

Introduction

Scholarship on Jewish communities in the Maghreb and the Middle East has broken new ground through steering away from dominant narratives that approached Jews as a separate entity within Muslim societies. Specifically, Ella Shohat has drawn attention to the Orientalist modes of thinking that continue to underlie the myth of perpetual Jewish-Muslim enmity in art and language politics.¹ Shohat's work allows us to perceive narratives of separation as a production that contradicts both Jewish and Muslim values. By shifting course from two opposing historiographies that identify Jewish lives in Muslim lands in the modern times with the rise of anti-Semitism or with the era that brought about the demise of the Jewish communities in the Middle East, current scholarship on Jewish-Muslim relations examines Jews and Jewish topics as being part and parcel of their societies, be they Amazigh, Arab, Persian, or Turkish. Rather than treating Jews as aliens within largely Muslim societies, this new approach has shown the variegated geographies and uneven topographies of Jewish experiences within the extended area south of the Mediterranean and west of Asia, which was home to over six hundred thousand Jews until the end of the 1960s.² New historiographical approaches to the study of Jews in the modern Maghreb and the Middle East have rejected the arbitrary association between the identities of Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews and Zionism, thus challenging the conflation of Judaism with Zionism, and they have explored the way local reforms and the rise of nation-states have affected and shaped the lives of Jews in this expansive region. Spanning disciplines as far afield as sociology, legal studies, anthropology, and literary criticism, these scholars have examined the political, cultural, and social institutions and organizations that have facilitated the integration of Jews into their local societies. Further,

they have considered the imperial influences and processes that fostered the Jews' separation from their communities of origin, leading to their uprooting in the middle of the twentieth century.

In this "Middle Eastern turn," as historian Orit Bashkin has identified it,³ where the focus on Jewish themes in the region has drawn closer to the field of Middle East studies, we propose paying scholarly attention to the ways in which local communities in the Maghreb and the Middle East have interacted with, thought of, and written about the Jews who once lived in their midst. These groups have shared their challenging sociopolitical and economic realities, but, due to political and historical circumstances, they remain active and present primarily via memory, a source for generating national narratives despite no longer existing in proximity. Postcolonial in nature, this emergent historiography is critical of national elites, grand narratives, nationalist histories, and Zionist assumptions about Jews across languages and cultures. In the context of the decolonial moment in the middle of the twentieth century, Maghrebi and Middle Eastern Jews may have left their societies of origin for other horizons that seemed better economically, socially, culturally, or religiously, but their erstwhile existence in their predominantly Muslim societies has become a conspicuous marker of the deep transformation and mutilation these societies have experienced as a result of their Jews' emigration. We aspire in this volume to scrutinize the sequelae of separation and emigration in Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies as they emerge in literature and film produced by non-Jewish, and mostly Muslim, citizens of these countries and by some of their Jewish counterparts, specifically from Iran. Although not Jewish, these writers and filmmakers have shown a genuine interest in reconnecting their own stories to Jewish lives through a cultural production that recuperates and centers Jewish histories, cultures, and lives that once were part of the societal fabric these creators inherited from their elders.

Remembering Jews is about the significance of the resurgence of Jewish memory as a main topic in Maghrebi and Middle Eastern cultural production in the last thirty years. The current volume emerged from a two-day workshop Brahim El Guabli convened at the Oakley Humanities Center at Williams College in May 2019 under the mentorship of Professor Ella Shohat. Spurred by the convener's observation that Jewish emigration to Israel and other parts of the world has had far-reaching consequences for these Jews' societies of origin, something that Maghrebi and Middle

Eastern literature and film are finally articulating openly and provocatively, this conference invited participants to engage with the “decades-old, albeit overlooked, question of Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies’ responses to the sudden and fast exodus of their Jewish communities.”⁴ This conversation at the Oakley Center was preceded by an equally stimulating conversation at a panel that Mostafa Hussein organized at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association in Washington, DC, in 2017. Unlike most discussions that focus on historiography and other social scientific disciplines, these conversations drew mostly on literature and film produced by Muslims about Jews to probe how these media have become a locus for present engagements with the memory of departed Jews.

Up until 1948, Maghrebi and Middle Eastern cities and villages were inhabited by Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike. By 2012, some eight hundred and sixty-five thousand Jews had emigrated from their homelands in the Maghreb and the Middle East to the newly created State of Israel. Fewer than five thousand Jews live in the expansive area between Morocco and Iran today, highlighting the drastic attrition of populations that once were part of the societal and cultural fabric in these states and societies. Their relationship may not always have been ideal, but centuries of living alongside each other allowed Jews and Muslims to forge legal, social, and cultural practices that helped them navigate their relationships as well as negotiate the challenges that arose from the existence of a dominant majority and a dominated minority. Although historians have shown that the distinction was between Muslims and non-Muslims, questioning the relevance of the language of dominant and dominated, it is important to recognize that group power dynamics existed in these societies and expressed themselves in moments of conflict, moments we do not think were prevalent markers of the long history of Jewish-Muslim *covivance* (“shared living” in French). Rather than idealizing or “conflictualizing” Jewish-Muslim relations, *Remembering Jews* is a critical intervention that not only admits the asymmetrical power dynamics between given groups (namely Jews and Muslims included in predominantly Muslim societies) but also foregrounds the existence of long periods of millennial *covivance* that Jews and Muslims shared in their homelands. This is a situation that European colonial intervention in the region in the nineteenth century terminated gradually by undoing the social, linguistic, and cultural setups that allowed Jews and Muslims to converse with each other and negotiate their belonging to these societies.⁵

