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'Where Are You, My Beloved Iraq?': Arab-Jewish Identity and Culture Between Demise and Biased Scholarship

Abstract We are currently witnessing the demise of Arab-Jewish identity and culture—a tradition that started more than 1,500 years ago is vanishing before our very own eyes. Until the twentieth century, the great majority of the Jews under the rule of Islam used Arabic as their language but after the establishment of the State of Israel, Arabic has been gradually disappearing as a language mastered by Jews. The Arabized Jews have been deliberately excluded from Arabism to the point that we can now assume an unspoken agreement between Zionism and Arab nationalism to carry out a total cleansing of Arab-Jewish identity and culture. The present article focuses on the changes in the concept of identity and belonging among the Arabized Jews, especially the Iraqi-Baghdadi intellectuals among them. As I previously argued, due to some processes that those Jews had experienced during the twentieth century and because of some global developments, they gradually developed a negative sensitivity toward the notion of stable identity, whatever identity. Instead of that, they started to assert, explicitly and implicitly, their particular singularities and to search for alternative forms of identification, mostly various kinds

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of inessential solidarity and belonging. The article refers as well to the scholarship on Arab-Jewish identity and culture that has frequently been moving into non-academic spaces, neglecting the necessary unbiased scholarly discourse.

Keywords Arab-Jewish culture, Arab identity, inessential solidarity, Iraqi Jews, Zionism, biased scholarship

1 Introduction

We are currently witnessing the demise of Arab-Jewish identity and culture. A tradition that started more than 1,500 years ago is vanishing before our very eyes. The main factor in the Muslim-Christian-Jewish Arab symbiosis up to the twentieth century, from the Jewish point of view, was that the great majority of the Jews under the rule of Islam adopted Arabic as their language. This symbiosis does not exist in our time because Arabic is gradually disappearing as a language spoken on a daily basis by Jews. The image of an hourglass is an apposite one: the grains of sand are quickly running out. Furthermore, in the field of literature there is not even one Jewish writer of record who was born after 1948 and who is still writing in Arabic. A Jew who is now fluent in Arabic must have either been born in an Arab country (and their numbers, of course, are rapidly decreasing) or have acquired the language as part of his training for service in the military or security services (and their numbers, needless to say, are always increasing). There are only few exceptions. The Israeli-Jewish canonical elite does not see the Arabic language and Arab culture as intellectual assets, and there is no better illustration of this point than the structure of the comparative literature departments at Israeli universities, where you can hardly find tenured scholars who have a knowledge of Arabic or who have taken the trouble to study its literature. In short, we all know that the chapter of Arab-Jewish symbiosis has reached its end, and that the hourglass will not be turned over anytime soon, if at all.

In the present article, I will deal with the aforementioned developments through the investigation of the changes in the concept of identity and belonging among the Arabized Jews,[1] concentrating on the Iraqi-Baghdadi intellectuals among them. It goes without saying that the study has been conducted with due awareness that bundling all the Arabized Jews together could be problematic and may lead to erroneous generalizations because of significant differences between socioeconomic classes and between various generations among the Arabized Jews. My main argument is that, due

[1] I will use here in general the term 'Arabized Jews' following Brann (2000: 435–454). On the question of terminology, see Behar (2009: 747–771).

to some processes that those Jews had experienced during the twentieth century and due to some global developments, they gradually developed a negative sensitivity toward the notion of a stable identity. Instead of that, they started to assert, explicitly and implicitly, their particular singularities and to search for alternative forms of identification, mostly various kinds of inessential solidarities and senses of belonging. From a sample of partial investigations, I have a solid basis for the hypothesis that the same developments have occurred, if in different rhythms and intensities, among other communities of Arabized Jews as well. The discussion will refer as well to the scholarship on Arab-Jewish identity and culture against the background of the gradually dwindling number of the scholars who have been expressing any interest in investigating this topic and, at the same time, have the necessary linguistic skills to do that. Moreover, the scholarship on Arab-Jewish culture has frequently been moving into non-academic spaces, neglecting the unbiased scholarly discourse. Before discussing the changes in the concept of identity and belonging among the Arabized Jews, it is necessary to present some points related to historical background of the Arabized Jews.

2 Historical background: We are Arabs before we are Jews

In the sixth century CE, when Arabic reached its full development with the appearance of poetry of high standing, Jewish communities were flourishing throughout the Arabian Peninsula. Jews, inasmuch as they were an integral part of Arab society, participated in the making of the local culture, and Jewish tribes had distinguished poets. The personal integrity of one such poet, al-Samawʾal ibn ʿĀdiyāʾ, became proverbial, and he has since been commemorated by the saying *awfā min al-Samawʾal* ('more loyal than al-Samawʾal'). The incident referred to was his refusal to yield weapons entrusted to him, even when a Bedouin chieftain laid siege to his castle and murdered his son.[2] Describing the noble qualities of his own Arab-Jewish tribe, al-Samawʾal composed a poem, the opening verse of which was:

إذا المَرءُ لَم يدنَس مِنَ اللُؤمِ عِرضُهُ فَكُـــلُّ رِداءٍ يَـرتَديـهِ جَميـلُ

When a man's honor is not defiled by baseness,
Then every cloak he cloaks himself in is comely.[3]

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[2] See al-Maydānī (1988: II, 441–442). On the poet and his loyalty, see also Meisami and Starkey (1998: II, 685–686).

[3] For the poem, see Abū Tammām (n.d.: I, 36). See also the text, together with an English translation, in Arberry (1965: 30–33).

This poem, which even today is highly regarded in the Arabic literary tradition, testifies to the existence of a past in which no one would consider that being an Arab and at the same time a Jew was paradoxical. There were also female poets among the Jewish poets of the pre-Islamic period, such as Sāra al-Qurayẓiyya, whose elegy for 350 noblemen of her tribe killed in a battle in 492 CE is frequently cited in ancient Arab sources.[4]

When Islam in the seventh century CE became the dominant faith and defining legal and social framework in the Near East, Jews (together with Christians and in Persia Zoroastrians as well) were considered to be protégés (*Ahl al-Dhimma* [People of the Pact]) of the new community. Jews were not only well acquainted with the emerging Islamic literature, but were also deeply inspired by it, and gradually became thoroughly Arabicized. As interference normally occurs when a target culture is either in a state of emergence, in a vacuum, or at a turning point in its history,[5] the Jews had in turn the ability to influence the rising Islamic civilization. To borrow words said on the role of Christians in Muslim society, the seventh century was a peculiar juncture when the characteristic institutions of the dominant community were 'in the process of formation, radical modification, or destruction by forces which the marginal community [might] or [might] not have helped generate but which it [was] able to accelerate and focus'.[6] The Jews were thus by no means passive agents for the new Muslim society. Judeo-Muslim symbiosis began at the very birth of Islam, in which process the Jews played an important role; the Qurʾān provides solid testimony for this process of mutual influence. Arabized Jews had an intimate knowledge of the holy book of Islam and its source texts,[7] and they would play an active role in shaping medieval Arab-Muslim civilization by serving as an intermediate link between Hellenistic-Roman civilization and modern civilization. Medieval Arab-Muslim civilization was to be an admixture of cultural elements; it would invariably manifest pre-Islamic roots alongside the Islamic religion itself as well as a basis in Greek humanism and in various cultural elements of the ancient heritage of the Near East. Therefore, 'it is not mere coincidence that the flowering of Jewish culture in the Arab world should occur at the very time that

[4] On Arab-Jewish poets in the pre-Islamic period, see al-Iṣbahānī (1964: XXIV, 97–128). On Sāra al-Qurayẓiyya, see al-Iṣbahānī (1964: XXII, 102–105), and Bitton (1999: 43–46).

[5] Sebeok 1986: I, 462.

[6] Haddad 1970: 3.

[7] On knowledge of the Qurʾān among Jews, see Lazarus-Yafeh (1992: 143–160).

Islamic civilization was at its apogee'.[8] Nor is it strange that Jews often preferred writing in Arabic over writing in Hebrew, even when dealing with the most sacred matters of Judaism, which had the effect of making their literature virtually unavailable to Europeans. Arabized Jews had no conscious motivation behind the widespread use of Arabic, as in view of their extensive adjustment under Islam, and the degree to which they identified themselves with its culture, 'nothing is more natural than that they should use in their writings the language which served them in every other need'.[9]

The Jews of Mesopotamia, for example, who looked back to the Jewish Exile to Babylon, for centuries spoke Aramaic, the language they used to produce the Talmud. However, after the Arab conquest, especially under the Abbasid Caliphate,[10] the then-thriving Jewish community underwent a rapid process of Arabization and integration into the surrounding Arab-Muslim society, the majority of them congregating in the new metropolis of Baghdad. Facilitating their integration was their high level of achievement and resulting prosperity in commerce, education, and culture. As with Mesopotamia, in all other lands conquered by the Arabs the Jews adopted Arabic as their language. From the ninth century, Judeo-Arabic literature flourished, that is, texts in Jewish dialects of vernacular Arabic that combined Hebrew and Aramaic lexical items with Arabic and that were generally written in Hebrew script.[11] Large portions of this literature were scientific, philosophical, and theological in nature. The works of, for example, Saʿīd ibn Yūsuf al-Fayyūmī, known as Saʿadia Gaon (882–942), were almost all written in Judeo-Arabic. He translated the Bible into Arabic, the language in which he also composed his commentary, the *Sharḥ*. Born in Egypt, after a stay in Palestine he left for Mesopotamia where in 928 CE he was appointed Head of the Babylonian Academy at Sūra, a position he held (with a six-year intermission) until his death. He applied his knowledge of Arabic poetry and

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[8] Stillman 1979: 61. For an overview of 1,400 years of the intertwined history of Judaism and Islam, see Stillman (2011: 10–20).

[9] Halkin 1956: 220–221. On Arabic as a unifying element among the various religious and ethnic groups in the Muslim Empire and as a universal medium of intellectual expression among both Muslims and non-Muslims, see Chejne (1969: 13–16).

[10] 'Arabic had become the *lingua franca* of the caliphate. This wide use of this language also served to lower ethnic and cultural barriers. In fact, it had a unifying effect. Politically and ideologically, ʿAbbāsid society no longer focused on *Arab* culture. Instead, the emphasis was now on *Arabic* culture' (Pietruschka 2005: 32).

[11] As the education at the time was religious, people generally used the script of their religious writings, even when writing in a language that they had not been educated in (Goitein 1967: I, 16).

poetics to Hebrew poetics in order to halt a decrease in Hebrew writing; he also used Arabic literary criticism for the purpose of increasing the value of Hebrew poetry in the eyes of his own Jewish generation. Also, one of the greatest scholars in Jewish history, the physician and philosopher Maimonides (Mūsā ibn Maymūn) (1135–1204), wrote most of his works in Judeo-Arabic; the most influential of these was *Dalālat al-Ḥāʾirīn* (The Guide of the Perplexed).

