

# Emily Benichou Gottreich ~ Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the Maghrib



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To begin, a few quick observations about the concept of the “Arab Jew” that prompt the current intervention: (1), it is largely an identity of exile; (2), it implies a particular politics of knowledge vis-à-vis the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and larger Zionist narrative(s); (3), it was originally theorized from within the frameworks of, and remains especially prominent in, specific academic fields, namely, literary and cultural studies.<sup>1</sup> While clearly recognizing the significance of the concept of Arab Jews to post-Zionist discourse, not to mention the groundbreaking contributions of those who have revitalized the term in recent years, this essay will nonetheless argue that these three factors have, to varying degrees, converged to keep the discourse about Arab Jews limited to the semantic-epistemological level, resulting in a flattened identity that is both historically and geographically ambiguous. Developed in conversation with and presented here alongside the related essay by Lital Levy, this essay questions the presumed cultural (i.e., historical) unity inherent in contemporary articulations of the Arab Jew from a Maghribi perspective. That is, I will try to imagine how Arabness and Jewishness may have intersected in the Maghrib—and particularly in Morocco—at pivotal junctures in the past. Such efforts at historicization, it is hoped, will allow for much-needed nuance and specificity to accrue to this important identity-category, lending the concept of “Arab Jews” meaning beyond merely the ethical or political.

Read more: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/252138>

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# The Jewish Miss Iraq

In 1947, the first-ever Miss Iraq was chosen - a Jewish beauty queen. But there was little time to celebrate. The State of Israel was created soon after, and life changed for the worse for the Iraqi Jewish community. Here's their story.

November 30th commemorates the Jewish refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. A day to acknowledge the collective trauma the communities faced. Their plight will not be forgotten.

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## The Jewish Community In Baghdad In The Eighteenth Century, Zvi Yehuda, Nehardea, Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, 2003



Photo: cojs.org

For the last few years, interest in the history of the Jewish Community that dwelt in Iraq has increased, especially the community who lived in Baghdad and which was the most significant and numerous of all other Iraqi Jewish communities, just prior to the mass Aliya which spelled the end of the ancient Babylonian Diaspora. Considerable interest has been shown not only by members of the community and their offspring, who are scattered all over the world and who want to know something of their origins, but also by researchers seeking common roots of various populations, in order to investigate various medical manifestations. However, what little research has been conducted regarding the history of Iraqi Jews in the latter generations, especially from the 14th Century to the present day, never touched upon this subject.

Investigations of the chronicles of the Jewish community in Baghdad during the second Millennium have always drawn a blank, when they encountered some break in the lineage of Baghdadi Jewish families in the 20th Century, from their historical origins as the offspring of the Babylonian Diaspora, the Geonim and the Exilarchs. This manifestation became increasingly significant later due to the liquidation of the Iraqi community ≠ the Exodus of Iraqi Jews from the land of their exile in the second half of the 20th Century and their settlement in Israel, Western Europe, the United States, Australia and the Far East.

Read

more: [http://cojs.org/jewish\\_community\\_in\\_baghdad\\_in\\_the\\_eighteenth\\_century](http://cojs.org/jewish_community_in_baghdad_in_the_eighteenth_century)

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## **Sarah Ehrlich ~ Farhud Memories: Baghdad's 1941 Slaughter Of The Jews**



*BBC News. June 2011.*

On 1 June 1941, a Nazi-inspired pogrom erupted in Baghdad, bringing to an end more than two millennia of peaceful existence for the city's Jewish minority. Some Jewish children witnessed the bloodshed, and retain vivid memories 70

years later.

Heskel Haddad, an 11-year-old boy was finishing a festive meal and preparing to celebrate the Jewish festival of Shavuot, oblivious to the angry mob that was about to take over the city.

Thousands of armed Iraqi Muslims were on the rampage, with swords, knives and guns.

The two days of violence that followed have become known as the *Farhud* (Arabic for "violent dispossession"). It spelt the end for a Jewish community that dated from the time of Babylon. There are contemporary reports of up to 180 people killed, but some sources put the number much higher. The Israeli-based Babylonian Heritage Museum says about another 600 unidentified victims were buried in a mass grave.

"On the first night of Shavuot we usually go to synagogue and stay up all night studying Torah," says Haddad, now a veteran ophthalmologist in New York.

"Suddenly we heard screams, 'Allah Allah!' and shots were fired. We went out to the roof to see what's happening, we saw fires, we saw people on the roofs in the ghetto screaming, begging God to help them."

