among Jews—statistically higher than among Gentiles—to racial factors.[36] Instead, he ascribed it to their anxious disposition as one "of the oppressed races," the mental strain imposed by trade professions (in which longstanding discriminatory laws had forced them to specialize), and the widespread practice of consanguineous marriage, which fostered the hereditary transmission of

[34] Cesare Lombroso, "Sulla mortalità degli Ebrei di Verona nel decennio 1855–1864," in Lombroso, *Studi statistico-igienici sull'Italia* (Bologna: Fava e Garagnani, 1867), 33-49.

[35] Cesare Lombroso, "Frammenti medico-psicologici," *Gazzetta medica italiana – Provincie Venete*, December 18, 1858, 206-207. For a similar understanding of Jewish criminality, see Cesare Lombroso, *L'uomo delinquente in rapporto alla antropologia, alla medicina legale ed alle discipline carcerarie* (Milan: Hoepli, 1876), 122-128.

[36] On the psychiatric debate, see Vinzia Fiorino, "Gli ebrei, un popolo di nevrastenici. Una costruzione culturale della psichiatria tra Otto e Novecento," *Italia contemporanea* 286 (2018): 209-237.

pathologies within affected family groups.[37] Despite these ephemeral differences in Jewish biostatistics, Lombroso maintained the "truth" sanctioned by anthropology: Jews and Gentiles were equal not only before the law, but also in life and "death."

An Atavistic Hatred

In 1881, Lombroso published an excerpt from his forthcoming book, *Genio e follia* (*Genius and Madness*), in Italy's most popular Jewish journal, concluding with a condemnation of German anti-Semitism.[38] His critique did not stem from an analysis of a phenomenon already prominent in the politics and public life of Bismarck's Reich.[39] Instead, the criminologist sought to support with positive "facts" his scientific theory that individuals engaged in creative activities shared a psychopathological status with those suffering from mental illness. Drawing on historical and anecdotal sources and health statistics, he argued that European Jews produced a proportionally greater number of "radically creative" geniuses and lunatics than their Gentile counterparts. This assertion paved the way for his outraged moral denunciation of anti-Semitism. Its "coryphaeus," Lombroso declared, were "a [shame] of contemporary Germany," which was promoting an unjust hatred toward a "poor race" despite its "past tragedies" and present "misfortunes." These remarks represent the earliest evidence of Lombroso's concern about the rise of European anti-Semitism.

In the 1880s, Lombroso—who had been a professor of Forensic Medicine at the University of Turin since 1876, where he established an influential school for the scientific study of deviance—had developed the second ideological pillar of his analysis: the assertion that anti-Jewish hatred was atavistic. Alongside disciples such as Salvatore Ottolenghi, a fellow Piedmontese Jew and later the "father" of Italian scientific policing, Lombroso continued to carry out anthropological

[37] Lombroso, "Sulla mortalità," 44-45.

[38] Cesare Lombroso, "Influenza della razza sul genio e la pazzia," *Il Vessillo Israelitico*, October 1881, 301-302; Lombroso, *Genio e follia in rapporto alla medicina legale, alla critica ed alla storia* (Turin: Bocca, 1882), 48-50.

[39] Peter Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Anti-Semitism in Germany & Austria*, Revised ed. (London: Halban, 1988), 247-248.

studies of the Jewish people.[40] While the thesis of Jewish racial identity with Gentiles remained useful for asserting equality on a scientific basis, it began to feel outdated in the new political climate. Attacks on Jewish diversity had moved beyond scientific and cultural discourse into the political sphere, becoming tools for mass mobilization in Central and Eastern Europe. Anti-Semitism—influenced by events such as the Russian pogroms of 1881-82 and the rise of anti-Semitic political organizations in Germany and Austria-Hungary—became a major issue of concern on international political and Jewish agendas. Against this alarming backdrop, Lombroso turned to a scientific question: the origins of this seemingly eternal anti-Jewish hatred.

Observing shocking episodes of anti-Semitism, Lombroso and several of his disciples developed an increasingly pessimistic view on modern civilization's ability to address the Jewish question. The Tisza-Eszlàr affair of 1882-1883, which marked the return of the blood libel myth in the courts of Central and Eastern Europe and in related anti-Semitic propaganda, exemplified this.[41] While Lombroso was concerned,[42] he avoided overtly criticizing the ancient accusation that Jews killed Christian children to feed on their blood in rituals.[43] Refuting this myth on an anthropological basis probably appeared futile or even counterproductive for the image of Jews, especially when dealing with noisy polemics from anti-Semitic proponents. As stated by Ottolenghi, who analyzed the Tisza-Eszlàr affair from a medico-forensic perspective, the Gentiles who legitimized it offered disheartening proof not only of "human credulity [but also of] the power of suggestion," which was exerted by "false accusations [repeated] over the centuries." Despite numerous acquittals over the centuries, the "progress

[40] Salvatore Ottolenghi, *Il senso cromatico negli Israeliti* (Turin: Camilla e Bertolero, 1883); Ottolenghi, "Il senso cromatico degli Israeliti," *Il Vessillo Israelitico*, September 1884, 295-300. On Ottolenghi, see Emanuele D'Antonio, "Lombroso, Ottolenghi e le origini della Polizia scientifica italiana," in *Una cultura professionale per la polizia dell'Italia liberale e fascista. Antologia del "Bollettino della Scuola superiore di Polizia scientifica"*, eds. Nicola Labanca and Michele Di Giorgio (Milan: Unicopli 2020), 23-46.

[41] Hillel J. Kieval, *Blood Inscriptions: Science, Modernity, and Ritual Murder at Europe's Fin-de-Siècle* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).

[42] See the 1892 document filed by Lombroso in Sistema Museale di Ateneo (henceforth SMAUT): Lombroso, 1118, Università di Torino.

[43] For several allusive remarks, see ASM, 21 and 107.

of civilization" had failed to dislodge these "absurd beliefs" about Jewish practices.[44]

By the late 1880s, Lombroso began to develop his critical understanding of the "causes" of anti-Semitism. He addressed this topic for the first time in *Il delitto politico e le rivoluzioni* (*The Political Crime and the Revolutions*), a book co-authored in 1890 with a young disciple and coreligionist, the Veronese lawyer Rodolfo Laschi.[45] This analyzed political upheavals in relation to the progress of human societies in several somewhat self-contradictory pages, which downplayed the influence of racial factors in the emergence of conflicts between ethnonational groups within the same political community.[46] So-called racial struggles, Lombroso argued, were often rooted in historical grievances rather than ethnic antagonism. Anti-Semitism, described as "that sad shame of [European] civilization," was a case in point. It was not the inevitable clash of racially different peoples but rather the product of historical hatreds.

As a regular contributor and attentive reader, Lombroso was probably aware of the heated polemic that gripped the popular Paris-based *Revue Scientifique* in 1888.[47] The journal's editor the physiologist Charles Richet, Lombroso's personal friend and a future Nobel Prize winner for Medicine, was forced to refute a virulent attack against emancipation by one of the journal's most brilliant and celebrated writers,[48] the French ethno-psychologist Gustave Le Bon. Le Bon used the Aryan myth to end an argument with the physicist Félix Hément on the Jewish

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[44] Salvatore Ottolenghi, *La suggestione e le facoltà psichiche occulte in rapporto alla pratica legale e medico-forense* (Turin: Bocca, 1900), 268. For his first intervention see Ottolenghi and Lombroso, *Nuovi studi sull'ipnotismo e la credulità* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice, 1889), 51-52.

[45] Augusto Caperle, "Rodolfo Laschi," *L'Adige*, August 26, 1905.

[46] Cesare Lombroso and Rodolfo Laschi, *Il delitto politico e le rivoluzioni in rapporto al diritto, all'antropologia criminale ed alla scienza di governo* (Turin: Bocca, 1890), 115 and 210-212. On the ambivalences of Lombroso's political raciology, see Elena Bovo, "La voie italienne de la psychologie des fouls," in *Beccaria* 6 (2020-2021), 222-223.

[47] Since 1884, the journal had deliberately offered Lombroso the opportunity to gather sources from its readership for his research on political crime, Lombroso Ferrero, *Cesare Lombroso*, 247.

[48] Charles Richet, "Le rôle des Juifs dans la civilisation," *Revue Scientifique*, November 10, 1888, 600-603.

contribution to civilization, declaring this to be "null"[49] and explaining and legitimizing the anti-Jewish hatred of the "European nations" on naturalistic grounds. For Le Bon, the Jews were racially "foreigners" who possessed psychological tendencies inherited from their Semitic ancestors' that were opposed to those of their Gentile counterparts.[50] The long-lasting persecution of the Jews, he also argued, had made them a dangerous race endowed with economic power derived from financial skills they had been forced to acquire. Le Bon portrayed the Jews as enclosed within an impermeable social exclusivism and consumed by a merciless hatred of Christianity. In his view, anti-Semitism was a sentiment of self-defense spontaneously felt by "Aryan peoples" in front of a racial alien who, once freed from legal discrimination, threatened to conquer their "native" national societies.

In 1890, Lombroso rejected racial and racist interpretations of anti-Semitism in the style of Le Bon, presenting a two-fold counterargument. First, he argued that anti-Semitism was not a racial struggle because it involved two anthropologically equal populations. Second, he contended that it deviated from Europe's political tradition, which historically promoted the blending and merging of "very diverse races" into ethnically heterogeneous nations through their "mutual [physical] attraction" and "[shared] interests."[51]

Lombroso conceptualized anti-Semitism as stemming from a pre-rational hatred of Jews, widespread among European Gentiles and originating in ancient atavistic roots that persisted hereditarily into the present. He traced its genesis to two primary sentiments: the disdain of ancient "[Aryans ruling over] slave peoples," later absorbed by modern nationalism, and the animosity of imperial Rome toward the Jews, which the medieval Church transformed into a Christian "religious duty and [...] rite." These feelings, Lombroso argued, became hereditarily entrenched through the material and moral gratification that early anti-Jewish persecutors derived from their acts. Contemporary anti-Semites, he

[49] Gustave Le Bon, "Du rôle des juifs dans l'histoire de la civilisation. Les dieux d'Israël," *Revue Scientifique*, September 29, 1888, 386-393; Félix Hément, "Quelque observations à propos du rôle des Juifs dans l'histoire de la civilisation," *Revue Scientifique*, October 20, 1888, 490-492.

[50] Gustave Le Bon, "Rèponse à Félix Hément," *Revue Scientifique*, October 20, 1888, 492-494. On his anti-Jewish racism, see Benoit Marpeau, *Gustave Le Bon. Parcour d'un intellectuel 1841–1935* (Paris: CNRS, 2000), 149-152.

[51] Lombroso and Laschi, *Il delitto politico*, 109-115 and 210-211.

suggested, were unconsciously driven by the same persecutory instincts as their ancestors, deriving similar satisfaction in the "debasement" (*avvilimento*) of the Jews. Lombroso not only rejected the notion of anti-Semitism as an Aryan defensive reaction to Jewish racial diversity, but he also, and more importantly, shifted the primary responsibility for its emergence onto the non-Jewish world. For him, hatred of the Jews was structurally, if not an innate psychopathology, an ingrained psychological trait in many Gentiles. His analysis, which had already begun addressing the political prophylaxis of the phenomenon,[52] would expand three years later.

