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Europe, Israel, United States

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To Joe, Emile, and all those who make the deserts of their pasts into gardens.

> "As we left the ruins at Xanthos, the shepherd who had been our guide pointed out a small tree. It was an olive tree, growing haphazardly, with murky green leaves. According to the shepherd, four years ago, when the archaeological dig was in progress, three olive pips had fallen from a bottle. The American archaeologist who found them sent one to Israel, another home to the States, and the third he sowed on the outskirts of the town of Xanthos. And here it was, this stunted tree had grown from that third pip [...] This twisted olive tree, which had witnessed the massacre of the families of Xanthos's soldiers, was still able to push toward life. It's a tree. It acts differently than people. It doesn't forget, but it doesn't remember anything either." Sema Kaygusuz, *Ce lieu sur ton visage*, Paris, Actes Sud.

1 Here are fragments of lives[1]; of Joseph, Moshe, Jacques, Yvette, Sarah, and so many others whose ancestors came from Turkey, Syria, Greece, Albania or Morocco, and who settled in Egypt between the 19th and 20th centuries. They became part of the thriving melting pot[2] of diverse populations, including a few thousand Jews who had formerly settled in the country, before the course of their existence was once again altered by a new exile and, dispersed, they remade their lives elsewhere, on other continents.

2 Such trajectories of anchorage and exile, to and from Egypt, sometimes constituting a tragic to-and-fro with other uprooted peoples,[3] often took place in quasi "silence", in the "unseen"; what we do not want to see or cannot, and what is both unseen and yet also seen. Long marginal in research in social sciences, with only a few exceptions,[4] the Jews of Egypt have more often been studied from a historical perspective and have remained generally invisible and/or absent from social spaces and official histories of

the different countries they came from or were exiled to. They have largely been "filtered" by their new contexts. Although certain authors (Hassoun, 1985; 1989; 1994; 2001) have found an audience for these subjects and contributed to shaping narratives around these populations, sometimes between autobiography and fiction, their access to the paths by which historical narratives (FISHER, 1982; ACIMAN, 1994; KAHANOFF, 1985; 1978; CASTEL-BLUM, 2016; MATALON, 1995) are produced also remains unevenly distributed. Recently however, their pasts have been taken up, often to respond to different interests and expectations. They have been mobilized as a criticism of the social and political marginalisation of Jews in Islamic countries, or as a symbolic and political struggle directed at other refugees (Palestinians), or as an indirect condemnation of political systems, as was the case during the 2000s when positive references to the historical Jewish presence flourished to condemn the regime of Hosni Mubarak (BEININ, 2016).

3 This "unseen" which contributes to their invisibility seems reinforced by the fact that their history is so close that we cannot feel completely excluded from it, but yet we have to look closely to constitute and share it, without ever even being really able to glimpse this time that is at once remote and familiar (BARTHES, 2018, 100, 102). But what is it that separates us from this history? Is it its exotic and remote nature, both literally and figuratively, which tells of people, places, and objects that are both "disappeared" and yet still present? Where have they gone, because we can see, in photos and maps, that they still exist, we can touch certain objects that have been displaced from Egypt, and talk to those who brought them here? Even when they are here, there is something in them that we cannot see. Something that remains hidden. Or that we do not want to see. There seems to be a place where our vision stops; beyond which we no longer look.

4 The story begins with bodies and artefacts (TROUILLOT, 1995, 28). But the few traces and fragments left here and there by those who are displaced, who carry the story and its future, do not impart the illusion of being able to share it, touch it or to imagine the lives "behind the mortar" (TROUILLOT, 1995, 29). At most, once connected, disrupted histories and recovered memories are only partially melted, as discontinuous zones entering into a form of continuity, although their times and spaces remain distinct. They are a leftover, both a link and a break (PEREC, 1995, 57-58), reflected in the recurrent evocation in the interviews of a "chiasmic" (MERLEAU-PONTY, 2019) relationship: between the Jews who leave Egypt and Egypt, which at the same time leaves the Jews. This binary relationship - "me", the country -, reciprocal - the two poles of the relationship move away from each other or leave each other in the end -, not only takes place in the lived space, but determines it. What is then the nature of this space? And what does this fragmentation of time and space, which we can no longer/want to think together, do to identifications, to memory, to places of living? How does it affect the present in different spaces today and among different populations that have been separated for decades - Egyptian Jews in Egypt, in the Diaspora, in Israel, Egyptians...?

5 This article is dedicated to these "unseen", "disappeared" worlds and their "relics", their burning remains (GLEIZE, 2018). Not from a material or monumental perspective, but rather through what stays with people, and through those who stay. The work that I have begun, by soliciting and collecting their voices, observing them in their meetings, discovering the places they live, and observing their everyday practices is

not a nostalgic attempt to bring history back to life nor look to make up for a "need for history", or a recognition that only a researcher or politician could bring about.

6 This kind of goal would be immediately contradicted by the reality of my fieldwork where many of those I encountered bluntly express their surprise at anyone interested in the(ir) past, which they often described as just useless "piles of old stuff". This observation clearly poses the question of reflexivity and the gaze of researchers or other social actors on the identity of certain individuals, perceiving it to be problematic or at least as something to be questioned, while the people in question do not experience it as such, nor question it themselves. This ambition would also be contested and contestable by the absurdity of its assumption, which is the fact that not being the object of study for scholarly history, not being recorded in "official" and/or national history means not having a history at all. Alternatively, and more modestly, it would assume that not being the object of this history would give rise to a feeling of absence or lack of history, two things that are clearly distinct. What does it mean to "need history" in a world in which individuals suffer from an "overdose" of "historic consumption" (Nietzsche, 2011 [1874]), as Nietzsche noted; where they have become the "complacent hostages" of the pasts that they create or appropriate (TROUILLOT, 1995)[5]?

7 My goal here is quite different. This article explores the successive movements of individuals who, outsiders and excluded, are caught between several populations, histories, and territories, for whom there are no roads back – neither to people, specific places, nor even to the material and social spaces of former European empires and colonies which have today, for the most part, crumbled. These colonies were the matrix in which people were associated and filtered,[6] before being exiled, and moving on to reconstitute the diffracted constellations of these disappeared worlds elsewhere. They then attempt to connect these to the new places they have spread to, where they have now been re-filtered, like lights along the dark pasts of the past and present.[7] Based on a "retroactive ethnography" (BAHLOUL, 1992), this article draws on research with and on the memory of Egyptian Jews, who are both actors and narrators in this.[8]

8 By following their trajectories, this article looks at the past as a position in the present, and therefore as having no content in itself, and at the lived space of Egypt as a "there" which can only be pointed to from a position in a "here". How to grasp the meaning of these pasts that still count and find multiple modes of inscription in countries and among populations separated for decades, in fragmented and dispersed presents and spaces? For this purpose, the paper explores the persistence and relevance of certain traces, practices and concrete memories of the past in their relationship to material spaces - what we might call the memory of the inhabited[9]. It is also focused, through return journeys, on the confrontation with the absence of memory, ignorance or silence of the Egyptians who today occupy the different spaces where the Jews lived and frequented: what could be named the uninhabited of memory. In doing so, it explores the encounter and the gap created between the memory of the inhabited and the uninhabited of memory, between the tangible forms left in situ and no longer associated with their former memory circles and the memories of the ones who lived in and had to abandon them, often letting everything behind.

Without fire nor hearth: imagined countries and interrupted dreams

9 Here are the stories of the Jews of Egypt who, at least twice, had to flee the lands of Mizraim to find refuge elsewhere, each time pushed to reimagine their links to the country and between each other, between presence and absence. The first was Exodus, remembered each year as a deliverance, transformed into an unfailing connection preserved over the centuries and throughout the spaces they left, crossed, or settled in. The Jewish people left behind them long centuries of slavery and a country that had become a prison. Walking towards the promised land, they walked decisively into History and into memory. The second departure was often experienced as a loss, a heartbreak even, and they then forced themselves to forget how they had been pushed to leave, before cultivating the memory of their existence in their country, torn from what they still nostalgically describe as a "dream life" in the heart of what some call "a fool's paradise".

10 Egypt and the Exodus constitute part of the foundations of Judaism, which brought the Jews together led by Moses, accompanied by Aaron, to the accept the covenant with Yahweh whose commandments they agreed to follow. Every year, the celebration of Passover Seder recalls this moment, as a sort of a matrix for the Jewish people. For many people, both among the Jewish diaspora and in Israel, this core alliance establishes Egyptian Jews as one of the oldest Jewish diasporas in the Middle East,[10] in spite of this first mythical Exodus. This highlights the remarkable near-disappearance of this community in the country from the mid-20th century.

11 Its more recent history tells us something quite different. At the beginning of the 19th century only a few Jewish families remained here and there, scattered between Cairo, Alexandria, Rasheed, as well as in the towns of the Delta and Upper Egypt.[11] To this should be added the *Karaims,*[12] Jews who belong to a scripturalist movement which separated from rabbinic Judaism,[13] between the 8th and 10th centuries. Far from being the continual ancestral homeland of the Jews, Egypt only encouraged their presence at the time of Viceroy Mohammed Ali, with the opening of the Mahmoudiyah Canal, which linked the port of Alexandria with one of the main branches of the Nile, between 1819 and 1821, the coastal inland, and through the Nile Delta, the rest of the country.

12 Two key terms characterize this (re)nascent community: diversity and mobility. This diversity is expressed both in rituals – especially between Rabbanite and Karaite Jews –, in the long-established communities, in the languages, cultures, legal statuses, socio-economic conditions and nationalities.[14] These Jews come from provinces of the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, Greece, Portugal, Spain, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Romania, Russia, Poland, [15]Italy, France, or England, alone or with their families. Many things attracted them to this country, and more specifically to Cairo and Alexandria: trade, in particular, which rose remarkably with the construction of the Suez Canal between 1859 and 1869, and the cotton boom between 1861 and 1865.

13 Egypt became a land of opportunity for some, and a land of relegation for others. It combined the still living heritage of a certain urban Ottoman multiculturalism, with English domination and multiple foreign influences, and would become a melting pot for these Jewish migrants, who would not however totally abandon their differences. Those among them who had come to Egypt for the first time brought with them the

imaginary associated with the places they had left, and with which they long remained identified – whether Damascus, Corfu, or Skopje. But they also became Jews of Alexandria, Cairo, Port Said or Tanta (ASLAN, 2009). And it was as "Egyptian Jews" that they left the country again, leaving everything behind them. They nevertheless kept this "family resemblance" that they had acquired in Egypt. Over a period of 150 years they had made Egypt their homeland, and they would then carry it with them to Paris, New York, Tel Aviv or Milan.