From the mid-tenth to the mid-thirteenth centuries, Jewish culture in al-Andalus (Muslim Spain) had even more than elsewhere the closest of connections with Arab-Islamic culture through direct translation, imitation, adaptation, and borrowing. The atmosphere created allowed the elements of separate cultures to be actively exposed to one and other and also to fuse together. New hybrid literary forms, therefore, came into being where Arabic was the *lingua franca*. In 'A Father's Admonition' for his son, Yudah ibn Tibbon (1120–1190) wrote: 'Thou art well aware how our foremost men only attained to high distinction through their proficiency in Arabic writing'.[12] In the case of Hebrew secular poetry, Arabic poetic models were used that undoubtedly brought about the most perfect expression of Arab-Jewish symbiosis in al-Andalus. The form of most of the secular Hebrew poetry in al-Andalus was on the model of the *qaṣīda*, which uses one unchangeable rhyme throughout the poem and one quantitative meter dividing each verse into two hemistichs. Hebrew literature, grammar, and philosophy also reached a peak during this era. There is no other way of understanding the Jewish achievements and their imitating of the rhetorical embellishment of Arabic poetry and prose at the time, except in the light of their being informed with a knowledge of Arabic literature and Muslim philosophical thinking. There was in fact an elite class of Jewish courtiers and officials who were as polished in the Arabic language, literature, and culture as they were learned in the Hebrew and Jewish religious tradition. At least some of the members of that elite were even more assimilated to Arabic culture than Hebrew culture and more at home in literary standard Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) than in Hebrew, although one cannot, of course, reduce the difference between the Arabic poetry and Hebrew poetry of the time to purely one of language.

Moses ibn Ezra (1055–1138), whose poetry has been described as the one that 'most resembles that of an Arabic poet',[13] wrote a number of prose works in Arabic, among them *Kitāb al-Muḥāḍara wa-l-Mudhākara* (Book of Conversation and Deliberation), which is 'the most important

[12] Abrahams 1926: I, 59.
[13] Scheindlin 2000: 252.

medieval book about Hebrew poetry'.[14] Jewish Hebrew poets also adopted strophic forms (*muwashshaḥ*), with the last strophe (*kharja*) often written in vernacular Arabic. Some Jewish poets became famous in both Hebrew and Arabic, such as Ismāʿīl ibn Naghrīla (Shmuel ha-Nagid) (993–1056), the Zirid vizier, who held office in Granada during the mid-eleventh century, and the poet and philosopher Ibn Gabirol (1021–1058). Being thoroughly Arabized, Jews used not only Hebrew but also Arabic for liturgical purposes, such as for hymns and religious ceremonies, particularly on the New Year, Passover, Pentecost, and the Ninth of Av.

There were also outside the mainstream of Jewish society in the Middle East communities that enjoyed reading or writing Arabic. The Karaites in Egypt wrote even the Hebrew Bible in Arabic characters, and present in Karaite manuscripts were vestiges of the works of Muslim Ṣūfī mystics that had been previously transposed into Hebrew characters.[15] The Jews' reading and writing of Arabic poetry was not restricted to al-Andalus: Yehuda al-Ḥarīzī (Yehuda Alharizi) (1165–1225), who translated the *maqāmāt* of al-Ḥarīrī (1054–1122) into Hebrew under the title *Maḥberot Itiʾel* (Itiʾel's Notebooks), wrote after leaving Christian Spain poems in Arabic for circulation throughout the Middle East. In the eighteenth *maqāma* in his book entitled *Taḥkemonī*, he alludes to the acknowledged primacy of Arabic poetry, stating that 'the golden Poesy was the Arabs' legacy'.[16]

Nevertheless, when it came to poetry, most of the Andalusian Jewish poets wrote in Hebrew, not Arabic, at least according to the available sources. There are various explanations given for this. Samuel Miklos Stern (1920–1969), for example, thinks that the chief reason for this was love for the Hebrew language as a holy language and the desire to clothe the expression of new ideals in Jewish poetry in the national language. This means that the Hebrew poets did not seek to address themselves to the larger Muslim public, because they considered it their function to be at the service of their own particular Jewish society.[17] Joshua Blau (1919–2020) argues that being much less attracted by the ideal of *ʿarabiyya*, the veritable Arabic language, than their Muslim fellow citizens, the Jews generally attained only a limited mastery of classical Arabic. Consequently, they could venture to write Arabic when composing scientific and religious tracts, but their superficial knowledge did not suffice for writing

[14] Scheindlin 2000: 259.
[15] See Fenton (2002: 5–19).
[16] Alḥarizi 2001: 175–189.
[17] Stern 1963: 254.

poetry.[18] According to Rina Drory (1947–2000), Arabic served for lucid, straightforward expression, while Hebrew served for festive and exalted writing, often at the expense of clarity and specificity: 'Writing in Hebrew was designed to demonstrate the author's command of the language and to produce a text that would arouse admiration for its beauty and elegance; writing in Arabic was intended to produce a clear and understandable text'.[19]

One should, however, distinguish between the use of the Arabic language for practical purposes, such as composing scientific texts or theological polemical tracts, and the use of language for 'non-practical' aesthetic purposes, that is, texts in which the author gives free rein to his artistic imagination and expresses his inner feelings and emotions. One would not expect a Jewish writer whose inner aesthetic preferences were rooted in the spiritual values of the Jewish culture alone to express his innermost feelings in Arabic. Also, in the eleventh through the thirteenth centuries, Jews in al-Andalus became so integrated into Arab culture that many were able to achieve widespread recognition for their Arabic poetry. Information about Jewish poetry in Arabic has as a rule not come from Jewish traditional circles, which considered such activity to be harmful to Jewish cultural identity. Nor could it come from Muslim traditional circles unless it was about Jewish converts to Islam or on a creative level of achievement within Arab culture that Muslim sources were unable to ignore. That we know something at all about Jews who distinguished themselves in Arabic poetry without converting to Islam (some very few!) may only testify to the recognition of the high quality of their poetry. But we can assume that literary writing in Arabic was much more widespread than the available sources indicate. We cannot rule out that many poets who wrote in Arabic were forgotten or caused to be forgotten, since both Jewish or Muslim circles did not have any desire that they would be remembered unless they produced literary masterpieces that could not be forgotten.

It would be hard, however, to find in the works of the Arabized Jews a specifically *Jewish* contribution to Arab *Belles Lettres*—Jews were simply 'members of the vast subject population of the Middle East which was assimilated to Arab ways of thinking and expression'.[20] The most outstanding of the assimilated Jewish poets known to us is Ibrāhīm ibn Sahl al-Ishbīlī al-Isrāʾīlī (1208–1259), who only wrote in Arabic and became famous for his panegyrics and love poems. Regarding some of Ibn Sahl's verses that were said to refer to his worldly love, Raymond P. Scheindlin

[18] Blau 1981: 22–23.
[19] Drory 2000: 198.
[20] Goitein 1955: 127.

(b. 1940) thinks that they could just as well be about his conversion to Islam:

تَسَلّيتُ عن موسى بحبّ محمّدٍ هديتُ ولولا اللهُ ما كنتُ أهتدي
وما عن قِلًى قد كان ذاك وإنّما شريعة ُ موسى عُطّلتْ بمحمّدِ

I have found comfort for Moses in the love of Muḥammad,
This is right guidance from God; but without Him I would have strayed.
I did not change out of hatred, but simply
Because Moses's law has been replaced by Muḥammad's.[21]

Although there were no great female poets in Arab cultural circles in al-Andalus, literate Jewish women were not as rare as we tend to assume. In the twelfth century, Qasmūna, a cultured Jewish woman steeped in Arabic literature (it has been suggested that she be identified as the daughter of Shmuel ha-Nagid)[22] composed Arabic poetry sufficiently lofty to be transmitted by some Arab sources. Examples of her poetry are the verses that she composed when she looked into a mirror one day and became aware that, though beautiful, she was not yet married:

أرى روضة قد حان منها قطافها وليس يُــرى جانٍ يمدّ لها يـدا
فوا أسفي يمضي الشّباب مضيّعًا ويبقى الّذي ما إن أسمّيه مفردا

I see a garden whose harvest time has come;
No harvester can be seen to extend a hand.
Alas! Youth passes and is wasted,
While one remains—I will not name him—who is alone.[23]

In the Andalusian Jewish communities, the process of Arabization led to fundamental changes in the attitude of at least some elements to the issue of language. The Jews spoke Arabic for generations, and it is logical to suppose that they 'came to think in and view the world through the medium of that language'. To speak a language, as Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) argues, 'is to take on a world, a culture'.[24] And just as language structures reality through preexistent cognitive ingredients and thereby informs the

[21] Al-Kutubī 1951: I, 42 (English translation: Scheindlin 1992b: 188–200).
[22] Bellamy 1983: 423–424.
[23] See al-Suyūṭī (n.d.: 75).
[24] Fanon 1967: 38.

experience of its speakers, the literary culture of Jews in al-Andalus also represents, as R. Brann states, their instinctive, creative refraction of the language, forms, and substance of Arabo-Islamic learning in the forms of subcultural adaptation:

> The Jews' Arabization fully integrated them into the pluralistic Andalusi scene. Arabic language and culture not only surrounded the Jews in the speech and writings of their Muslim (and Christian) neighbors so as to influence them as cultural others; but also and more pertinently, Arabic was the linguistic medium central to the Andalusi-Jewish experience. Indeed, it was the agency responsible for their intellectual and social integration, which along with their full participation in the political economy of al-Andalus and their inspired attachment to the country they called Sefarad marked them as Andalusis.[25]

The factors that made possible the Jews' involvement in al-Andalus in Arab culture were also effective in modern times, even if to a much lesser degree in the twentieth century due to the national and political conflict in the Middle East.

In modern times, Jews were nowhere as open to participation in the wider Arab culture or as at home in literary standard Arabic as in the first half of the twentieth century in Iraq. In the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, the Jewish community had lived without interruption for two-and-a-half millennia, and traced their domicile in Iraq to the Babylonian Exile. The reasons and circumstances that paved the way for Iraqi Jews to be much more open than in other Arab countries to participation in the wider canonical culture of the local society are still not completely clear, but we know that since the early Islamic era Jews in the territories that would later be part of Iraq had been taking part in Arab cultural gatherings whose cultural atmosphere and openness may be described to have been multicultural.[26] With the advent of modern times, the Iraqi-Jewish community seemed on the whole to be isolated from the main trend of canonical Arab culture. The start of the involvement of Jews in the outer Arab society in Iraq was the outcome of the process of secularization of Jews that started in the second half of the nineteenth century. Much earlier than their Muslim or even Christian compatriots, the Iraqi Jews

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[25] Brann 2000: 441–442. On the connection of Hebrew literature with Arab culture in al-Andalus, see also Scheindlin (1986; 1991; 1992b: 188–200).