At the Origins of an Instant Book

In the preface of *L'antisemitismo*, Lombroso claimed that the initial impetus for his work stemmed from an invitation he received in 1893 from two prominent European journals, the Viennese *Neue Freie Presse* and the Parisian *Revue des revues*, "to express [his] opinion" on anti-Semitism.[53] This assertion, aimed at presenting himself to the Italian public as an internationally recognized authority, was not entirely truthful. While Lombroso did approach the French magazine an excerpt from his book on the eve of its publication, it was rejected on the grounds that, as it could be published only after the book's release in Italy, it failed to meet the journal's requirement for originality.[54] In reality, his research was primarily prompted by a request from the *Neue Freie Presse*, Austria's most important newspaper, which sought contributions reflecting the perspectives of "Italian scientists" on anti-Semitism. The initiative, led by the translator Otto Eisenschitz—a mediator between Italian culture and the German-speaking publishing industry—invited the selected scholars to discuss the "origin," legitimacy, and "fate" of anti-Semitism "from a psychological, ethical, and [...] pathological perspective."[55] The liberal Viennese newspaper aimed to publish

[52] Ibid., 442 and 506.

[53] ASM, 5.

[54] George Lefevre to Cesare Lombroso, 4 and 8 December 1893, SMAUT, IT: Carrara/CL, Lefevre 2 and 3, Università di Torino.

[55] For his invitation to another contributor, see Otto Eisenschitz to Paolo Mantegazza, 17 April 1893, Fondo Mantegazza: 6-7, 2097 (ex 2090), Museo Nazionale di Antropologia, Florence.

their "impartial" judgments, allegedly free from extra-scientific biases, to stimulate public debate amid the rising anti-Semitic movements in the Empire's capital.[56]

Lombroso's article opened the *Neue Freie Presse*'s inquiry, presenting an analysis that established the framework of his later book.[57] The criminologist defended the Jewish emancipation challenged by "political pseudo-anthropologists," reaffirming the racial equality between Jews and European populations. He argued that anti-Semitism emerged from a pre-rational, anti-Jewish hatred with ancient, atavistic roots, hereditarily ingrained in the psyche of the Gentiles. However, Lombroso also suggested that Jews had contributed to Gentile aversion through (alleged) historical deficiencies linked to their economic roles and religiosity. He claimed that the process of civilization, while improving the rationality of individuals, would not eliminate anti-Semitism because it would leave their instinctive feelings untouched. Furthermore, anti-Semitism would continue to spread, propagated by cynical or deranged (*mattoidi*) politicians seeking mass political support.

Lombroso linked the extinction of anti-Semitism to a transformation of the relationship between Jews and Christians. He called on both groups to free themselves from their (supposedly) anachronistic religious identities in order to merge into a new solidarity. This outcome might be fostered only by a socialist religion of humanity, which could shape a mutual brotherhood. However, he concluded pessimistically that this was merely a "utopia."

For the first time, Lombroso rationalized an assimilationist solution to the Jewish question. His call for the disappearance of traditional identities did not stem from a rejection of Jewishness, which he affirmed very occasionally in visits to the Turin synagogue and charitable acts in favor of poor coreligionists.[58] Instead, it was rooted in his evolutionary critique of religion, which he described in *Delitto politico* as institutions "completely based on misoneism" that naturally hindered social progress.[59] Religious practice, he argued, reinforced psychological resistance to the modernization of beliefs, customs, and lifestyles.

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[56] Pulzer, *The Rise of Political Antisemitism*, 171-183.

[57] Cesare Lombroso, "Der Antisemitismus," *Neue Freie Presse*, June 11, 1893, 1-3.

[58] "Funerali civili," *Il Piccolo della Sera*, October 21, 1909.

[59] Lombroso and Laschi, *Il delitto politico*, 13. On misoneism, see Luisa Mangoni, *Una crisi fine secolo. La cultura italiana e la Francia fra Otto e Novecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1985), 119-121.

Lombroso acknowledged that the scientific "truth" of racial equality between Semites and European Aryans faced opposition from "hatreds" and "superstitions" perpetuated by Christianity.[60] At the same time, he claimed the Jews were the target of unjust but understandable mistrust as the protective guardians of an archaic religiosity. Their "conservatism" was evident from their (supposedly) "primitive" rituals, including the bloody practice of circumcision, bizarre customs like the Passover *matzoth*, and magical-superstitious acts like inscribing formulas on devotional objects. Shockingly, he wrote that Jewish rites invited ridicule or suspicion of "strange mysteries," making the Jews appear incompatible with modern civilization. The socialist religion of humanity that Lombroso proposed sought to eradicate the (alleged) sources of Christian and Jewish "conservatism"—the "Vatican" and "Judaic" religions—which he saw as barriers to greater familiarity between their followers.

Lombroso's article sparked a noisy reaction in Vienna. An anti-Semitic newspaper issued a vehement response, describing him as a "pseudo-scholar" and insisting that "a pure-blooded Italian Jew" could not be an authoritative and honest judge of anti-Semitism.[61] Liberal opinion appreciated his scientific defense of emancipation but was uneasy with the idea that anti-Semitism was a permanent political disturbance impervious to civil progress.[62] Liberal Jews were irritated by his pessimistic views, in particular his criticisms of Jewish religious identity.[63] A prominent rabbi, Adolf Jellinek, declared himself "disappointed," arguing that the struggle against anti-Semitism did not require any "utopia" but merely a firm response from non-Jewish authorities. The state, he said, had to defend Jewish citizens from anti-Semitic attacks, while the church needed to imbue all Christians with the evangelical principle of universal love.[64]

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[60] ASM, 108. For his critique of Catholic "conservatism," see Cesare Lombroso, "Il Vaticano e il suo fato futuro," *La Nuova Rassegna*, November 5, 1893, 581-582.

[61] "Der Antisemitismus und der Jude Cesare Lombroso," *Deutsches Volksblatt*, June 13, 1893, 1.

[62] "Cesare Lombroso über den Antisemitismus," *Freies Blatt*, June 18, 1893, 5-6; "Fragmente von der Woche. Lombroso, das 'Deutsches Volksblatt' und der Antisemitismus," *Wiener Sonn- und Montags Zeitung*, June 26, 1893, 2-3.

[63] On their understanding of anti-Semitism, see Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin-de-Siècle*, 11-12.

[64] J. [Adolf Jellinek], "Cesare Lombroso und der Antisemitismus," *Die Neuzeit*, June 23, 1893, 243-244; J. Zerkowitz, "Kleine Chronik. Triest," *Die Neuzeit*, June 16, 1893, 237.

Conversely, the Zionist association *Kadimah* showed unexpected but sincere interest in Lombroso's analysis. His representation of European society as inherently hostile to Jews due to the Gentiles' innate psychology echoed pre-Herzlian Zionist ideology.[65] The Russian physician Léon Pinsker, for example, had called on his coreligionists to return to the land of their ancestors to escape annihilation at the hands of a hostile Europe, which he diagnosed as suffering from an innate anti-Jewish psychopathology (*Judäophobie*).[66] Nathan Birnbaum, *Kadimah*'s leader, sent Lombroso the association's journal and Pinsker's pamphlet, in an attempt to gain his support for the Jewish colonization of Palestine. He responded by declaring Zionism to be an anti-modern utopia, arguing that the few "fanatics" willing to leave civilization for an inhospitable "desert" would lack resources to cultivate it and inevitably regress to "primitive barbarism."[67]

The resonance of Lombroso's article in Vienna likely encouraged him to plan his book on anti-Semitism. Despite the largely negative critiques, he considered the article a success, as it had drawn attention to his ideas: he had deliberately expressed his views in a provocative manner, as he typically did while launching his *fin-de-siècle* treatises,[68] seeing this as the most effective way to test and attract public attention. The noisy debate that ensued likely confirmed to him the relevance of his ideas and convinced him that there was an opportunity to extend his analysis further. Lombroso was indeed satisfied by the public response and attempted—unsuccessfully—to maintain readers' interest with "a special article" aimed at countering "all the objections and [...] polemics."[69] The debate was in fact revived by one of Lombroso's closest disciples and associates, the jurist Enrico Ferri, who published an analysis of anti-Semitic "psychopathology" in the *Neue Freie Presse*.[70] Ferri's article complemented Lombroso's, and the "sociologist," as the

[65] "Notizien. Cesare Lombroso," *Selbst-Emancipation*, July 1, 1893, 5; "Lombroso über den Antisemitismus," *Selbst-Emancipation*, July 15, 1893, 1-4.

[66] [Léon Pinsker,] *"Auto-Emancipation!" Mahnruf an seine Stammgenossen, von einem russischen Jude* (Berlin: Commissions-Verlag, 1882).

[67] "Lombroso über den Zionismus," *Selbst-Emancipation*, August 15, 1893, 1-2.

[68] Montaldo, *Donne delinquenti*, 200-204.

[69] Cesare Lombroso to Otto Eisenschitz, 14 June 1893, [1893, post June 16], Aut. 469/27-4, 175/60-1, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna.

[70] Enrico Ferri, "Der Antisemitismus," *Neue Freie Presse*, August 13, 1893, 2-3 and August 15, 1893, 2-3.

newspaper presented him, strengthened his mentor's interpretation by adding a historical dimension that had previously been largely absent.

This first significant criticism of Lombroso's views came from the historian Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu in an authoritative book, *Israël chez les nations*, published in France presumably at around the same time as the Viennese controversies. Leroy-Beaulieu was an avowedly liberal and Catholic interpreter of the Jewish question, who tried to defend emancipation on a scientific basis.[71] He was not hostile to Lombroso, but, while appreciating his racial anthropology of the Jews,[72] he rejected his conceptualization of anti-Semitism. Citing the French translation of *Delitto politico*,[73] Leroy-Beaulieu argued that anti-Semitism might reflect a "natural repugnance" of Gentiles toward Jews but was not merely "a phenomenon of regression, [or] a fact of atavism."[74] Instead, anti-Semitic discourse appealed to the masses because of its apparent modernity, building on ancient prejudices an effective—yet totally misleading—response to the problems of modern society, which it blamed on the Jews. In any case, for the French scholar a scientific understanding of anti-Semitism did not necessarily involve dematerializing it into a mere psychological attitude detached from the political history of contemporary Europe in which it was generated.

Ferri, apparently unaware of Leroy-Beaulieu's book, shared similar criticisms of Lombroso's analysis. He sought to place anti-Semitism within a plausible historical-political framework and questioned why the hereditary anti-Jewish animosity of Gentiles—widespread but, as he emphatically pointed out, usually latent—had transformed into an active political phenomenon in Central and Eastern Europe. His explanation was influenced, on the eve of his joining the Socialist Party, by the Second International's theses on anti-Semitism, which had

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[71] Facchini, "Le metamorfosi di un'ostilità antica," 215-21; Francine Goujon, "Le nom de Leroy-Beaulieu dans le salon Villeparisis. De l'alliance franco-russe à l'affaire Dreyfus," *Bulletin d'informations proustiennes* 45 (2015): 49-60.

[72] Anatole Leroy-Beauliu, *Israël chez les nations. Les Juifs et l'antisèmitisme* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1893), 132, 134, 182, 197, and 279.

[73] Cesare Lombroso and Rodolfo Laschi, *Le Crime politique et les révolutions, par rapports au droit, à l'anthropologie criminelle et à la science du gouvernement*, Vol. 1 (Paris: Alcan, 1892), 281-283.

[74] Leroy-Beauliu, *Israël chez les nations*, 13-14.

resonated within the Italian labor movement.[75] Ferri argued that anti-Semitism was a tool used by the ruling classes to consolidate power over societies undergoing structural change. The political leaderships of Russia, Germany and Austria-Hungary had encouraged its spread to revive "the religious sentiment of Christian peoples" and, above all, to divert public attention from socialism. However, the spread of anti-Jewish hatred throughout society, contrary to the expectations of its "reckless promoters," had created a new threat to political order. The "vast blaze" that had erupted could not be extinguished through repressive political measures but was expected to subside over time as part of a broader "social renewal."