14 When they recount this second exile, they are often quite elusive, mentioning the progressive liberation of Egypt from English (and European more generally) domination, which led to some of its minorities being swept from the land and its history. They also evoke the shrinking social and human horizon, and the way they sometimes became "pariahs in the country" they were born (RISPOLI and DEPAULE, 2010). It mattered little that they had once been Egyptians or local subjects (DANON and YANNAKAKIS, 1981). They had gone, at least that is how they remember it, from being on the "stable margins" providing structure to a specific colonial world, to being foreigners, ranked among the "lords" overthrown in a world that now rejected them.

15 Having left the territory and the history of Egypt behind them, they nevertheless retained a certain psychological complex: "say nothing of the expulsion, or only rarely and in the strictest secrecy" (CASTEL-BLUM, 2016, 46).[16] For a long time, many of them refused the title of "refugees" and tried "to prove that they were ordinary immigrants." They wanted to "rebuild" their lives, "that was all" (ARENDT, 2013, 5; 2007, 264). Reminders of their past only appeared between them and in the various social spaces where they were transplanted as "a background noise, hardly audible, or as a catastrophic eruption", moulding into the silence and the ignorance that surrounded them more generally. A noise that was therefore "difficult to interpret" (POLLAK, 1990, 273). This background noise may suggest an unequal access to the production historic narratives, as well as a disinterest in the(ir) past(s). Perhaps, in everyone's interests it was best to not awaken the memory of it.

Being outside the frame

16 The collection of events that led to the eviction of certain minorities from Egypt, embedded in a constellation of communitarian structures, both local and cosmopolitan, has been broadly documented by certain historians (SHIMON, 1987; BEININ, 2016; BARDA, 2006). These studies draw a portrait of these communities that longed for Western and modern forms of bourgeoisie. They are depicted as transnational figures (BENTON, 2002; STEIN, 2015) who belong to a fictitious nation based on a biased universalizing cosmopolitanism that ultimately would lead to their gradual isolation from the country. Little work has been devoted to their trajectories once out of Egypt (BEININ, 2016; BARDA, 2006).

17 The case of the Jewish community is one example among others of these populations that were swept up in the collapse of colonial empires, even though it seems to have been more fragile and exposed than others, particularly by three wars that set (among others) Egypt against the nascent state of Israel: 1948 with the creation of the Israeli state, 1956 the Suez crisis, and 1967 the Six-Day War. In the space of around 20 years, this community was dissolved and fragmented between various countries and

continents – Israel, Europe, and in particular but not exclusively France, England, Switzerland, and Italy, as well as North and South America, and also Australia. Only a very small minority remained in Egypt.

18 Undoubtedly it might be assumed that in Israel, this history, now scattered in fragments between several continents, could be produced, known and integrated into academic spheres as well as into teaching and other areas of society. However, contrary to what might be expected, Jews from Egyptian, Iraqi, Yemeni or Moroccan communities were long marginalised in this country from a spatial, social, and cultural perspective (YIFTACHEL, 2006; BEN AMOS, 2010), even though they constituted a significant portion of the national community. More specifically, like in most of the societies where they resettled, Egyptian Jews often became "invisible Jews" to use a category coined by W. Weiker in relation to Turkish Jews in Israel (Weiker, 1988). According to some of my respondents, the price of their integration was there "de-orientalization", in a country that saw the "levantine mentality" as a destructive force of both individuals and societies (KATZ-KRAKOTZKIN, 2007). However, they were categorised with other Jews from Islamic countries under the same generic term, that they sometimes re-appropriated and which recalls their attachment to the east – Mizrahi, in which some would include the Sephardi – although the historical and sociological foundation of this term remains controversial (GOLDBERG and BRAM, 2006). In the 1990s, Mizrahi Israeli activists also used the term "Arab Jews" to talk about Jews from Islamic countries and to emphasise the use of this category in the Middle East before 1948 (LEVY, 2008). Almost none of the people I spoke to identified with this particular term, however, preferring to emphasise the deep interconnectedness of Egypt and their Egyptian-ness with the primacy of their Jewish identification. This is very well expressed by the statement made by Jacques Hassoun: "I am Jewish because I am Egyptian, I am Egyptian because I am Jewish" (Hassoun, 1997).

19 This marginalisation is of course not specific to Egyptian Jews, nor to Jews from Islamic countries more generally. It broadly affects the various (post)-imperial diasporas from the collapsed colonial worlds. Spread to the four corners of the world, they took with them the remains of colonial histories, that some preferred to imagine as being the legacy of a past now long gone (STOLER, 2016). The analysis of this heritage lies at the crossroads of several problems. The first stems from the plurality of forms of memory that produce it at different levels ("official", "historical", "borrowed" memory, or memories conveyed by associative actors, living memory based on experience or transmitted, etc. (LAVABRE, 1994)[17]). The second problem reflects the social heterogeneity and qualitative nature of the lived experiences (ATTIAS-DONFUT, 1988) that partly condition the content of this memory, involving different spaces and times. The third is linked to scientific, political, and memorial issues around these colonial worlds and their fragmentations, which take on various, and sometimes dissonant meanings for the different actors involved. Finally, the fourth problem stems more specifically from the transmission of this past in the present, its persistent effects :

> "in the corroded hollows of landscapes, in the gutted infrastructures of segregated cityscapes and in the micro-ecologies of matter and mind. [...] in ruined landscapes and through the social ruination of people's lives?" (STOLER,2008, 194).

20 Once they were exiled and dispersed, it is therefore possible to think that these populations, who had fled colonial worlds and their equivocal heritages, would disappear and/or melt into new entities, wiping away the past, which was now little

more than fragments of individual memories perhaps transmitted in restricted family circles (LEVY, 1997), for the benefit of the future. On the contrary, by leaving this country, many of them reconstructed links between members of the community in the places where they were re-implanted, building reversed diasporas (TRIER, 1996; VOUTIRA, 2011) which made Egypt their homeland. And yet this attachment did not expunge the doubt, in certain imaginaries, as to their supposedly ambiguous relationship with Egypt (BEININ, 1998): either they broke all links with this country, without regret or nostalgia, or this connection was secondary or purely instrumental. Jacques Hassoun reminds us that in the early 1960s, an Egyptian intellectual wrote in a Parisian journal of the Egyptian Jews: "not one is attached to this land, they left without protest, as though satisfied" (HASSOUN, 2001). When they are recognised as being native, or local, it is often to incarnate the archetype of the Levantine, whose identity remains vague,[18] the citizen of a "fictional nation" (STEIN, 2015). Or it may be used to represents the essence of cosmopolitanism, that connects them to a European bourgeois model (HANLEY, 2008), in which more affluent spheres defend their own interests, sheltered in their well-to-do neighbourhoods.

21 Of course, some also presented them as being "the same as other addictions", arguing that it would have been "impossible" to "differentiate their compatriots from other faiths", who had been "settled for generations in the country" and who participated in "building modern Egypt" (WARDA, 2013) in which most were "well integrated" (AL-GHAR, 2004). This portrait probably expresses a new sensibility, to use Joël Beinin's terms, to the past of Egyptian Jews. This is also evidenced by the exchanges, mainly in Arabic, on social networks, especially between Egyptian Jews and Egyptians, who are looking for interpretations of past events outside the history books and in the traces still remaining in the country.

22 But more often in my reading or fieldwork, during conferences, or research seminars in which I have presented my work, the comments have tended to minimise the relationships of belonging and attachment to the country, probably once again reinforced by the social, demographic, and historical disconnection with today's Egypt. It is as though there are certain exiles and nostalgias that are legitimate, and others less so; as though situations, populations, autobiographical narratives are produced by a history which, in losing its territory, no longer has a vocation to find a place from which to speak, other than that of a separation that neither the country of exile nor the country of settlement wish to acknowledge and accommodate – unless it is in ways and uses that are partly misappropriated (SAGUI BIZAWI, 2017). After leaving Egypt, Egyptian Jews therefore found themselves symbolically cast as outsiders, in a no man's land. Their repeated exiles may lead some to wonder if they were ever settled, as they continue their long march across the desert of history and memory, carrying with them the fragments of their former worlds.

The past is dead :"اللي فات مات"

23 One of the reasons for this marginalisation is the silence and separateness that the Egyptian Jews I spoke to have long maintained about their past. These were engraved "into hearts and places"; they were told by "stone, trees, rivers, and seas".[19] Some chose

to forget in order to keep on living. "The past is dead" proclaims one Egyptian proverb, llei fâat mâat. اللي فات مات But in order to forget, they also had to remember.