[26] It was during the time of the Abbasid caliph al-Manṣūr (754–775), who founded the city of Baghdad and propagated an open and multicultural policy toward religious minorities.

were aware of the need to master European secular culture, especially its science, as the means to achieve modernization while defining their religious faith as a matter of personal belief. When they started down the road to secularization, there were attempts to develop a secular Hebrew literature. Under the aegis of secular education, Jews adhered less to a strict religious life to the point that in the twentieth century the intellectual elite was predominantly secular, or as Emile Marmorstein (1901–1983), Headmaster of the Shammāsh School for Boys in Baghdad in the 1930s, observed in 1953: 'Baghdad between the two wars resembled the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe some 50 or 60 years ago but for the absence of zeal, both religious and irreligious'.[27] At the same time, the tendency toward Western culture and the adoption of secular values made Jews more open to the modern Arabic culture that was developing during the same period.

When in the wake of World War I the State of Iraq was created, the Jews were inspired by a cultural vision with the eloquent secularist dictum *al-dīnu li-llāhi wa-l-waṭanu li-l-jamīʿ* ('Religion is for God, the Fatherland is for everyone')[28]—it was employed as part of the Arabization vision of secular Jewish intellectuals who sought to remind people of the close symbiotic contact that Jews had with the wider Arab-Muslim culture. They rallied as a matter of course behind the efforts to make Iraq a modern nation-state for all its citizens—Sunni and Shiʿi Muslim Arabs, Kurds and Turcomans, Assyrian and Aramean Christians, Yazidis, and Jews alike.[29] The vision and hopes of European Zionists to establish a Jewish nation-state in Palestine, as promised in 1917 by the Balfour Declaration,[30] was for the Iraqi Jews at the time a far-off cloud, totally undesired.[31] Their real national vision, at least the vision of the intellectual secular elite, was Iraqi and Arab. It was a vision that for the Jews had its roots in the nineteenth century with the start of the processes of Westernization and secularization, a time when cultural barriers between them and the wider local society

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[27] Preface in Drower (1989: VI, 8–11).

[28] Shāʾul 1980: 119, 223.

[29] Retrospectively and after the establishment of the State of Israel, it would be more convenient for Jewish-Iraqi immigrants, especially from the economic and intellectual elite, to justify their involvement in Iraq before 1948 by citing the Talmudic principle *dina de-malkhuta dina* ('the law of the land is the law') (Babylonian Talmud, *Nedarim* 28a).

[30] The letter sent on 2 November 1917, by British Foreign Minister Arthur James Balfour to Lord Rothschild in which 'his Majesty's Government view with favor the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people'.

[31] Elie Kedourie argued that even in the 1940s 'the Zionist cause did not seem to me as a matter of any political wisdom. The expectancies which Zionism was creating were too high and unrealistic' (*Davar ha-shavuʿ*, 7 April 1988: 9).

had begun to crumble. As a result of these processes, in the 1930s most of the Jewish population lived in Baghdad, filling most of the civil service jobs under the British and the early monarchy. The Civil Administration of Mesopotamia, in its annual review for the year 1920, stated that the Jews of the City of Baghdad were 'a very important section of the community, outnumbering the Sunnis or Shias'.[32] According to the Iraqi-Jewish scholar Elie Kedourie (1926–1992), Baghdad at the time 'could be said to be as much a Jewish city as an Islamic one'.[33] The Iraqi-Jewish journalist Nissīm Rajwān (Rejwan) (1924–2017) thought that just as it has often been said that New York is a Jewish city, so 'one can safely say the same about Baghdad in the first half of the 20th century'.[34]

From the early 1920s, the Jews had every reason to believe that the surrounding local society would not oppose their full integration. For example, presenting al-Samawʾal's aforementioned poem about the noble qualities of his Jewish tribe as the *Iliad* of the Arabs, the newspaper *Dijla* quoted the opening verse as a proof of the true Arabness of Jews in Iraq.[35] On 18 July 1921, one month before his coronation as King of Iraq, Amir Fayṣal (1883–1933), when addressing Jewish community leaders, said:

لا شيء في عرف الوطنيّة اسمه مسلم ومسيحيّ وإسرائيليّ، بل هناك شيء يقال له العراق [...]إنّني أطالب من أبناء وطني العراقيّين أن لا يكونوا إلّا عراقيّين لأنّنا نرجع إلى أرومة واحدة ودوحة واحدة هي دوحة جدّنا سام وكلّنا منسوبون إلى العنصر السامّيّ ولا فرق في ذلك بين المسلم والمسيحيّ واليهوديّ [...] وليس لنا اليوم إلّا واسطة القوميّة القويّة التّأثير.

> In the vocabulary of patriotism, there is no such thing as Jew, a Muslim, or a Christian. There is simply one thing called Iraq [...] I ask all the Iraqi children of my homeland to be just Iraqis, because we all belong to one origin and one tree, the tree of our ancestor Shem, and all of us related to the Semitic root, which makes no distinction between Muslim, Christian or Jew [...] Today we have but one means [to our end]: influential patriotism.[36]

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[32] Rejwan 1985: 210.

[33] Kedourie 1989: 21.

[34] *Midstream*, February-March 2001: 14.

[35] *Dijla* 8, 3 July 1921.

[36] The original text was first published in *al-ʿIrāq*, 19 July 1921. For the text of the speech, see *Fayṣal ibn al-Ḥusayn fī khuṭabihi wa-aqwālihi*. Baghdād: Maṭbaʿat al-Ḥukūma (1945: 246–249). In an address Fayṣal had delivered before the Arab Club in Aleppo on 9 June 1919, he had already emphasized that 'there are no religions or sects, for we were Arab before Moses, Mohammed, Jesus, and Abraham. We Arabs are bound together in life, separated only by death. There is no division among us except when we are buried' (al-Ḥuṣrī 1965: 231 [English translation according to al-Ḥuṣrī 1966: 113]). In January 1919, Fayṣal signed with Chaim Weizmann (1874–1952), who acted on behalf of the Zionist Organization, the Fayṣal-Weizmann Agreement (for the text of the agreement, see Antonius [1938: 437–439]). Although attempts have been made to marginalize Fayṣal's readiness

In a poem addressing the British High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel (1870–1963), the Iraqi poet Maʿrūf al-Ruṣāfī (1875–1945) wrote: 'The two people are but close relatives; in their language is the proof'.[37] The poem was composed after al-Ruṣāfī had attended on 13 December 1920, in Jerusalem a lecture on the medieval Andalusian Arab civilization delivered by the Jewish scholar Professor Avraham Shalom Yehuda (1887–1951). The lecture, at the invitation of the Mayor Rāghib al-Nashāshībī (1881–1951) of Jerusalem, was given in literary standard Arabic.[38] Testifying before the League of Nations' Mandate Commission, the High Commissioner for Iraq declared that he 'had never found such tolerance of others' races and religions as in Iraq'.[39]

Following the escalation of the national conflict in Palestine, the distinctions made by early Arab nationalists between the Jewish religion and political Zionism began to blur, especially after 1936, with the advent of Nazi propaganda and when Iraqi support for the Palestinians was joined with pan-Arab foreign policy. On 1–2 June 1941, following the attempted *coup d'état* by the pro-Nazi Rashīd ʿĀlī al-Kaylānī (1892–1965), they were victims of the *Farhūd*, when 149 of them were killed and Jewish property was looted.[40] Following the obfuscation of their role in Iraqi society by implying doubts about their loyalty, and as their life became increasingly intolerable, Jews, especially young men, were forced to choose new directions for their future. Whether as a committed way of struggle or as a kind of escapism, the shift in their thinking pushed them into joining the Zionist movement or the Communist underground. While the first struggled for the establishment of an independent Jewish state, the latter fought against the corrupt, dictatorial regime and for equal rights for all minorities. In the early 1950s, most of the Jewish-Iraqi poets, writers, and intellectuals left Iraq among the mass immigration to Israel; a much smaller number decided to seek their future in the West—only a few chose to stay in Iraq.

Before referring to the changes in the concept of identity and belonging among the Arabized Jews, especially the Iraqi-Baghdadi intellectuals

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at the time to accept the Zionist programs, even considering the agreement as a failed attempt 'to secure by fair or unfair means an Arab endorsement of the Balfour Declaration' (for example, Tibawi [1972: 315–323]), no one, to my knowledge, has gone so far as to doubt Fayṣal's good will and sincere intentions.

[37] See al-Ruṣāfī (1986: II, 327–331).

[38] Al-Ruṣāfī spent several years in Jerusalem (1918–1921) after he had accepted a job at the local Teachers' Training College.

[39] Luks 1977: 32.

[40] On the *Farhūd* see Snir (2005 [index]); and Yehuda (2017: 249–281) (providing the names of the 141 Jews killed in Baghdad and the eight Jews killed in other cities).

among them, it is necessary to present some points related to the general issue of the fragmentation of the concept of identity in the previous century.

3 Arabized Jews between interpellation and exclusion[41]

In the last section of his essay 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)' (1971),[42] the French Marxist philosopher Louis Pierre Althusser (1918–1990) coined the term 'interpellation', theorizing the constitutive process by which individuals acknowledge and respond to ideologies, thereby recognizing themselves as subjects. Stating that (a) 'there is no practice except by and in an ideology' and (b) 'there is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects', Althusser comes to his central thesis that 'ideology interpellates individuals as subjects'.[43] To be interpellated is to identify with a particular idea or identity; it is the process by which you recognize yourself to belong to a particular identity. The process of identification creates identity, and we recognize ourselves when we are hailed—you identify me, and I become that 'me' that you have identified. I know that it is me who is being called, as I unconsciously accept the subject position and my subjectivity is thus created or modified—it is as if I had always-already been there. By 'subjectivity', I mean the inner life processes and affective states as they have been expressed in words, images, institutions, and behaviors through which people actually represent themselves to themselves and to one another. This understanding is accompanied by the awareness that subjects are themselves unfinished and unfinishable, as well as by the recognition that, because individuals are members of cross-cutting and often conflicting associations, subjectivity characterization shifts widely between multiple perspectives and no single analytic framework can fully account for the inner lives of people and their intersubjective relations.[44] When we recognize that we are being spoken to, we not only engage more deeply with the hailing, we also accept the social role being offered to us: young, white, female, gay, athletic, liberal, etc. And in the context of our present study we have Arab, Jew, Muslim, Israeli, Zionist, as well as Mizrahi, Levantine, Oriental, Sephardi, Black, etc. Speaking about terminology, it should be noted

[41] This section first appeared in Snir (2021: 123–154), but is included here in shortened version for the sake of the clarity of the analysis.

[42] Althusser 1971: 121–173.

[43] Althusser 1971: 160.

[44] Based on Biehl et al. (2007: 1–23 [introduction]). For tracing the history of some of the philosophical insights that have shaped current understandings of subjectivity, see Rorty (2007: 34–51).

that while the term 'Mizrahi' had been invented by the systems of power, it has also been used as a subversive catchword by radical militant Middle Eastern and North African Jewish intellectuals and activists to express resistance to the conception of Israel as a Zionist and Western country.[45] For the purpose of my investigation into the identities of Arabized Jews, I have broadened the scope of interpellation to encompass all human interactions.

