

"Jews of the Arab World, why did they leave?"

Paris, Museum of Jewish Art and History (mahJ)

19-20 January 2022

Call for papers

In the second half of the 20th century, almost all the Jewish populations left the Arab world, in a troubled context characterized by the destruction of the European Jews, the creation of the State of Israel, decolonization and the Israeli-Arab wars. The causes and circumstances of these emigration processes, which prove complex and greatly differ from one national context to the other, remain poorly known and understood. Added to this, they give rise to instrumentalizations of all sorts.

The conference takes place in an already rich historiography, being strongly renewed for several years. The reception conditions in Israel, Europe and North America have been tackled by important scholar works (Katz 2015; Bashkin 2017), as have the representations and memories associated to these migrations in the host societies (Bahloul 1992; Baussant 2013; 2015; 2017; Allouche-Benayoun and Dermenjian 2015; Cohen, Calle-Gruber, and Vignon 2014) and home countries (Boum 2014). Paradoxically, the migrations themselves remain less studied. In 2001 a conference drew up a first general picture, however introducing a certain number of biases: the narrative of the "expulsion from the Arab world" suggests a homogeneous situation in the different countries and at different times, and inscribes these migrations in the framework of "ethnic cleansing" policies that would have been applied by the Arab states (Trigano 2003). The narrative of the "great uprooting" echoes it (Bensoussan 2013). In 2010, the conference on "Migrations, identities and modernity in the Maghreb" represented a major milestone in research on Jewish and Muslim migrations in the Mediterranean (Abécassis, Aouad, and Dirèche 2012), without however going all the way round situations and issues.

The existing literature has thus not shed light on all the gray areas of an object unfolding over several decades and in an extremely vast space, from North Africa to the

Middle East. A comprehensive overview of the circumstances, causes and processes is still lacking. For an in-depth understanding of these phenomena, a broad chronological scope will be adopted, situating the migratory movements in the more general trends of the history of North African and Middle Eastern societies. This conference invites to readdress the departure of Jews from the Arab world, keeping its distance from political exploitations, in a comparative perspective opened up to international specialists, in order to present an up-to-date inventory of our knowledge about this history.

"Why did they leave?": asking this question opens up several fields of reflection. The proposals may examine one of the following issues (non-exhaustive list):

Area n°1: The long history of incidents between Jews and Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East

Long considered a priori to be forms of pogroms, the violent rioting and even murderous incidents the Jews were victims of could be better understood if replaced in frameworks going beyond the Jewish-Muslim relations (without neglecting them either). They are now read in the light of colonial policies and of the responsibilities of European authorities (Cole 2019), keeping away from the police and administrative categories used at the time of the events (Le Foll-Luciani 2020), those of international Jewish organizations in charge of investigating the facts (Mandel 2017) and those mobilized by reconstructed memories.

Drawing from these works and rereading the sources with new perspectives, knowledge of a certain number of events could be deepened, such as those happening in Baghdad in 1941, Tripoli in 1945 and 1948, Aden in 1947, Oujda and Djerada in 1948, Petit-Jean (Sidi Kacem) in 1954, Bizerte in 1961.

What was the impact of these events on the Jewish communities? Have these incidents reconfigured the transcommunal social dynamics and if so, how and at what pace? In the Near and Middle East, what was the role of other non-Muslim minorities in these events?

Area n° 2: The role of Arab and Zionist nationalist ideologies

The sociology of migration classically distinguishes between push and pull factors. Arab and Zionist nationalist ideologies can be read in these terms, respectively as attractive and repulsive forces. What role did Zionism, be it religious or political, play in the departures of Jews from the Arab world since the beginning of the 20th century? What was the strength of its permeation and to what extent did it initiate migration decision-making?

As for the factors that pushed the populations to leave, a focus will be made on the nationalist movements that took off in the countries of the Arab world from the 1920s-1930s. The participation of Jewish individuals in Arab nationalist debates and movements, and later in the struggles for independence, has recently been highlighted (Le Foll-Luciani 2015; Schlaepfer 2016). What were the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion at work in nationalist movements? What place did they reserve for the Jews in the building of national independence projects?

Finally, the reflection will focus on the "growing hostility" (Saadoun 2003) suffered by Jewish communities as nationalist projects developed. By detailing the chronologies, the actors and the networks, it is possible to historicize the nationalist policies that led to the departure of the Jewish populations without falling into the narrative of a perpetual persecution, as scholars recently proved it (Bashkin 2012; Miccoli 2015). Different national situations can thus be described, and in particular the reception of Nazi and fascist ideologies in the Arab world during the Second World War, in the thread of recent works (Wien 2006; Gershoni 2009; 2014; Nordbruch 2009).

Area n° 3: Chronologies, processes, actors and networks of emigration

It seems necessary to detail the process of departures in the different contexts. The role of different actors can be highlighted: that of State authorities, be they colonial or independent, that of community authorities, Zionist organizations (Jewish Agency, Mossad and their local branches) and non-governmental organizations (such as the Alliance Israelite Universelle, the World Jewish Congress, the JDC and the American Jewish Congress).

Refining the chronologies, by varying the scales, will also prove crucial: the migratory waves take place in international contexts (decolonization, Israeli-Arab and then Israeli-Palestinian wars), national contexts (regime changes, attempted coup d'état, nationalization policies), also local contexts that could be helpfully described and analyzed. It would also be relevant to replace migratory movements into the global socio-economic contexts, highlighting the role of economic crises, changes in the school and university systems, language policies, etc.

Individual or family trajectories may finally be traced, in order to give historical depth to these migrations, to emphasize the role of some peculiar figures and the way in which migrations have marked individual or collective life journeys.

Please submit proposals to the organizing committee (joseph.hirsch@mahj.org ; claire.marynower@iepg.fr) **by September 20, 2021**. They must include the author's affiliation, a title, a summary of the proposal including the methods and sources to be used (one page maximum).

Languages of communication: French, English.

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