This imperialistic interference set in motion a transformative historical process that not only changed Jewish-Muslim relations but also widened the gap between these communities. Ella Shohat has demonstrated how a cultural and racial separation emanated from this intervention,⁶ alienating the Jew from the Arab/Amazigh and paving the way for emigration and loss. As Norman Stillman has written, the “Muslim world and all of its people underwent a veritable metamorphosis during the course of the nineteenth century.”⁷ This “metamorphosis” has resulted from a multipronged Euro-American intervention that took on different manifestations in the Maghreb (primarily Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, and the Middle East under the rule of the Ottoman Empire), opening the way for the massive emigration of hundreds of thousands of Jews from their homelands in the Maghreb and the Middle East. Starting in the nineteenth century, European diplomats in the Ottoman Empire were already pushing for the separation of Muslims and other religious minorities, namely Christians and Jews.⁸ The Damascus Affair of 1840, which is also known as the Damascus Blood Libel, intensified European pressure on the Ottomans to protect Jews from excesses of Christians and Muslims.⁹ The legal exceptions that these European interventions allowed these minorities to have, while entirely justified by their inferior status in a predominantly Muslim state, were also part of a long-term design to use them as pawns in the imperialistic and expansionist project that was already emerging in Europe at the time. The famous *dhimmi* status of non-Muslims was ended thanks to the *Tanzimât* (regulations) reforms, and the ‘Ahd al-Amân (pledge of security) in Tunisia granted Jews and Christians equality before the law.¹⁰ Jews in Egypt prospered economically under Khedive Isma‘il’s rule (1863–79), and Khedive Tawfiq in Egypt granted Jews “civil equality” in 1882 under the British Mandate.¹¹ Algeria was already under the French colonial system by 1830, and the status of its Jews became the object of different legal, educational, and cultural initiatives that culminated in their being granted French citizenship in 1870 thanks to the *Decr  e Cr  mieux*.¹² Even Morocco, which was not under Ottoman control, was visited by Sir Montefiore, a Jewish political leader and philanthropist, in 1863 to urge Sultan Muhammad bin ‘Abd al-Rahm  n to “improve the legal and social position of Morocco’s Jews.”¹³ The multipronged interventions to improve the status of Christian and Jewish minorities in these regions, whether genuine or simply subterfuge for European states to secure zones of influence within the Ottoman Empire and beyond, contributed to

the cultural and social separation of Jews and Muslims, especially after the establishment of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) in Paris in 1860.

The AIU's school system played a pivotal role in the process that ultimately distanced Jews from Muslims culturally, socially, and legally. With its Talmudic motto "All Jews are responsible for each other"¹⁴ and its founding principles articulated by the emancipated French Jewry, who felt responsible for their "persecuted" coreligionists elsewhere, the AIU had a comprehensive project that included cultural, social, and political advancement of Jews wherever they were.¹⁵ In particular, AIU was part of a larger project to Gallicize Jews by offering Francophone education as part of the colonial civilizing mission. These schools, which were part of the larger response to the persecution of Jews in Europe, offered all sorts of support to Jewish communities in the Maghreb and the Middle East and as far as eastern Europe. The first AIU school was opened in the northern Moroccan city of Tetouan in 1862.¹⁶ This educational mission *de facto* morphed into a diplomatic and assistance mission that went beyond the mere provision of education. The geographical and demographic reach of the AIU was such that its schools trained thousands of students in Morocco, Iran, Israel, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Syria, among others, throughout its existence.¹⁷ Although the organization abided mostly by its secular approach to education so as to "westernize" Jewish communities, the establishment of the State of Israel and the pressure of Zionist organizations influenced it to reorient its mission to aid Jewish emigration. Laskier has documented the disagreements that took place between the AIU's officials and the Zionist organizations in Morocco in particular.¹⁸ These disagreements aside, the AIU's schools played a major role in the secularizing project that created a rift between the now-secularized and westernized Jew and the still-traditional Muslim. Jews were learning French, which started to replace Arabic and Tamazight for the educated youth, and this modern education exposed them to new ideas and different ways of belonging beyond the local societies. Traditional nationalism or local belonging became obsolete for educated Jews, who looked toward Paris and London, as shown by Carlos de Nesry in his writings.¹⁹

The acquisition of French citizenship through the *Decr e Cr mieux* further complicated the relationship between Jews and Muslims.²⁰ The latter had to contend with the fact that the indigenous Jews were now assimilable into Western culture, meaning that they abandoned the issue of

independence. While Jews enjoyed their Frenchness, Muslims had to resist Gallicization and construct local nationalism, a concept founded on the rejection of French and Western culture that had now become part of Jewish identities in North Africa. This fact does not negate the existence of a sizable number of Jews who were not assimilated and who were supportive of the nationalist project. However, the particular polarization between Gallicized Jews and their Muslim counterparts in Algeria was very clear. Similarly, the French reinvention of North African Judaism through the intervention of Parisian Jewish authorities transformed the liturgy, furthering the cultural break between two formerly neighborly communities.²¹ In the past, Jews and Muslims could understand each other because they spoke the same language, and they had a chance to comprehend each other's worshipping methods, as they were all rooted in local religious practices. However, European education, the civilizing mission, and citizenship politics further complicated the situation. The generations of Jews and Muslims who could understand each other were dying out, and the descendants were being pulled in oppositional directions. This was especially noticeable in the 1940s, a pivotal moment in the history of Jewish-Muslim relations. While Muslims were fighting colonialism both in their local countries and in Palestine (under the British Mandate at the time), most politicized Jewish leaders were incorporated into the anti-independence projects as well as the Israeli proestablishment politics in Palestine. These rifts and separations were the result of historical processes that local Jewish communities did not entirely control or assent, but the end result was a situation in which one had to choose between leaving and staying. In other cases, such as Morocco, Jewish emigration was negotiated between the monarchy and Israeli envoys,²² pointing to the existence of internal interests that were served by the dislocation of Jews in some places.