Throughout the last three or four decades, scholars have pointed out the veritable discursive explosion around the concept of identity: the critique of the self-sustaining subject at the center of post-Cartesian Western metaphysics has been comprehensively advanced in philosophy; the question of subjectivity and its unconscious processes of formation has been developed within the discourse of a psychoanalytically influenced feminism and cultural criticism; the endlessly performative self has been advanced in celebratory variants of postmodernism; within the anti-essentialist critique of ethnic, racial, and national conceptions of cultural identity and the 'politics of location', some adventurous theoretical conceptions have been sketched in their most grounded forms. What, then, 'is the need', asks the Jamaican-born cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1932–2014) in 1996, 'for a further debate about 'identity'? Who needs it?'[46] In 2009, however, the Polish sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (1925–2017) still referred to the same 'discursive explosion' around the concept of identity that has even 'triggered an avalanche'.[47]

In the labyrinths of these theoretical and sometimes bewildering discussions about identity, one can notice that most deliberations have been conducted around two models: the first assumes that there is an essential content to any identity that is defined by a common origin or a common structure of experience. The second one, which stands at the center of the present study, emphasizes the impossibility of fully separate distinct identities. Any identity depends upon its difference from some other identity—'identity is a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the narrow eye of the negative', writes Hall, 'it has to go through the eye of the needle of the other before it can construct itself'.[48] Identity is thus always a temporary and unstable effect of relations that define identities by marking differences, which means that the multiplicity

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[45] According to Ella Shohat, one of the first of these radical thinkers, the aim is 'to re-link [our]selves with the history and culture of the Arab and Muslim world, after the brutal rupture experienced since the foundation of Israel' (1992: 121–143 [the quotation is from 141, n. 4]). See also Levy (2009: 127–172).

[46] Hall 1996: 1.

[47] Bauman 2009: 1.

[48] Hall 1991: 21.

of identities and differences and the emphasis on connections or articulations between the fragments of or differences in identities are inevitable. While the identity of someone cannot be explored or challenged without a simultaneous investigation of another, this is rarely the case in practice and most investigations in cultural studies deal with the construction of subaltern, marginalized, or dominated identities, and rarely are the two ever studied together, as mutually constitutive, as the theory would seem to dictate. All identities are thus only 'points of temporary attachment to the subject position which discursive practices construct for us'.[49] Because we are always in the process of being exposed to new interpellating machines and processes, reacting always consciously *and* unconsciously to them with our own complicated and unique singular subjectivities, there is no escape from elusiveness and fluidity. Bauman describes contemporary society as a place in which everything is elusive, and where the disorientation and insecurity caused by living in society cannot be solved by parading past certainties and established systems.[50] In other words, identities deal with the past only on the exterior level, simply because they cannot be but present- and future-oriented projects: they are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than in the process being: it is not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as 'what we might become', 'how we have been represented', and 'how that bears on how we might represent ourselves'.[51]

In the modern history of the Iraqi Jews, we may notice some processes that led already around the middle of twentieth century to the creation of embryonic forms of such singular subjectivities that some decades later would be celebrated globally among intellectual and academic circles in the West. The following analysis is based on an investigation of the subjectivities and singularities of more than 100 Iraqi-Jewish intellectuals, writers, and artists.[52] I have a solid basis for the hypothesis that the same developments have occurred among other communities of Arabized Jews as well. Because the Iraqi Jews have been the topic of my studies during the last three decades, I will concentrate here on them. Also, I will try to trace the exclusionary operations that the Iraqi Jews experienced during the last century. 'Once it is understood that subjects are formed through exclusionary operations', says the feminist theorist Joan Wallach Scott (b. 1941), 'it becomes necessary to trace the operations of that con-

[49] Hall 1996: 5–6.

[50] Bauman 2004; 2007.

[51] Hall 1996: 4.

[52] On these subjectivities, see my publications on the Iraqi Jews published during the last two decades, especially Snir (2005; 2015; 2019a).

struction and erasure'.[53] The Iraqi Jews as a whole experienced during the twentieth century at least four major processes of collective interpellation, two of them were at the same time intense exclusionary operations and erasure as well:

1. Hailing the Iraqi Jews as Arabs
2. Hailing the Iraqi Jews as 'Zionist' (= first exclusion)
3. Hailing the Iraqi Jews as 'Arabs' (= second exclusion)
4. Hailing the Iraqi Jews as one side in a binary monolithic category

The quotation marks around 'Zionist' and 'Arabs' in the second and third processes (the first and the second operations of exclusion) mean that, in each case, the hailing ascribed to them a specific identity while at the same time ignoring whether the subjectivities of the interpellated people were at all ready to positively respond to such a hailing. I have focused my investigations on the ways in which Iraqi Jews articulated their cultural preferences, defined their identities, and expressed their identification and belonging before and after their immigration to Israel. In other words, I am interested more in their subjectivities and less in the identities ascribed to them.

The first process was hailing the Iraqi Jews as Arabs. From the late nineteenth century and even after the 1917 Balfour Declaration, the Jews living in Arab societies had been hailed, in one way or another, as Arabs; they were considered part of the Arab collective, if only from the linguistic respect—they spoke Arabic. In the conclusion to his four-volume *Taʾrīkh al-Ṣiḥāfa al-ʿArabiyya* (History of the Arab Press), the pioneer scholar of Arabic journalism Philip de Ṭarrāzī (1865–1956) wrote in 1933 about Islam, Christianity, and Judaism as 'the leading religions to which the Arabic writers of the world belong'.[54] The Balfour Declaration was considered by many Arabized Jews as encapsulating the vision and hopes of only European Ashkenazi Jews. For most of the Iraqi Jews, the idea of establishing a Jewish nation-state in Palestine was at the time a far-off cloud, totally undesired. Sir Arnold Talbot Wilson (1884–1940), the Acting Civil Commissioner in Mesopotamia (1918–1920), wrote in 1936 that he discussed the Declaration with several members of the Jewish community and they remarked that Palestine was a poor country and that Jerusalem was a bad town to live in. Compared with Palestine, Mesopotamia was a paradise. 'This is the Garden of Eden', said one of the Jews, 'it is from this country that Adam was driven forth—give us a good government and

[53] Nicholson 1995: 12.
[54] Ṭarrāzī 1933: IV, 486–487.

we will make this country flourish—for us Mesopotamia is a home, a national home to which the Jews of Bombay and Persia and Turkey will be glad to come. Here shall be liberty and with it opportunity! In Palestine there may be liberty, but there will be no opportunity'.[55]

The real national vision of most of the Iraqi Jews at the time, certainly of the intellectual secular elite, was Iraqi and Arab. It was a vision that had its roots in the nineteenth century with the start of the process of secularization and when cultural barriers between the Jews and the wider local society had begun to crumble. The connection between interpellation, rhetoric, and identity was expressed, for example, by Emir Fayṣal (1883–1933) in his speech on 18 July 1921, one month before his coronation as King of Iraq, before the Jewish community leaders, in which he emphasized that 'there is no such thing as Jew, a Muslim, or a Christian. There is simply one thing called Iraq'. He asked 'all the Iraqi children of my homeland to be just Iraqis, because we all belong to one origin and one tree, the tree of our ancestor Shem, and all of us are related to the Semitic root, which makes no distinction between Muslim, Christian or Jew'.[56] Fayṣal's aim was to create 'an independent strong Arab state, which will be a cornerstone for Arab unity'—the Jewish citizens were an integral part of that vision. Sāṭiʿ al-Ḥuṣrī (1880–1968), Director General of Education in Iraq (1923–1927) and Arab nationalism's first true ideologue, argued that 'every person who is related to the Arab lands and speaks Arabic is an Arab'.[57] The Iraqi constitution of 21 March 1925 (al-Qānūn al-Asāsī al-ʿIrāqī) stated that 'there is no difference between the Iraqi people in rights before the law, even if they belong to different nationalities, religions and languages'.[58]

It is thus not surprising to find the intellectual secular elite of the Jews in Iraq rallying behind the efforts to make it a state for all its citizens—Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Even in the late 1930s, Iraqi-Jewish educator ʿEzra Ḥaddād (1900–1972) declared that 'we are Arabs before we are Jews' (*naḥnu ʿArab qabla an nakūna yahūda*).[59] On 30 July 1938, his compatriot, the poet Anwar Shāʾul (1904–1984), emphasized the Arabism

[55] Wilson 1936: I, 305–306. Wilson writes afterwards: 'Vain words, no doubt, but they concealed perhaps the seeds of economic truth'. This comment, however, was presumably added in retrospect in the light of the escalation in the national conflict in the Middle East and the increasing tension between the Jews and the Iraqi authorities.

[56] The original text was first published in *al-ʿIrāq*, 19 July 1921. See also above.

[57] See al-Ḥuṣrī 1965 [1955]: 12.

[58] For the text of the constitution, see al-Ḥusnī (1974: I, 319–334 [quotation is on 319]).

[59] Rejwan 1985: 219.

of the Iraqi Jews and their rejection of Zionism.[60] Another Iraqi-Jewish writer, Yaʿqūb Balbūl (1920–2003), indicated that 'a Jewish youth in the Arab countries expects nothing from Zionism other than colonialism and domination'.[61] The English historian of Lebanese origin Albert H. Hourani (1915–1993) wrote in 1947 that 'the Iraqi Jews, like the Oriental Jews, are for the most part not Zionists by conviction; some of them indeed profess to Arab nationalism and are hostile to Zionism'.[62] In his survey of Jewish communities in the Muslim countries of the Middle East, published in 1950, German Marxian scholar and sociologist Siegfried Landshut (1897–1968) wrote that, except for a natural interest in developments in Palestine, there has never in Iraq been any feeling of solidarity with the political aspirations of Zionism.[63] Considering themselves an integral part of Arab-Muslim culture and the Iraqi nation, Iraqi Jews were full of confidence that Iraq was their only homeland and that the Jewish community in Iraq would endure, as Iraqi-Jewish writer Shālom Darwīsh (1913–1997) was to put it, 'to the days of the Messiah'.[64]

The second process was hailing the Iraqi Jews as 'Zionist'. The German sociologist Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966) makes a distinction between two kinds of communities: on the one hand, there are 'communities of life and fate', whose members 'live together in an indissoluble attachment rather than being welded together solely by ideas or various principles'. Instances of this kind are the family and the nation: they envelop any person born into them just the way he is, from his birth through his death and even beyond his death. These communities, whose origins and purposes are irrational, devote themselves to an 'endless multiplicity of objectives, though they never find their definitive significance in any of them'. On the other hand, there are those communities whose accord is based on an idea with which they arise and perish. Their unity 'is not an imminent part of organic, growing life, but is fully encompassed by a specific concept that will come to life through them'.[65]

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[60] Darwaza 1993: III, 545.

[61] *Al-Akhbār*, 21 July 1938; cited in Maʿrūf (1976: II, 70), and Rejwan (1985: 219). It was argued that notices published by well-known Jews in the Iraqi press during the 1930s declaring that they were loyal to their motherland and that they had no connections with Zionist activities were initiated by the authorities against the background of the anti-Jewish atmosphere created following the disturbances in Palestine (Kedourie 1989: 28–29). The same, of course, might be said about the testimonies included in *Iraqi Jews Speak for Themselves*. Baghdad: Dar al-Jumhuriyah Press (1969).