Ferri's article garnered mixed responses, with some approval but significant criticism from Viennese liberal Jews, who were dissatisfied with the lack of concrete proposals to counteract anti-Semitic movements.[76] Nonetheless, the new controversies provided Lombroso with additional public exposure. By that point, he had already begun work on his "extended study on anti-Semitism, especially from the anthropological perspective."[77] He quickly expanded his initial article by conducting additional research, critically analyzing Leroy-Beaulieu's arguments, and undertaking anthropometric measurements—the first time he did so systematically on his coreligionists, to the best of my knowledge. These efforts supported his thesis on racial identity shared by European Jews and Gentiles.[78]

Lombroso's book was soon to be published by the liberal publisher Roux, who was already attuned to the fight against anti-Semitism.[79] Before its release, several excerpts appeared in three Italian journals, each reflecting different interests in the topic.[80]

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[75] Alessandra Tarquini, *La sinistra italiana e gli ebrei. Socialismo, sionismo e antisemitismo dal 1892 al 1992* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2019), 32.

[76] "Enrico Ferri über den Antisemitismus," *Freies Blatt*, August 20, 1893, 4; E.B., "Correspondenzen. Wien (Fehlten den Juden der persönliche Muth?)," *Oesterreichische Wochenschrift*, August 18, 1893, 620-621; J. [Adolf Jellinek], "Enrico Ferri über den Antisemitismus," *Die Neuzeit*, August 25, 1893, 335-336.

[77] Enrico Ferri to Luigi Lodi, August 23, 1893, in Ferdinando Cordova, *"Caro Olgogigi". Lettere ad Olga e Luigi Lodi. Dalla Roma bizantina all'Italia fascista (1881–1933)* (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 1999), 240-241.

[78] ASM, 113-120 and 141-148.

[79] Corrado Guidetti (pseud.), *Pro Judaeis. Scritti e documenti* (Turin: Roux, 1884).

[80] Cesare Lombroso, "Genii e novatori ebrei," *Il Corriere Israelitico* 32, no. 8 (1893-1894): 175-178; Lombroso, "Gli Ebrei nell'evoluzione economica," *Critica Sociale*, January 1, 1894, 5-9; Lombroso, "Le cause dell'antisemitismo e i difetti degli Ebrei," *Gazzetta Letteraria*, January 6, 1894, 5-6. For

The Judgement of Science

Lombroso's book was perceived by some Italian critics as chaotic, yet its seemingly disconnected chapters were organized into three relatively coherent parts, each addressing the broad aspects of the phenomenon under investigation: the "causes" of anti-Semitism, its potential utility for European society, and its scientific remedies. In the first section, the criminologist, while discussing the "aetiology" of anti-Semitism, moved beyond his earlier assertion that it stemmed from a millennia-old anti-Jewish hatred deeply rooted in the psyche of Gentiles and reignited by Jewish "defects." Influenced by scholarly critiques and the Viennese debate, Lombroso was able to redefine anti-Semitism as a political pathology of modern society with atavistic origins.[81] While hereditary aversion among non-Jews provided a structural foundation, it was not the catalyst for the intense and violent mass upheaval against Jews in Central and Eastern Europe at this time.

The "epidemic" of anti-Semitism that began in the 1880s, Lombroso argued, following Ferri's analysis, was political in origin and nature, having been introduced into the social body through anti-Semitic propaganda disseminated by a diverse array of political actors. Russian and German "governments," along with various European "sects" and parties—predominantly but not exclusively nationalist—employed anti-Jewish hatred as a tool to outmaneuver political opponents and consolidate their grip on power or increase their appeal over the masses amid a severe socio-economic crisis. This propaganda, moreover, thrived in a turn-of-the-century political climate (*andazzo*) in which radical nationalist rule within and beyond Europe intensified hostility towards "strangers" and groups like the Jews, perceived as distinct from the majority populations of European states. The advance of anti-Jewish hatred, however, was not merely the product of the calculated actions of its political promoters.

Lombroso now described anti-Semitism as a political form of deviance. European liberal press depicted extremist propagandists such as the Marquis de Morès,

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the Italian translation of the Viennese articles, see Enrico Ferri, "L'antisemitismo," *La Nuova Rassegna*, September 3, 1893, 289-293; Cesare Lombroso, "Ancora sull'antisemitismo," *La Nuova Rassegna*, September 10, 1893, 321-324.

[81] ASM, 21-31.

Hermann Ahlwardt or Carl Paasch as afflicted by severe mental illnesses.[82] These "lunatics" or "crazies" (*mattoidi*), he commented—drawing on his earlier interpretation of the genesis of "revolts" outlined in *Delitto politico*[83]—were able to rally naive crowds to their political agendas through suggestive propaganda imbued with the "energetic impulsiveness of madness" and "fanaticism." Building on this assumption, Lombroso referenced a "statistic" shared privately by a physician in Bucharest, which allegedly revealed high mortality rates from degenerative syphilis among Romanian anti-Semites.[84] Based on this information—and despite the admittedly uncertain reliability of his source—Lombroso hypothesized that individual militancy within anti-Semitic parties reflected a form of latent psychopathology.

The purported abnormality of these "passionate anti-Semites" (*antisemiti per passione*), as described by the Romanian physician, found its way into Lombroso's criminological notes on two Franco-Algerian anti-Semitic leaders,[85] though it remained underdeveloped as a significant theory. Nevertheless, Lombroso and his disciples employed this idea as a polemical weapon during the public debates surrounding the Dreyfus Affair. By analyzing press reports and iconographic sources, they inferred psychophysical and behavioral anomalies among anti-Semitic propagandists and army officers that seemingly proved their innate criminality or degeneration.[86]

After addressing the "causes" of anti-Semitism, Lombroso's book turned to question the supposed benefits of anti-Jewish discrimination for European nations, as claimed by the "anti-Semitic party." In the second section, he dismissed such policies as both anti-scientific and regressive. He offered a particularly pointed refutation of a racist thesis put forward in *Synthése de l'antisémitisme*

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[82] For Paasch's case, quoted by Lombroso and Ferri, see "Berlin, 20. Juni," *Neue Freie Presse*, June 21, 1893, 7.

[83] Montaldo, *Donne delinquenti*, 179.

[84] ASM, 27-29.

[85] Cesare Lombroso, *Tipi di criminali moderni*, in Lombroso, *Delitti vecchi e delitti nuovi* (Turin: Bocca, 1902), 260-261.

[86] Cesare Lombroso, "La molla segreta dell'affaire Dreyfus," *Gazzetta del Popolo*, July 6, 1899; Angelo Zuccarelli, *L'antropologia nell'avvenimento Zola-Dreyfus. Conferenza detta in Napoli, il giorno 6 marzo '98, nel locale universitario della Sapienza* (Naples: n.p., 1898), 133-134. See also Enrico Serventi Longhi, *Il dramma di un'epoca. L'*affaire *Dreyfus e il giornalismo italiano di fine Ottocento* (Rome: Viella, 2022), 200-203.

(1892), a pamphlet he regarded as typical of "scientists living among the peoples most infected with anti-Semitism."[87] The publication's author, the Belgian jurist and socialist politician Edmond Picard, constructed his anti-Jewish discourse on a view of history as an eternal struggle between Aryan and Semitic races.[88] Picard was influenced by the ideas of Renan and Le Bon and argued that the Jews, as a Semitic people, were inherently incapable of contributing to civil progress due to their hereditary psychic deficiencies. He portrayed Jewish emancipation as a mortal threat to European society,[89] claiming that Aryans needed to defend themselves not only from Jewish actions naturally harmful to their own prosperity, but also from racial "bastardisation" through intermarriage, which would lead to decadence in the European nations.

Lombroso countered Picard's assertion using race science to challenge the anti-Jewish charges of racial diversity, inferiority, and pollution. He began by reaffirming the ethnic kinship between European Jews and fellow Gentiles, now framing it as a quasi-primordial biological connection.[90] His defense drew on a new racial classification of Jews by prominent international physical anthropologists, who increasingly identified them as a mixed-blood group.[91] This conceptualization was based on observed physical traits that differed significantly from those attributed to Semitic populations. For instance, Austrian anthropologist Felix von Luschan argued that Jews with brachycephalic skulls and light complexions provided living evidence of the ancient Israelite's hybrid origins, which arose from repeated interbreeding with Indo-European groups in the pre-Biblical Middle East.[92]

Lombroso adopted this depiction of a mixed-origin group that had for a long time been "more Aryan than Semitic" primarily to disprove on an anthropological basis Picard's claims of "ethnic antagonism." This perspective also paved the way for his

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[87] ASM, 34.

[88] Francesco Germinario, *Costruire la razza nemica. La formazione dell'immaginario antisemita tra la fine dell'Ottocento e gli inizi del Novecento* (Turin: Utet, 2010), 206-208.

[89] Edmond Picard, *Synthèse de l'antisèmitisme [...]* (Brussels-Paris: Larcier-Savine, 1892), 57-68.

[90] ASM, 35-41.

[91] On the debate, see Dan Stone, "'Not a Race but only a People after all': the Racial Origins of the Jews in *Fin-de-Siècle* Anthropology" *Patterns of Prejudice* 42, no. 2 (2008): 133-149.

[92] Felix von Luschan, "Die antropologische Stellung der Juden," *Correspondenz-Blatt der deutschen Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* 23 (1892): 94-100.

scientific celebration of Jewish "assimilation" within European societies. According to Lombroso, the Aryo-Semitic kinship had indeed facilitated this process, which began soon after ancient Jewish migrations to Europe and quickly achieved success. The historical reality of this assimilation, he argued, was demonstrated by the substantial homology in biosocial and cultural characteristics shared by Jews and Gentile across every European nation.[93]

Jews were hardly racially inferior to Aryans or—as Picard wrote—anthropologically unfit for progress. To counter this charge, Lombroso highlighted a multitude of Jewish "geniuses" from various countries and eras, whose cultural contributions had played a pivotal role in shaping European civilization.[94] Their "revolutionary" character, he argued in apologetic tones, was the product of an average Jewish intelligence at least equal to that of other populations in Europe. Supporting this claim, Lombroso cited Jewish race scientist Joseph Jacobs, an Anglo-Australian scholar associated with the renowned polymath and Charles Darwin's cousin Sir Francis Galton, who had statistically demonstrated that European Jews produced a proportionally higher number of intellectually gifted individuals than their Gentile counterparts.[95]

Starting from this data, Lombroso explored the causes of this "excess of genius," attributing its origin to the intense brain activity required for survival in a hostile, Darwinian world shaped by medieval persecutions. This environment fostered the development of a Jewish mind that remained fertile due to a combination of historical and socio-cultural factors, several of which he surprisingly ascribed to Jewish religious culture. Additionally, Lombroso's theory of genius, which framed creativity as a positive manifestation of brain dysfunction, provided another explanation for the genius of the Jews. Overturning the prevailing anti-Jewish psychiatric stereotypes, he connected it to the spread of mental illness among his coreligionists, arguing that the distress experienced by many, far from diminishing their intelligence, refined and enhanced their innovative and progressive qualities.

In the third place, Lombroso dismissed anti-Semitic fears of Aryan-Semitic racial mixing as scientifically baseless. Responding to Picard's call to defend the racial

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[93] ASM, 43-52.

[94] Ibid., 69-83.