This account of Jewish emigration and the factors that spurred it is not applicable to all Jewries in the Middle East. For instance, messianic and religious impetus for emigration to Palestine has always existed. However, the nineteenth century witnessed an increase in its traffic. Between 1881 and 1910, Yemenite Jews left for late Ottoman Palestine in response to political and economic volatility within Yemen. During this period they received no support from Zionist organizations, and they were even marginalized in Zionist historiography because their emigration was not rooted in European political ideology.²³ The story was different in the twentieth century,

when the Zionist movement became active throughout the Arab world, advocating for emigration and working to convince Jewish communities to return to and redeem the land of their forefathers. For instance, from 1911 onward the Zionist labor movement played a crucial role in the encouragement and organization of Yemenite Jewish emigration. This process included plans to liquidate one segment of the Jewish communities in the Arab world, replace Palestinian Arab workers in Jewish settlements, and provide the Hebrew labor market in Palestine with cheap workers who would do difficult labor in the colonies.²⁴ While only a minority of Jews embraced the Zionist idea as salvation from their dire economic and social conditions, the founding of the State of Israel and the rifts it created almost universalized the Zionist appeal. Within Jewish communities themselves, there were deep clefts between those who tried to reconcile their Zionist convictions with their belonging to their immediate society.²⁵ In the Maghreb, many leftist Jews opposed Zionism and saw in it a negation of their Jewish identity, instead calling for its rejection.²⁶ Other Jews in the region sounded their critique of Zionism and rejected it completely.²⁷

The transformations set in motion in the nineteenth century materialized in drastic ways. In addition to the creation of independent nation-states on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, the ensuing conflict between Arab states and the nascent State of Israel, the displacement of Palestinians from their homes, and mass Jewish emigration to Israel and other parts of the world (including France and the United States), imperialist incursions in the region led to the biggest dislocation of any religious group. This created an impactful, albeit understudied, demographic impoverishment of entire societies and geographies in the Maghreb and the Middle East. Emigrations happen and populations move because of internal wars and conflicts, but for a vibrant and fully integrated religious community to move swiftly over the course of twenty years, leaving hearth and home without impending danger to the lives of the majority of its members, is an unprecedented phenomenon whose ramifications beg for more scholarly investigation. Granted, the Zionist appeal and roles have been elucidated in great part, but the roles of local elites and their cooperation with Zionism to facilitate and speed up Jewish emigration for various internal agendas have yet to be addressed.²⁸ Questions of benefit and loss for Arab political regimes, ones that paid lip service to Palestine while aiding Jewish emigration to the Holy

Land, have remained a taboo topic whose study could demonstrate the ways in which Jewish emigration served and benefited regimes internally. El Guabli's *Moroccan Other-Archives* has developed the argument that the construction of authoritarianism went hand in hand with the facilitation of Jewish immigration, leading to multilayered losses that Moroccan society has only recently been able to process through historicizing and archive creation.²⁹ Most importantly, considering the way educated and westernized Jewish community members threatened authoritarianism and its then-ongoing homogenizing endeavors, the idea is not far-fetched that the emigration of Jews—and also Christians—contributed to the construction of authoritarianism and to the disabling of pluralistic societies that could have emerged from continued Jewish-Muslim collaborations.³⁰ The most important case in point here is Abraham Serfaty, who was (and remains) one of the most popular political leaders among Moroccans. He cofounded the revolutionary organization *Ilā al-Amām* (Forward!) and expressed his commitment to the liberation of Palestine, refusing to leave his home country despite political persecution by Hassan II's regime.³¹ This is to say that while the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 saw both the speedy departure of Jews and the officialization of Jewish-Muslim separation, as El Guabli shows, the causes that led to that point, including colonialism, Zionism, and internal factors motivated by the interests of local postcolonial regimes, need to be viewed in combination with each other to fully understand how the drastic rift between Jews and Muslims came to be.

Given this historical trajectory, Jews were a taboo topic in the Maghreb and the Middle East for almost seven decades. This rich history was relegated to oblivion, and important segments of society were deprived of the chance to mourn the loss of the world they grew up in and, from that, to accept the new situation of their homogenized societies and communities. Of course, the official and historical silencing of the existence of an erstwhile Jewish-Muslim life, especially among the younger generations, was contradicted by the existence of physical markers and ruins of this Jewish existence. From deserted cemeteries to old synagogues, both renovated and crumbling, Jews' ubiquitous presence is inscribed in the topographies of the Maghreb and the Middle East. Topography and toponymy continued telling a story that both state politics and the uncomfortable colonization of Palestine did not allow to be told. Despite bureaucratic, political, and procedural hurdles, Christian and Muslim individuals in Egypt frequent

deserted Jewish spaces so as to bring to their historical consciousness a cosmopolitan and a tolerant society, as Mostafa Hussein has indicated.³² More significant, however, are the stories told by older generations of Muslims who could remember a world they shared with their Jewish neighbors and friends. Aomar Boum has insightfully rendered the vibrancy of these memories, revealing how four generations of Muslims remember Jews.³³ Similarly, Emanuela Trevisan Semi and Hanane Sekkat Hatimi have demonstrated how Jews are remembered in the urban setting of Meknes,³⁴ illustrating how these memories share similarities and reveal differences between the different settings and contexts. The focus on ethnographic research in the Moroccan context has particularly overshadowed the writerly remembering and accounting for loss that has developed within literature and film.³⁵

