Dario Miccoli, *A Sephardi Sea: Jewish Memories Across the Modern Mediterranean* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022), 239 pp., ISBN: 978-0253062925.

A Sephardi Sea approaches a history of proximity, harmony, conflict, and violence. It looks at the "memorial itineraries" through which Sephardim have represented and transmitted their past from the present (7). Dario Miccoli analyzes this transmission through literature, cinema, migrant associations, museums, the internet, and some political spaces in three post-migration locations: France, Israel, and Italy. Miccoli emphasizes the importance of Jewish history for the field of colonial studies, as it is a history that "complicates the opposition between colonizer and colonized and often disrupts any linear understanding of the relations between Europe and the Arab world" (25). A theme that reappears throughout the book is the potential functionality of the Mediterranean as a bridge and a neighborhood where Europe and north Africa meet in quotidian encounters. A second recurrent theme is the value and uses of the past for the future.

The first chapter is devoted to the study of literary works produced by North African and Egyptian Jewish migrants or their descendants. The author's approach to literature shows that stories can get where history falls short. Miccoli's analysis of the diasporic experience is poignant and probably one of the highlights of the book. This chapter—probably the most accomplished of all—studies the works of Chohana Boukhobza (Franco Tunisian Israeli), Orly Castel-Bloom (born in Israel to Egyptian parents), Raphael Luzon (Italo Libyan origin) and Victor Magiar (Italo Libyan origin). Through these works we see how diaspora transforms the images of life into something as fragile (and always contested, at times painfully so) as memories. The depiction of Jews and Arabs as friends, neighbors, or enemies, or everything at the same time, form an ambiguity that must be sustained and respected, not solved. The chapter revolves around the idea that personal narratives often challenge the national ones or, to put it differently, how (nationalistic) politics interrupt human relations that would otherwise be more resilient to conflict. For example, in his exploration of the cosmopolitan accounts of Egyptian Jewish author Orly Castel-Bloom, Miccoli reminds the reader of a time where "being an Egyptian Zionist did not mean rejecting feelings of belonging to the Egyptian nation. In an only apparently contradictory manner, Zionist aspirations coexisted with profound cultural and emotional ties to Egypt" (47). These loyalties became contradictory and unsustainable only in the postmigration context of the ongoing Arab Israeli conflict. Another element that remains unviable in the young Jewish state of the 1940s is the cosmopolitanism and multilingualism that characterized the Levantine atmosphere of cities like Alexandria, Algiers, or Tangier, where many Sephardi *olim* (migrants) had grown up. Belonging in that Levantine world remains a lost opportunity for Israel, although maybe not indefinitely. Miccoli refers to the countries of origin of the four authors

as a "foundational imaginative landscape in which to situate their identity" (53). Israel will be part of a Mediterranean world where these authors became migrants, thus blurring the distinction between the Land of Israel and Diaspora.

Miccoli's study of the work of Victor Magiar and Raphael Luzon sheds light on the different ways and purposes of remembering the past among Sephardim: "as a source of historical knowledge and ethnic pride, as a tribute to one's own family in the context of a wider North Africa and Sephardi past, or more simply a story that, despite its historical significance, few people seem to remember" (35).We are introduced to stories of friendship between Jews and Arabs that represent a multireligious and multicultural North African past where difference was at the center of life. We see expressions of nostalgia for a possible world, "a reminder of the pain that borders and war can generate and as a spark that sheds light on the limitless Mediterranean Sea" (39).

