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Editorial Introduction

EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

Palestinian Member of Parliament and spokesperson Hanan Ashrawi posted a September 6, 2012 blog in the *Huffington Post* ([“Israel’s Cynical Definition of Refugee.”](#)) accusing the Israeli government of being “cynical” and “hypocritical” in raising the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab lands within the international arena. Since Zionism views Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people, she asks, how can Jews who “immigrated or fled” Arab lands be considered refugees? “You can’t be returnees to one homeland and refugees from another,” she writes, further arguing that by equating Jewish and Palestinian refugees, Israel is cynically “undermining the legitimate rights of the Palestinians.”

Ashrawi also suggests a population exchange - Palestinians returning to Israel proper and Jews returning to their native Arab countries. Considering today's prevailing antagonism towards Jews in Arab countries together with Israel's refusal to be bombarded with millions of disgruntled Palestinians, whose numbers would shift the religious-ethnic balance of power within democratic Israel, this is a proposal Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon calls “ridiculous.”

Rather, by asserting these claims and suggestions, Ashrawi reveals either an astonishing ignorance of international law that clearly equates one's nationality with one's place of birth ([“The Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: An Examination of Legal Rights - A Case Study of the Human Rights Violations of Iraqi Jews.”](#)), or she herself is cynically manipulating the issue. (In accordance with international law, the Palestinian refugee issue is itself exceptional, in that the UN considers refugees as those who lived in Palestine for a mere two years or longer,

and not necessarily having been born there, and includes as well in this designation all their descendants in marked contrast to the generally accepted definition.)

Furthermore, refugees are generally defined as those forced to flee either their place of birth or naturalized residence. That is precisely what happened to Jews living in Arab lands. And, their expulsion had nothing to do with the Palestinians. So argues Ya'acov Meron in "Why Jews Fled the Arab Countries". He notes that there was a concerted effort on behalf of Arab countries to expel its Jewish populations a full five months before the Arabs left Palestine en masse and the matter of Palestinian refugees emerged. Indeed, Jewish emigration out of countries like Syria, Libya, Egypt and Yemen began well before the establishment of the State of Israel, the consequence of discriminatory laws as well as violence.

He further notes that a "strange silence" exists over the expulsion of Jews, both within Arab historical literature (for instance, there is little reference to the Farhud , a pro-Nazi uprising considered by many to be the Middle East's equivalent to *Kristallnacht*, that took place in Iraq in 1941) and in Israel, where Operations Magic Carpet that airlifted the Yemenite Jews to Israel and Ezra and Nechemiah that airlifted Iraqi Jews romanticize Jewish Arab emigration and gloss over the terrible hardships that it entailed.

Finally waking up to this issue, the Israeli government now asserts that international recognition as full-fledge refugees would not only entitle Jews from Arab Lands to financial compensation but, as Ben Sales writes in "Recognizing Jewish Refugees from Arab World", but would also serve as a "counterbalance to the Palestinian refugee issue in any future Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations... and ... be a part of any final-status deal." Regardless of whether Oriental Jews feel disenfranchised from their countries of birth, their status as refugees must be acknowledged, as Danny Ayalon states, "All those Jews wanted to be part of the Jewish rebuilding of Israel. But the fact that they were harassed, they were killed; that they were robbed of their dignity as human beings, is something that never has been recognized."

Jewish rights to refugee status must be recognized, Fouad Ajami, a Middle East scholar with Stanford's Hoover Institute, asserts. He writes, "The Arab Jews became phantoms", whose stories were "edited out" of Arab consciousness. We are talking about the claims of the Palestinians? Fine, but there were 800,000 Arab Jews, and they have a story to tell." It is some of their stories that Egyptian-born author Lucette Lagnado poignantly recounts in her article "When Jews Fled Arab Lands". Focusing on the plights of individual families like the Abadie family from Syria, and others from Libya and Egypt, the particular suffering of the communities they represent is brought to light through their stories: not only the tortures and intimidation that forced Jews to abandon family and well-established businesses and communities, but the difficulties in integrating into new societies (e.g., the *ma'aburot* (Israeli refugee camps as one example).