Part of a larger reemergence of Jews as a theme in Maghrebi, Middle Eastern, and diasporic literature and film, this cultural production has broken the silence over the absence of Jewish co-citizens from their societies. Morocco and Egypt seem to produce the lion's share of novels and films that revisit their Jewish histories.³⁶ Despite their small number, writers and producers in Egypt (about five in Cairo and fifteen in Alexandria) continue to pay special attention to Jews. The proliferation of Jewish literary representations that incorporate episodes from the long and rich Jewish history in Egypt, from ancient to modern times, can be read as a solidification of Egyptian national identity as it works to retrieve a pluralistic past where Jews were an integral part of the national and sociocultural fabric of the country.³⁷ In fact, the contemporaneous reemergence of Jews in cultural productions across different regions seems to announce the end of a period of silence and latency that prevented these societies from mourning their losses. Grappling with the loss of past Jewish communities is not merely vital for a healthier understanding of national identity, but also the *sine qua non* for the reorientation of these societies toward a new future. One could argue that until the 2000s Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies never had an opportunity to mourn the richer and more diverse world they had lost. The emigration of Jews was costly not just in terms of the occupation of Palestine and its devastating effects for Jewish-Muslim relations, but also in terms of impoverishing Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies' sense of being. Relationships, friendships, families, partnerships, and myriad forms of local collaborations and fraternities between Jews and Muslims were

never grieved. Shohat's very productive reading of the implications of Said Sayegh's novel *L'Autre juive* as it "ruminates on deeply shared Moroccan cultural heritages and familial bonds" and depicts "a world without borders, whether geographical, biological, racial or linguistic" offers a segue into the loss of this borderless, familial, and shared world.³⁸ Loss, as such, has never been theorized and used as a framework to understand this bygone world and the consequences of its disappearance. Loss as a conceptual framework for the study of the literary and filmic Jewish return to a central role in Maghrebi and Middle Eastern public spheres accounts for all that was there but is no more, and that which older generations might remember and pass down, albeit through absence, to the younger generations.³⁹

Although scholars of Jewish-Muslim relations have approached the topic through different disciplinary lenses, including enmity, cohabitation, remembrance, political participation, legal doctrine, and colonial and post-colonial educational politics, the generative potential of loss has escaped scholarly attention. In Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia," responses to loss take the form of either mourning, which helps over time to achieve closure, or "melancholia," which associates the object of loss with the loss of the ego, therefore making closure impossible. The Jewish populations' departure from Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies could be seen as a cause for perpetual sadness, intertwined with the loss of Palestine and Andalus and other historical events. Indeed, loss does appear or is adumbrated in different academic works, but it is mainly linked to Jewish populations' loss of property or positions within their Arab states, rather than the more psychoanalytical and psychological meaning of loss as leading to mourning or melancholia in the Freudian sense.⁴⁰ In the Middle East, scholarship on Iranian and Iraqi Jews has articulated this Jewish loss. Shohat has analyzed how the works of Iraqi and Iranian Jewish authors engaged with the Iraq-Iran War (1980–88). The war, in Shohat's analysis, served as a vehicle for them to return to their lost homeland and become part of the events of a lost, distant, and intimate geography.⁴¹ Writing in languages other than their native tongues, the Iranian and Iraqi Jewish authors use a linguistic medium, as Shohat observes, that reflects their diasporic status, midway between loss and the possibility of return. Lital Levy has alluded to loss in her analysis of Shimon Ballas's short story "Iyya," noting that Ballas depicts "the tragedy of the mass emigration of Baghdad's Jews not only from the point of view of those leaving, but also from the standpoint

of those who are left behind.”⁴² Likewise, Orit Bashkin writes of the same story that “Jews and Muslims are presented as being part of the same family, and hence the departure of Jews from Iraq leaves a void that cannot be filled.”⁴³ Boum and Oren Kosansky have underlined that the films they analyzed about Moroccan Jews are embedded in an “an aura of nostalgia, memory, and loss.”⁴⁴

The absence of a more engaged examination of how loss has served as the impetus for the prolific novelistic and filmic output about Maghrebi and Middle Eastern Jews can be attributed to two broad factors. The first is the continued occupation of Palestine, which has put ethical constraints on the possibility of casting the mostly voluntary Jewish emigration as a loss for Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies. The assumption was that no loss could be equivalent to that of Palestine and the displacement of its people, creating a deadlock within which enacting rightful solidarity with Palestinians diminished the internal losses that other societies suffered via the loss of their Jewish populations and internal diversity. The second broad factor is disciplinary. There is no discipline of Jewish studies in the Maghreb and the Middle East, and the indigenous scholars who work on Jewish topics are rare and less vocal than their Jewish counterparts. Most of these indigenous scholars still focus on precolonial times, and they have to navigate political and archival constraints that limit their ability to write up-to-date histories. To overcome these constraints and maintain scholarly productivity, in some parts of the Middle East scholars of Jewish studies tend to focus primarily on the study of Hebrew and carrying out translation projects.⁴⁵ Other scholars are still confined to the old framework that conflates Judaism with Zionism, drawing on war-era literature to depict Jews negatively or sustain an image that is detrimental to Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies’ more nuanced and complicated perceptions of how central the colonial situation in Palestine is. This said, a new generation of US-based scholars in particular has taken on these issues in novel and doubly critical ways in order to chart a path for the birth of a Maghrebi / Middle Eastern–infused discipline of Jewish studies.

The other dimension of this disciplinary issue is related to the fact that Jewish studies is predominantly social-scientific, leaving literary studies outside the scope of the vibrant scholarship that is produced about the region. Ranging from musical to even legal issues, social scientists have delved into Jewish-Muslim *covivance* and shown the multidimensional aspects of Jewish-Muslim relations.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, literature written by

Maghrebi and Middle Eastern non-Jewish writers has mostly remained unclaimed by the discipline of Arabic studies and remains rarely treated by Jewish studies, the latter of which has mainly focused on literature by Jews or within bilingual contexts of Hebrew and Arabic.⁴⁷ This rich literary corpus offers an opportunity to reclaim Jewish topics for Arabic and Middle Eastern studies. In doing so, our aim is to create spaces and loci of intersection between Jewish studies and other fields focused on the Maghreb and the Middle East. Thus, we propose Maghrebi / Middle Eastern Jewish studies as a space of convergence and coalescence between these different disciplines. By doing so, we hope to open more space for an intersectional scholarship that draws on the different fields that examine Jewish topics in the region and to normalize the study of Jewish topics among scholars from the area. As such, loss offers both topical and disciplinary boundaries, ones that the current scholarship has yet to broach.