[95] Joseph Jacobs, "The Comparative Distribution of Jewish Ability" (1886), in Jacobs, *Jewish Statistics: Social, Vital and Anthropometric* (London: Nutt, 1891), xli-lxix.

purity of Aryan nations, he stated that such a goal was anti-historical, as Europe had been ethnically stratified since antiquity. It was also regressive for the character of its populations,[96] since interracial "grafting" (Lombroso used the analogy of the cross-breeding of plants and animals studied by evolutionary naturalists) was a progressive force. This blending of human groups, regardless of their initial levels of civilization, advanced their development. Lombroso contended that various historical examples showed that racially homogenous populations demonstrated less intellectual advancement than those shaped by intense *métissage*. The Semitic "blood" that mixed with Aryan blood in Jewish populations was in any case not anthropologically degenerative for European nations. Spain, for example, had systematically prevented Aryo-Semitic mixtures since the late Middle Ages by eliminating Jews and Moors through "persecution and massacres," but the result was a "much purer [but] at the same time [intellectually] more sterile" population compared to other European nations that had historically embraced racial mixing. This articulate refutation of racist anti-Jewish accusations—which was intimately built on race science—laid the groundwork for Lombroso's ultimate critique of political anti-Semitism, condemning it as detrimental to the prosperity of European nations. In concluding his discussion of racially based accusations against Jews, particularly regarding their economic behaviors, Lombroso sought to re-legitimize Jewish emancipation, which was under attack.[97]

Challenging the depiction of Jews as a "parasitic race" that instinctively undermined Aryan wealth,[98] Lombroso argued that the Jewish *homo oeconomicus* was the result of a historical process shaped mainly by political oppression. He posited that Jewish vices, as well as their substantial virtues, were not inherent but rather the legacy of centuries of confinement to mercantile professions enforced by discriminatory medieval laws. Contemporary Jewish businessmen engaged in immoral or illicit trades, Lombroso asserted, were unrepresentative of the group's overall morality, and bore the marks of customs acquired through centuries of oppression from the Gentile world. Their regeneration from those residual attitudes—which certainly did not affect the multitude of Jewish socialists striving to liberate modern society from the "brutal

[96] ASM, 53-57.
[97] ASM, 86-98.
[98] Picard, *Synthèse*, 119-120.

domination" of capitalistic classes—was tied to the process of emancipation: Jews in Western Europe, now equal in rights to their non-Jewish fellow citizens and free to determine their own professional paths, frequently engaged in occupations unrelated to finance, and made invaluable contributions to their countries. Anti-Semitic demands for the reintroduction of discriminatory laws starkly highlighted the political irrationality and folly of anti-Semitism: forcing Jews back into traditional economic roles would inevitably reinforce the antisocial, usurious, and fraudulent tendencies from which equality would protect them.

Having delegitimized anti-Semitism on utilitarian grounds, Lombroso's book concluded by outlining prophylactic "measures" against its resurgence. In the final section, he reaffirmed—with only minor revisions—the solution to the Jewish question that he had earlier proposed to the Viennese public.[99] Zionism, as he had argued in his reply to Nathan Birnbaum, was an anti-modern response to anti-Semitism. For persecuted Jews in the Tsarist Empire and Romania, life in the "pseudo-idyllic colonies" of Palestine would not offer better conditions than migration to modern countries like Australia and America. Instead, Lombroso was a fervid supporter of universal, unconditional emancipation as a precursor to the eventual "fusion" of Jewish and Christian citizens in societies freed from the ancient disease of anti-Jewish hatred. While his outlook on the eradication of anti-Semitism and the emergence of new social solidarities remained pessimistic, he no longer dismissed the prospect of unity. The fraternization of the two groups within a new socialist religion of humanity no longer seemed to him a utopia but a hopeful, if remote, possibility.

Italian Echoes

Gina Lombroso Ferrero, the criminologist's daughter and first biographer (or perhaps hagiographer) claimed retrospectively that *L'antisemitismo* did not have had "much relevance [and] repercussion."[100] This assertion, however, appears not entirely accurate. The book was translated into four foreign languages between

[99] ASM, 103-110.
[100] Lombroso-Ferrero, *Cesare Lombroso*, 324-325.

1894 and 1906, indicating a significant but historically underexplored global circulation.[101] Nevertheless, her assessment likely reflects how Lombroso himself viewed the reception of his work, particularly in *fin-de-siècle* Italy. As one of his closest scientific collaborators, Gina likely transmitted his father's disappointment at the generally negative reception his study received from Italian public opinion. While *L'antisemitismo* sparked relatively broad public and private debate, it drew far more criticism—often severe—than it garnered appreciation. These controversies illuminate the anxieties of Italian-Jewish institutions grappling with widespread assimilationist tendencies among their members and, less well-known, the persistent ambiguity of Gentile perspectives on anti-Semitism.

In *fin-de-siècle* Italy, Lombroso's book garnered far more interest from journalists than from social scientists. The academic community paid little attention to an enquiry which, while pioneering in its focus of study, was widely perceived as lacking the rigorous scholarly foundations Lombroso claimed. One reviewer, puzzled by his methods and arguments, remarked that the criminologist condemned "anti-Semitism a priori" without explaining it as a "true sociologist" might.[102] All the critics regarded the book as firmly opposed to anti-Semitism, and many dismissed it as overtly pro-Jewish. This label posed no issue for figures like Claudio Treves, a young Turinese Jewish socialist who admired Lombroso, shared his political beliefs, and even had some personal connections to him. Writing in the Socialist Party's theoretical journal, Treves expressed enthusiasm for the book, albeit with some measured reservations. He framed Jews as part of an oppressed humanity striving for liberation from the yoke of capitalism.[103]

While not unanimous in its praise—one hostile reviewer sneeringly referred to the work as a "philo-Semitic pamphlet"[104]—Italian socialism offered the most receptive cultural ground for Lombroso's ideas. However, such positive assessments were the exception in a public debate that notably appeared to bypass

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[101] Emanuele D'Antonio, "Social Science, Jewish Public Opinion and the Jewish Race in the United States of the Progressive Era: Echoes of Cesare Lombroso's *L'antisemitismo*, 1893–1911," in *Lombroso in the Americas*, eds. Silvano Montaldo and Franco Orlandi, in press.

[102] "Bollettino Bibliografico," *Nuova Antologia di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti* 135 (1894): 373-374. For a more positive assessment, Gino Macchioro, "L'antisemitismo e le scienze moderne," *La Nuova Rassegna*, February 4, 1894, 149-150.

[103] Claudio Treves, "L'Antisemitismo," *Critica Sociale*, March 1, 1894, 72-74.

[104] Pompeo Bettini, "Gli ebrei e la civiltà," *Vita Moderna*, March 25, 1894, 89-90.

the Catholic movement, even though it was the principal driver of Italian anti-Semitism at the time.

Lombroso's critique of anti-Semitism faced rejection from Gentile reviewers across liberal and post-liberal circles. A Turinese musical critic and prominent promoter of Wagner's music in Italy maliciously attributed Lombroso's alleged bias to "unconscious Semitism," accusing him of exaggerating Jewish virtues and downplaying their flaws.[105] According to this prejudiced view, the Jews were psychologically incapable of impartially analyzing anti-Semitism or acknowledging their own supposedly major responsibility for its emergence. Since the 1880s, several progressive Gentile intellectuals, while morally condemning European anti-Semitism, had interpreted it as a reaction to the Jews' alleged refusal to assimilate. Their perceived separatism—whether emancipated or not—was seen as rooted not in racial differences but in the particularism of their religious culture.[106] This culturalist, anti-Jewish interpretation of anti-Semitism, championed by the renowned anthropologist Paolo Mantegazza, re-emerged in the 1890s as a basis for harsh critiques of Lombroso's arguments. Its most prominent supporter was Giuseppe Sergi, a fellow progressive intellectual and champion of positivist science, including of the Lombrosian school. In the only scholarly review of the work,[107] the anthropologist agreed that the Jews belonged to European races but rejected, on historical and ethnographic grounds, Lombroso's assertion that anti-Semitism was psychological ingrained in Gentiles. Instead, Sergi argued that its "primary and primitive" cause was the supposed proud intolerance of Jews, who, he claimed, derived from their religious culture the impulse to live in perpetual "spontaneous segregation [from] other peoples." For Sergi, anti-Jewish hatred was a natural defensive response to unrepentant Jewish separatism.

Lombroso's work did not—if it ever could—undermine the stereotype of Jewish separatism that was widespread in Gentile perceptions, but provoked negative

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[105] Giuseppe Depanis, "L'antisemitismo e le scienze moderne," *Gazzetta Piemontese*, January 23-24 and 24-25, 1894. For a similar, openly anti-Semitic assessment see Eugenio Righini, *Antisemitismo e semitismo nell'Italia politica moderna* (Milan-Palermo: Sandron, 1901), 344.

[106] Ilaria Pavan, "L'impossibile rigenerazione. Ostilità antiebraiche nell'Italia liberale," *Storia e problemi contemporanei* 22, no. 50 (2009): 35-63.

[107] Giuseppe Sergi, "L'Antisemitismo e le Scienze Moderne," *Educazione e Istruzione*, 1 (1894): 109-112.

responses even from Italian Jews. His harsh critique of Jewish religious tradition upset many of his coreligionists, including long-time friends like the renowned linguist Graziadio Ascoli, preventing them from engaging with or appreciating his critique of anti-Semitism.[108] Italian-Jewish institutions predictably rejected the book's assimilationist argument, which advocated for the erasure of distinct identities—including the Jewish one—in favor of a utopian vision of human brotherhood. A Jewish monthly based in Trieste vehemently attacked Lombroso's criticism of Judaic religiosity, going so far as to question his honesty, mental acuity, and even his and his forefathers' Jewishness.[109] Meanwhile, the most popular Italian-Jewish magazine expressed its disappointment more diplomatically, and granted Lombroso a crucial concession. Its reviewer, Rabbi Flaminio Servi, regarded the book as generally unsatisfactory but conceded that it served to "enlighten Christians" about the inconsistency of "many [anti-Jewish] prejudices."[110]

The perception of Lombroso as a scientific apologist—whether he was or not a good Jew—appears to have been a minority view, albeit one not entirely absent among his coreligionists. Several young Piedmontese Jewish socialists, like the aforementioned Treves, were personally linked to him and admired him as a rare epitome of a "scientific apostle" (*scienziato apostolo*) of social reform.[111] Felice Momigliano, a philosopher who conceived Judaism as a universal ethical tradition and sought to reconcile its values with those of modern positivism and socialism, wrote about the book on several occasions, describing it as "small in size [but] dense of thought."[112] Although Momigliano felt that Lombroso underestimated religious anti-Semitism, which remained dangerous in barely secularized countries like Italy, he believed the criminologist had produced a scientific "truth" useful for

[108] Emanuele D'Antonio, "Graziadio Isaia Ascoli e l'*Antisemitismo* di Cesare Lombroso. Una critica epistolare," in *Non solo verso Oriente. Studi sull'Ebraismo in onore di Pier Cesare Ioly Zorattini*, eds. Maddalena Del Bianco Cotrozzi, Riccardo Disegni and Marcello Massenzio, Vol. 2 (Florence: Olschki, 2014), 503-517.

[109] "Dagli amici mi guardi Iddio," *Il Corriere Israelitico* 32, no. 9 (1893-94), 200-202.

[110] F[laminio] S[ervi], "Bullettino Bibliografico," *Il Vessillo Israelitico*, February 1894, 63.

[111] Alberto Cavaglion, *Felice Momigliano (1866–1924). Una biografia* (Bologna-Naples: il Mulino, 1988), 74-77.