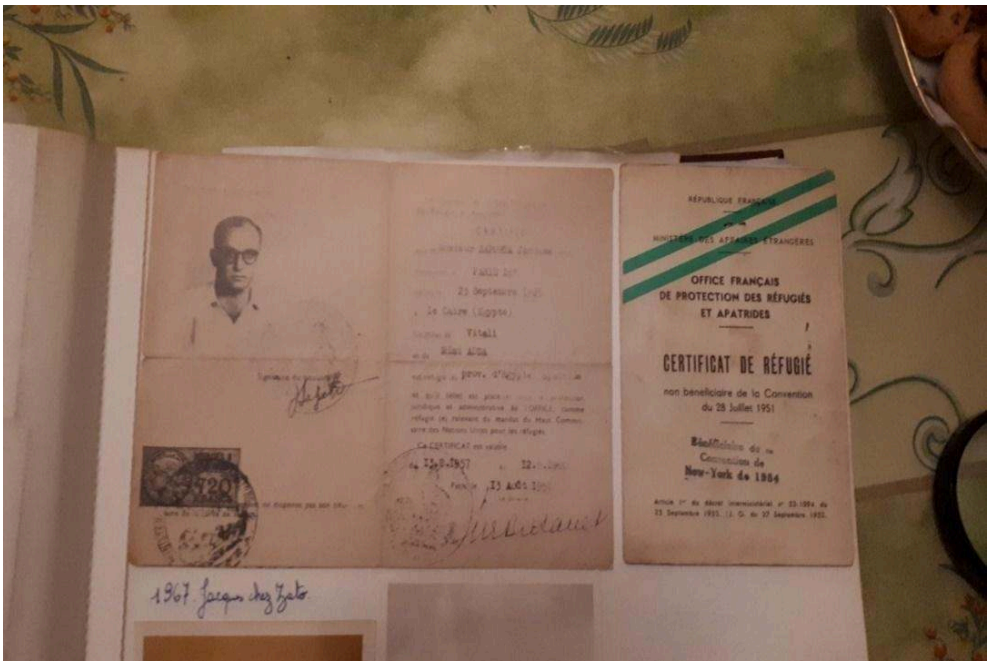
24 Many of them remember having left the country, and all their possessions behind them, forced to take only the strictest minimum, searched thoroughly when they left, sometimes having their passport "cancelled" and replaced with a "no-return visa." Yet today, it is rare that they spontaneously mention the causes of their departure, or only a few factual elements like the Suez crisis in 1956 that led to the expulsion of isolated individuals and whole families from the country.[20] Sarah,[21] for example, recalls: "we left Cairo because my aunt was accused of being involved in the in Israeli youth movement and they were responsible for an attack on a cinema... the Lavon affair. And my aunt [...] She was on the list of the movement, and because it was people from the movement that had launched that attack, well that was confirmed, right... So they also caught my aunt who was not involved in all that, her friend was... So they arrested her and her friend and put them in prison. And that was when the family realised that it was time to leave Egypt." Many respondents say only that the tragic nature of the departure was probably minimised, although they sometimes still define themselves as "chosen".

25 With the exception of certain Jews in Israel and in the United States who have in recent years demanded the recognition of refugee status for Jews in Islamic countries, most of the people I met in various European countries[22] remained reticent about defining themselves in these terms and recounting the detail of their departure. This was the case for Hubert[23] who, after more than an hour of interview, finally discussed his arrival in France in 1955:

> "I had no papers. I had no nationality. I was not kicked out, but I had faced serious charges. There were eight of us [...] we were arrested in 53, and the trial was in 54. Most of us were acquitted, except for two who were sentenced, but I was made to understand that I had to leave Egypt as quickly as possible.[...] And then one day, in February/March 1955, I was summoned to Mabahass (State security investigation and they said, 'well if you do not leave, we will put you in a boat and leave (مباحث you in the middle of the sea near a ship, and you will have to manage to get on it.' [...] In France, it was quite complicated because I arrived in Marseille, and in Marseille there was an announcement on the boat saying 'Mr and Mrs C. are to report to the Jewish agency for immediate embarkation to Israel.' They had my name, the Egyptian authorities must have given my name, I do not really know [...] But they knew I was on that boat [...] The French Consulate had given me a 10-day visa with no possibility to extend it or to stay indefinitely."

26 In France, in particular, those who were stateless remained that way a long time before obtaining French citizenship. "We did not want to exaggerate" one of them said to me modestly[24] "we were not all expelled, many of us were afraid in the face of a situation that was objectively bad. But with time we realised that is possibly also what it means to be a refugee." This objectively "bad" situation is expressed in interviews by the sporadic reference to several elements: the policy of Arabization and nationalization, the impounding of goods, the degradation of working conditions, the tightening of the social, professional and community framework, a feeling of insecurity, eviction notices and finally, for some of them the loss of Egyptian nationality as they left.

ill. 1. Refugee certificate, Jacques Saporta



Marlyse Saporta, Milan, January 2019

27 Why such a long silence, even within the family? One respondent, Joseph, who now lives in Tel Aviv, suggested it was perhaps because they saw their departure as unjustified.[25] His mother, a Communist, was arrested in 1957. She managed to obtain Italian documents via the Italian Consulate and, like many other Jews then known as "paper Italians", her documents were attached to Livorno where the municipal records had allegedly burned.[26] His father, who had Egyptian nationality, remained in Egypt and joined his family later. After they left, they did not speak of Egypt, although they were both Arabic-speakers, unless it was between themselves. They never returned. They never managed to transmit their story. "They did not know to whom or with whom they could talk", concluded Joseph. "They never understood why they had to leave their country."

28 The difficulties in integration and downward mobility that many families experienced were also generally suffered in silence, except for small, rare references, for example, surrounding the death of a father "who could not bear it", or burlesque anecdotes told as jokes. Sitting in Jacques' living room, I listen to him talk about his sometimes-tragic past in a voice that is always joyful and optimistic. He was born 1909 in Alexandria, to a Greek mother and a Moroccan father, and he worked in various companies in Egypt. In 1956 he was given seven days to leave Cairo and Egypt in the middle of December. He arrived in the Parisians suburbs with his wife and children in a brutally cold winter where he discovered snow for the first time. When he talks about his one-way trip, his sentences are broken by burst of laughter:

> "When we left, we went by plane because most people were going by boat and we went by plane, us, and there was no direct flight to Paris, we had to stop over in Rome first. We stopped over in Rome, and then we had to stay there for five hours or six hours to take another plane to take us to Orly, and what were we going to do for five or six hours? We hired a horse-drawn carriage (laughs)! We left our bags at the luggage office and we hired a carriage to take us around Rome! We did not realise what was happening to us, we did not realise that we (laughs uncontrollably)

> ... At the time hats were all the fashion, my wife had a hat, and with a carriage we had this man who took us around Rome and everything! Afterwards I do know, we went to have a meal somewhere, it was funny... We got on the plane and we arrived in Orly and there were ladies from the Red Cross who were welcoming the recently repatriated! One lady came up to us and said "do you know where you are going?" And we said, "No we don't know"."

29 Only those who arrived as children eat more freely about the dispersal of families, the difficulties and the internal and external tensions. Sarah remembers:

> "From Genoa we went to Milan. Why? Because that was a place where there was a large Israelite community and naturally our family was looking for a way to survive this experience. But we got to Milan, everybody, my mother's parents, [...] There were reunited... I still remember that reunion, I was very little, it is terrible when you see your parents very serious in a room talking about where to go. And most wanted to go to Israel, but my father did not want to and he was the only one. So, there were lots of fights, but he did not give in. He absolutely did not want to go to Israel. Why? Because his brothers had gone to Israel from Egypt in 1956, they made 'Aliyah[27], they were in the movements [...] There was a terrible situation in Israel, it was not, it was villages, sand ... [...] My father was already married with three children, and they wrote him letters and my father understood that this was not somewhere that was a good environment to take a family [...] And so we stayed in Milan. My mother was sick about it [...] For years and years, she was very depressed, and not only, she was maybe 30 years old no more, and she lost her periods just like that because of the shock of dispersal [...] We lived in a small boarding house near the central station. One room for five people, very, very difficult."

30 She also remembers the Jewish school in Milan: "it was really dark for us here, we had come from Egypt, the sun, here it was cold, December. The language is very difficult to learn right away. The other Jews also did not treat us very well. They looked down on us. Those who came from Arab countries. They thought that we did not have any education, that we were like the Arabs, etc. [...] They were sort of prejudiced before, and that prejudice existed up until the end of high school, can you imagine? I went to all the Jewish schools, but the prejudice was always there. [..] And I must say that it is still like that."

31 They also recounted the struggles of their parents, who hid their misery behind the importance of keeping up appearances. Edwin, for example remembers his grandmother:

> "She was a tall woman, very beautiful and always elegantly dressed. She had a taste for luxury, unlike mother who always dressed very humbly, even at the end when she was no longer poor and we had all been successful. La Nona would take me to the Café de la Paix in the Opéra neighbourhood, where I felt very intimidated and I did not dare to look around me because I had to be very well-behaved so she would be pleased. Behind this facade, there was a woman who had become very poor, and who had to go to COSAJOR[28] like many Jews who had been expelled from Arab countries."

32 Another interviewee, Samuel, after many interviews, mentioned the image of these families of Egyptian Jews who came together in exile in Milan in one of the buildings of the Jewish school, on the Via Eupili. They were in such a state of deprivation and social isolation that it prevented any kind of solidarity, or almost. This reminder of the living conditions in France or in Italy expresses clearly what many respondents eluded to, and which for some remained unspeakable:

> "Rue Rodier, there was not any heating in our apartment; the bathroom was the kitchen and we shared the toilets with the neighbours on the same floor.[...] From

> time to time the family got bigger with other refugees who did not know where to go, and who came for a time to squash into our three little rooms. It took a while to learn how to protect ourselves from cold. Papa put a newspaper between my jumper and my shirt, and I was always afraid that the other children would see and laugh at me." [29]

33 In Israel, where the Jews were granted Israeli nationality when they arrived the difficulties were striking in the accounts given by the respondents, with the exception of those who arrived in 1948 as part of the left-wing Zionist youth movement *Hashomer Hatzair* (the Young Gard). Indeed, these respondents rarely mentioned the expulsion of the Egyptians from the kibbutz, recounted in the novel by Castel-Blum, and focus more on a voluntary departure to try their luck in the city and abandon a way of life that did not suit them (CASTEL-BLUM, 2016). Others transited through *Ma'abarot,* through *kibbutzim* or, for the "lucky ones", went directly to the towns of their choice, sometimes with the help of their families who were already present. But not all of them managed to integrate.

34 Yvette[30] remembers the letters she received from her sister who lived for more than a year in a tent when she arrived in Israel, and who complained about having only one egg per week and having to share that with her husband. The lack of mutual assistance was sometimes emphasized, and solidarity was limited to family networks. In some cases this was decisive for integration. This was the case for Meir, who was born in Cairo and arrived in Israel aged 14 with his parents and young brother. They were sent to Sderot, in the south of Israel near Gaza, between 1952 in 1955. In this border zone where Jews from Islamic countries had been placed to serve as a buffer population with the Palestinians, they lived through war and fear on a daily basis. Their father found a job, with some difficulty, building roads, but he could not keep it up long. In 1959 Meir left Israel and his family to live in France, and then in the United States where he lived illegally for some years before returning to Paris. He talked about conditions in the *Ma'abara*, violent and unstable because of the war, and his isolation from his family. Leaving Egypt and his time in Israel were associated with a failure in his life course. In order to support his family, he was forced to accept physically arduous work and never had the chance to study. Like many of his compatriots he was not among the "lords of the country", and had to "keep his mouth shut", eventually only expressing his "opinion in private" and "not in Hebrew" (Castel-Blum, 2016, 52), a language that he still speaks with difficulty. He then left the country.

