



Brahim El Guabli and Mostafa Hussein, eds. -. *Remembering Jews in Maghrebi and Middle Eastern Media* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press 2024), 288 p.

Brahim El Guabli and Mostafa Hussein's edited volume fleshes out the sequelae of the departure of Jewish citizens from Amazigh, Arab, Iranian and Turkish societies and the historical void they left. The narrative surrounding the memory of Maghrebi and Middle Eastern Jews is complex and spans various media. Notably, there exists an expanding cultural production of novels, stories, poems, songs, memoirs, and films created by Jewish émigrés and their descendants. These works serve to commemorate their erstwhile homelands and endeavour to reclaim the experiences and memories of earlier generations. Besides, these works manage to portray social and political realities of the Jews. While previous researches have primarily focused on the mass exodus of Jewish populations, El Guabli and Hussein broach the implications of Jewish absence within Tamazghan and Middle Eastern communities; that is, they presence the absence, to borrow Jacques Derrida's terminology. By focusing on the stakes of loss as a paradigm, the cultural recollections of Jewish-Muslim coexistence extend beyond the prevailing narratives of conflict, taboo, and nostalgia that have characterised both Muslim and dominant academic discourses on Jewish emigration.

Maghrebi and Middle Eastern Jews may have departed from their original societies in search of new and auspicious scopes, be they economic, social, cultural, or religious. However, their previous presence in predominantly Muslim communities has become notably evident. Their one-time existence 'has become a conspicuous marker of the deep transformation and mutilation these societies have experienced as a result of their Jews' emigration' (2). In contrast to other researches that are practically historiographical and anthropological-cum-sociological, El Guabli and Hussein's *Remembering Jews*, which underscores the novelistic and cinematographic output about Jews, came to light out of a two-day workshop El Guabli organized at the Oakley Humanities Center at Williams College (2017) and a panel Hussein convened in the same year at the Middle East Studies Association in Washington, D.C.

Remembering Jews historicises, contextualises and refigures Jews' loss after centuries of living among Muslims with whom Jews established a relationship that was characterised by *vivre-ensemble* and intimacy. Indeed, Muslims and Jews were able to mould social, cultural and legal practises (See

Jessica M. Marglin's *Across Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco*, 2021). El Guabli and Hussein argue that the loss of this intimacy and *covivance* between Muslims and Jews and even between them and Christians as it was the case under the Ottoman Empire can be attributed to imperial nations' interventions, especially during the 'high era of imperialism.' Under colonialists' 'scramble,' Jews were used as 'pawns in the imperialistic and expansionist project' (4). A good example in this context is the establishment of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (1860), a Paris-based international Jewish Organisation whose main purpose was to Gallicise Maghrebi and Middle Eastern Jews and to promote the ideals of Jewish self-defence and self-sufficiency through education and professional development. The AIU, thus, contributed to the alienation of Jews from Muslims and Christians alike.

The departure of Jews grew fast with the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. This exodus put the Jewish question into historiographical and archival oblivion and silence as Jews were a kind of taboo in their erstwhile homes. Indeed, there are scholars who still commingle between Judaism and Zionism and, as a corollary, they depict Jews negatively. However, Muslims still remember Jews and their impact in different domains as Aomar Boum and Brahim El Guabli confirm in their books *Memories of Absence* (2013) and *Moroccan Other-Archive: History and Citizenship After State Violence* (2023), respectively.

Remembering Jews treats Muslim-Jewish interactions and relations in a multidimensional manner, and this approach helps the editors to accentuate Jews' loss as multilayered and multiprocessual 'which can be noticed in the long-term projects that led to this moment of quasi-Jewless societies in the Maghreb and the Middle East' (15). By focusing on literature and cinema, North African and Middle Eastern novelists (through what El Guabli names 'mnemonic literature') and filmmakers (through documentary, fictional and feature films) bring to the limelight Jews' identities, returns, religious (in)tolerance, emigration, and places such as quarters (*mellah* as in the case in Morocco), cemeteries, synagogues, cafés, bars, etc.