[112] Felice Momigliano, "La stampa cattolica e l'antisemitismo. Lettera aperta al professore Cesare Lombroso," *La Stampa-Gazzetta piemontese*, January 28-29, 1895; Momigliano, "Le attualità della scienza. La Musica e gli Ebrei," *Gazzetta letteraria*, March 3, 1894, 104.

the progressive cause of social justice. Lombroso's portrayal of Jews as an ancient people racially transformed by history and adapted to a hostile world outflanked, in Momigliano's view, the anti-Jewish racism propagated by anti-Semitism. To be sure, his judgement reflected the perspective of an intellectual who regarded Lombroso as a cultural hero and, as their relationship deepened, came to consider himself as both a disciple and a friend.[113] However, the same perception of Lombroso as a "defender of the race," was also shared by Jews who had no personal connection to him. This was evident, for instance, in the case of a Genoese medical student who, between 1894 and 1895, faced repeated instances of anti-Jewish hostility. In that critical context, the criminologist seemed to him the most fitting figure to turn to for "advice" on how to structure his strategy of self-defense.[114]

Conclusions

Lombroso's *L'antisemitismo* has been the subject of some pioneering and relevant researches in the last three decades. Unlike his major works, especially those on criminality, however, the book has remained relatively less-known in the historical and historiographical field. Moreover, its negative attitude toward the Jewish religion and—more importantly—its foundation in race science led several scholars to view it as scientifically legitimizing anti-Jewish prejudice, and thus unintentionally contributing to the construction of a cultural climate conducive to the dramatic development of anti-Semitism in twentieth century Europe. I have challenged these teleological interpretations not only by framing Lombrosian enquiry within the context—in the aforementioned John Efron's words—of the "scientific apologia" built by European Jewish race scientists to counter anti-Semitic images of Jewish diversity. The anachronism of these interpretation is also quite clearly evident in the previously unexplored, wide rejection of Lombroso's scientific thesis on anti-Semitism by *fin-de-siècle* non-Jewish Italian criticism; the contemporary observers were intimately unable—as the criminologist had done—

[113] Felice Momigliano to Cesare Lombroso7 September 1897, SMAUT: Carrara/CL, Momigliano 2, Università di Torino.

[114] Gustavo Lusena to Cesare Lombroso, 17 February 1895, SMAUT: Carrara/CL, Lusena 1, Università di Torino.

to root the origins of anti-Jewish hatred mainly in the Gentile world and, more specifically, in ancestral tendencies of the Gentiles' mind.

Today, this does not obviously mean re-evaluating Lombroso's conceptualization of anti-Semitism, which would be an anachronistic exercise akin to its criticism. My essay aimed simply to provide a historical understanding of it by contextualizing it within the criminologist's decades-long engagement with the Jewish question through an intellectual-biographical approach. However, I would suggest as a matter of future research the hypothesis that its more subtle, long-lasting legacy might be located in a specific field of scientific scholarship. While attempting to defend the group he proudly regarded as his own race, Lombroso—as other *fin-de-siècle* European Jewish and Gentile intellectuals—may have crudely, even grossly pioneered the psychological approach to the study of anti-Semitic collective behaviors, which would have flourished in twentieth century international social sciences.

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Keywords: Cesare Lombroso, *Fin-de-siècle* European anti-Semitism, Emancipation, Social Sciences, Race Science

How to quote this article:
Emanuele D'Antonio, "A Scientific Defence of Jewish Emancipation in *fin-de-siècle* Italy: Cesare Lombroso's *L'antisemitismo*," in *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15961

Alyssa Quint and Amanda Miryem-Khaye Seigel, eds., *Women on the Yiddish Stage* (Oxford: Legenda, 2023), pp. 331.

by *Ruthie Abeliovich*

Women on the Yiddish Stage, edited by Alyssa Quint and Amanda Miryem-Khaye Seigel, represents a significant scholarly contribution to Jewish studies and theater history. This groundbreaking anthology defines a new field of research, by assembling a diverse collection of essays that illuminate the pivotal yet often overlooked roles of women in Yiddish theater, from its origins to contemporary times. In addition to uncovering the previously unexplored histories of women artists in Yiddish theatre, the volume paves new research vistas and establishes a foundation for future research, encouraging scholars to explore the rich intersections of gender, Jewish culture, and performance.

From its inception, Yiddish theater was notable for its inclusion of women performers—a cultural shift that, as Quint discusses in her introduction, marked one of the most significant developments in this artistic domain. The book raises critical questions regarding the cultural contributions of women on the Yiddish stage. How did female actors shape and generate culture? While male performers had long dominated diverse public stages, women had rarely participated in public Jewish performances prior to the establishment of Yiddish theater. The pioneers of this theater enterprise recognized that women's involvement was essential, and by the late 19th century, female performers had begun to achieve celebrity status comparable to their male counterparts. At the same time, the public visibility of women in performance also exposed them to societal stigmas, including associations with prostitution and moral impropriety. For many women working in the theater and traveling with Yiddish theatre troupes, marriage offered a measure of protection against the harassment and chauvinism prevalent in their profession. The study of women in Yiddish theater encompasses their leadership roles and participation in troupes often structured like familial units.

Women on the Yiddish Stage provides a compelling examination of the social challenges that women theatre creators encountered in their pursuit of recognition and success in the Yiddish theatrical world. The book delves into the social barriers and gender biases these women faced, while highlighting their multifaceted artistic

contributions to Yiddish theatre. The prominence of women in Yiddish theatre reflects their growing enfranchisement in public Jewish cultural life, as well as the integration of secular values into their artistic expressions.

Many of the women theatre makers discussed in this volume not only performed but also authored plays and penned memoirs that chronicled their careers and lives, often serialized in the Yiddish press. Nina Warnke's essay examines how performers like Bessie Thomashefsky, Bertha Kalich, and Sarah Adler navigated societal conventions, simultaneously challenging and conforming to gender norms. The impact of women's presence on stage extended beyond aspiring actresses; they became symbols of empowerment and financial independence for female audiences.

This volume features twelve chapters authored by scholars of Yiddish theater, each offering historical perspectives on the careers and representation of women in this vibrant cultural sphere. For instance, Sonia Gollance explores Judith Berg's choreographic practice, highlighting the significance of dance within Poland's Yiddish Art theater. Vivi Lachs provides an insightful analysis of early 20th-century Yiddish theater song sheets, revealing how composers and performers engaged with gender roles during a period of profound cultural transformation. Ronald Robboy's meticulous examination of Molly Picon's songwriting uncovers lesser-known aspects of her illustrious career, while Caraid O'Brien discusses Miriam Kressyn's navigation of American life for immigrant and Yiddish-speaking audiences. O'Brien sheds light on the transition of women actresses from the Yiddish theatre stage to the Yiddish speaking airwaves, and the fashioning of their personas as radio broadcasters. Ina Pukelyte sheds light on the interwar Yiddish theater scene in Kaunas, spotlighting the previously unknown influential roles of female impresarios Sofia Edri and Rachel Berger.

Debra Caplan's chapter on Sonia Alumis raises pivotal historiographical questions about our ability to study and understand an artist whose personal narrative remains largely undocumented. Utilizing the trope of the 'voice' to discuss the dearth of women narratives in Yiddish theatre, Caplan's chapter provides a model for theatre historians that seek to recover stories of female theatre makers whose archival presence is less robust than their male colleagues. Tova Markenson addresses the societal stigmas faced by female theatergoers in turn-of-the-century

Buenos Aires, while Veronica Belling chronicles Sarah Sylvia's trailblazing leadership in the Johannesburg's Yiddish theater scene.

Giulia Randone analyzes Ida Kaminska's innovative Yiddish adaptations of Bertolt Brecht's "Mother Courage," described by its critics as "anti-Brechtian." Anna Rozenfeld discusses Diana Blumenfeld's theatrical activities, in the Warsaw Ghetto and later, in postwar Poland, as she became a Yiddish radio broadcast. Similar to the example of Miriam Kressyn discussed in O'Brien's chapter, the voices of these motherly female performers guided their audiences through profound cultural and social transitions. Finally, Corina L. Petrescu explores the lives of Dina Koenig and her daughter Lya Koenig-Stolper, whose theatrical careers exemplify the resilience and agency of women within the shifting landscape of Yiddish art theater.

Despite the rich tapestry of women's contributions, theatre histories tend to minimize their agency, and their cultural networks are frequently depicted as subordinate to male-dominated systems. This trend was further compounded by the prevailing focus on national theater histories and elite institutions in theater historiography. *Women on the Yiddish Stage* offers to reconsider such prevailing cultural narratives by placing the limelight on the seminal activities of women in the Yiddish theatre. The contributions in this volume cover a wide temporal range, from late 19th-century Yiddish theater in Eastern Europe to postwar productions featuring Yiddish-speaking actresses. The geographical scope of the chapters provides insight into the theatrical activities of Yiddish-speaking theater makers, spanning from Romania to the United States and from Buenos Aires to Johannesburg. Collectively, these elements form a transnational network of women in Yiddish theater, which helped to propagate Jewish cultural identity across borders and connect diasporas within a social landscape marked by fragmentation.

Women on the Yiddish Stage effectively brings the work of women in the Yiddish theater work into visibility through a series of compelling case studies, laying the groundwork for future research that will illuminate transnational, female-centered networks of creative and intellectual exchange. This anthology is an essential resource for scholars and students alike, offering invaluable insights into the roles of women in Yiddish theater and their broader cultural implications. Through its meticulous scholarship and comprehensive analysis, it paves the way

for a more nuanced understanding of the intersections between gender, culture, and performance in the Yiddish theatrical tradition.

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How to quote this article:
Ruthie Abeliovich, review of *Women on the Yiddish Stage*, by Alyssa Quint and Amanda Miryem-Khaye Seigel, eds., *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15963

Daniel Ristau, *Die Familie Bondi und das »Jüdische«. Beziehungsgeschichte unter dem bürgerlichen Wertehimmel, 1790-1870* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023), pp. 611.

by *Rotraud Ries*

Life is relationships, family life in nuclear and extended families forms a web of relationships. Daniel Ristau makes use of this fact in his study and examines the history of the Bondi family as a history of relationships—and he does so with an innovative research question: the book is not simply about the history of a family that is naturally located in the Jewish cosmos due to its origin and religion. Instead, the author questions *das Jüdische*[1] and differentiates between its presence or non-presence in the age of embourgeoisement. Ristau uses a relational approach to history to structure his study, which he submitted as a dissertation to the Georg August University of Göttingen in 2019 and shortened considerably for the book. The Bondi family (chapter 2.1) can be traced back to the end of the 16th century in the booming Jewish community of Prague, where individual wealthy bearers of the name acquired property. A little later, direct ancestors are mentioned by name. From the second half of the seventeenth century, members of the Bondi family belonged to the wealthy ruling class of the Jewish community, in which they frequently held offices. Economically, they were very successful and well connected, with many men trained as Jewish scholars. The first doctors can be found in the 18th century. There are no sources for the lives of the families, women and children though.

The expulsion of the large Jewish community, including the Bondis, from Prague in 1746 became a benchmark in the family's later memory. Simon Isaac Bondi fled with his family to Dresden, where, after a brief return to Prague in 1748, he settled permanently in the early 1750s. The economic potential of the Saxon residence was promising and probably outweighed the fact that the existence of a Jewish community with a synagogue was not allowed (for a long time). As early as 1754, he was listed as a royal Polish coin supplier. His household included a son-in-law

[1] Ristau transformed the German adjective *jüdisch* (Jewish) into a noun: *das Jüdische* which has different meanings depending on the context. As there is no English pendant I will use the German original.

and four servants in addition to his nuclear family. Ten years later, he was appointed court factor.

All six of Simon Isaac Bondi's children, including one daughter, were able to establish themselves in Dresden, while the grandchildren, particularly the children of Wolf Simon Bondi, married out into other Jewish communities and established branches of the family there. The Bondi family spread—sometimes under different names—besides Dresden to Mainz, Hamburg (Oppenheim) and Altona (Warburg). The study focuses on these two generations and their descendants.

The relational approach to history characterizes the author's methodology (chapter 1.4), which not only examines the interconnectedness but also the disentanglement of persons, groups of persons, things and objects. In the sense of a histoire croisèe the approach also includes the work of the historian as an entanglement factor. Pragmatism and reflexivity guide the approach to the sources. Ristau examines a large corpus of sources, primarily self-narratives, including well over 900 letters from men and women of the family, and contemporary publications by and about the protagonists, as well as other archival sources.