35 Those who left for the United States often experienced similar trajectories to other Egyptian Jews. They travelled via several countries, sometimes including Israel, before settling in the United States which, they emphasise, had not opened up immigration to Jews from Egypt. Although many moved within transnational trajectories which allowed them to circulate more freely, others arrived via France where they remained for two or three years before being able to reach the United States, sometimes only because they sent their boys to *yeshivot* schools[31]. Unlike those who settled in France, however, these respondents emphasized the difficulties they went through after they left. For example, Moshe[32] and his family left Egypt in March 1957, arrived in Barcelona because they had Spanish nationality even though they had never been to Spain and did not speak Spanish. His parents wanted to go to France but could not settle there.

> "After a few months in Spain, my parents decided that was not a life that we could live. The Jewish community in Barcelona was very small and there was no way to eat kosher, nothing, it was very difficult. [...] We arrived in Spain, my mother did

> not know how to wash clothes... [...] We had to learn all that and begin a completely different life. [...] We did not succeed in living in Spain [...] The church was very, very strong at the time, even to the point where on Sunday mornings we had to dress as if we were going to church, for the neighbours, who saw us going out. In fact, we just went for a walk." They left Spain and went to Israel, to Ashdod, and ended up in a *Ma'abara*. Moshe says, "there was absolutely nothing. There was lots of sand [...] The situation in Israel when we arrived in 1957 was very difficult, there were only ration tickets for food, there was no work, or if there was, it was not interesting.[...] We went to Israel because we had no choice. The Americans did not want us, the French did not want us."

36 Moshe left Israel as soon as he had a possibility to go to the United States, where part of his family had settled, in 1970, in Brooklyn.

من فات قديمه مات: "he who turns his back on his past is dead"

37 Although they take diverse forms and occur over a period of more than 20 years, the conditions of departure and settlement of Egyptian Jews outside Egypt, are nevertheless quite comparable in terms of the irremediable nature of the rupture. It is possible to imagine that they conserve only a fragile connection to Egypt, particularly given their family trajectories are also often rooted elsewhere. And yet, once the initial urgency of settlement was passed, and with the signature of the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt, some returned to the places that they grew up in. Although they had long tried to forget their connections to Egypt, sometimes considered as a form of stigma by their host country or even sometimes by themselves, these return trips reveal an Egypt whose exoticism is merely the visible aspect of an experience that had become indelibly embedded into their being. Another proverb says, "من فات قديمه مات"; "he who turns his back on his past is dead"/"The one for whom the past no longer exists is dead". In order to remember, they also had to decide what to forget (CONFINO, 2015).

38 With the doors to Egypt only just reopened, their choice was to frantically search for the places they had lived, their friends, their former Egyptian employers, through metropolises like Cairo which had gone from 1.5 million inhabitants to more than 20 million. Sometimes they express surprise, in reproachful tones that so few remembered this past that was yet so recent, and their presence/absence; it was as though a wound had been freshly (re-)opened. But they were even more surprised when they were recognised:

> "And in 1980[...] I took my wife to Alexandria, in Egypt. [...] And I went down to the end of the souk al Hosr, on the place. [...] And after five minutes tops, people were crowding around us [...] They had not seen me since 1953 [...]: there's the son of that *khawagat*[33] Jacques! Some even remembered my name, very surprising! [...] Thirty years later, as if I had been gone for a weekend, it was incredible [...] And they all said to me: don't go, don't go back to your country..."[34]

39 They saw in this the confirmation that they had indeed belonged in this country, and that their memory had not been completely erased. Searching for familiar faces through the streets of Alexandria or Cairo, trying to attract the attention of Egyptians more generally, perhaps they were deep down imagining that things had not changed.

40 Travelling alone or with their families, or for tourism, cultural or "reunion" trips organised by associations such as the *Amicale Alexandrie Hier et Aujourd'hui* (Alexandria Today and Yesterday Friendship Society) or the *Association de sauvegarde du patrimoine culturel des Juifs d'Egypte* (the Association for protecting the cultural heritage of Egyptian Jews[35]), their presence is tolerated as long as they remain non-ostentatious.[36] For descendants who have never known Egypt directly, or for those who left when they were very young, these trips give them images to go with the words and fragments of memory they have, or for their absence, sometimes reinforcing the feeling not of "having forgotten" but of "never having been able to learn." (PEREC, 1995, 60) They visit the sites of family history and collective Jewish memory, such as synagogues, generic symbols of Egyptian Judaism that are sometimes only one element among others (and not the most central) of their parents' lived experiences. They search for the tombs of their ancestors, which they do not always find, and experience this trip, sometimes with their parents, as a mystery to be solved, in the face of a transmission that is experienced as partial or incomplete (DRES, 2018). But this "return" does not allow them to either evaluate the transformations that have taken place here, which they have not themselves experienced, nor to shed light on the mystery of fragmented history that they feel is so "full of previous breaks and breaches that they are as though isolated in brief living reality" (BRAUDEL, 53).

ill.2. Visit to the synagogue in Alexandria, Eliyahu Hanabi,

Michèle Baussant, 2010

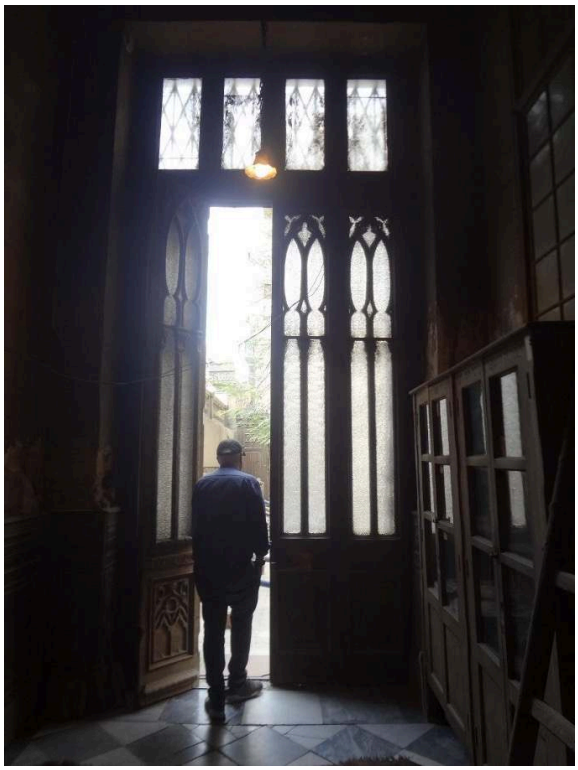
ill.3. "Looking for my street"

Michèle Baussant, February 2020

ill.4. "Belzoni street, a new building has replaced my childhood home"

Michèle Baussant, February 2020

ill.5. Etz Haim (Hanan) synagogue



Michèle Baussant, February 2020.

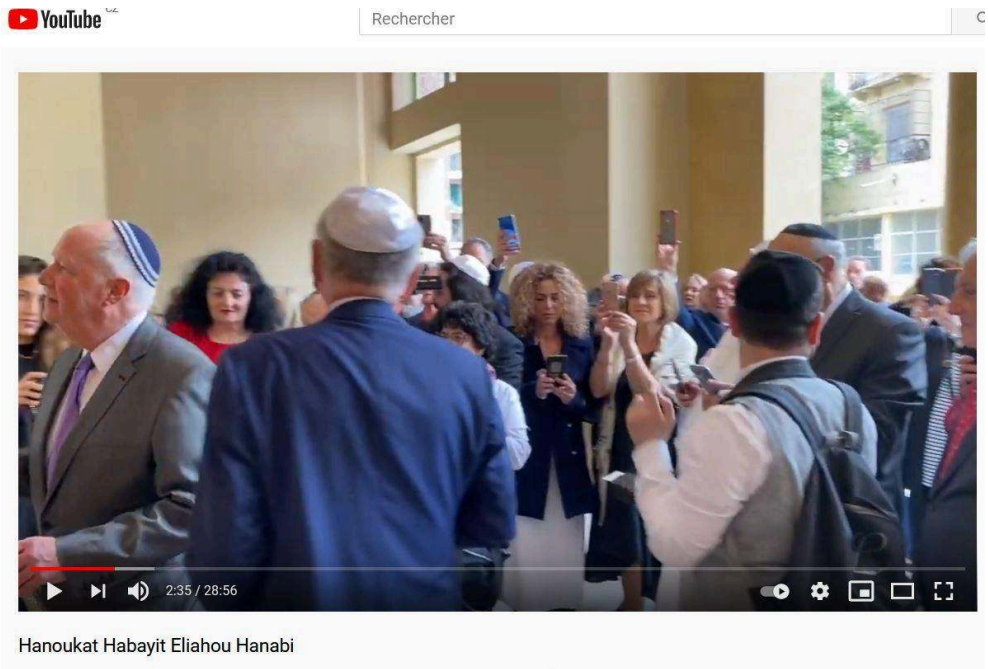
41 By contrast, those who left Egypt when they were older were directly confronted with these transformations or the disconnection between these places and their memories of them. They realise, as they walk around, that the part of the city they thought they knew by heart is foreign to them. As I walk with one, in the road where she grew up, and she shows me certain buildings and places that are emblematic for her, I ask what the old imposing building across the road is. She admits that she does not know, "we only walked along one side of the road and I do not remember this building." Others note the disappearance of the social sphere which had not completely disintegrated when they left. This is the case of Marc,[37] who discovered a town that was "empty because the people who should have been there weren't there. There was so many, so many, so many people, but not the right ones. The right ones weren't there." Those who did remain were isolated and increasingly elderly.

ill.6. The Jewish Cemetery of al-Bassatine, Cairo

Michèle Baussant, February 2020.