The second chapter analyses spaces where heritage and memory are elaborated in Israel, France, and Italy. The theme of this chapter is the connection between memory, heritage, and transmission or, to put it differently, the value of the past for the future. In the case of Israel, the author looks at Egyptian migrant associations. In France he analyzes Algerian Jewish migrant associations, exhibits, museums, and monuments. Finally, he presents digital diasporas through the study of websites. Miccoli claims that Israeli migrant associations "often continue to be perceived as politicized lobbies that reflect a Zionist, or at least more normative, interpretation of the past, which does not appeal to the more socially and politically active among the young Mizrahim" (76). However, he brings *Ars Poetica* or *Tor HaZahav* groups as proof of this claim, although the work of these third-generation Mizrahi activists does not constitute an explicit critique of migrant associations' embracement of Zionist narratives of exile. This analysis could have benefitted from other works on migrant associations in Israel—for instance, Aviad Moreno's research on Spanish Moroccan Jews in Israel—that challenge the assumption that these associations tend to uncritically embrace a less socially or politically active agenda. In the case of Algerian Jewish migrant associations in France, these constitute a "difficult heritage" in postcolonial France, where Jewishness, Algerianness and Frenchness are reference points whose center is to be found in the individuals more than in a shared memory between the three. In the last part of the chapter, Miccoli analyzes the Moroccan and the Egyptian digital diasporas as they are formed by first generation Jewish migrants, their descendants, local Muslims, and people with an interest in these communities. The third chapter focuses on the history of and migrations from the north of Africa and the Middle East and attempts to draw some potential parallels between the experiences of Sephardi Jews in Europe with those of Muslim north African and Middle Eastern migrants today. This chapter presents the Sephardi Studies reader with different challenges and questions. The chapter starts with the place of the

Holocaust in the collective memory of the Jews of the Arab world. Miccoli claims that that Jews of the Middle East and North Africa during the Second World War, "did not go through episodes of persecution and anti-Semitic violence as tragic as the Holocaust" (123), although the chapter does describe some instances of deportation to labor and prison camps. This thesis could have been nuanced by engaging the work of Aomar Boum and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, who in the introduction to their 2018 edited volume *The Holocaust and North Africa* debunk the representation of North Africa, as "a region considered marginal, if not to World War II (which was fought in part on North African soil), then to the racial and genocidal policies of the Nazis and their allies" (2).

The chapter then turns to the much-criticized Jews from Arab Lands and Iran Day and its focus on property claims and anti-Jewish violence, which leads to deeming these Jews as refugees. The author's main critique of this day and the 2014 law that was created alongside it, is the focus on "the expulsion, on the very end, of the history of these communities" which "inscribes them inside the Israeli memorial landscape by way of their being—just like the Jews of Europe—victims of a history of antisemitism and persecution, terminated with the homecoming to Israel" (139). Violence against Jews in Muslim countries, and the impact of Arab nationalism on Jewish communities, as well as the impact of the Arab Israeli conflict on Jewish persecution in these countries, continues to be a question that all of us working on Sephardi migrations face continuously. The field often continues to show different iterations of the very dynamics it has historically criticized: either one downplays or adds caveat over caveat to each reference to violence against Jews—the more nuanced version of the Garden of Eden narrative—or one makes this violence the focus of their research, thus being deemed as upholding the old-school Zionist narrative about the diaspora, Mark Cohen's "neo-lachrymose history" of Sephardi Jews.

Miccoli claims, in his critique of the Israeli press and the Kedem Forum, together with American organizations like JIMENA, that they "present a contradictory view of Mizrahi Jews as both passive, dispossessed individuals and Zionist activists—an image that resembles the depiction of Holocaust survivors in 1960s Israeli schoolbooks" (144). There is nothing contradictory about an oppressed collective that engages in self-determination aspirations. A more sympathetic critique would have also been more precise: the Holocaust has had a central role as the epitome of Jewish persecution and ultimately genocide in Israel, to such an extent that other stories of violence—no matter how traumatic for those who suffered them—seemed to have no space in the Israeli collective memory. The absence of a more critical study of the unviability of an imagined future for Jews in most North African and Middle Eastern countries is surprising, as this imagined future could have fueled different heritagization strategies. Zionism seems to be the only national ideology that is given enough agency by the author to impact identity and heritage formation.

In order to be able to represent Sephardi and Mizrahi history as a "multilayered and heterogenous tale" (47), as it should be told, we must be able to handle the difficulty of believing all stories, even contradictory ones, even the ones that only emphasize violence and those which deny it. As researchers, we are the recipients of this tension, these conflictual experiences of Sephardi migrants. The ability to hold this tension without resolving it may be the core of our symbolic and moral legacy, as Miccoli seems to suggest.

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