Taking these disciplinary considerations into account, loss (in this context) allows us to reflect on the internal dynamics within Arab societies themselves. Whether it leads to acting out or working through, loss has the capacity to pave the way for a new understanding of Jewish-Muslim relations, helping us theorize what it is that literature and films produced about Jews are saying. This is not necessarily about Jews themselves, but rather about the societies they left behind when they emigrated to Israel or other places. Moroccan novelists El Hassane Aït Moh and Muhammad Ezzedine Tazi, Egyptian novelists Kamal Ruḥayyim and Amru al-Jundi, Palestinian novelist Rabai al-Madhoun, Algerian novelist Amin Zaoui, and the Iraqi writers ‘Ali Bader and Khdaïr al-Zaydi have all returned to different periods of the Jewish histories of their countries to remind their readers of the existence of a Jewish past that belongs to them.⁴⁸ In turn, this literature depicts social and political realities that may not be accessible to the majority of the populations today, but that were in fact part of a real existence until just a few decades ago. These novelists portray returns, identity conflicts, religious intolerance, and emigration as they affected these characters not only in their fictional worlds, but also in the real stories that might have inspired these novelists to produce their works. Brahim El Guabli has coined the phrase “*al-kitāba al-dhākirātiyya*” (mnemonic literature) to conceptualize this subfield that Moroccan and Arabic/Francophone Muslim litterateurs have dedicated to Jewish themes. As El Guabli defines it, mnemonic literature is a locus in which younger Muslim generations who were not old

enough to live with Jewish people “remember their departed Jewish co-citizens and fill the voids of historical silences in a way that radically transforms the vacuum of amnesia into a locus for memory.”⁴⁹ Rooted in an intergenerational transference of memory, mnemonic literature engages with loss and attempts to account for the void left by the departure of thousands of Jews from their countries of origin. Whether it takes the form of novels, short stories, or even films, this mnemonic cultural production is a primary site for the articulation of loss as a result of this Jewish emigration. By refilling Maghrebi and Middle Eastern cities and villages with Jews and Muslims, these works enrich an impoverished world with visions of a society that was once possible but is no longer, thus allowing loss to settle in as a consequence of this Jewish departure. Loss in mnemonic literature is located at the intersection between the reader’s awareness of the current nonexistence of these Jewish populations and the history that literature recovers and brings back to life.

Maghrebi and Middle Eastern cinematic traditions have likewise returned to this Jewish-Muslim past in different ways. Both documentary and feature films as well as soap operas have depicted Jewish themes in recent years. Moroccan cinema once again accounts for the lion’s share in the number of films, both documentary and fictional. Morocco is a very specific case in the Arab world due to the fact that some three thousand Jews still remain in the country. As such, it has been able to sustain its ties with its Jewish communities worldwide despite the vicissitudes of the situation in the Middle East. A precolonial-era agreement between Morocco and European powers set Moroccan citizenship in stone, in contrast to any other country in the region. A Moroccan can never lose his or her citizenship, and this fact alone has kept Moroccan Jews technically Moroccan despite their physical disappearance from the country. Whether they live in Israel or in other places, Moroccan Jews are still Moroccan under the law. Morocco’s under-the-table relations with Israel are an open secret, and this fostered a different kind of relationship with Jewish communities compared to Iraq or Egypt, where Jews had to leave under very different circumstances. Kamal Hachkar’s film *Tinghir-Jerusalem*, Kathy Wazana’s film *They Were Promised the Sea*, and Youness Laghrari’s film *Juifs marocains, destins contrariés* (Moroccan Jews: destinies undone) go in divergent directions in their search for Jews, but they all converge by depicting the fact that Morocco’s Jews left under unclear circumstances as well as posing historical questions that

address the void left by this departure. Beyond documentary films, *Where Are You Going Moshé?* and *Midnight Orchestra* were among the most successful feature films made about Jews in Morocco. It is important to note here that some of these films received taxpayer funding, indicating the existence of an official will to create space for the theme of Moroccan Jews in Moroccan cinema.

In Egypt, Jews are remembered for enriching Egyptian cultural heritage via their contributions to the theater and cinema industries. Recent works highlight the productions of Ya‘qūb Ṣannu‘ and his role in the making of Egyptian theatre. In some works, Ṣannu‘ is defined as “the father of the Modern Egyptian theatre.”⁵⁰ Authors from the field of cinema have published monographs honoring the cinematic productions of Munir Murad and Laila Murad.⁵¹ Togo Mizrahi, the Jewish director who discovered Laila Murad and introduced her to wider audiences, received the attention of contemporary Egyptian TV hosts, who introduced him as “the Egyptian” and “a pioneer” of Egyptian cinema.⁵² Aside from drawing attention to such Jewish figures who participated in the enhancement of Egypt’s cultural life and attempted to raise it to the same level as European countries, everyday Egyptian Jews are featured in a growing number of soap operas and films, both fictional and documentary. The objective of these television and film productions is to cast Egypt as a tolerant society that takes pride in its diverse social, cultural, and religious heritage, making the point that Egyptian Jews were always part and parcel of the fabric of Egyptian society. This view aims to push back against claims put forward either by diasporic Jews or by local Egyptians that Jews were never an integral part of the country and used to live as a community isolated from their surrounding society. Dismayed by the religious intolerance that one of her family members experienced in Egypt, Nadia Kamel wanted to retrieve glimpses of the multireligious society in Egypt from the past. In doing so, she produced the documentary *Salāṭah balādī* (An Egyptian salad), a principally Egyptian production filmed partly in Israel, containing interviews with the family members of her mother’s cousin who emigrated to Palestine in 1946, retaining elements of Egyptian culture all the while. A few years later, Amir Ramses produced a historical documentary featuring several Egyptian Jews living in the diaspora. ‘*An yahūd miṣr* (The Jews of Egypt) highlights the lives of Egyptian Jews during the first half of the twentieth century and covers the key historical and political events that influenced their lives up