[62] Hourani 1947: 104.

[63] Landshut 1950: 45.

[64] Darwīsh 1980: 83.

[65] Kracauer 1995: 144.

For the Jews, Iraqi society was certainly of the first kind: it was a community of life and fate whose members had been living together by means of an indissoluble attachment. Suddenly, however, that community was denied to them and they were excluded as the 'Others'—they were not considered anymore *true* Iraqis and *real* Arabs. It was the Balfour Declaration that started a process that interpellated the Iraqi Jews into Zionism while at the same time interpellating the Arab Muslims and Christians as a unified Arab community calling upon themselves to operate exclusionary operations against Jews. Because of the escalation of the Arab-Jewish conflict over Palestine during the late 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, the Iraqi-Arab identity of the Jews, which had been firmly consolidated during the 1920s and 1930s, underwent a speedy fragmentation in a way that left them no alternative but to emigrate. Among the immigrants to Israel we can hardly find even one, no matter what his political point or view, who did not lament that exclusion. Here, it should be noted that the controversy over whether the Arabized Jews lived before the Balfour Declaration in perfect harmony with Muslims and Christians or whether this is only a myth current among left-wing intellectuals is irrelevant. At any event, unlike popular conceptions, the well-known myth of a 'Golden Age' and harmonious Muslim-Jewish relations prior to the rise of Zionism as well as the 'neo-lachrymose' counter-myth, which views Jewish history under Arab Islam as a story of intolerance, persecution, and an unending nightmare of oppression and humiliation are both highly exaggerated, and no serious professional scholar of Jewish history under Islam holds to either of them.[66]

After the immigration of the Iraqi Jews to Israel, their subjectivities, and certainly those of their offspring, were gradually 'enriched' by new components of identity, the most outstanding of which were the Zionist, the Israeli, and the Hebrew layers of identity. No Arabized Jew who immigrated to Israel could resist the strong interpellating processes administrated by the state, even not those in whose subjectivities the Arab component was dominant. The new Zionist-Israeli rhetoric of identity overwhelmingly swept up all of them. The Zionist and Israeli processes of interpellation lead us to both the third and fourth processes of interpellation that the Iraqi Jews have experienced. These processes were somehow temporally overlapping, though I refer to them here as two dif-

[66] On this issue and the question about whether the Arabized Jews suffered discrimination as a minority within Muslim society or enjoyed a perfect symbiotic relationship, see the debate in *Tikkun*: Cohen (1991: 55–60); Stillman (1991: 60–64). Joel Beinin rejects both approaches and opts instead for a Marxist interpretation of the political events and the question of identity (see especially Beinin [1998: 1–28]).

ferent processes. The third process was the hailing of them as a population in need of 'education' due to their *Arabness* (= primitiveness), and, at the same time, the fourth process was the hailing of them, together with all other communities of Arabized Jews in Israel, as a monolithic population.

The third process was the hailing of the Iraqi Jews as 'Arabs'. This process of interpellation is thus the second exclusion of the Iraqi Jews, and this time it was in Israel. After their exclusion in Iraq, and after the Iraqi authorities deprived them of claiming property rights left at home, they realized that they were excluded again, and now precisely because of their Arabness, by none other than their coreligionists, the Ashkenazim, who had been involved in the construction of the Israeli state and Hebrew society from an earlier stage. Before their immigration, they had found themselves excluded because of their *Jewish* identity, and now, in Israel, they found themselves excluded because of their *Arab* identity. Both exclusions were based on a kind of unspoken agreement and a substantial identification of interests between both national movements, Zionism and Arab nationalism, for they saw *Jewishness* as equated with *Zionism* and later even with *Israelines* to the point that the three identities came to be considered by both movements as virtually synonymous. In order to be part of the new Israeli-Jewish-Zionist collective, the immigrants were encouraged to change their Arab names, to stop using Arabic in public spaces, to train themselves to adopt Israeli-Hebrew culture, to remodel their family patterns, and to 'refine' their lifestyles. In retrospect, many of the Arabized Jews would consider this process as a 'cultural ethnic cleansing'.[67] They were Jews, and they immigrated to the state of the Jews, but they discovered that Israeli society was not for them a community in which they could live together with the others, in Kracauer's terms, in 'an indissoluble attachment'. For most of them, certainly after their very immigration, the bond with the other Jewish majority members was only a bond of religion.

But there was another process, simultaneous and overlapping, to that process: the second exclusion was accompanied by labeling the immigrants as one side in an evaluative binary. The fourth process was hailing the Iraqi Jews as 'Arabs'. For the purpose of my argumentation, there is no difference if the monolithic category is Sephardim, *ʿEdot Mizrah*, Mizrahim, Easterners, Orientals, Levantines, or any derogatory name like Blacks, Franks, or the journalist Arye Gelblum's (1921–1993) description of one community of Arabized Jews as 'people whose primitivism is at a peak, whose level of knowledge is one of virtually absolute ignorance,

[67] For example, Rabeeya (2000: 27).

and worse, who have little talent for understanding anything intellectual'.[68] Now, it is widely recognized that any such monolithic category is inadequate, but this insight of the inadequateness of the monolithic hailing had been always a matter of fact among all communities of Arabized Jews, certainly among the Iraqis. In their reflections on the study of Middle Eastern Jewries within the context of Israeli society, the Israeli scholars Harvey E. Goldberg (b. 1939) and Chen Bram (b. 1962) showed how 'analysis based on explicit and implicit binary models skews the understanding of some historical developments'. Furthermore, 'critical approaches have provided useful insights into how hegemonic structures have excluded Jews defined as 'Eastern,' but have been less successful in documentation and grasping developments reflecting the distinctiveness and creative categories and assumptions of those groups themselves'.[69] From my investigations into the identities of the Arabized Jews from Iraq—and I do not have any reason to believe that something fundamentally different happened with Arabized Jews emigrating from other places—it is clear that Goldberg and Bram were too cautious in their critical comments about the binary-oriented analytical methods and critical approaches of other scholars.

Such monolithic categories were never adopted by Arabized Jews in the way they were meant to interpellate and hail them by the systems of power. From the point of view of the Iraqi Jews, this process of interpellation has been the weakest among all four processes. But it has served the aims of the state and of the dominant and hegemonic systems and structures, precisely as any exclusionary operations serve the aims of any state or any system of power. The influence of such a process was very significant, but by no means did it go in the direction that the interpellating systems desired, particularly because it coincided with the above-mentioned global processes that created the tendency to escape into inessential subjectivities and to prefer singularities, and also because it did not take into account the double exclusion of the previous two processes. Unfortunately, for political and ideological reasons, scholars have preferred mostly so far to emphasize only one side of that double exclusion—either that exercised in the Arab countries before the Jews' immigration, or that exercised in Israel after their immigration. Measured in their combined effect, the significance of both exclusionary operations cannot be underestimated. Most of the Iraqi Jews realized that what was very convenient for the state might be convenient for them as well as long as they can behave as singularities. What is the dif-

[68] *Haaretz*, 22 April 1949.

[69] Goldberg and Bram 2007: 227–256 (quotations are on 242 and 247, respectively).

ference if I am personally hailed as Mizrahi, Sephardic, Easterner, *ʿEdot Mizrah*, Iraqi, Frank, Black, or any other identity ascribed to me (and in person I have faced *all* those very labels), if I insist in my personal life to behave according to my own singularity without affirming, in my own subjectivity, any stable identity?

4 Language and identity

The global developments were not fully effective during the middle of the twentieth century, but the contemporary political, social, and cultural circumstances had prepared the Iraqi Jews to gradually develop a negative sensitivity toward the notion of a stable identity. If it were only the first exclusion, it would have been sufficient for them to be aware that belonging and identity were not set in stone, and that they were not secured by a lifelong guarantee. But what were they to expect after being excluded again in their very promised homeland, a land 'promised' by both those who pulled them—the Zionists—as well as by those who pushed them—the Iraqi authorities and the Arab national activists? Was there any chance for them to think that belonging and identity were set in stone? Following that very double exclusion, and after adapting and adjusting to the new Israeli society, they found themselves, separately and not collectively, preferring to assert their own singularities and, at the same time, to reject any essential identity. To paraphrase a declaration by writer Sami Michael (b. 1926), each chose to build his own unique 'state' consisting of only one citizen—himself.[70] During less than half a century, the Iraqi Jews had witnessed a rapid process by which their Iraqi-Arab-Jewish identity was firmly consolidated (1920s–1940s), which was only to be followed by another process that resulted in its speedy fragmentation (1950–1951). Many hoped that their uprooting from Iraq might be a blessing in disguise, dreaming that their immigration to the new Jewish land would guarantee for them a full integration into a unified new Israeli-Jewish identity without renouncing their Arabness. Instead of that, they were left excluded from both old and new identities.

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[70] In the documentary film *Forget Baghdad: Jews and Arabs—The Iraqi Connection* (produced by Dschoint Ventschr, Zurich, 2002), Michael says: 'When I first arrived here in Israel, I decided to found a state called [the State of] Sami Michael. [There has been] an ongoing fight between [the State of] Israel and [the State of] Myself. Of course, both the state and myself wanted to be [victorious]. But today I can say that I have won' (this is the written translation of his Arabic original text, which appears in the subtitles of the film with necessary modifications. The exact wording of the original Arabic spoken text was slightly different). On the film, made by the Iraqi Shiite exile filmmaker Samīr Jamāl al-Dīn (b. 1955), see Tsoffar (2006: 133–143), and Snir (2015: 140, 147, 174).

It was thus the absurdity of both aforementioned exclusionary operations that paved the way to the rejection of the notion of fixed identity, simply because each of these operations was aiming at the heart of a *major* component of their Iraqi-Jewish identity: in Iraq during the late 1940s, precisely when the Jews felt themselves *more Arab and Iraqi than Jewish*, they were excluded as the Other in a way that left them no alternative but to immigrate to the state of the Jews. In Israel, precisely when they should have felt themselves *more Jewish than Arab and Iraqi*, they were excluded as the Other because they were Iraqis and Arabs. But, now, unlike the first exclusion, there was no another abode that would serve as a new promised haven. The political circumstances in the Middle East, which were the direct cause of that double exclusion, accelerated among many of the immigrants a tendency, which at the time was globally and universally still in its infancy, to reject in principle the notion of stable and fixed identities, to assert their particular singularities, and to search for alternative forms of identification, mostly various kinds of inessential solidarities and sense of belonging. The local, regional, and global developments, sometimes simultaneous and overlapping, served as a fertile ground for the formation among many of them of such a form of subjectivity that responded to the natural human need for identification and belonging and that, at the same time, was flexible enough to provide them with some shield against additional frustrations and disappointments. Turning to their own singularity was their preferred option but not by default. It was a conscious choice that fit the local, global, and, in most cases, personal circumstances of the Iraqi Jews.