The author's relational approach to history also characterizes the structure of the work and its main topics. At times though, tensions arise because the structural terms are filled heterogeneously (chapters 2 and 6). There are also topics that do not fit in just one place within the larger structure of the book, such as the private libraries, which are presented as places but would have fitted just as well (or even better?) in the topic of resources.

Chapters three to five provide the core of the (relational-historical) investigation of the Bondi family. In "Practices" (chapter 3), the author focuses on establishing and maintaining contacts, publishing and corresponding as well as disentangling, i.e. breaking off relationships. While these practices of the family network were often based on bourgeois patterns, individual fields such as marriage or publishing in the context of Wissenschaft des Judentums show a clear Jewish relevance. In chapter four, Ristau presents resources as prerequisites for webs of relationships and deals with body and soul, assets, education, time, relationships and das Jüdische as a resource. In chapter five, he describes spaces and places as nodal points in the web of relationships and examines the source material for spaces of interaction, namely living and business spaces, worlds of books, places of faith,

metropolitan meeting places and spas with an international clientele. As a counterpart to "Beginnings" in chapter two, the account ends in chapter six with "Outlook[s]". In this chapter, Ristau discusses death as the end of a relationship as well as the family history from 1870, the end of the actual period under investigation, until 1945. Finally—erroneously introduced as chapter seven in the introduction (p. 36) —there are critical reflections on the lines of tradition, the politics of memory and historiography with their clichéd tendencies to attach the label "Jewish" indiscriminately to every person and every group with a certain connection to Jewish origin, culture or religion.

The author presents the results of his study in a short concluding chapter (chapter 7). Literary skillfully he uses again Clara Bondi, his example from the beginning of the book, to present his findings on "whether and in which fields the Bondis and their contemporaries attributed any relevance to *das Jüdische*" (p. 432).

Ristau summarizes his findings in three points (pp. 432-434). (1) "The everyday relevance of das Jüdische correlated [...] clearly with individual attitudes towards the Jewish religion." This was evident among the neo-orthodox Bondis in Mainz and it had effects on networking and disentanglement, for example in the field of urban bourgeois sociability. To a lesser extent, this relevance can also be found among the more conservative Bondis in Dresden, while the conversions in the Hamburg Oppenheim family mark the disappearance of das Jüdische in an extreme way. (2) However, the author cannot observe a uniform development—"clear collective interpretations"—within each of the three branches of the family. This was due to individual developments such as "educational paths, everyday work life, gender, generational affiliation" or even radical breaks in religious orientation. Das Jüdische was able to recede behind "other reference categories such as bourgeois status or educational ideals," either selectively or successively and permanently. (3) Finally, "interpretations of das Jüdische were highly situational," "different attributions therefore stood side by side and not infrequently even in apparent contradiction." Self-interpretations and negotiations of das Jüdische in all three branches of the family prove that they were "never just Jews." Thus, although das Jüdische is tangible, it proves to be a "category of attribution and interpretation" that is "liquid and situational."

At the end of the book, Ristau provides helpful tables that summarize subscriptions, university studies and doctorates, conversion cases and supervisory board positions of the members of the kinship network, while 36 plates illustrate the genealogical connections of the different branches of the Bondi family. The publications of members of the kinship network can be found in the comprehensive bibliography, in which all primary sources, newspapers and research literature that the author made use of are listed. The volume is rounded off with an index of persons and places.

Daniel Ristau's relational history of the Bondi family from 1790 to 1870 presents a well-structured, detailed history of an upper-class family in the age of embourgeoisement that puts the question of das Jüdische at its center. He achieves this based on remarkable ego-documents and other archival sources. Unfortunately, he does not subject his sources to any critical assessment. He has convincingly mastered the rich material and research and offers his readers an example of resilience, potential and differentiation in the Central European Jewish elite at the beginning of the modern era. Ristau provides us with a significant contribution to the field of research into Jewish bourgeoisie.

Addressing the issue of das Jüdische in a family during a period of transition into bourgeois society is innovative, important and the great merit of this study. However, its significance goes far beyond this and formulates a prompt to further researchers to deal with and qualify the category of das Jüdische more consciously—regardless of the period in question. Doing so, researchers can add new perspectives to allegedly well-known historical developments.

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How to quote this article:
Rotraud Ries, review of *Die Familie Bondi und das »Jüdische«. Beziehungsgeschichte unter dem bürgerlichen Wertehimmel, 1790-1870*, by Daniel Ristau, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15968

Maurice Samuels, *Alfred Dreyfus: The Man at the Center of the Affair* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 2024), pp. 209.

by *Simon Levis Sullam*

Alfred Dreyfus (1859-1935) is an icon of modern European Jewish history, and perhaps modern history *tout court*, but did he deserve a new biography, a volume in the "Jewish Lives" series of Yale University Press? What is extraordinary about his life apart from the affair that bears his name (1894-1906)? Did something specific in his life trigger the affair? And does the story of Dreyfus' life shed particular light on the causes, or the developments, of the affair and what it came to represent?

Alfred's life was in fact—apart from his judicial nightmare and the ensuing *cause célèbre*—that of a quite ordinary Jewish Frenchman between the 19th and the 20th centuries, born in a well-to-do family of entrepreneurs from Alsace and later married to a wealthy Jewish Parisian, Lucie Hadamard. He studied at the Ecole Polytechnique in Paris, entered the army, and reached the level of captain in the General Staff. Well-read, socially established, secularized (according to Samuels, in fact, "a rationalist and a skeptic," p. 29), he well represents the fine equilibrium reached by "Frenchness" and "Jewishness" in the Third Republic: an equilibrium that the eruption of modern antisemitism would break.

This eruption resulted from the action of forces that contrasted secularization, *laicité,* and modernization in France at least since the mid-nineteenth century, if not since 1789, when such forces came to identify the "Jew" as the symbol of the evils of modernity. They were mostly the Catholic Church and the Catholic party, foundational segments of the State (the Army to begin with), and the conservative public opinion. Perhaps these negative premises and context are partly neglected in the picture laid out by Samuel—an authority in the study of French antisemitism—as he sets the background of Dreyfus' story. In his treatment, they seem to almost suddenly arise (or arise *post factum*), as major factors coalescing in the creation of the judicial affair. However, independently from Dreyfus' case, France had become since the mid-1880s the cradle of modern antisemitism, thanks to figures such as Édouard Drumont, Alphonse Toussenel and others (and indeed Samuels claims that around this time antisemitism became for France a "cultural

code," (p. 36): an expression notoriously used by Shulamit Volkov for contemporary German antisemitism). Analyzing the reactions to the affair and its consequences, Samuels does linger upon the aggressive anti-Jewish campaign in the newly established antisemitic press (e.g. *La libre Parole* edited by Drumont) and in the largely spread Catholic periodicals, such as *La Croix* published by the Assumptionist order. Attention is then given to the entrance into the French parliament of 22 antisemitic deputies, to the (unsuccessful) proposal of antisemitic legislation, and to the burst of anti-Jewish attacks in major French cities and of all-out violence in Algiers in 1897-1898.

One of the aspects which develop indeed from Alfred Dreyfus's life story and its vicissitudes during the affair is, in Samuels' analysis, Alfred's "resistance," especially to "state-sanctioned violence against individuals—and particularly against Jewish individuals." This was the kind of violence that later marked the "totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century," the author adds. According to Samuels, "It was only because of Dreyfus's stubborn determination to survive this torture that the political struggle to free him could take place." Thanks to the resistance of "this particular man," "truth and justice emerged victorious" and the "forces of reaction" did not "triumph," avoiding "devastating consequences for twentieth-century French politics" (pp. 67-68). Together with the sweeping argument bringing together French politics from last century and the violence of totalitarian regimes (evoked by Samuels), the insistence on Dreyfus' role—a conscious, deliberate role—in resisting in favor of France, "and by extension for the world" (p. 68), is probably exaggerated. Although we do see Alfred reacting to and, with admirable physical and spiritual strengths, coping with the appalling conditions of his imprisonment on Devil's Island, we do not have evidence—also in Dreyfus' *Souvenirs*—of a broader intellectual or political elaboration of this resistance by the French officer, going beyond his personal case. Certainly, Dreyfus' survival made possible the second trial and the mobilization and debates surrounding it. But were it not for the intervention of outstanding figures such as the writer Emile Zola, or the activist and historian Bernard Lazare (among many others), and more generally without the mobilization of the newly self-defined "intellectuals" in the name of liberty and justice—founding values of French democracy—, there would certainly not have been a Dreyfus affair.

Speaking of reactions to the trials and the affair, Samuels is especially careful to contrast the view that Jews remained silent in front of the events and of the rising tide of antisemitism. This view was later expressed by outstanding Jewish figures such as the French prime minister Léon Blum in his *Souvenirs sur l'Affaire* (1935), and by Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951). But Samuels shows how the major Jewish press of the time intervened in favor of Dreyfus, and the chief rabbi of France Zadoc Kahn assembled at the time a Committee of Defense against Antisemitism, which included Edmond de Rothschild and the president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle.

Apart from such contemporary, specific reactions, Samuels insists on how through the affair for the well-integrated French Jewish community, and for most Jews throughout Europe, a modern Jewish identity emerged. This came to be mostly kept together and was founded, in a new secularized context, by "the memory of—and ongoing fear of—antisemitic persecution" (p. 156). Elegantly written and based on a solid historiography, Samuel's biography of Dreyfus shows us how, not thanks to or because of, but *through* the life of an ordinary Frenchman - who became a scapegoat of bigotry and racism - we can witness, as in a prism of contemporary events and context, the birth of modern Jewish and (perhaps) modern European identity.

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How to quote this article:
Simon Levis Sullam, review of *Alfred Dreyfus: The Man at the Center of the Affair*, by Maurice Samuels, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15972

Janine Fubel, Alexandra Klei and Annika Wienert, eds., *Space in Holocaust Research: A Transdisciplinary Approach to Spatial Thinking* (Berlin: De Guyter Oldenbourg, 2024), pp. 355.

by *Jürgen Matthäus*

In the traditional historical sense, space in Holocaust Studies encompasses the boundless dystopia of Nazi "Lebensraum" in "the East" on the one end of the spectrum, the genocidal confines of German-controlled Jewish life in ghettos and camps on the other, and somewhere in between the often liminal zones of refuge, self-help and protection. Between these functionally connected phenomena, it is not easy for researchers to orient themselves; if one adds additional dimensions of spatiality—e.g., aspects transcending the geophysical world towards social, cognitive and sensual perceptions of space—and the expansive evolution of this academic field, the danger of getting lost increases. In the book under review, researchers find a most valuable beacon of orientation on where the research about space and the Holocaust stands, what challenges and possibilities it raises, and what remains as desiderata for future exploration.

Space in Holocaust Research traverses a remarkably broad range of scholars, educators, and artists from a variety of backgrounds; they reflect on conceptual, topical, and methodological issues within a structural framework developed with great care by the volume editors. Originating from a conference held in Hamburg in early 2020, the book presents a prologue (in the form of images by and reflections on the work of Israeli artist Yael Atzmoni), a brief introduction on "spatial thinking in Holocaust Studies" by the editors, and 19 chapters (four in German with English abstracts) organized in two parts, each with their separate introductory texts. Moving on swiftly from the by now obligatory nod to Holocaust Studies' various "turns," the contributors explore what could be called "the primacy of the spatial" with promising heuristic results. The combination of theoretical-methodological approaches (part 1) with case studies (part 2), the absence of a rigid separation between history and its representation, as well as the editors' preference for multi- and transdisciplinarity situates the book at the cutting edge of academic research; furthermore, it helps guide Holocaust Studies

onto comparative fields tilled by geographers, art historians, sociologists, architects, genocide scholars, and Digital Humanities experts.