The violence continued through the night. A red hand sign, or hamsa, had been painted on Jewish homes, to mark them out. Families had to defend themselves by whatever means they could.

Read more: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east->

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# The Disappeared Children Of Israel



*Photo: en.wikipedia.org*

ROSH HAAYIN, Israel — Ofra Mazor, 62, had been looking for her sister, Varda, for 30 years when she submitted her DNA samples to the Israeli genealogy company MyHeritage in 2017. Her mother, Yochevet, who is now deceased, said that she got to breast-feed her sister only once after giving birth to her in an Israeli hospital in 1950. She was told by the nurses that her newborn daughter had died. Ms. Mazor's mother didn't believe the nurses and had her husband demand their child back. He was never given the child.

A few months after submitting her DNA, Ms. Mazor received the call she'd been waiting for: A match had been found. Last January, the sisters were reunited. Varda Fuchs had been adopted by a German-Jewish couple in Israel. She was told at a young age that she was adopted. The sisters are part of a community of Israelis of Yemenite descent who for decades have been seeking answers about their lost kin.

Known as the "[Yemenite Children Affair](#)," there are over 1,000 official reported cases of missing babies and toddlers, but some estimates from advocates are as high as 4,500. Their families believe the babies were abducted by the Israeli authorities in the 1950s, and were illegally put up for adoption to childless Ashkenazi families, Jews of European descent. The children who disappeared were mostly from the Yemenite and other "Mizrahi" communities, an umbrella term for Jews from North Africa and the Middle East. While the Israeli government is trying to be more transparent about the disappearances, to this

day, it denies that there were systematic abductions.

Read more: <https://www.nytimes.com/israel-yemenite-children-affair.html>

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# Clare Louise Ducker ~ Jews, Arabs And Arab Jews: The Politics Of Identity And Reproduction In Israel

## *1.1 Introduction*

While the bulk of anti-Zionist literature has tended to focus on the disastrous effects of the creation of the state of Israel upon the indigenous Palestinian population and its consequences, including the present day endemic discrimination faced by Palestinian citizens of Israel (Lustick 1980), there is relatively little recognition of the tragedies that befell Jews from Arab countries (and also from Turkey, Iran, India & Ethiopia) during and after the creation of Israel in 1948. It is rarely acknowledged that Jews from the Arab world have been politically, economically and socially marginalized by the ruling Ashkenazi elite and have suffered discrimination based on their appearance and cultural affinity – a phenomenon that is an inseparable part of the Zionist discrimination against Palestinians and Arabs as a whole (Giladi 1990:208). Professor Yehouda Shenhav (1996) has remarked that the new historians – those Israeli historians who have exposed the Zionist myths surrounding the creation of the state of Israel as ‘a land without people, for a people without land’ and revealed the massacres, expulsions and ill-treatment of Palestinians that occurred during the creation of Israel – have excluded from their revision of Israeli history the many injustices inflicted on Jews who came from the Arab world. The lack of recognition of the plight (and even existence) of Arab Jews is reflected in descriptions of the conflict in the Middle East as ‘a conflict between Jews and Arabs’ despite the fact that about fifty percent of Israel’s Jewish population are also Arab (Kanaanah

2002:43).

Israel, defined as the “Jewish State” but whose founding members were all European asserted from the outset the European character the Jewish state would take: Theodore Herzl, the founder of political Zionism, wrote that the Jewish state would serve as “the portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilisation as opposed to oriental barbarism”. Conceptions of East versus West, of the modern and civilized world against the backward and barbaric “other” are a recurrent theme in Zionist literature and which are directly associated with the colonial Europe Zionism emerged from. During the first Zionist Congress, European Zionists consistently addressed themselves only to Ashkenazi Jews, rejecting the non-Ashkenazim and opposing the “tainting” of the settlements in Palestine with an admission of “Levantine Jews” (Shohat 1999:9). Zionism’s answer to the “Jewish question” was therefore an analysis of the “European Jewish question” deliberately not concerning itself with the Jews from the Middle East, Asia and Africa (Massad 1996:54). It can thus be seen that Zionism is actually an Ashkenazi nationalist movement, a movement established by and for Jews of European origin (Giladi 1990:67).

Read more: <https://www.semanticscholar.org/JewsArabs-and-Arab-Jews>

Institute of Social Studies. The Hague. *Working Paper Series* No. 421, 2006.