We can see the same process even with the Iraqi-Jewish intellectuals who preferred to immigrate to the West, the prominent among them was the Iraqi-Jewish author Naïm Kattan (1928–2021) whose literary and intellectual experience has been another testimony to demise of Arab-Jewish culture and identity. Kattan was the only Iraqi-Jewish author who achieved an international literary reputation, even more than the Iraqi-Jewish authors in Israel who continued to write in Arabic or shifted to writing in Hebrew. His quasi-autobiographical novel *Adieu, Babylone* (1975)[71] that attempted to recapture and reinvent salient moments of

[71] The novel was first published in French (Kattan 1975) and appeared in 1976 in an English translation (Kattan 1980 [1976]). Asked why *Farewell, Babylon* and not *Farewell, Baghdad* as a title for the novel, Kattan said that 'it was not *Farewell, Baghdad* because Baghdad continues, Iraq continues. But Babylon has ended' (Dahab 2009: 71). In 2005, a new English edition was published, this time with an added subtitle, *Coming of Age in Jewish Baghdad* (Kattan 2005). Later, Kattan added two additional volumes, which presented a sort of 'transcontinental trilogy': the second volume of the trilogy, *Les Fruits arrachés* (Kattan 1977), was translated in 1979 under the title *Paris Interlude* (Kattan 1979),

the unnamed narrator's life includes, for example, a dramatization of the aforementioned *Farhūd* pogrom carried out against Jews in June 1941. Kattan was then only 13 but even these bloody events did by no means change his own Iraqi patriotism and preferences of Iraqi nationalism and Arab culture: 'We were united to our Muslim and Christian brothers. At last we were going to forget our distinguishing marks, tear down fences. We would reject any grounds for discord, refuse to assign malicious intentions to our companions'.[72] Referring to his activities at the time, Kattan saw himself as a faithful son of the new Iraqi nation: 'I wrote in Arabic and considered myself as among the creators of the literature in my homeland'.[73] However, after traveling to Paris and then his settling down in Montreal, he stopped writing in Arabic, shifted to French and integrating into the Canadian society, he became one of the most prominent Jewish-Francophone writers: Kattan may be compared only to the North-African Jewish authors like the Egyptian-French writer and poet Edmond Jabès (1912–1991), the French-Tunisian writer Albert Memmi (1920–2020), and the Algerian-French writer and translator Albert Bensoussan (b. 1935).

Kattan's shift to writing in French, which was so decisive that three of his books were translated into Arabic without any involvement on his behalf,[74] was accompanied by what, in retrospect, seems to be a personal process of consciously developing a more complicated enriched identity under the impact of the new temporal and spatial circumstances in his new exile in which he was living and active in. After his immigration from

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while the third volume, *La Fiancée promise* (Kattan 1983) has yet to be translated into English. The second volume of the trilogy sees the protagonist narrator, Meir—he is never named in the first volume—in Paris, studying at the Sorbonne, while the third volume is about protagonist's 1954 immigration to Canada, where he settles and works in Ottawa and in Montréal (on the trilogy, see Dahab [2009: 70–78]).

[72] Kattan 1980: 149.

[73] Qaṭṭān 1970: 166–167; 1997: 150.

[74] Two of Kattan's novels were translated into Arabic by the Tunisian poet Ādam Fatḥī (b. 1957) (Qaṭṭān 1999 [unfortunately Michel Tournier's preface was omitted from the Arabic version]; and Qaṭṭān 2006 (The original is Kattan 1991)—the Arabic versions of both novels are accurate and most readable, moreover, the reader does not feel that the original novels had been written in French and not in Arabic. The fact that the author is known as a Jewish writer and that his name does not leave any doubt as for his religious affiliation have made the circulation and reading of both novels very limited, as happened with all Arabic fiction written during the twentieth century by Jews. Also, all critics who have written about the novels by no means referred to their poetic traits and were satisfied in general with only the discussion of these aspects related to Kattan as Jewish author who immigrated from Iraq. If the novels had been published by Iraqi Muslim or Christian author, they would have been probably regarded among the canonical Arabic novels of the twentieth century.

Baghdad, Kattan frequently emphasized the need of any human being to change frequently fixed spaces and to prefer fluidity of identities such as in his statement: 'I do not accept the fixity of safe places or the comfort of certitudes'.[75] Furthermore, unlike his tendency while in Baghdad to distant himself from Jewish religion and to stress his Iraqi patriotism and Arab cultural preferences, the French-Canadian cultural and spatial identity paradoxically strengthened the Jewish cultural layers of Kattan's own identity mainly because of the attitude towards him and the expectations of the intellectual French-Canadian-Quebecer community he had gladly joined. One can hardly think of Kattan as an exile in Montreal, certainly not from the point of view of his own feeling, as it was illustrated in his writing and sayings. The Jewish writer of Egyptian origin André Aciman (b. 1951) defines exile not as someone who just has lost his home but 'someone who can't find another, who can't think of another. […] Some people bring exile with them the way they bring it upon themselves wherever they go'.[76] Unlike Aciman, Kattan found another home, another language and tried *not* to bring his exile to his new physical, social, intellectual, cultural, and literary space. To sum up, Kattan's shifting to writing in French was accompanied by a process of enriching his own personal identity: from being a secular Jew with a solid fixed Arab-Iraqi identity in Baghdad, he gradually adopted since he arrived in Montreal a Canadian-Quebecer-Jewish French-Arab-Iraqi fluid subjectivity.

Comparing Kattan with the aforementioned Iraqi-Jewish-Israeli writer Sammy Michael (b. 1926), who immigrated to Israel and shifted to writing in Hebrew, Stephanie Tara Schwartz writes that Kattan's *Adieu, Babylone* and Michael's *Ḥasūt* [*Refuge*] (1977)[77] elaborate the difficulties of Arabized Jews fitting into the idea of Jews as a homogeneous group:

> These works demonstrate the tension of being dispersed from two homelands and the impossibility of ever resolving the conflict between two relationships without breaking down the 'stable' boundaries of territory in land, identity, and thought. In both works the writer is proffered as a character that navigates across chaos without permanently settling in any territory. Only in loneliness does the character realize the constructedness of territories of identity that prohibits the possibility of a permanent refuge in an imagined homeland. The acknowledgment of this loneliness, of one's unsettledness in the chaos of all possibilities, and of ideas in the madness

[75] Kattan 1971 (1970): 181; 1972: 188 (English translation); Qaṭṭān 1997: 165 (Arabic translation). Cf. Dahab (2009: 87).

[76] Aciman 1999: 22.

[77] Michael 1977.

> of conversation is necessary to enable thinking beyond the confinement of exclusionary territories such as 'Arab' versus 'Jew'.[78]

Michael's fluidity was expressed in many of his literary works as well as in his various activities, declarations, and statements from the time he had immigrated to Israel. One of the most prominent of his declarations was the one he made in the aforementioned documentary film *Forget Baghdad: Jews and Arabs—The Iraqi Connection* (2002):

> When I first arrived here in Israel, I decided to found a state called 'Sammy Michael'. [There has been] an ongoing fight between [the State of] Israel and [the state of] myself. Of course, both the state and myself wanted to be [victorious]. But today I can say that I have won.[79]

It seems that Kattan also established another *state* called 'Naïm Kattan', just as we may refer to many other 'states' founded by various other Iraqi-Jewish intellectuals during the second half of the previous century.

I believe that the aforementioned analysis of the subjectivities of the Iraqi Jews is applicable as well, in one way or another, to other immigrants from Arab countries. There are of course significant differences between the Iraqi Jews and other Arabized immigrants, especially with regard to their attitude toward the Arabic language and Arab culture. But I found that the tendency toward inessential solidarities had *nothing* to do with the Iraqi Jews' well-known Arab cultural preference: it mainly had to do with the two processes of exclusion, which most—if not all—the Arabized Jews had undergone. Already in the 1950s, three decades before the global/local dialectics could be clearly noticed in Israel as well, most of the intellectuals among the Arabized immigrants felt the same dialectics but threefold: global/regional/local—and these dialectics involved their very existence: as members of the Israeli-Hebrew society, they spoke *Hebrew*, but they were also part of the *Arabic*-speaking Middle East, and, at the same time, they could not escape contemporary *global* developments. Whoever lived this double exclusion could not have adhered to any notion of a stable identity, and, if he wished to survive socially and culturally, he must have thought about the need to be flexible and adapt himself to the changing circumstances, emphasizing his own singularity in which each of the major layers of collective identities, such as Arabness,

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[78] See Schwartz (2010: 92–100).

[79] This is the written translation of his original Arabic text, which appears in the subtitles of the film, with necessary modifications. The exact wording of the original Arabic spoken text was slightly different.

Jewishness, Hebrewness, Israeliness, Zionism, and Communism, played different roles, in addition various more specific components like gender, profession, hobby, and local environment.

As for the new generation of neo-Arab-Jewish intellectuals, those radical Mizrahi leftist scholars such as Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani (b. 1952), Ella Shohat (b. 1959), and Sami Shalom Chetrit (b. 1960) and their followers, it seems that all of them adopted Arab-Jewish or Mizrahi identity as part of their identity politics in Israel, which is not, albeit not exclusively, isolated from what has appeared to be the case during the last decades as switching with the changing winds of fashion. Following the English historian Edward Hallet Carr's (1892–1982) constructive suggestion that one ought to 'to study the historian before you begin to study the facts',[80] I have studied the 'identities' of the three of the above scholars in the same way I have studied the subjectivities of the Iraqi-Jewish writers and intellectuals during the last century.[81] It is paradoxical that my investigations have led me to one solid conclusion: all of them have been recycling their identities according to changing circumstances, preferring, in one way or another, to adhere, each in their own way, to various inessential solidarities as well. All of them are moving toward what the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (b. 1942) has described as the 'coming community', which is a community of human beings devoid of any stable or fixed identity attached to them. In other words, they are not viewed, and do not see themselves, as belonging to a particular group by virtue of some essential feature of theirs. They do not have any identity in the usual sense of the term: Shenhav-Shahrabani, Shohat, and Chetrit do not think of themselves as having a core essence that is the *sine qua non* of their existence. More than that, even if they speak in favor of Arabism and Arabic, they are excellent examples of how the Arabic language has been gradually disappearing as a language spoken on a daily basis and mastered by Jews.

Proficiency in Arabic can mainly be traced now to two cases: Jews who emigrated from Arab lands having already mastered the language (and their number, of course, is rapidly decreasing), or those who make a living from their knowledge of Arabic whether in the Israeli governmental, educational, or security services (and their number, of course, is always increasing). The Jewish or Israeli canonical elite, among them these very Mizrahi intellectuals, do not see the Arabic language and Arab culture as an intellectual asset, as can be seen from their attitude toward them by their daily life and professional practice. What is more interesting is

[80] Carr 1965: 32.