42 These travels sometimes produce the desire to find a space in the countries they have settled in where they can come together and transmit the "lived experience" of those who had left Egypt, between different generations and within the diaspora of Egyptian Jews. In France, the Association to Protect the Cultural Heritage of Egyptian Jews (*Association de sauvegarde du patrimoine culturel juif égyptien*), founded in 1979, strives to preserve the memory and the traces of the history of Egyptian Jews, while the Association Nebi Daniel, created in 2003, seeks to conserve primarily cultural heritage in situ.

ill.7. Hanoukat haBayit de la synagogue Nebi Daniel, organisée par l'Association Nebi Daniel, 14 février 2020



video link https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=or5ek8UFpmE
Michele Baussant

43 In New York, some have gathered within the *Ahava ve-Ahva* congregation, founded in 1979, and which bears the name of the oldest synagogue and Talmud Torah in Cairo. They are rebuilding a synagogue by the same name in Brooklyn, under the guidance of the Syrian Jewish community that dominates the local Sephardic Jewish scene (SUTTON, 1988). Every year, the congregation is celebrating the annual Passover Seder al-Tawhid, a "proud Egyptian tradition that goes back centuries". In fact, for Alfred Morabia, the Seder al-Tawhid could have been written by the Nagid Avraham, son of Maimonides (HASSOUN, 2019 [1987]). Its repertoire, described as "typical", includes Egyptian songs close to taqsîm and uses Arabic into Hebrew liturgical poems, hymns and hazanut. If, in the diaspora, these songs are highlighted as a central element of a specific Egyptian Judaism, none of my interlocutors ever evoked their use in Egypt.

ill.8. Tawhid 2006

For listening Seder al-Tawhid on the website of Ahava Ve Ahva Congregation follow the link: https://www.ahaba.org/audio_library.php

For watching the Seder al- Tawhid 2019 at the Ahava Ve Ahva Congregation, follow the link : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6shU-Q2yYA&list=RDu6shU-Q2yYA&start_radio=1&t=0

and 2018: https://vimeo.com/6727273

Ahaba Ve Ahva

44 However, Jacques Hassoun's description of Kenisseth el-Masryin (of the Egyptians) or El-Oustad (from the name of thaumaturge "Al Oustadh" Haïm Fadil ben-Abou Awi ben-Ibrahim ben-Hananel el Imshati), bears witness to some of these customs in some synagogues. During the Purim Mysraim (or Cairo) the reading of the Megillah was done in Hebrew and Arabic. And "All the first Nissan, that is to say at the beginning of spring, when, before the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jews celebrated the New Year, was held in Cairo and only in Cairo, a ceremony called "Leilet El Tawhid" - The Night of Divine Unification. During this night, several hymns and songs were recited, sung, and translated as they went along. In fact, it was an interpretation in which the passage from Hebrew to Arabic was made, without the Hebrew phrase and the Arabic phrase necessarily overlapping. Following these hymns, the most religious of the officiants of the synagogue known as kenisseth el-Masryin rose to sing in Arabic the Seder El Tawhid proper. It is a text that begins with : "In the name of Allah, Clement and Merciful" - and which is molded on the Koran, evoking the divinity in its 99 attributes, naming Abraham under the name of El Khalil. Aharon the High Priest, Haroun El Iman ... as for Moses, he is the Rassul Allah, the envoy of Allah. This is the only time we realize that this is a Hebrew, Judaic and not a Muslim text. I mean, this is an extreme point, an extreme point in the encounter between Jews and Muslims (HASSOUN, 1989, 117). In another text, he described the specific way in which some Egyptian synagogues performed the costum of limmud (studying Torah) on the eve of 1 Nisan, in singing liturgical poems (pizmomim, mizmorim and piyyutim), often to the tune of Egyptian music (HASSOUN, 2019, 170).

ill.9. Synagogue Ahaba ve Ahva, Brooklyn

Michèle Baussant, January 2017

45 In Israel, although subscribing to a Zionist ideal and a desire to distance themselves from an enemy and Arab country may have led them to (at least publicly) block out the memories of their life in Egypt, the 1979 peace treaty allowed them to come together to build a specific history for Egyptian Jews around festivities in which Egyptian dances and foods from "over there" are central, and at Pourim they don the "traditional" garments of Jews from Egypt for a day. In general tarbouche and a galabeya which they often no longer wore in Egypt and weren't specific to the Jews.

ill. 10. Purim 1947

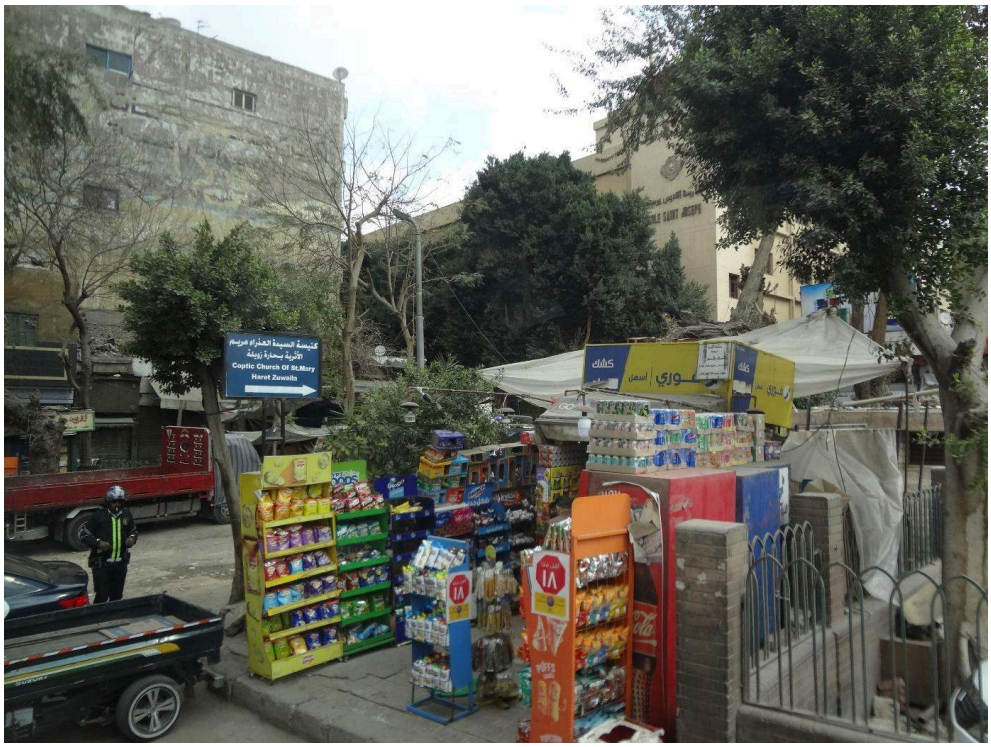
Picture posted on Facebook by Désiré Sakkal, 27 February 2017

46 Although they do so differently, they are all anxious to preserve the "traces" of their past in Egypt, as Jews and as survivors. These traces are no longer inscribed in spaces of memory, nor associated with practices and social spaces in Egypt, but rather scattered and only sporadically maintained in the activities of these communities of exiled Egyptian Jews. A shared feeling of loss and exclusion from history, which led to the creation of their community, drives the desire to remember together. Eviction from history in Egypt, where "Jewish memory has disappeared [...] there are only a handful of Egyptian Jews, and they are dying. A book is no longer a book, a man is no longer a man. Egypt today has wiped out my memory, our memory" (RAHMANI, 2000, 3) There has been an undertaking of "uniformization, banalization, with which we are confronted every day," (HASSOUN, 1978) or even silence and forgetting in other places.

ill. 11. Alexandria

Michèle Baussant, 2008

ill.12. Near the entrance of the oldest synagogue of Cairo, Ben Ezra temple. There's no indication that this temple exists



Michèle Baussant, 2020

47 The narratives they produce, often outside scholarly circles, are not infinitely malleable, nor disconnected from all credibility. They circulate and relate facts and events that are important for those who evoke them. To the point where some have invested them with new meaning, particularly in Israel, with calls for legal, political and historical recognition for Jews from Islamic countries as refugees. Among the leaders of these demands for recognition are Egyptian Jews.

Recognition: histories unmade, histories remade?

48 This recognition is first and foremost based on the production of a history of which the object is the departure and disappearance of oriental Jewish communities, described as the "forgotten Exodus."[38] For these authors, the objective is not really to situate this disappearance in the context of the deep transformations that affect Muslim societies as a whole, but to trace back the thread of history, marked as it is by successive dramatic episodes that constitute the general narrative, to reveal an overarching vision and elements of continuity. For some, the forms of insertion and statuses of Jews have been unified in the neologism *dhimmitude* (as a combination of dhimmi and servitude) and for others, their fate is comparable to that of European Jews (BENSOUSSAN, 2012). This kind of generalization can be seen be seen among certain historians, essayists or activists, particularly within the Jewish diaspora (ROUMANI, 1978; LEVIN, 2001; TRIGANO, 2009; FENTON and LITTMAN, 2010).

49 Also present in Israel, this demand for recognition can be seen within the context of a political agenda that is at work in the Middle East, and in the United States.[39] There are some key dates in this chronology: between 1957-1958, when the Central Office for Documentation related to Jewish losses in Egypt (*Bureau central de documentation relative aux pertes juives en Égypte*) was created in Paris; 1975, when WOJAC (World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries) was created in Paris; and the 2008 recognition by the American Congress of the refugee status of Jews and Christians form Arab countries; and the 2010 Israeli law recognising Israeli citizens who had left an Arab country, or Iran, due to religious discrimination as "refugees from Arab countries". In the context of this recognition, the Palestinian diaspora's right of return is associated with demands for compensation made to Islamic countries for the expulsion of their Jewish communities.[40]

50 This recognition has been accompanied by recent efforts in Israel to incorporate a history of Jews from Islamic countries into the national narrative. Up until now, this narrative had left little or no room for these communities, relying on a historical model that devalued Jewish life in exile (*Galut*) as a negative historical phase in comparison with Ancient and modern periods. By creating this link between these two periods, they were able to provide a foundation for the Hebrew/Jewish/Zionist equation,[41] which has been inculcated through a number of state structures (education, youth movements and the army) designed to integrate all Jews who have a right to citizenship due to their immigration to the country (Law of Return). This was transmitted via the teaching of a national ethic and Israeli tradition of the Hebrew language and the transmission of a supposedly "universal" historical narrative. It was also transmitted by the subscription to a religious logic, a form of "civil religion of Israel" (LIEBMAN and DON-YEHIHA,1983) or "state Judaism," (REMENNICK and PRASHIZKY, 2012) which can be seen even

in the political and governmental institutions and which dominates the ethos of "assimilation and the institutions responsible for it". In fact, from its beginnings, the Jewish secular state used religiosity to "correct" and "Israelize problematic immigrants, beginning with the *Mizrahim* Jews from the Middle East and North Africa, and then Ethiopian Jews" (LERNER, 2015).