until their departure from their native country. The documentary was screened in 2012 in several movie theaters across Cairo. The television series *Ḥārat al-Yahūd* (The Jewish quarter) broke away from the prevalent narrative that excluded Jews from the sociocultural fabric of the Egyptian society by providing a historical account of the country during the 1948 War and its aftermath. In such a sensitive historical moment, Jews, Christians, and Muslims are portrayed as living together in a place that has been thought of as an exclusively Jewish space. In this volume, Jews are portrayed, as Iskandar Ahmad Abdalla shows in his chapter, in the series as a “metony[m] for a lost beautiful age, projected onto the present while also acting as its contrast, its role model, and the essence of the nation.”⁵³

By focusing on the ways in which the absence of Jews affected the lives of the societies in which they lived, and by putting an end to the assumption that Jews were segregated and lived in isolation from their immediate society, literature and film challenge assumptions of enmity and inherent separation between Jews and Muslims. Indeed, Jewish emigration from the Maghreb and the Middle East took place under traumatic conditions for both Muslims and Jews, leaving many unsutured mental wounds. Unfortunately, healing these wounds has never been a priority for political regimes. The need to recollect and reflect on what was lost or went missing with the emigration of Jews is probably what motivates older men and women to share stories from when they still lived with Jews. Likewise, literature has depicted how “something was missing from the neighborhood[s]” as Jews left their Alexandrian quarters.⁵⁴ In fact, Jewish emigration was experienced as a mutilation that ripped off an essential social and cultural element from the collective body. Nevertheless, the current state of scholarship about Jewish emigration does not account for emotions in this history. Recent historical research has brought the sensorial aspect to the fore,⁵⁵ but emotions remain elusive, thus allowing us to extend this history to literature and film and tap into its historical potential. The loss we are addressing in this book is both multidimensional and multiprocessual, spanning both public and private aspects of bygone Jewish-Muslim existence. This loss’s multidimensional aspects can be noticed in the reduced cultural, social, and demographic diversity, something that has implications for democracy and pluralism in society.⁵⁶ Loss’s multiprocessual dimensions can be noticed in the long-term projects that led to this moment of quasi-Jewless societies in the Maghreb and the Middle East. Through engagement with

these unaddressed voids, mutilations, and traumas, *Remembering Jews* therefore aims to shift scholarly attention to the decades-old, but oft overlooked, question concerning the far-reaching consequences of Jewish emigration for the societies they left behind.

Maghrebi and Middle Eastern literature and film's articulations of loss do not merely address a topic that has been taboo for six decades. In fact, the articulation of Jewish loss is also one of the lost opportunities as well as a depiction of internal strife that was once explained away by being attributed to the situation in Palestine. The context of ongoing conflict with Israel, which became a justification for the internal repression of political pluralism and democratic reform within Arab states, comforted Arab regimes and allowed them to postpone all sorts of societal and cultural changes as long as the conflict continued to exist. Therefore, in addition to addressing the loss of Jewish communities who left the Maghreb and the Middle East, the literary and filmic resurgence of Jews in recent years indicates a social awareness of the different stakes that are involved in the history of such conflicts. Creative writers and filmmakers do not deny the Palestinian people's right to statehood and independence when they cast their erstwhile Jewish co-citizens in a positive light. Rather, they reclaim their agency as an able citizenry who has a right to knowledge and the dissemination of their history. In reclaiming this, the cultural producers we discuss in this book break taboos and raise new questions that pave the way for their societies to reckon with the impact of the absence of the Jews on their internal evolution. These aesthetic interventions open a wholly new scholarly avenue for a novel investigation of the place of Jews in contemporary Maghrebi and Middle Eastern cultural memories.

The topic of Jewish-Muslim relations lends itself easily to binaries of nostalgia and conflict. Aware of their dangers, *Remembering Jews* actively resists both. Both nostalgia and conflict have proven their limitations and even counterproductive natures. Nostalgia, on the one hand, idealizes a history that was rife with challenges, pain, and wounds, and it erases uncomfortable experiences that do not suit an idealizing narrative. Our goal is not to idealize the erstwhile Jewish-Muslim past, but rather to cast a new light on a silenced dimension of history whose ramifications are still felt in the present. Whether in cemeteries, empty synagogues, or other places marked as Jewish, Jewish pasts of Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies defy silence and reemerge constantly in various forms. Conflict, on the other

hand, exaggerates the inherence of Jewish-Muslim enmity, thus overriding the centuries of shared living between the two communities. Conflict may be the current response to the ongoing colonial situation in Palestine, but it blurs the picture of historical research and diminishes the potential that other sources offer to understand Jewish-Muslim relations in their depth and complexity. Neither nostalgic nor conflictual, *Remembering Jews* calls attention to a more productive theorization of what literature and film bring to the field of Jewish studies from the perspective of Maghrebi and Middle Eastern studies. The conceptual framework of loss places emphasis on the larger societal and mnemonic implications of the absence of Jews from the daily lives of communities in which they existed for millennia, allowing us to make a crucial intervention in rethinking the way in which Jewish themes have been traditionally studied in Arabic literature and film.