Despite their topic's dazzling diversity and the inherent heterogeneity of anthology contributions, the editors manage to achieve volume cohesion effectively and elegantly. Understanding space as "a social, relational, processual, and performative phenomenon" (p. 34), the contributors are given room to freely chart their respective paths while staying within the volume's conceptual bounds. This is most evident in part 2 in which case studies are organized into broad sections ("Fleeting Spaces," "Institutionalized Spaces," "Border/ing Spaces," "Spatial Relations") introduced by the editors using a contemporary photo of a Holocaust site as a point of departure, thus embedding their authors' far-ranging deliberations within concrete spatiality even where the "relative spacelessness" (p. 137) of mass execution sites hinders their localization. Each chapter ends with a helpful bibliography that, given the volume's focus on space as a social construct, highlight especially works that engage the history of Holocaust persecution, its memorialization and representation.

Among the contributions, several stand out to this reviewer. Historian Eliyana Adler provides an insightful overview about the (English-language) literature on Jewish refugees and their destinations around the world, exemplifying "the Holocaust as a global phenomenon" (p. 59) manifested in local settings and indicating how space-focused research on the Nazi persecution of the Jews can enrich Migration and Genocide Studies. Building on the work of Tim Cole, for Slavic Studies scholar Luba Jurgenson, the study of landscapes broadens the meaning of genocidal space towards the environmental and material in their impact on individual, collective, and communicative memory. Concretion figures prominently too in Anne Kelly Knowles' refreshing critique of historical mapping conventions with their bias towards documentation, indexicality, and categorical rigidity; instead, Knowles points at memory maps and digital mapping projects (including her own on ghettos in the German-occupied "East") to overcome both "ranked symbolization and exclusion of lesser spaces" (p. 96) and "location bias" (102) still prevalent in Holocaust Studies in favor of "iterative, exploratory, and graphical experimental [map] design" (p. 106 n. 51).

A similar flattening of space and its meanings continue to mark filmic representations of space explored in the intriguing chapter by Sue Vice and Dominic Williams, i.a. based on outtakes from Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* and Chantal Akerman's oeuvre. Investigating the production stages of Lanzmann's movie, the authors observe a reduction of social space by way of excluding scenes of family interaction discernible in the outtakes that contrasts sharply with Akerman's attempts to locate "private life's suffusion with history" (p. 190). The importance of institutionalized space is investigated by Christhardt Henschel (on the impact of war-time mobility restrictions, racial segregation, and other German measures on the Polish-German border region of Ciechanów/Zichenau) and, with regard to mass killing monuments as landmarks ("space-makers," p. 229), by Gundula Pohl whose fascinating case study of the theme-park-like Trascjanec memorial complex near Minsk (Belarus) highlights the different, at times diverging influences and interests by multiple stakeholders—from survivors to pressure groups to politicians—that determine the material outcomes of memorialization. Pohl's findings are echoed in the chapters by Chad A. Gibbs (on "Treblinka Geography"), Thomas Pekar (on the Shanghai-Hongkou-Tilanqiao memorial space), and Anne Mertins (on the Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück).

Readers most interested in Jewish spaces during the Holocaust find stimulating insights throughout the volume, most notably in the contributions by Adler, Knowles, and Yaakov Borut (on German Jewish spaces before and after 1933). Still, given the range of expertise represented by the authors assembled in this book, perhaps more ground could have been covered. Particularly a closer look at the interrelation between Nazi ideas, some materializing in architectural designs and building projects, on the one hand, Jewish spaces—both defined by Jews as well as by the majority population in the countries they inhabited—on the other, would have enriched this useful book even further.[1] But this is not to say the book lacks explanatory potential; in fact the opposite is the case. *Space in Holocaust Research*

[1] With a focus on Nazi spatial perceptions involving Jews e.g. Boaz Neumann, *Die Weltanschauung des Nazismus. Raum–Körper–Sprache*, trans. Markus Lemke (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010); Paul Jaskot and Eve Duffy, "Germanizing Krakow: The Political Complexity of Architecture under Nazi Occupation," in *Histories of the Nationalist International*, eds. Reinhold Martin and Claire Zimmerman (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2024), 121-139.

provides a rich roadmap for researchers of many disciplines for surveying space as an analytical factor intertwined with the Holocaust and mass violence in general.

Jürgen Matthäus, Independent scholar

How to quote this article:
Jürgen Matthäus, review of *Space in Holocaust Research: A Transdisciplinary Approach to Spatial Thinking*, by Janine Fubel, Alexandra Klei and Annika Wienert, eds., *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15977

Silvia Pin, *Jews in Japan: Presence and Perception. Antisemitism, Philosemitism and International Relations* (Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2023), pp. 198.

by *Meron Medzini*

Jews settled in Japan in six waves. The first took place from 1858 and lasted until 1904, from the opening of Japan by the Western powers until the Russo-Japanese War. It consisted predominantly of Russian Jews fleeing from pogroms and persecution. The second wave (1917-1933) also consisted of Russian Jews escaping the October Revolution, civil war in Russia and pogroms. The third wave (1933-1941) consisted of German Jews who fled from Nazi Germany and were joined later by Jews escaping from Austria and Czechoslovakia. The fourth wave arrived after Japan surrendered in 1945 and consisted of American Jewish servicemen who served there during the occupation (1945-1952), and were joined by mostly Russian Jews who fled from the civil war in China and the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The last wave began in the 1990s and consists of many Israelis who arrived after the improvement of Israel-Japan relations since the Gulf War. At no time did the number of Jews living in Japan exceed 2000 souls.

And yet, this tiny Jewish community attracted the attention of a growing number of scholars in Japan, America, Israel and Europe. At least three major works on this topic were published in English since 2020. The work under review was written originally as a master's thesis presented to the Ca' Foscari University of Venice. It is based on vast amount of books in Hebrew, English, French and even Italian. Missing are sources in Japanese, Chinese, Russian and German. Unlike a doctoral thesis, a master's thesis does not usually demand or contain new material or new interpretation, but this work is somewhat different. First and foremost for its voluminous bibliography that includes, for example, material from the Israel State Archives in Jerusalem, in addition to many newspaper citations as well as a huge number of secondary sources. Given the limitation imposed by a master's thesis, this is a very impressive book. Its strength lies in a succinct and accurate description of the origins, growth and development of the Jewish community in Japan and the local reaction to this phenomenon. That response consisted mainly of a mixture

of antisemitism and philosemitism that go back to the beginning of the 20th century.

The purpose and significance of the book, as described by the author, "lies in two main aspects. On the one hand it provides a systematization of existing material about Jews and their image in Japan." It attempts "to put together all or most aspects of the connections between Jews and Japan, including relations with the state of Israel" (p. 7). Chapter one deals with the arrival of the Jews in newly opened Japan and their very virtually non-existent role in its modernization following the Meiji Restoration. Clearly Jews played virtually no role in Japanese politics, media, academia, the arts, literature because they never made the effort of learning Japanese, one of the most difficult languages to acquire. This chapter also describes the attitude of the Japanese towards the Jews: they were seen as part of the foreign community. Chapter two describes how the views of Jews developed from the 1920's until the end of the second world war. This chapter also covers the meeting of Japanese soldiers with Jews in the territories occupied by Japan during the Pacific War, mostly in Shanghai. Chapter three explains why virtually all the Japanese were totally unaware of the Holocaust, and hence the need for a Jewish state to settle Holocaust survivors. This chapter also deals with the growth of both antisemitism and philosemitism, a growing admiration for the Jews based on their perceived "control" of international finance, politics and the media. Chapter four covers Israel-Japan relations. The final chapter deals with Japan's only "Righteous Gentile," the Japanese diplomat Sugihara Chiune, who issued some 2500 transit visas to Japan in July and August 1940.

Given the limitations imposed by the author on the scope of her work, she has managed well to describe the very complicated relationship between the Jews and their Japanese neighbors. She makes it quite clear that there has never been street antisemitism in Japan, since unlike in Europe and America, Jews living in Japan were not land lords, money lenders, politicians, bureaucrats, university professors, labor union activists or journalists. Most of them were traders sent to Japan by their companies for a limited tenure in that country. The first antisemitic tracts translated to Japanese were the notorious "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," that was imported by Japanese soldiers who served in Siberia during the years of Japan's intervention in Russia following the October revolution. Nazi antisemitic propaganda also failed to make any significant headway in Japan. Before and

during the Pacific War, no major Japanese figure such as the Emperor, cabinet ministers, senior generals and admirals, ever made antisemitic remarks. The American scholar John Dower was right when he ascribed anti-Jewish propaganda in Japan during the war as part of a broader propaganda effort designed to explain to the Japanese people why they were fighting America and who the Americans were.

One could argue with the author over several aspects of her work. She ascribes Japan's initial hostility to Israel because of the latter's reliance on Arab oil. That is true but she omits mention of other ties that flourished during those years, mainly academic and cultural. When it came to relations with Israel from the early 1990's the change came about as a result of a different and far more positive view of Israel, by then a prosperous, flourishing industrial technological nation, something many Japanese could identify with and admire. Like many other writers who attempted to understand the deeds of Sugihara Chiune, she does not speculate on the possibility that he may have been a Russian agent in addition to being a Japanese intelligence officer since he studied Russian in Harbin the early 1920s. Sugihara was not a typical Japanese bureaucrat, and informed his superiors in Tokyo of his activities on behalf of Jewish refugees in Kaunas. He never referred to them as Jews, but as Polish refugees.

All this does not detract from the value of this book that joins a growing list of works on this subject, which gives their authors the chance to deal with Japan, Israel, antisemitism and the new phenomenon that is also affects prevalent in Communist China these days—philosemitism. Future writers will owe a great deal of gratitude for the excellent bibliography and for raising the key issues that have affected the ties between the Jews and Japanese.

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How to quote this article:
Meron Medzini, review of *Jews in Japan: Presence and Perception. Antisemitism, Philosemitism and International Relations*, by Silvia Pin, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15983

Derek J. Penslar, *Zionism: An Emotional State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2023), pp. 284.

by *Guri Schwarz*

Derek J. Penslar is a renown and authoritative scholar in the fields of modern Jewish studies, the history of Zionism and the State of Israel. His latest contribution to the field, *Zionism: An Emotional State* is a concise but brilliant scholarly examination of Zionism through the lens of the history of emotions.

The book appeared in the summer of 2023, thus before the global upheaval that followed the horrific events of October 7, and the ensuing Israeli military response against the territory of Gaza. What we have witnessed since these events was the explosion of scorching hot emotional reactions; very diverse, and opposing, views and political positions were expressed, but the force that generated and kept them burning in global media, public opinion and university campuses was passion. Similar in intensity though most often opposing in content, emotions have fueled international debates, grassroot movements, and various form of communication both in traditional and new media.

This is not new. In fact, through the long history of the State of Israel, previous crisis also led to fiery reactions both locally and abroad. Penslar's book allows us, to some extent, to set this dynamic in a proper historical framework, offering both specialists and non-specialist readers helpful tools to better understand the subject. While there is a wealth of historiography dealing with the origins and history of the Zionist movement and then the history of the State of Israel, and—to a lesser degree—also dealing with anti-Zionism, existing scholarship predominantly offered a political, ideological, sometimes social framework of analysis. Opening to the history of emotions, for and against Zionism, Penslar enriches the current scenario.