ill. 13. Mr.David Matas at Justice for Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries Conference, Jerusalem, September 2012

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tVQT3lM61I4

51 Founded on the concept of *Shlilat ha-golah* (negation of the diaspora),[42] this perspective long avoided any non-European dimensions of Jewish history (SHOHAT, 1999). The recognition of refugee status for Jews from Islamic countries, as it has been formalized in legal and institutional terms, particularly through the incorporation of the history and heritage of "Jews from Arab countries and Iran", reconnected to biblical times,[43] into the school curriculum, could be seen as a correction to the forgetting and marginalisation that these populations have experienced for decades. We might think that the actions of the Ministry for Social Equality in 2009, which officially reopened the files pending since the Sadat agreements on lost heritage and the various revoked rights of communities originating in Islamic countries and Iran, would allow these communities to obtain compensation (PEREZ, 2014). We might think this, even though in 2014 there were few measures taken by the Ministry for Retirements to constitute a list of potential candidates for compensation. It might seem that the commemorative day of November 30, established in Israel and other countries such as Canada and the United states, since 2014, and intentionally linked to the anniversary of the United Nations vote of 1947 ending the British mandate,[44] grants them an official and visible place within this narrative. We might assume that in 2015 the inclusion of the history

of oriental Jewish communities both in the diaspora and in Israeli history in the school curriculum paves the way for the transmission of an emotional connection to their past in this country. And that the 2018 creation of a mobile application, רואים הת הקולות , (ro'im het haqolot, Shemot, Exodus, 20:15)[45] would give a voice or voices to Jews from Islamic countries living in Israel, to recount their exile.

ill. 14. ro'im het haqolot Web site

52 The political actors that implement these policies, which are centred on symbolic compensation,[46] present these different initiatives and their visibility as a form of official recognition that helps to redress the relegation of these communities and the social and economic inequalities they still suffer from in the Israelo-Palestinian space. These policies aim to generate shared values, symbols and identity between the different components of the Jewish population living in this region, through tools such as the writing of a common narrative of experiences, similar to that of European Jews. But they also pursue broader political objectives, particularly on a regional level. Indeed, the rewriting and integration of the history of these communities, balanced against the Palestinian *Nakba*[47] and which aims to have Palestinian refugees bear the burden of a debt incurred by Islamic countries in relation to Israel, deferred in time and "shifted in space", reveals certain contradictions and issues linked to this integration. Lyn Julius, who manages one of the associations for the recognition of the "destruction and dispossession" of historic Jewish communities in Islamic countries, wrote that :

> "our objective is to draw special attention to a sector of the global Jewish population whose existence is routinely denied or ignored. The *Mizrahim* never left the 'Arab' world – they merely moved from one corner of the region to another. It is essential to emphasize their indigeneity *vis-a-vis the Arabs,* who arrived in the greater Middle East and North Africa 1,000 years after the Jews. Native Jews, who

now happen to comprise the majority of the Jews of Israel, also have a specific quarrel with Arab and Muslim states: these regimes need to be called to account for 'ethnically cleansing' their Jews. Our job is to advocate for Mizrahi rights to justice – recognition and redress. The plight of Middle Eastern Jews is also essential to understanding the ongoing Arab and Muslim conflict with Israel and the persecution of minorities. There is another important goal: to vindicate the legitimacy of the sovereign state of Israel in the modern Middle East. As an aboriginal people of the Middle East the Jews of the region have no less a right to a state of their own in their ancestral homeland."[48]

ill. 15. Hasbara campaign from Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon to « restore the truth » about who the "real refugees" would be, 2012

Danny Ayalon -The Truth About the Refugees

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_3A6_qSBBQ

ill. 16. Young Americans belonging to Christians United for Israel (CUFI)

CUFI On Campus leaders are committed to standing in solidarity with Israel and the Jewish people, and remember the Jewish refugees of North Africa & the Middle East by helping the The Mizrahi Project bring the story of the "forgotten refugees" to their campuses.

In this video, young Americans belonging to Christians United for Israel (CUFI), an organization founded in 2006 and claiming to be the largest pro-Israel organization in the U.S., remember Jews in Islamic countries. https://www.themizrahiproject.org/about

53 These initiatives of recognition are for the moment included only in the national memorial discourse (CHIVALLON, 2012). They do not counteract the multiple discriminations that these middle-eastern Jewish communities are subject to today, and continue to neglect the diversity of forms of insertion, statuses, and connections between Jewish worlds and the countries they are established in (BENSOUSSAN, 2012), as well as the different trajectories of Jewish communities from Muslim countries to Israel. Jews in so-called oriental communities do not all recognise themselves in the construction of a history couched in a "European Jewish terminology",[49] nor in the demand for the recognition of a traumatic history of destruction that would serve as the paradoxical foundation of their cohesion and identification. We can see this in the critical comments made by Eyal Sagui Bizawi, in relation to the new Israeli school curriculum that includes the history of Jews from Muslim countries:

> "After all, there's nothing like some good trauma to bring us all together around our memory of national tragedy, where we can put the head of a Persian Jew on the shoulders of a Polish Jew and the head of a German Jew on the shoulders of an Iraqi Jew, wailing together that the shtetl is burning." (BIZAWI, 2017)

54 Although some are driven by the desire to see the cultures of Jews from Muslim countries recognised for their diversity and cultural contributions, others refuse to reject an ongoing connection with "Arab identity" which corresponds to a shared language and culture, notwithstanding religious differences or the recognition of their Judaism and its position among what are claimed to be multi-secular traditions. They emphasize the memory of the *Ma'abarot* camps set up in the 1950s to house Jews in Israel, and the difficult living conditions in the country. For many of them, earning the

title of refugee was paradoxically a way of being identified as a legitimate element of the memory of the Arab world. For others, it also means a recognition of their role in Israel's development.

וְכָל־הָעָם֙ רֹאִ֣ים אֶת־הַקּוֹלֹ֔ת *(VeChol HaAm Ro'im Et Haqolot) :* "and all the people saw the voices"

> "The stories of our lives it is when they have been told many times that they speak for the first time" (MESCHONNIC, 2000, 39)

55 *Ro'im Et Haqolot*: the title of the software application that allows Jews from Islamic countries to narrate their stories in Israel and to see "what is meant to be heard, something impossible to find elsewhere" (MESCONNIC , 2003, 282), was probably not randomly chosen. A strange verse, taken from the Book of Names, which translators have long been reluctant to translate as it is and was often transcribed through an "erasing" (Meschonnic, 2005) translation. It is both "a true parable and therefore also a prophecy of meaning. A utopia of the visionary meaning of the voice in language", to quote Henri Meschonnic:

> "it is a prophecy in the sense that prophecy is not a prediction, but the rejection of ideas in power, and it is a utopia in the sense that it is a displaced thought. Nevertheless, at the same time for it to be a utopia, it must have an inner necessity to transform the prevailing deafness into listening." (Meschonnic, 2005, 65)

56 Outside this process of recognition that has been undertaken in Israel, many of the people I met in this country and elsewhere were not expecting institutional recognition from the countries in which they live today. For some, this is out of defiance towards the political world, others because they consider their past to be past, or simply because they are shy, hadn't thought to ask or because they are more focused on seeking an exchange within a non-institutionalised place. Moreover, they are not all happy to say that they are refugees, even today. They sometimes see in the various initiatives to give a voice to the Jews of Egypt a "bad relationship between voice and sight" that leads to a "theatricalization" (Meschonnic, 2005, 67) of their history which only partially reflects their experiences.

57 They retain a nostalgia for a world in which rights associated with belonging depended on prerogatives of religious affiliations, social and family networks, and access to protections, and were accorded to certain nationalities which situated them within a "supra-local" (ARENDT, 1969) legal space. Mentions of the past prioritizes the links to Egypt as well as relations with the West, through the idea of cosmopolitanism that promotes a humanitarian vision of harmonious coexistence between different communities but nevertheless leaves "the more numerous members" on the fringes of the social body. It establishes the history of a society of "equals", citizens of the universe that could live and evolve without nationality, or who could acquire one of their choosing, depending on the strategies of different powers, which are diverse and variable over time, within the context of capitulations and protections.

58 For them, this history has continued differently than they had planned and probably hoped. This unexpected turn of events which shifted the course of their existences cannot be reduced to a collective founding "traumatic" event, around which they reconsider and reconstruct their past. The reality is, as we have seen, much more complex and nuanced. Moreover, events that constitute a breakpoint do not always

appear as such when they occur, and there is no simple correlation between their extent, their gravity, and their legacy for future generations (TROUILLOT, 1995, 16) who will not always narrate them (or not in the same way).

59 For Jews both within Egypt and elsewhere, the past cannot be reduced to the two decades that saw their near total disappearance from the country, tethering them to a nostalgia that has the twin characteristics of being a quasi-fictional relationship with history, and a prison of the past. When I met and got to know these people, both in Egypt and in other places around the world, I often felt lost, swallowed up by the depth of their narratives and memories, in which their departure and resettlement often took up only a limited place. Alongside my own observations and interviews, there has been a startling growth of websites and data collected by individuals themselves, or from their personal archives. The possibilities for interactions provided by some of these websites were also added to my corpus, revealing the fragile and sometimes unexpected support structures for these memories that had been brought into contact, although sometimes over thousands of kilometres and even across time. What could this diversity contribute? What could I learn from this apparently unlimited corpus of sources? Should I reduce these accounts to their purely historical and sociological dimensions, localise them to attempt to link them together, submit them to connections revealed *a posteriori* in listening to them? Given that I would produce these connections, because in many ways I would also become the link between these voices, I would be what brought them together, through my interactions with each interviewee and by my overarching research. Or should I seek to render visible and audible their heterogeneity, their individuality, their ambiguities, the common spaces, the silences, and the unsaid? Or all of that at once? And how was it to be done?