The need for critical studies like the ones we present here is even more pressing since the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020. Bahrain, Morocco, and the United Arab Emirates have openly (and sometimes blatantly) displayed their craving for normalization with Israel, with little regard for Palestinian rights. These relationships have spurred interest in Jewish-Muslim relations, often taking the form of an unbridled filmic and novelistic output in the Gulf states. While the cultural works we discuss in this book emerged in their totality before 2020, therefore escaping the normalizing states' ideology, the mushrooming of novels, news stories, films, and songs about Jews in these areas before and since the Accords shows the role that culture serves in this project. The same states that created and nurtured the culture of conflict now foster a culture of nostalgia that could potentially delegitimize a richer and more compelling civil project that has emerged from the lower strata of society to address the loss of Jews. *Remembering Jews* is therefore not interested in cultural production that responds to normalization initiatives or is motivated by the political agendas of specific state parties. Rather, we focus on civil society's attendance to the historical void left by the departed Jews, something beyond statal intervention, orientation, and agendas.

These chapters speak to each other, creating a thematic and interdisciplinary conversation between the different regions and their Jewish experiences, which are linked through the topic of loss. In his chapter "Generative Absence," El Guabli offers a three-part analysis in which he presents an overview of the topic of Jewish loss in both literature and thought

as well as film in the Maghreb and the Middle East. El Guabli expands his notion of generative loss into the realm of theorization in the work of Abdelkébir Khatibi, opening up more space for understanding loss's fundamental presence in Maghrebi and Middle Eastern ideation processes and concept creation. Morocco being the only Arabic-speaking Maghrebi and Middle Eastern country to have a museum for local Judaism, Nadia Sabri explores the history and space of the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca. Entitled "Exile in a Contemporary Artistic Project in Morocco: Jewish Memories in Form and Concrete Territories," Sabri's chapter compares the place's invisible identity and the history it cocoons within its walls, arguing that the museum contains "fragments of history in which places, dates, cultural histories, and objects of daily use from Morocco are evoked."

In his chapter, "On the Wrong Side of History: Jews in Algerian Literature," Abdelkader Aoudjit examines the ways in which Jewish-Muslim relations were marked by the context of the Algerian War of Independence between 1954 and 1962. Drawing on the history of Algerian nationalism, Aoudjit probes how Jewish citizens' failure to be part of the nation has placed them on the wrong side of Algerian history. Loss in Aoudjit's chapter foregrounds a historical process as well as a complicated present in which situated decisions in the past are used to adjudicate citizenship.

In his chapter, "Literary Representations of Jews in Twenty-First-Century Arabic Literature in Egypt," Mostafa Hussein reads against the grain to find erstwhile negative portrayals of Jews in Egyptian literature framed by the Israeli-Arab conflict. Hussein casts a new light on the current status of representations of Jews in Egyptian literature, whose aim is to portray Egypt as a multiethnic and multicultural society of which Jews were always an integral part. Directly in conversation with Hussein's chapter is Iskandar Ahmad Abdalla's chapter, entitled "*Al-Zaman al-Gamil* Refigured: Jews and Re-narration of the Nation on Egyptian TV." Abdalla draws upon the increasing interest in investigating the modern history of Egyptian Jews as *Ḥārat al-Yahūd* reimagines a pre-1948 Egypt, one that Abdalla argues insists on recovering "a cosmopolitan age." Jews in his analysis are objects of national nostalgia for an era in which all Egyptians shared a sense of belonging to a diverse society.

In "Death, Burial, and Loss in Ali al-Muqri's *Al-Yahūdī al-ḥālī* [The Handsome Jew]," Sarah Irving closely reads *Al-Yahūdī al-ḥālī*, a novel by the

Yemeni author Ali al-Muqri, which recounts the romance between a Muslim woman and a Jewish man in seventeenth-century Yemen. While the narrative asserts their rights to claim their specific identities and mutual love, actual relationships between Muslims and Jews are depicted as fatal. The fatality of Jewish-Muslim relations appears differently in Stephanie Kraver's chapter, "Bearing Witness and Resurrecting Kurdish-Arab-Jewish Memory in *Mādhā 'an al-sayyida al-yahūdiyya rāḥil?*," which explores the role of the Jewish woman in retelling the history of Jewish life and displacement in both Syrian and Lebanese Arabic novels.

Outside the Amazigh- and Arabic-speaking areas in the Maghreb and the Middle East, Iran and Turkey have also experienced, albeit in different circumstances and variable degrees, the attrition of their Jewish populations. İlker Hepkaner's chapter, "Documenting and Debating Turkey's Loss," analyzes two documentary features from the mid-2010s that broke new ground in representations of the history, memory, and contemporary lives of Jews in Turkey. Hepkaner argues that these documentaries are part of a larger debate about the losses that Jewish culture endured in Turkey, one that exists within the even larger discussion about the status of minorities in the country. Departing from the premise of this book as being about Muslim cultural producers and the loss of their Jewish co-citizens, Lior B. Sternfeld's chapter, "Narrating the Homeland from Exile: Iranian Jewish Writers Writing on Their Departure, Identity, and Longing," examines Iranian Jewish writers' memoirs, fiction, and autobiographies in different diasporic communities in Israel and the United States. Using a historical approach, Sternfeld's chapter oscillates between past existence, present concerns, and future anxieties of these writers. Iran emerges as a lost home and an object of loss in their works. For Sternfeld, loss carries both physical and metaphysical meanings.

Due to factors beyond our control, Iraq is absent from the book. However, we also would like to stress the fact that the scholarship of Lital Levy, Orit Bashkin, and Ronen Zeidel, among others, has already charted the path for the study of cultural and literary histories of this important country's Jews.³⁷

All in all, the loss of Jewish populations permeates cultural production in the area extending from Morocco to Iran. As these chapters reveal, it is not just the loss of relationships that figures in these works, but also, and probably even most importantly, the sense of it no longer being possible to

live in multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural societies that is being processed in many of these works; the departed “Jew” serves as a most fitting excuse to delve into the realms that were, for a long time, impossible to discuss openly. As El Guabli asserts in his chapter, similar to post–World War II Europe, which entered an “era of the witness,” the Maghreb and the Middle East have been living the “age of loss,” which is grounded in an endeavor to understand the self in relation to what could have been achieved had the Jews and other minorities stayed.