[81] See the list of them in Snir (2015: 231–234).

their reluctance to master Arabic or to touch upon Arabic *Belles Lettres*, especially those literary works that were written by Jews. Even those who speak for the importance of reviving the hybrid Arab-Jewish option, their cultural identity is more a political or imported academic tool than an ethnic or cultural one. Although cultural and political identities are not necessarily dichotomous—in fact, they overlap, interact with, and dynamically compose one other—it is paradoxical that the way the radical Mizrahi intellectuals refer to the historical Arab-Jewish identity implies conceiving the notion of identity as essential; at the same time, they play down the fluidity of the subjectivities of Arab-Jewish immigrants.

One of the few exceptions that prove the rule is the aforementioned Yehouda Shenhav-Shahrabani, who in recent years has gradually learned Arabic and started to translate Arabic literature into Hebrew and has even established the *Maktūb* project for translating works of Arabic literature and culture and for making them accessible to Israeli readers. The project, an initiative of translators and scholars of Arabic, both Jews and Palestinians, grew out of the translators' forum that was established at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute in 2015. The project offers 'a hybrid model in which Jewish Israelis and Palestinian Arabs translate together through dialogue and speech, with linguistic flexibility and a multiplicity of versions intended to connect, instead of dividing the linguistic space and breaking the linear and delayed connection between source and translation'.[82] However, the fact that this project published many books in Hebrew translation but nobody has presented yet any critical and serious assessment of its conception and literary products, despite its fundamental shortcomings and the level of some of the translations, is another testimony to the demise of Arab-Jewish identity culture.[83]

5 Biased scholarship discourse

Arabic literature produced by Jews is another victim of the conflict that has been and continues to be played out in Palestine, especially following the disappearance of the distinction between 'Jew' and 'Zionist' in Arab

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[82] Shenhav-Shahrabani and Mendel 2019: 13.

[83] On the *Maktūb* project, see also the various contributions in *Journal of Levantine Studies* 9 (2), 2019, entitled 'Translation and the Colonial Encounter Maktoob מכתוב مكتوب', and edited by Yehouda Shenhav-Sharabani and Yonatan Mendel. For a limited critical approach to the project, and not only because the writer does not have any knowledge of Arabic or Arabic literature, see Benni Ziffer's (b. 1953) essay in *Haaretz*, 2 June 2021. Accessed 24 November 2021. http://www.haaretz.co.il/literature/study/.premium-REVIEW-1.9864452. On Ziffer's tendentious agenda toward Arab culture, see Snir (2019a: 128–129).

nationalist discourse and the attitude of the hegemonic Zionist narrative toward Arab culture. Since the early 1950s, the literature of twentieth-century Arabized Jews produced in Arabic has gradually been relegated entirely to the margins of Arabic literature. Political, national, and cultural reasons are behind that process and behind the paucity of scholarly attention paid to this literature over the years. Now, unfortunately, only rarely can we hear Muslim and Christian authors and intellectuals regret the fact that the Jewish voice in Arab literature has been lost.[84] Moreover, most of them hardly know that such a voice ever existed. From the scholarly point of view, it is important to emphasize the following:

First, there were Jews that identified themselves as Arab, but no Jewish group has ever declared itself to be an Arab-Jewish community. We can only find retrospective allusions to Jewish communities who lived in Arab societies as such. It goes without saying that no Arab-Jewish community currently exists.

Second, all current references to any historical Arab-Jewish identity do not aim to celebrate the past but only to express present and future ideological and political desires and aspirations.

Third, Arab-Jewish identity has been paradoxically reinvented precisely when those who could have been mostly interpellated as Arabized Jews were in the process of escaping such a recruitment. More than that, the interpellating machine is now being administrated by people who pretend to be such, but never had the potentiality of such an identity.

Fourth, most of the individuals who, during the last decades, have been identifying themselves as Arabized Jews have been only using such an identity as a war cry against Zionism.

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[84] The Lebanese writer and critic Ilyās Khūrī (Elias Khoury) (b. 1948) considers the 'Jewish-Arab voice' a central voice in Arab culture; therefore, its loss has been a severe blow to that culture (interview with Anton Shammās in *Yediot Aḥronoth*, 15 March [2002: 60]). Cf. the Arabic version of the interview is in *Mashārif* (Haifa) 17 (Summer 2002: 237–238). It is ironic that, about six years earlier, Khūrī himself threatened to walk out of the hall during a conference on Arabic literature in Carthage (Tunis) when the Israeli writer Sami Michael, himself an Arabized Jew, was prepared to come up on the stage to give his lecture. Michael's anger was expressed in his essay 'Shylock in Carthage', *The Jewish Quarterly* (Winter 1994–1995: 71–72). Under the title 'The Experience of Oriental Jews in Israel: Have We Lost for Ever the Jews of Iraq?' the Jordanian writer Ibrāhīm Gharāyiba (b. 1962) laments the failure of the Arabs to have the Arabized Jews, especially the Iraqis, as an integral part of Arab society and culture (*al-Ḥayāt* [25 July 2002: 25]. The article appeared in English translation in *The Scribe*, the journal of Babylonian Jewry published by the Jewish Exilarch's Foundation in London, 72 [September 1999: 25]. However, the translation omits some sentences in which the writer argues that the above failure has only served Israeli and Zionist aggression against the Arabs).

Fifth, the radical Mizrahi intellectuals have succeeded to provoke 'real' Arabized Jews, mostly Iraqis (e.g., Nissim Rejwan [1924–2017], Sami Michael [b. 1926], Shimon Ballas [1930–2019], Shmuel Moreh [1932–2017], and Sasson Somekh [1933–2019]), to 'reclaim' their Arab-Jewish identity and to use it as a war cry against those very radical intellectuals themselves. The Arab-Jewish 'veterans' rightly feel that, now when Arab-Jewish identity has become something to be proud of in certain circles, if there is any credit to be given for having such an identity, *they* deserve it more than anyone else.

Sixth, Muslim and Christian Arab intellectuals in general have not been paying any attention to the emergence of the new 'fashion' of Arab-Jewish identity in Israel. If they have done so, it has mostly been for political reasons and as a tool against Israel and Zionism.

From among the many authors of Arab-Jewish literature who have been active since the 1920s, only a few are still alive as the last witnesses of the Muslim-Christian-Jewish Arab symbiosis, and their direct testimonies are now irreplaceable. That is why each literary text can also be considered—at least now when many of us have known and still know some of the Arab-Jewish poets, writers, and intellectuals—as a document, even if literary and fictive, signaling the last stage of Arab-Jewish culture born more than 1,500 years ago in the deserts of pre-Islamic Arabia. The authors, the narrators, and the implied authors of the stories, and the few readers who still remain as well are the last witnesses of the binational savage flood—the unspoken 'agreement' between the two national movements, Zionism and Arab nationalism, to perform a total cleansing of Arab-Jewish culture. The national and political struggle over a small piece of territory has not hindered the two national movements from seeing eye-to-eye in this respect, although I was very much aware of the difference between them: one was inspired by European colonialism, and the other was an anticolonial venture. This flood is currently sweeping away Arab-Jewish culture toward its speedy anticipated cleansing:

هذا ما رأيناه في صباح الفيضان
نحن الشّهود على الضّفاف.

This is what we saw, the morning of the flood
We, the witnesses on the banks.[85]

[85] Borrowed from the poem 'Shuhūd ʿalā al-ḍifāf' ('Witnesses on the Banks') by the Iraqi poet Sarkūn Būluṣ (1944–2007) (Boulus 1997: 6–9).

As for the scholarship on Arab-Jewish identity and culture, it seems that its fate would be by no means any different. From my scholarly experience during the last 35 years, the number of scholars who have been expressing any interest in investigating this topic and, at the same time, have the necessary skills to do that (including the mastery of Arabic and Hebrew) has been gradually dwindling. Moreover, the scholarship on Arab-Jewish culture has frequently been moving into non-academic spaces, neglecting unbiased scholarly discourse. It is not rare to see now scholars sometimes turning to emotions in order to support perceptions that are scientifically unsubstantiated, creating a discourse directed by ideologically, politically, and socially unrelated motives. Scholars who are still insisting that Jewish-Arab identity is still blooming and that the relevant culture is flourishing among Jews do not act as impartial academics and researchers but adopt post-truth populist strategies.

One example is the controversy surrounding Arab-Jewish identity and culture that has emerged among a research group known as 'Jewish Life in Modern Islamic Contexts', which convened during the 2018–2019 academic year at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. Summarizing my experience as a member of this research group, I published a short essay in *Haaretz* entitled 'Arab-Jewish Identity: For a Long Time, There Has Been No Such Thing'.[86] Four of the fellows of the group, Yoram Meital, Orit Bashkin, Nancy Berg, and Yuval Evri, responded to my article in an essay[87] that basically uses fallacious straw-man arguments, attributing to me distorted weaker arguments and misrepresenting my positions, only to 'successfully' defeat them. I published a detailed response to their essay in which I referred in detail to their fallacious straw-man arguments,[88] but, surprisingly (or not), the four scholars responded with another article full (again!) of new fallacious straw-man arguments but this time much more sophisticated in their misleading methods.[89] Examining *all* the publications of the four scholars, it is beyond any doubt that the response had been written by Bashkin alone, with only minor contributions by the other three—she is the only one whose studies illustrate her ability to produce such a detailed analytical and knowledgeable response on the topic. In order to expose all the false arguments included in the response itself, an article of several dozens of pages is needed, but perhaps it is appropriate to quote here Norman A. Stillman's comment on Bashkin's basic approach

[86] Snir 2019b.
[87] *Haaretz*, 25 May 2019.
[88] See Snir (2020: 317–352).
[89] *Jamaʿa: Interdisciplinary Journal of Middle East Studies* 25 (2020): 353–378.

as a cultural studies scholar who interprets texts but does not fully take into account the actual events, people, and politics associated with them:

> Bashkin from the very outset acknowledges her intellectual debt to contrarians such Sami Zubaida, Ella Shohat, and Gilbert Achcar, and the ghost of Edward Said often lurks in the background unnamed. Previous historical work on the Jews of the Islamic world is reduced to an oversimplified caricature: 'a model of harmonious coexistence' or 'a tale of perpetual persecution', and 'alongside these ideas, an orientalist [*sic*] interpretation'.[90] More seriously, there is an element of naïve wishful thinking which constantly views positive examples of Jewish acculturation and patriotism, on the one hand, and the openness of some Arab liberal intellectuals and politicians, on the other, as proving that the dark forces of radical Arab nationalism were not really as powerful as they appeared in retrospect.[91]

Another example is the responses to the exhibition 'Juifs d'Orient, une Histoire Plurimillénaire' ('Jews from Islamic Lands, a Multi-Millennial History') held at the Institut du Monde Arabe (Arab World Institute) in Paris.[92] In an open letter entitled 'Culture Is the Salt of the Earth and We Shall Not Allow It to Be Used for Normalizing Oppression' and signed by more than 260 Arab intellectuals, writers, and artists, most of them Palestinian,[93] they called the Arab World Institute to retract the signals it has sent through the exhibition, 'which indicate a trend toward normalization—an attempt to impose Israel as if it were a normal state in the Arab region'. The Arab World Institute, according to the open letter, betrays its intellectual mission by adopting this normalization approach that is 'one of the worst forms of coercive and immoral political abuse of art as a tool to legitimize colonialism and oppression'. It is also

> a betrayal of intellectual and moral honesty because *it deliberately conflates Arab Jews and the Jews of the 'Orient' on the one hand, and Israel as a colonial and apartheid regime on the other*. Israel, in coordination with the global Zionist movement, has not only ethnically cleansed most of the indigenous

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[90] Bashkin 2012: 9.