60 Working on silences, gaining a new perspective on the "unseen", the "worlds that have disappeared", these pasts that are untraceable from the present, and their effects, these "olive pips" transplanted by Yvette, Jacques and Moshe, this means questioning the potential pitfalls of such a collection (which becomes a collection in spite of itself (PRESNER, 2015)[50]), tearing the object away from its context, where it "was formerly a part of a much bigger living whole", to gather its precious fragments from the ruins of the past and the "sacrificial pit of the now". This striking image came to me during a conference on the memory of slavery I was participating in. A historian concluded her presentation by asking the researchers in her panel to read extracts from different interviews in turn. These interviews were anonymised, but they were also completely decontextualized and juxtaposing them – which was intended to reflect a unity and an identity of experiences rather than a hierarchy – in fact made it difficult to hear their differences and individualities, which were nevertheless supposed to appear in these snippets in the present. In so doing, this researcher blocked any possibility for the transmission of this past, in favour of its "quotability". Exhibited as "pearls" and "corals" (PRESNER, 2015, 95-96) these extracts became "robbers by the roadside who make an armed attack and relieve an idler of his convictions"[51]. Listening to them, I wondered what it would be like to hear these same extracts not one by one, but all at once. A cacophony.

61 What happens when we assemble these interviews one by one? What does the auditor listen to and hear? Moreover, what results from their superposition, what noise, what sounds, what dominant and silenced voices? Do assemblage and superposition produce a centrality of experiences and intelligibility zones? Or liminality, grey zones of

unintelligibility, fluidity, noise, instability? And how? To what extent does the cacophony created by the multiplication of narratives, their struggle to become, if not hegemonic, at least "heard," not ultimately serve to misdirect and cloud attention from the very structures that maintain and enable the power relations and "regimes of truth" they remain subjected?

62 To claim that we must consider all experiences and histories - especially those of the voiceless, the "storyless" - has almost become a commonplace today. However, such an assumption is not sufficient to deal with the articulation between those different narratives that challenge the simple logic of the set theory according to which the whole must be greater than the part (DERRIDA, 1988). It may be worthwhile to investigate further the idea of cacophony that Slavoj Žižek defined as a form of parallax view (ŽIŽEK, 2006, 20). According to him, "we should renounce all attempts to reduce one aspect to the other (or, even more so, to enact a kind of 'dialectical synthesis' of opposites); on the contrary, we should assert antinomy as irreducible, and conceive the point of radical critique not as a certain determinate position as opposed to another position, but as the irreducible gap between the positions themselves".

63 What could we learn from this gap?

Living in Egypt

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65 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document http://journals.openedition.org/cm/5537

and leaving Egypt

66 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document http://journals.openedition.org/cm/5537

67 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document http://journals.openedition.org/cm/5537

Having a citizenship (or not)…

68 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document http://journals.openedition.org/cm/5537

69 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document http://journals.openedition.org/cm/5537

Returning

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What can we hear about those we cannot or do not want to see in our everyday life and the incessant flow of images, and information? What can we learn from thinking voice and sight together? Jacques Rancière reminds us that "Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct 'fictions,' that is to say material rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done." (RANCIÈRE, 2000, 62) This connection between voice and sight is related to the question of silence, and the restriction of our gaze, to us who traverse our "lifespan, from birth to death, with eyes closed," or without knowing what we see (CIXOUS and DERRIDA, 1998). It also brings us to the issue of being or not being visible in a "common" space, endowed with a common language, as long as the "politics is about what we see and what we can say about it, who has the competence to see and the quality to speak, on the properties of the spaces and the possibilities of time"(RANCIÈRE, 2001, 13-14).

This observation reminds me of the same question, which constantly runs through the social sciences and public debates: to speak on behalf of/for someone else. This question is problematic when this "someone else '' has been chased away, expelled, despoiled, because precisely we no longer wanted to see him and share a common space and voice with him. But maybe it is more comfortable to talk about/ speak for those we no longer see and treat their traces and voices as artifacts of a bygone time. However, the long absence of discourse and voices in the public sphere on the Jews' demise does not mean forgetfulness and void as evidenced by the resurgence today of crossed and parallel social constructions of the presence and absence of the Jews, both in Egypt and abroad: in social media, newspapers, cinema, official heritage initiatives, publications, or exchanges between Egyptians and Egyptian Jews on the internet and via Facebook. Thus, the silence and the disappearance of the Jews from Egyptians' sight also turned into a vehicle of memory used by various groups for different purposes.

This observation leaves an open question: why does the Jewish past matter today, in and out of Egypt? Why did the Jewish part of the Egyptian past stick to the present? What is at stake, especially for people who are not directly concerned? What are actors talking about when they refer to Jews in Egypt, who speak about them, say what with whom? Why collecting the voices of those whipped out as if they belonged only to the past? Why commemorating the Jews as if they were *out of the frame* while we can still observe them *in the frame*, returning to Egypt, evoking their experiences, and recasting themselves as part of the picture in the present? Promoting their past, praising their heritage, designing guided tours *via* mobile applications, while they can still speak, be present but often unheard and more or less barred from access to their heritage?

Therefore, what is the place of Jews in this process, not just as voices and traces but also as living bodies?

75 It is commonly assumed that these memorial and commemorative actions provide a symbolic reparation that aims to both heal and repair the past and to display tolerance.These actions allow to now provisionally and symbolically include these othered people from the Egyptian Nation-State without endorsing their presence nor really intending to deal with them. They are confined to the role of the " missing part " of the Egyptian cultural identity. Thus, we can pretend that the past is repaired and healed, without addressing and redressing the present. This means there is a long way left to open our eyes, see, hear, listen to those who can still speak and stand there, facing us now. Their voices layer and resonate from different spaces and times to another, unveiled and covered by the cacophonies of the present.

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NOTES

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2. The population increased from 4.5 million in 1800 to 24 million 1957 (REYNOLDS, 2012). This was also the case of the Jewish community that went from around 7000 people in the mid-19th century to around 80,000 at the end of the second world war.

3. Elias Khoury recounts two inextricably connected situations of exile, between a Palestinian woman condemned to live eternally uprooted in a refugee camp in Lebanon, and a Jewish woman from Lebanon living a difficult present in Israel, in the nostalgia of her lost country and her human environment (KHOURY, 2000).

4. For the contemporary period, studies have developed in recent years. Some explore the question of Jews as part of a broader perspective in monographies on cities, such as the monumental work by Robert Ilbert on Alexandria, or around other themes such as cosmopolitanism or the legal status of individuals(FARGEON, 1938; LANDAU, 1974; HASSOUN, 1981; SAFRAN, 1981; SHIMON, 1987; CARASSO, 1982; KRÄMER, 1989; LASKIER, 1992 ; BEININ, 1994; BEININ, 1998; MEITAL, 1996; SILVERA, 1999; SANUA, 2004; HIRST and SILK, 2004; FAHMY, 2004; BARDA, 2006; HANLEY, 2007; HANLEY, 2008; MICCOLI, 2015; STARR, 2009; ABDULHAQ, 2016). There are also studies by Egyptian researchers, particularly on the media or on the role of Jews in communist movements. See, for example: Siham Nassar,*al-Yahud al-misriyun bayna al-misriyya wal-sahayuniyya*, Cairo: Al-Arabi, 1981; Awatef 'Abd al-Rahman, *al-sihafa al-sahayuniyya fi misr*, 1897-1954, Cairo, Dar al-Thaqafa al-Jadida, 1980; 'Ali Shalash, *al-Yahud wa'l-masun fi misr: dirasa ta'rikhiyya*, Cairo, al-Zahra' li'l-I'lam al-'Arabi, 1986. Rif'at Sa'id, *Ta'rikh al-haraka al-shuyu'iyya al-misriyya: al-wahda, al-inqisam, al-hall, 1957–1965,* Cairo, Dar al-Thaqafa al-Jadida, 1986 and *Munadilun yasariyun*, Cairo, Sharikat al-Amal lil-Tib'ah, 2011; Mohamed Abu al-Ghar, *Yahud misr min al-izdihar ila al-shatat*, Cairo, Dar al-Hilal, 2004.

5. Nietzsche reminds us of the reasons individuals need to refer to the past, and the need for history: "History pertains to the living man in three respects: it pertains to him as a being who acts and strives, as a being who preserves and reveres, as a being who suffers and seeks deliverance. This threefold relationship corresponds to three species of history - insofar as it is permissible to distinguish between a monumental, an antiquarian and a critical species of history." (Nietzsche, 2011 [1874], 67). Moreover, we can also emphasise that today fiction is preferred to history, as we can see in the tourism associated with cinema or series in places like Krakow, where tourists come to see the places where Schindler's list was filmed, or Dubrovnik, where tourists are attracted more by Game of Thrones, than by the city's history.

6. On this notion of "filtering", Peter Brown shows how Christianity was progressively implanted in the political and cultural structures of the Roman Empire, then Byzantium, and finally the kingdoms of the Middle Ages in the west, filtering them through its representations and practices that aimed to regulate social life as a whole (BROWN, 1995).

7. A metaphor borrowed from a recurrent memory among the individuals I spoke to.

8. This article is based on a long-term ethnographic investigation, which began in 2006. It has led me to collect nearly three hundred interviews with Egyptian Jews who have settled in France, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Switzerland, Italy, England and in Israel, as well as some who stayed in Egypt. As part of this research I have also followed a large number of activities organised by associations of Egyptian Jews, and religious activities.

9. This article draws more on Levinas' work on the dwelling, which provides an insight into the notion of "inhabiting it", than on Heidegger's (LEVINAS, 1988 [1971]).

10. This representation is reinforced by the documented presence of Jews in the country at the beginning of the 6th century before the common era, and then when Alexander the Great arrived in Egypt (late 332 BCE), and again in the 1st century before the common era. The Jewish community lived at the heart of this "Greek Egypt" until the Arab conquest of 640-642, which marked the beginning of their Arabization, particularly in Alexandria, along with other religious minorities. Finally, from the 9th century we can observe the life, practices, activities, questionnings, and cultural and commercial exchanges that these Jews of Fustat (the new Egyptian capital founded by Amr ibn al-As) cultivated with those in other Arab and Muslim countries. The writings left to us by Jewish figures such as Moshe Mäimonide (1135-1204 or Saadia Gaon (882-942) and the documents of the Cairo Genizah also retract nearly ten centuries of history of this Egyptian Judaism, and its broader connections with other Jewish communities (Spain, Syria, Maghreb, Yemen, Sicily, etc.) (TIÈCHE-LOUBET, 1996).