Remembering Jews' nine chapters are interdisciplinary and thematic in nature, revisiting and bringing to the fore the concept of loss as the essence of the book. Loss is approached from different stances by contributors from Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Turkey and Iran. Brahim El Guabli provides a comprehensive three-pronged analysis that explores the theme of Jewish loss as it is highlighted by many novelists from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Tunisia, and by filmmakers such as Kamal Hachkar, Majid Shokor and Safinez Bousbia. This Tamazghani and Middle Eastern cultural production is intergenerational in nature within the contexts of the Maghreb and the Middle

East. He further develops his concept of intergenerational loss by engaging with the theoretical frameworks established by Abdelkébir Khatibi, who believes that a Jew is 'an absence whose culinary, sensational, or olfactory traces are left to bear witness to his former existence among Muslims' (44). In the same vein, Nadia Sabri touches upon the binary constructs of presence/absence, visibility and invisibility by exploring Casablanca's Museum of Moroccan Judaism. The Museum's documentary and archival materials echo a complex history of co-existence, loss and exile, inspiring artists to exhibit *Exiles: A Dialogue with the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca* (2016).

The trope of loss is also tackled from an Algerian perspective. Abdelkader Oudjit touches on the impact of the Algerian War of Independence, which occurred from 1954 to 1962, on Jewish-Muslim relations. By analysing the historical context of nationalism, Oudjit investigates how the exclusion of Jewish citizens from the national narrative has positioned them unfavourably within Algerian history. The theme of loss in Oudjit's chapter, 'On the Wrong Side of History: The Jews in Algerian Literature,' spotlights both a historical trajectory and a complex contemporary situation, wherein a deep rift between the two communities predominate. Oudjit elaborates on how the Algerian writers, especially novelists and playwrights, represent Jews. These writers such as Kateb Yacine, Yamina Mechakra, Rachid Boudjedra, Waciny Laredj, Amin Zaoui, among others, delve into the thesis that Jews are an integral component of the Algerian society and that they are indigenous to the Maghreb. The French colonization worsened the Jews' situation and their relations with Muslim. The French claimed that they wanted to 'de-orientalise' Jews by affording them citizenship, especially after the Crémieux Decree of 24 October, 1870. It is true that a lot of Jews Gallicise themselves, internalise French values and acted as good colonial agents; yet, from the French angle, Jews were merely seen as mimic men, to use Homi Bhabha's own phrase, whose 'menace' against '*mission civilisatrice*' was writ large. The corollary grew exacerbating, especially in the 1940s. Oudjit concludes that Jews are 'on the wrong side of history' because they betrayed their Muslim counterparts and their Jewishness even.

Mostafa Hussein critically examines the depictions of Jews in contemporary Arabic literary works published in Egypt at the beginning of the twentieth-first century. Hussein analyses three contemporary Egyptian new-consciousness novels that highlight the Jewish interactions with Muslims and other ethnic groups until their unexpected departure from Egypt after the triple invasion of Egypt by France, Israel and Britain in 1956. These Egyptian novelists fictionalise, historicise and narrativize Jewish characters and their space as the latter is the signifier of their identity. The Jewish space

is perceived as porous and liminal as Jews and Muslims constantly interact with each other both in the Jewish quarter and the Islamic city. Egypt, therefore, is perceived by these novelists as a diverse and multicultural society, wherein Jews are an integral part of the social and cultural fabric of Egypt.