[91] Stillman 2014: 149–151.

[92] The exhibition was held between 24 November 2021 and 13 March 2022; see http://www.imarabe.org/en/expositions/juifs-d-orient. Accessed 21 January 2022.

[93] Among the signatories the aforementioned Ella Shohat and Ammiel Alcalay (b. 1956), both of them scholars of Arab-Jewish culture and activists of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement working 'to end international support for Israel's oppression of Palestinians and pressure Israel to comply with international law' (http://usacbi.org/endorsers/. Accessed 21 January 2022).

> Palestinian people, colonizing their land and parts of their Arab heritage and culture, it has also appropriated the Jewish component in Arab culture and attempted to Zionize it and Israelize it, as a prelude to extracting it from its authentic roots and using it to serve its colonial project in the region. *The culture of Arab Jews is an integral part of Arab culture, and the process of severing it from its roots is an attempt to destroy part of Arab memory and history*. The continuation of this normalization approach would cause the Institute to lose not only the intellectuals and artists whose creative cultural output it has hosted for decades, but also the Arab public in general.[94]

The exhibition and the open letter of the Arab intellectuals, writers, and artists did not stir any interest among the Arabized Jews or their offspring in Israel or outside it. Also, the fact that the open letter was published in Arabic, French, and English but *not in Hebrew* is proof that the signatories to the open letter had by no means any interest in communicating with the communities of Arabized Jews and their offspring, which can only be approached now in Hebrew and through Israeli media. Moreover, the open letter, despite its poor scholarly foundations, has not aroused any responses or reactions even from the scholarly community of Arab-Jewish culture or Arab culture in general with the exception of a Hebrew essay by Moshe Behar of the University of Manchester and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite from New York University more than a month after the publication of the letter and in a marginal platform: *Haokets: Critical Platform on Socioeconomic, Political, Media, Cultural and Other Issues in Israel and Beyond*.[95] Although the scholarly foundations of the open letter are very weak to the point that the persons who prepared it seem to have not read the updated studies on the topic, let alone investigated it themselves, Behar and Ben-Dor Benite in their response by no means challenged its scholarly foundations but were satisfied to protest only against the *political agenda* of the open letter:

> התנועה הציונית האירופית הועידה למזרחים/ות תפקיד היסטורי אחד: להיות קורבנות של הערבים. המסמך על התערוכה בפריז מועיד לנו תפקיד היסטורי דומה: להיות קורבנות של הציונות. ואולם סך כל ההתפתחויות שיכולנו לתאר כאן בקצרה בלבד מחייב אותנו להצהיר ברורות: יהודי ערב של המאה ה-21 מסרבים להיות יהודים על פי התנאים שהועידה להם הציונות האשכנזית ומסרבים להיות ערבים על פי קווי המתאר שמועידה להם הקבוצה המרשימה של חותמי מסמך הפאן-ערבי, יהיה זה במודע או במובלע.

[94] See http://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfo5DR7RGXkbLw0182jwaW-N8Qu40lK-cx46uR9euvWVnddX-Q/viewform. 6 December 2021. Accessed 21 January 2022 (my emphasis).

[95] *Haokets*, 10 January 2022.

> The European Zionist movement conferred on the Mizrahim one historical role: to be victims of the Arabs. The document on the exhibition in Paris gives us a similar historical role: to be victims of Zionism. However, the total developments we could describe here only briefly require us to state clearly: The Arab Jews of the twenty-first century refuse to be Jews according to the conditions imposed on them by Ashkenazi Zionism and refuse to be Arabs according to the outline indicated, consciously or implicitly, by the impressive group of signers on the Pan-Arab document.

Nothing in their response refers to the poor scholarship the open letter was based on, although, as indicated above, Muslim and Christian Arab intellectuals in general do not pay any attention to the cultural aspect of Arab-Jewish identity unless it may be used as a tool against Israel and Zionism. The response of Behar and Ben-Dor Benite illustrates that they are also interested only in politics or identity politics but not at all in culture, literature, and art.

In one way or another, the scholarship on Arabic literature relevant to the issues discussed in the present article has been moving into non-academic spaces without at least even trying to stick to unbiased academic discourse, which unfortunately sometimes is turned into mere preaching directed by unrelated ideological, political, social, or even opportunistic motives. Nevertheless, one fact can by no means be denied: the vision embedded in the aforementioned dictum 'Religion is for God, the Fatherland is for everyone' was the product of a very limited period, a very confined space, and a very singular history. It lived to the age of a sturdy human being, by this rare combination of time, space, and history, before disappearing and being forgotten, at least for the foreseeable future.

6 Conclusion: 'An alienated history'

The aforementioned documentary film *Forget Baghdad: Jews and Arabs—The Iraqi Connection* (2002) epitomizes the demise not only of Arab-Jewish identity and culture but also of its scholarship, certainly among the Jews. The film revolves around the life of five Iraqi Arabized Jews: Mūsa Ḥūrī (1924–2010), Sami Michael (b. 1926), Shimon Ballas (1930–2019), Samīr Naqqāsh (1938–2004), and Ella Shohat (b. 1959). Although it is common to describe the Iraqi Jews in Israel as a unique 'Mizrahi' collective well integrated into Israeli-Jewish society and one that is inseparable from the Israeli middle class, in fact as what has been described as a great 'success story',[96] one can easily notice that, except for their common ethnic origins,

[96] See Meir-Glitzenstein (2015: 107–121).

the five aforementioned authors and intellectuals hardly have anything essential in common. The differences between the common layers of identity that all of them share, such as Iraqiness and Arabness, are more significant than the differences between the layers of identity such as Israeliness and Hebrewness, that they share with their non-Arabized Israeli-Jewish counterparts. For example, what Naqqāsh considered as true basic Arab cultural characteristics is totally different from what is seen by Shohat as being true basic Arab characteristics—in fact, she does not master Arabic at all and cannot read in the original his literary texts! On the other hand, if we compare most of Sami Michael's Hebrew novels with most contemporary Hebrew novels by any leftist writer of his generation, it would probably be hard to find essential differences between their literary, cultural, and ideological narratives.

The corpus of Arab *Belles Lettres* written by Jews during the twentieth century has hardly become wider during the last two decades. Furthermore, even the Judeo-Arabic tradition (Judeo-Arabic dialects written in Hebrew) waned with the decline of Jewish communities in Arab-controlled lands. Jews do not now write Arabic literature, and if they do so at all their works are not published—no one is interested in such writing anymore. For the last 35 years, I have been closely investigating the whole corpus of Arab-Jewish poems, stories, novels, plays, and memoirs written since the 1920s—until the last decades. I was able to also discuss my arguments with Arab-Jewish authors who had highly contributed to the scholarship on the topic, such as the aforementioned late authors Nissīm Rijwān, Shimon Ballas, Shmuel Moreh, and Sasson Somekh. Now, you can hardly find a scholar of Arab-Jewish culture whose scholarship is based on direct knowledge and experience of this culture. Most of the scholars publishing in the field adopt post-truth populist strategies and are more interested in identity politics than in Arab-Jewish culture and identity.

The tragedy of the demise of Arab-Jewish culture has been determined and constrained by broader political, ideological, social, and cultural realities. The writings of the last Arab-Jewish authors and the studies of the relevant scholars encourage their readers to rethink the recent Arab-Jewish cultural past, and perhaps the entire history of Arab-Jewish culture since the rise of Islam. Here, the Nigerian Chinua Achebe's (1930–2013) novel *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) may provide us with an insightful understanding of the last stage of Arab-Jewish identity and culture before its total demise. Pondering the fate of the two protagonists, the narrator wonders:

> Were they not in fact *trailed travellers* whose journeys from start to finish had been *carefully programmed* in advance by *an alienated history*? If so, how many

> more doomed voyagers were already in transition just sitting out, faces fresh with illusions of duty-free travel and happy landings ahead of them?[97]

As these protagonists are supposed to be 'trailed travellers' whose journeys 'had been carefully programmed' by 'an alienated history', we may rethink the past of Arab-Jewish culture by pondering the tragedy of its demise, as illustrated by the figures of its 'last Mohicans' among the Arab-Jewish authors[98] as it were: were they not in fact 'trailed travellers' whose journeys from start to finish had been carefully programmed in advance by 'an alienated history'?

For me, retrospectively, after more than three decades of investigating Arab-Jewish culture and identity in the context of the general Arab culture, the answer is definitely 'yes'. But, unlike the assumption in Achebe's novel, there are by no means 'more doomed voyagers' already in transition along the Arab-Jewish cultural path, certainly not voyagers 'with illusions of duty-free travel and happy landings ahead of them'. When the Iraqi-Jewish journalist and social activist Nīrān al-Baṣṣūn (Niran Bassoon) (b. 1957) refers to the literary activities of her Iraqi-Jewish parents—Salīm al-Baṣṣūn (1927–1995) and Maryam al-Mullā (al-Baṣṣūn) (1927–2013)—she does not have any 'illusions of duty-free travel and happy landings ahead of them'. Her mother's verses that she recently published on her Facebook page do not leave any doubt that their dear homeland has been lost and that Arab-Jewish culture is dying out before our eyes:

> وين أنت يا عراقي الحبيب، لوين رحلت؟
> وين دجلة إللي من ميّها الصّافي شربت؟
> وين الجزرة إللي على رملها گعدت؟
> گصگصوا أوصالك وأنت سكتت
> تشرّدوا أحبابك بالغرب وأنت طحت
> ودنّسوا الأوباش ترابك وأنت رضخت
> دوّرت عليك بكلّ بلاد الرحت
> وسألت عنك كلّمن شفت
> ما حدا دلاني وين أنت صرت
> حبّك بگلبي معشعش گد ما عشت
> وراح أبقى مخلصة إلك حتّى لو متت!
>
> Where are you, my beloved Iraq, where did you go?
> Where is the Tigris, from which pure water I drank?

[97] Achebe 1987: 220 (my emphasis).
[98] On 15 of these authors, see Snir (2019a).

Where is the al-Jazra[99] on which sand I used to sit?
Your limbs have been dismembered and you fell silent
Your beloved ones have been displaced in the West while you were overthrown
The bastards desecrated your soil, and you bowed
I looked for you in all the countries I visited
I asked whoever I saw about you
No one guided me to where you are
Your love will be nested in my heart as long as I live
I will remain loyal to you even if I die![100]

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[99] A small island on the Tigris in Baghdad used as a place for recreation.
[100] See Niran Bassoon. http://www.facebook.com/nb1957/posts/832473224116010. 18 October 2021. Accessed 6 November 2021.

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