11. During their travels in Egypt, Andrew Alexander Bonar, Robert Murray Mc Cheyne noted that: "there are about 100 families of European Jews in Alexandria, who have only one synagogue; and that there are about 300 families of native Jews who have two and these are called Arab Synagogues. [...] We afterwards learned from English residents that [...] there are more Jews in Cairo than in Alexandria. In the latter there may be about 1000 and in Cairo about 2000." In *Narrative of a Mission of Inquiry to the Jews from the Church of Scotland in 1839*, Edinburgh, William Oliphant and Co.,1859, p.67. See also the census conducted by Montefiore in 1840.

12. On this community, known to be embedded in several sites around Egypt, and for its association with Egyptian language and culture, see Emanuela Trevisan-Semi, *Les caraïtes, un autre judaïsme*, Albin Michel, 1992. They only follow the Written Law (the Tanakh or the Hebrew Bible) and do not recognize the authority of the post-biblical tradition in the Talmud and rabbinic writings. They reject all rabbinic teachings placing the Talmud at the same level as the Torah.

13. Between them and Egyptian rabbinic Jews, connections were often weak: "we knew who they were, that they were Haram [...] but we didn't know anything about them, they were completely Arabized, and we didn't know how to behave with them or what to do with them," remembers Samuel."

14. On the question of legal status, and in particular of the *musta'mîn* and *dhimmi,* the *jizya* having been revoked by the khédive Sa'îd in 1855 in Egypte, (LELLOUCH, 2011; KRÄMER, 1989). On the diversity of Jews in Egypt see Racheline Barda, *op.cit.*, p.6.

15. Some came because of intensifying anti-Jewish measures, pogroms and persecutions in these countries, like in Russia, Romania, or in other geographic areas like Morocco, Greece, Syria in the early 19th century (STILLMA, 1991).

16. If I borrow this phrase from literature, it is because it reflects a large number of comments from my interviewees.

17. If we look at its definition, historical memory is a way of using history, or finalised history, where the finality is not knowledge but rather legitimacy and identity. Shared memory refers to what has been experiences, memories and traces of the past.

18. This term however can in fact designate and regroup a variety of religions and nationalities. It refers to a figure that it seems we cannot identify as belonging to a national, religious or ethnic group.

19. I have borrowed this quotation from Elias Khoury, a Lebanese author who has been able to compare, and question the cruel paradox of the crossover between exiled Palestinians and Jews exiled from Muslim countries (KHOURY, 2018).
20. The question of anti-Semitism is only rarely raised, except by Egyptian Jews in Israel, and in generally it arrives late in the interview, except for anti-Semitism of certain Christians in Egypt. However, after 1956, it appears more clearly as one of the causes of departure.
21. Sarah is a senior manager in the cultural sector, living in Milan. She is originally from Heliopolis, which she left when she was five and a half years old, 1956. Her mother was Italian, and her father Austrian and Moroccan.
22. Particularly in France, the United Kingdom, in Switzerland, and in Italy.
23. A man born in Tanta in 193, who lives in Paris. A retired engineer.
24. A Jewish man, born in 1930 in Alexandria of Syrian-Lebanese parentage. A senior manager, he was exiled from Egypt in 1956, and settled in Paris. He died in 2018.
25. A man born in 1944 in Alexandria, a retired teacher. He moved to Israel in the 2000s to join his children who had moved there.
26. This was a recurring theme in the interviews that saw the attribution of Italian papers to Jews as linked to a fire that destroyed municipal records.
27. *'Aliyah* (pl. *'aliyot*, lit. "ascent [to Zion]")—the migration of a Jew to the Land of Israel.
28. Jewish Committee for Social Action and Reconstruction (COJASOR) founded in 1945. It is intended to respond to the social needs of people in difficulty of all origins and in particular those of the Jewish community.
29. Personal text sent to me by the author.
30. A woman born in Alexandria in 1933, living in Paris. Retired employee. She left Egypt in 1956.
31. Admission to these religious schools for young men was a way for families to obtain visas for the United States.
32. A man born in Alexandria in 1946. He now lives in Manhattan, New York.
33. This term, probably passed from Turkish to Egyptian Arabic, would come from the word of Persian origin, khodja, a title given in Iran and Turkey to a teacher or a scholar, then applied to princes and rich merchants. Depending on the context, the use of this term is either a mark of respect or a form of denigration.
34. Born in 1938, in Alexandria, Youssef is a retired journalist living in Israel, interviewed in 2009.
35. Cultural associations, created in 1993 and 1979 respectively.
36. In 2008, a voyage organized by the members of the *World Congress of the Jews from Egypt*, who were to attend the "First international conference on Jews from Egypt", fell through. At the last moment the hotel cancelled all the reservations and no other hotel accepted to accommodate the group, suspected of contributing to a campaign for compensation for despoiled assets. http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/133825/Egypt/Politics-/Jews-of-Egypt-Remembrance-of-things-past.aspx, consulté le 27 avril 2017.
37. Born in Alexandria in 1945, he left Egypt in 1956, came back in 1959 and left for good in 1960. Interview conducted in a Parisian suburb in 2009.
38. This "forgetting" is in contrast with the inflation of books in Arabic on Judaism and Jews since the end of the Arab-Israeli war (ABITBOL, 2005).
39. Like Justice for Jews from Arab countries (JJAC), and the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries, The Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa, and so forth
40. Israeli politician Gila Gamliel declared: "The time has come to correct the injustice against Jews in Libya, Tunisia, Morocco, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Yemen, and Iran – countries from which Jews were expelled." This estimation was published in prevision of the Trump administration's peace plan and it constitutes a prerequisite condition for any regional peace agreement, based on the

Israeli law of 2010. https://www.jforum.fr/israel-reclame-250-milliards-aux-arabes-pour-lexpulsion-des-juifs.html, 6 January 2019.

41. For a discussion of the terms Hebrew, Jew, and Zionist, see Motti Regev, "To have a culture of our own: on Israeliness and its variants" (REGEV, 2000).

42. This is a Zionist concept that is used to explain the impossibilty for Jews from the diaspora to be emancipated.

43. The revalorization of the Jewish presence and its near disappearance in the 20th century, justifies the claim of ancient Jewish presence from the Middle East to the Maghreb: "Oriental Jewry lived in Arab countries for 1,400 years *(minimum - ed)*, between wealth and persecution, between paganism and Islam. A new book describes the roots of 55 % of Israel's population. The book's translator says: 'We were refugees, not immigrants. It is time for our children to know the history of the other half of those living in the state of Israel.'" https://jewishrefugees.blogspot.com/, 3 September 2013.

44. This vote ended British Mandate and ordered the partition of the country into independent states, Arab and Jewish.

45. By the ministry responsible for cultural equality (המשרד לשיוויון חברתי).

46. Which can be seen in the "annual mizarhi cash price" of 150000 shekels per year (around 360000 euro). established since 2017, attributed to the Israeli prime minister to enourage and reinforce studies on the communities of "Arab countries and Iran".

47. This refers to the continual process of dispossession and deterritorialization of Palestinian since 1948 in the Israeli-Palestinian and Palestinian areas.

48. Lyn Julius, *op Does the Mizrahi campaign delegitimise Ashkenazim*?, http://jewishrefugees.blogspot.com/2018/12/does-mizrahi-rights-campaign.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+blogspot%2FZpKYsS+%28Point+of+no+return%29 et Dani Behan, "Ashkenazi Jews Are Indigenous To Israel, Not Europe", https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/ashkenazi-jews-are-indigenous-to-israel-not-europe/?fbclid=IwAR2pg46dIB9D6LS76zs_ts8_yzosty5BZGVJgJwcMZhEFAEmjQGIdlKSv6M.

49. This is the basis of the critique expressed by the Ramat Gan Committee of Baghdadi Jews. http://baghdadijews.wordpress.com/english/. It is echoed in certain exchanges and comments that I collected during the international meeting *Justice for Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries*, on September 10, 2012 in Jerusalem.

50. Paired with Stephen Smith, "On the Ethics of Technology and Testimony: A response to Todd Presner".

51. Walter Benjamin, quoted by Hannah Arendt, *ibid.*, p.38.

ABSTRACTS

This article focuses on the Jews of Egypt and how they rebuild their connections to Egypt from several spaces and contexts of exile. Based on a "retroactive ethnography," it relies on work with memory and the memory of the Jews of Egypt encountered both as actors and narrators and is interested in the crossed constructions of the presence and absence of Jews and Egyptians. To do so, he explores the persistence and relevance of certain traces, practices, and concrete memories of the past in their relationship to material spaces - what we might call the memory of the inhabited. It also focuses, through return journeys, on the confrontation with the ignorance or

silence of the Egyptians who today occupy the various spaces where the Jews lived, frequented, and left their traces: what one might call the uninhabited of memory. These traces, journeys, exchanges between Egyptians and Egyptian Jews reveal the discrepancy and the encounter of displaced histories of people "without traces" and persistent traces of a past as "without history."

Cet article porte sur les Juifs d'Égypte et sur la manière dont ils reconstruisent leurs liens à l'Égypte, à partir de plusieurs espaces et contextes d'exils. S'appuyant sur une « ethnographie rétroactive », il s'appuie sur un travail avec la mémoire et sur la mémoire des Juifs d'Égypte rencontrés à la fois comme acteurs et narrateurs et s'intéresse aux constructions croisées de la présence et de l'absence des Juifs et des Égyptiens. Pour ce faire, il explore la persistance et la pertinence de certaines traces, pratiques et souvenirs concrets du passé dans leur rapport aux espaces matériels - ce que l'on pourrait appeler la mémoire de l'habité. Il se centre également, à travers des voyages de retour, à la confrontation avec l'ignorance ou le silence des Égyptiens qui occupent aujourd'hui les différents espaces où les Juifs ont vécu, qu'ils ont fréquentés et où ils ont laissé leurs traces : ce que l'on pourrait appeler l'inhabité de la mémoire. S'y dévoilent, comme dans les échanges entre Égyptiens et Juifs d'Égypte sur les réseaux sociaux, la distance et la rencontre entre les histoires déplacées de personnes « sans traces » et les traces persistantes d'un passé comme « sans histoire ».

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Geographical index: Egypt, Égypte
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