The questions we and our coauthors raise in this book have acquired an even greater significance after Hamas’s sudden attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing devastating war Israel unleashed on Gaza. With thousands of Palestinians killed and hundreds of thousands displaced, there is no doubt that the memory of this unprecedented, televised war will have a deep impact on the way younger generations of Muslims view Jews. Therefore, it remains to be seen how much of the conclusions we present in this book can withstand the test of the new mnemonic, literary, political, and cultural landscape that will emerge in the aftermath of this extremely transformative war.

Notes

1. Shohat, “On Orientalist Genealogies,” 118, 143, 145. Shohat makes a powerful case against the use of Judeo-Arabic as another manifestation of this “separationist” ideology, which seeks to isolate the Arab from the Jew. See Shohat, “Question of Judeo-Arabic,” 19.
2. Bashkin, “Middle Eastern Shift.”
3. Bashkin, “Middle Eastern Shift.”
4. This quote is from Brahim El Guabli’s introduction to the conference held at Williams College in 2019.
5. Hayoun, *When We Were Arabs*, 94–154.
6. Shohat, “On Orientalist Genealogies,” 92, 104.
7. Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 95.
8. Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 95–103.
9. Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 105.
10. Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 98.
11. Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 99. See also Laskier, *Jews of Egypt*, 9–10.
12. Shohat, “On Orientalist Genealogies,” 11; Roberts, *Citizenship and Antisemitism*, 5–13.
13. Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 99.
14. Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims*, 8.
15. Rodrigue, *Jews and Muslims*, 7.
16. Laskier, *Alliance*, 147–71.
17. Winter, “René Cassin,” 208.
18. Laskier, *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 194–225.
19. See de Nesry’s books *Juif de Tanger* and *Israélites marocains*.
20. Roberts, *Citizenship and Antisemitism*, 143–200.
21. Zytnecki, “‘Oriental Jews’ of the Maghreb,” 35.
22. Bin Nun, “Quête d’un compromis.”
23. Parfitt, *Road to Redemption*, 51–55.
24. Parfitt, *Road to Redemption*, 55; Ariel, *Jewish-Muslim Relations*, 45.
25. Campos, *Ottoman Brothers*, 211–12; Starr, *Togo Mizrahi*, 8; Beinun, *Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 34.
26. Serfaty and Elbaz, *Insoumis*.
27. Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor, *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought*, 141–98.

28. El Guabli, *Moroccan Other-Archives*.
29. El Guabli, *Moroccan Other-Archives*.
30. El Guabli, *Moroccan Other-Archives*.
31. El Guabli, *Moroccan Other-Archives*.
32. Hussein, "Jewish Spaces in Egypt."
33. Boum, *Memories of Absence*.
34. Trevisan Semi and Sekkat Hatimi, *Mémoire et représentations*.
35. See El Guabli, "Breaking Ranks"; El Guabli, *Moroccan Other-Archives*.
36. In "Dissenting Narratives," Najat Abdulhaq draws attention to the politics of this film and literature from a very different position. However, we disagree with her focus on the expulsion of Jews from the regions under study. We believe that a more nuanced analysis is needed to reflect the different situations of Jews in different parts of Tamazgha and the Middle East.
37. Hussein, "Hasan, Marcus, and Cohen."
38. Shohat, "Orientalist Genealogies," 145.
39. El Guabli, "Breaking Ranks"; El Guabli, *Moroccan Other-Archives*.
40. For a survey of the losses of Jews and Jewish properties across the Arab world from North Africa to Iraq, see Fischbach, *Jewish Property Claims*. As Joel Benin has noted, the author's ability to explore and conduct research on such a politically explosive topic was possible thanks to previously conducting intensive research on the dispossession of Palestinian properties, an equally explosive topic for Israelis and Jews and non-Jews in the West. See Fischbach, *Records of Dispossession*. Aside from approaching the issue of Jewish personal and property loss in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli context, Shayna Zamkane offers a new perspective on the ways in which Jews from Maghrebi and Middle Eastern societies understood the issue of their lost assets and argues that "the nature of property claims are multidimensional and cannot be reduced to the question of whether they serve Israeli state interests" ("Property Claims of Jews," 79).
41. Shohat, "Lost Homelands, Imaginary Returns."
42. Levy, "Self and the City," 187.
43. Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 225.
44. Kosansky and Boum, "'Jewish Question,'" 438.
45. On the case of Egypt, see Hussein, "Hebrew on the Nile."
46. Silver, *Recording History*; Starr, *Remembering Cosmopolitan Egypt*; Marglin, *Across Legal Lines*.
47. Levy, *Poetic Trespass*.
48. Aït Moh, *Captif*; Tazi, *Anā al-mansī*; Ruhyym, *Diary*; Al-Jundi, *Missiyyā*; Al-Madhoun, *Al-Sayyida*; Zaoui, *Dernier juif*. Bader's *Hāris al-Tabagh* (The guardian of the tobacco shop) from 2008 and Zaydi's *Atlas 'Azrān al-Baghdaadi* ('Azrān al-Baghdadi's atlas) from 2015 are noteworthy examples here. On Iraqi novelists' return to Jews, see Zeidel, "On the Last Jews."
49. El Guabli, *Moroccan Other-Archives*.
50. Badawi, "Father of the Modern Egyptian Theatre."
51. Starr, *Togo Mizrahi*; Hammad, *Unknown Past*.
52. 'Isa, "Togo Mizrahi al-Mukhreg al-Yahudi."
53. See "Al-Zaman al-Gamil Refigured: Jews and Re-Narration of the Nation on Egyptian TV," in this volume.
54. See Hussein, "Jewish Representations," in this volume.
55. Fahmy, *Street Sounds*.
56. El Guabli, "Other-Archives."
57. Levy, "Self and the City"; Bashkin, *New Babylonians*; Zeidel, "On the Last Jews."

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