By the same token, Iskander Ahmad Abdalla, in a chapter entitled ‘*Al-Zaman Al-Gamil* Refigured: Jews and Re-narration of the nation on Egyptian TV,’ spotlights the current historical perceptions regarding the Jewish community in Egypt as well as the broader historical context under examination. He also explores the collective aspirations and visions that these perceptions entail. Abdalla reads *Hārat al-Yahūd*, (the Jewish quarter), which set between 1948 and 1954, as a metaphor for the Egyptian nation, reflecting both its historical self-conception and its aspirations for the future. As a historical melodrama, *Hārat al-Yahūd* screens and reimagines Jews as ‘an object of national *nostalgia*’ (95). The latter trope is infused with loss and silence to mourn the lost world before the first World War, or what Abdalla dubs as *Al-Zaman al-Gamil* [the beautiful age]. This term is used to describe an emotion of longing for lost times, a loss of the ethnic and religious fabric of the Egyptian society.

Sarah Irving elaborates on Ali al-Muqri’s 2009 novel *al-Yahudi al-Hali* [*The Handsome Jew*], which acquaints the reader, through a love story between a Muslim girl and a Jewish boy, in the 17th century in Yemen as its tempo-spatial frame of narration. Linking the imagined past to the complicated realities of today’s Arab world, the novel tries to bring to light alternative possibilities for a more meaningful, happy and peaceful life, where religions can be open doors to coexistence rather than serve as barriers.

The Kurdish-Syrian writer Stephanie Kraver chooses to resuscitate Kurdish-Arab-Jewish memory. She reads the novel of the Kurdish-Syrian writer, Salim Barakat, *Madha ‘an al-sayyida al-yahudiyya rahil?* (2019) [*What About Rachel, the Jewish Lady?*]. The novel presents a comprehensive depiction of Syria in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, highlighting the instances of police brutality during that period and the involvement of the Ba ‘athist intelligence agencies in facilitating the departure of Jews from Qamishli, located in northeastern Syria. This process involved smuggling these individuals to Turkey and Lebanon, eventually leading them to Cyprus. Qamishli, Barakat’s hometown, was pictured as a multi-ethnic and multicultural place. The narrative provides a glimpse into the Jewish quarter of Qamishli, which was home to Jews, Kurds, and Armenians, but things fell apart with the emergence of the Ba ‘athist authoritarian regime.

Remembering Jews does not focus only on areas populated by Imazighen and Arabs, but also extends to Iran and Turkey in which a sense

of loss is writ large. Ilker Hepkaner emphasises the losses that Jews of Turkey (*Türkiyeli Yahudiler*) underwent in the twentieth century, especially after the collapse of the multiethnic and multireligious Ottoman Empire. Hepkaner unpacks two documentary features in the mid-2010s which bring to the forefront the portrayals of the history, memory and contemporary lives of Jews in Turkey. Not only do these two films narrativize memory, but they reconfigure loss a crucial theme.

In contrast to writers from countries above-mentioned, writers in Iran both Jewish and Persian “remain largely silent about Jews in the national context” (190). In this context, Lior B. Sterfield delves into the memoirs, (non)-fictional works, and autobiographies of Iranian Jewish authors situated within various diasporic communities in Israel and the United States, who recount and narrate ‘the homeland from exile.’ Employing a historical lens, Sterfield’s chapter navigates the interplay between the writers’ historical experiences, contemporary issues, and future uncertainties. Iran is, therefore, portrayed as a forsaken homeland and a focal point of loss within their narratives. Iranian Jews’ departure from Iran mainly on the grounds of the 1979 revolution made Jewish-Iranian Jews’ writings ooze with loss, trauma and mourning.

El Guabli and Hussein’s edited book, *Remembering Jews*, brings to the surface a number of issues that we need to consider and probe into carefully, pushing what is ideological aside. Hamas attacked Israel on October 7, 2023, but the harrowing question that should be posed is: WHY? Palestinians have been prone to all aspects of trauma, loss, displacement, uprooting, and maiming for many years. People of Gaza are unprecedentedly massacred. *Remembering Jews*’ co-authored chapters are a call for a panacea to this never-ending plight between Muslims and Jews. Most of Moroccan Jews today in Israel do denounce all aspects of war and express their resentment towards the Zionist-cum-extremist eagles in the Cabinet who label Muslims ‘animals’ and wreak havoc in the lives of innocent people.

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