Structured in three parts, the book explores Zionism as an ideology and a movement, then analyzes the vicissitudes of the State of Israel, focusing on contemporary cultural and emotional resonances. The first two parts correspond each to a single chapter. The first one, *Staging Zionism*, traces the evolution of Zionism, highlighting its multifaceted nature as both a nationalist movement and an outgrowth of Jewish civilization. Penslar delves into the ideological and

practical components of Zionism while critiquing traditional taxonomies and proposing a more fluid and nuanced categorization. He examines its relationship with Jewish culture and other Jewish nationalist movements. The second part touches on a potentially more controversial, and yet central issue: *Zionism as colonialism*. This section contrasts with equilibrium and acumen internal Jewish discourses on Zionism's benefits with external critiques focused on its impact on Palestinians. It focuses on the theoretical framing of these effects within colonialist discourse, placing them in a precise historical setting. His analysis allows to situate that debate within broader emotional and ideological divides, connecting it to wider patterns in modern nationalism, where religion, ethnicity, and historical narratives intersect with political struggles. The third and final section is subdivided into four chapters. This is the longest and most innovative part of the book, highlighting emotions as the driving force behind both Zionism's endurance and its transformations. Penslar organizes this exploration around emotional clusters rather than isolated feelings. He discusses themes such as love, pride, fear, betrayal, and hatred, mapping their roles in the movement's history and its resonance in contemporary global narratives, both inside and outside the Jewish world. The book concludes with a call to integrate emotional analysis into historical and political studies, demonstrating how emotions underpin both Zionist solidarity and its contentious global reception.

By situating Zionism within the broader histories of nationalism and emotion, Penslar seeks to deepen understanding of its complexities and relevance today. This book is clearly in debt to the new wave of scholarly studies on nationalism that developed since the 1980s, reframing the conventional approaches, projecting attention not only to the reconstruction (and deconstruction) of nationalist narratives, but gradually shifting attention from the realms of the political, of the institutional, of the ideological, to the cultural analysis of the passions that lead men (and in different ways women) to reconfigure their personal identities in relation to the national horizon, squarely placing the option of sacrifice for the motherland at the center of individual and collective identities. Having said this, it must be noted that there is also something more in this contribution, as Zionism is not like any other national movement, it has obvious peculiarities, and it stimulates (and has stimulated) passionate reactions in a global scenario, well beyond the group or groups directly affected by it. Few other national movements

have been able to suscitate such intense reactions worldwide for a protracted long period. Among them, and inextricably intertwined with the Zionist issue, is the Palestinian national movement, especially since it arose to global prominence following the Six Days War. The two issues are so thoroughly enmeshed that to fully unravel the tangle of sentiments that conflate contemporary perceptions of Zionism one cannot be considered without the other. The author is obviously aware of this. To fully grasp the issue, two emotional states, one concerning Zionism and the other the Palestinian cause, together with their cultural and political misappropriations worldwide, would need to be analyzed conjointly. There are several studies that deal with the ideological and political history of the Palestinian liberation movement, as well as with the construction of Palestinian identity; further operations aimed at fully bridging the gap between the studies on the emotions provoked by Zionism and those stimulated by Palestinian aspirations would seem to be the obvious next step for scholarship.

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How to quote this article:
Guri Schwarz, review of *Zionism: An Emotional State*, by Derek J. Penslar, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15986

Barbara Beuys, *Die Heldin von Auschwitz. Leben und Widerstand der Mala Zimetbaum* (Berlin: Insel Verlag, 2023), pp. 333.

by *Ulrich Wyrwa*

The historian and journalist Barbara Beuys completed her doctorate at the University of Cologne in 1969 with a study on the inaugural speeches of American presidents from 1789 to 1945, then moved to Hamburg as a journalist. While there she also began publishing a large number of historical non-fiction books, for example on the resistance in National Socialist Germany and on Amsterdam under German occupation. She also published a comprehensive overview of the two-thousand-year history of Jews in Europe from Rome to Auschwitz, with a special focus on the Middle Ages, while also providing a picture of the diversity and unity of Judaism in the European era. Beuys also worked intensively on topics relating to women's history, having published a large number of biographies on individual women from the Middle Ages to the present, such as Hildegard von Bingen, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, Asta Nielsen and Sophie Scholl. Her latest biography describes the life of Mala Zimetbaum, a prisoner functionary in Auschwitz and resistance fighter against the concentration camp system.

Mala Zimetbaum's life is by no means unknown. A surviving prisoner who was in contact with her in Auschwitz wrote about Mala in his memoirs published in 1979. Then Lorenz Sichelschmidt published the first biography in 1995. This was followed in 2006 by a biography by the French historian Gérard Huber. He conducted extensive interviews with other surviving prisoners who had been in the camp with Mala Zimetbaum. For the title of his biography, he chose the phrase used by Beuys for her book, referring to Mala as a *femme juive héroique*. Huber's biography was followed ten years later by Italian journalist Francesca Paci's book, and in 2019 the Italian Frediano Sessi published another portrait.

With her biography of Mala Zimetbaum, Barbara Beuys builds on her series of women's biographies as well as her non-fiction books on Jewish history and the history of National Socialism. She traces the life of Mala, who was born in 1918 to a Jewish-Polish family in Brzesko, a small town in Galicia. In addition to describing the family history, it provides an overview of the history of the Jews in the Republic of Poland-Lithuania as well as a look into Jewish life in the small town

that became part of the new Polish state after the First World War. In 1913 the family moved to Mainz, but returned to Galicia four years later, before moving back to Germany, to Ludwigshafen, in 1925. Just one year later, her father left Ludwigshafen for Antwerp with the family following in 1928.

Beuys describes Antwerp as a cosmopolitan metropolis that offered the family a new home. As her father had become blind, Mala was unable to continue her education and had to work in the fashion business. At the same time, she became involved in the Zionist youth movement.

After 1933, Belgium became one of the places of refuge for German Jews, while at the same time antisemitism in the country grew, especially in the Flemish national movement. Beuys links the description of this development with statements about the ever-increasing persecution of Jews in National Socialist Germany. In doing so, she succinctly recapitulated the dynamics of the National Socialist persecution up to the decision to murder all European Jews as well as the antisemitic obsession of the perpetrators. The only critical point to be made is that Beuys has reproduced the thesis, sometimes also put forward in historiography but which does not correspond to historical reality, according to which antisemitism "finally established itself in all strata of society in the Weimar Republic" (p. 154). This ignores the largest mass organization of the German Republic, the Reichsbanner Schwarz Rot Gold, which was dedicated to the fight against antisemitism.

In May 1940, less than a year after the start of the war, the German Wehrmacht invaded Belgium. The first measures against Jews began in occupied Belgium as early as October. Whether Mala joined a resistance group during this time, as isolated later references suggest, remains an open question, according to Beuys. When the fashion shop where Mala worked closed at the beginning of 1941, she lost her job. However, she immediately found a new position in the secretariat of an American-Jewish diamond company. Due to an anti-Jewish ordinance, however, the company was forced to close the following year. The owners offered Mala the chance to emigrate to the USA with them. But out of consideration for her family, she refused. In July 1942, she was arrested during a raid and had to work as a clerk in a Belgian camp. Two months later, she was deported to Auschwitz. At the beginning of 1943, she was used as an interpreter and "runner," a function that involved passing on reports from the SS-commandant to subordinate offices in the Birkenau women's camp. As a prisoner functionary, she initially won the trust

of the SS leader. Mala used this function, as Beuys documents from a number of later memoirs, to support other female prisoners, to help them, to give them hope and to encourage them. She also passed along to the prisoners' information that she had obtained in the writing room. These efforts enabled her to save the lives of some of these women. In the summer of 1943, some of the prisoners in the Birkenau women's camp began to resist in various ways. Later reports from surviving women suggest that Mala, who enjoyed the trust of the prisoners, supported them in this endeavor. Beuys speaks of the "double capital of trust" (p. 221) that Mala used.

In autumn 1943, Mala fell in love with a young Polish Catholic prisoner, who was also used as a functional prisoner because of his manual skills. In this function he had access to the women's camp, too. They both supported resistance actions in Auschwitz. In June 1944 they fled the camp together, probably—Beuys argues very cautiously here—to inform the world of what they had seen there. Thirteen days later, however, they were caught by a German border control fifty kilometers south of Auschwitz. Brought back to the camp, interrogated and tortured, Mala once again performed an act of resistance before she was to be murdered. Put on public display she tried to take her own life, cut her wrist with a razor blade and slapped the SS-Unterscharführer in the face with her bloody hand.

Barbara Beuys has traced Mala Zimetbaum's life, primarily from the memories of surviving witnesses but also from the few direct sources available. She meticulously describes the violence and brutal prison conditions, she writes about Mengele's medical experiments on prisoners, which Zimetbaum witnessed, but also about the experiences of Jewish women musicians whom Zimetbaum had helped.

Barbara Beuys has painted a vivid picture of Mala Zimetbaum's life. Although she has not presented a scholarly biography—she has dispensed with annotations and references—her book is nevertheless scientifically sound, as she has primarily drawn on the memories of surviving prisoners who reported on Mala Zimetbaum. How prudently Beuys proceeded in view of the sparse source material is evident not least in her cautious formulations. If the evidence does not allow for a precise narrative, she chooses formulations such as "quite possible that …", "certainly it will" or "it is conceivable that …". At one passage, she points out: "The lack of

historical evidence must not lead to misleading theories", and continues: "What is beyond doubt, however, is that Mala …".

Prisoner functionaries had an ambivalent reputation. They were instrumentalized by the camp administrations, were involved in the system of oppression and extermination, and often enjoyed certain privileges because of their functions, including Mala Zimetbaum. Eugen Kogon's early analysis of the concentration camp system shows that the discipline and surveillance of the camps would not have been possible without the involvement of prisoner functionaries. For Hannah Arendt, they represented "the darkest chapter in the whole dark history." However, the perfidious strategy of involving the prisoner functionaries in terror and violence also gave them room for maneuvers at times. Mala Zimetbaum used her function as a "runner" and interpreter to provide help and support to other prisoners, and she was able to assist attempts at resistance herself. According to Beuys, women who survived Auschwitz have often reported on Mala's "human charisma, ingenious actions in the murderous and inhuman camp world" (p. 187). As a functional prisoner, Mala Zimetbaum, as Beuys emphasizes, "followed an inner compass of solidarity and empathy and secretly and deliberately overrode the inhumane laws of extermination policy" (p. 280).

In the first chapters of her biography, Barbara Beuys has also provided insights into the migration experiences of Eastern Jews in the early 20th century. In addition, she regularly wove descriptions of Jewish holidays and religious traditions into her narrative.

Above all, Beuys paints an impressive portrait of a young woman who, with incredible courage, used her role as a prisoner functionary in Auschwitz-Birkenau to help other prisoners and who knew how to utilize the gaps in the system to show signs of resistance whenever possible.

Postscript

Recently, the author Reiner Engelmann,[1] who repeatedly organized educational tours to Auschwitz as a teacher, published a book for young people about the story of Mala Zimentbaum and her Polish friend Edward Galinski, known as Edek.

[1] Reiner Engelmann, *Sie brachten uns Hoffnung. Die Geschichte von Edward Galinski und Mala Zimetbaum* (München: Kinder- und Jugendbuch Verlag, 2024).

Engelmann tells their love story in Auschwitz and their escape and murder. With the story of these two young people, their courage, their bravery and their resistance in Auschwitz, Engelmann meets the broad interest of a clear majority of German young people who, as a representative youth study from 2023 showed, are committed to dealing with Germany's National Socialist past, consider the period of National Socialism to be a decisive phase in German history and want to know more about it.

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How to quote this article:
Ulrich Wyrwa, review of *Die Heldin von Auschwitz. Leben und Widerstand der Mala Zimet-baum*, by Barbara Beuys, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of the Fondazione CDEC* 27, no. 1 (2025), DOI: 10.48248/issn.2037-741X/15989