Ultimately, Lagnado writes, mutual recognition of this double-victimization might even help bring about a rapprochement between Israelis and Palestinians. She quotes Jewish Egyptian refugee Sir Ronald Cohen: "There are refugees on both sides, so that evens the scales, and I think that it will be helpful to the (peace) process. It shows that both sides suffered the same fate."

It is some of these stories that are now being recorded for posterity. According to Adi Schwartz in "Sephardi Stories, on the Record," leading the effort is University of Miami professor Henry Green who is assembling these live testimonials into an audio-visual history, named *Sephardi Voices*, instituted along the lines of the Spielberg Foundation's USC Shoah Foundation Institute. ("[The Forgotten Refugees Collection](#)". is another organization doing similar work.) Begun in 2009, with a working budget of \$250,000, Green has already assembled 250 testimonials and hopes to gather a total of 5,000 within five years. "The end goal," says Green, "is to create an extensive, international, digital archive of testimonies and photographs and thus ensure the preservation of the history and heritage of Sephardi Jews for generations of scholars, educators, and the general public."

Machla Abramovitz

MAIN ARTICLES

1. Meron, Ya'akov. "[Why Jews Fled the Arab Countries.](#)" Middle East Quarterly. Vol. II. No. 3. September 1995.

In a key address before the Political Committee of the U.N. General Assembly on November 14, 1947, just five days before that body voted on the partition plan for Palestine, Heykal Pasha, an Egyptian delegate, made the following key statement in connection with that plan:

The United Nations . . . should not lose sight of the fact that the proposed solution might endanger a million Jews living in the Moslem countries. Partition of Palestine might create in those countries an anti-Semitism even more difficult to root out than the anti-Semitism which the Allies were trying to eradicate in Germany. . . If the United Nations decides to partition Palestine, it might be responsible for the massacre of a large number of Jews...

2. Ben Sales, "[Recognizing Jewish Refugees from Arab World.](#)" Jewish Forward. September 4, 2012.

Naim Reuven was only 8 when he left Baghdad more than 50 years ago, but he still remembers going with his father to catch fish in the Tigris River.

His dad worked in a laundromat, a middle-class father of six and one of Iraq's more than 100,000 Jews. Baghdad's Jewish community suffered a pogrom in 1941, but Reuven, born a year later, has only fond memories of his childhood there - until Israel declared independence in 1948.

3.. ["Lucette Lagnado: When Jews Fled Arab Lands."](#) Wall St. Journal. October 12, 2012.

Fortunée Abadie is still haunted by the day in 1947 when mobs stormed the Jewish Quarter of the ancient Syrian city of Aleppo, shortly after the United Nations vote that laid the groundwork for the creation of Israel.

Aleppo, a city where Jews and Muslims had lived together for centuries, exploded with anti-Jewish violence. Mrs. Abadie, now 88, remembers watching attackers burn prayer books, prayer shawls and other holy objects from the synagogue across the street. She heard the screams of neighbors as their homes were invaded. "We thought we were going to be killed," she says. The family fled to nearby Lebanon. Mrs. Abadie left behind all she had: clothes, furniture, photographs and even a small bottle of French perfume that she still misses, *Soir de Paris—Evening in Paris...*

4. Adi Schwartz. ["Sephardic Stories, on the Record."](#) The Tablet. May 1, 2013.

"Sometimes I still have nightmares," says Juliette Glaser to her interviewer, as she sits in front of a video camera in her Miami living room, recalling in a confident voice her childhood memories from Cairo—where she was born in 1941 and which she fled 15 years later. "They were putting the city on fire during the revolution of 1952. They were getting rid of King Farouk. The city was black, and there was fire everywhere. I remember Egyptians walking in the streets, holding big knives, saying, 'We're going to kill the Jews, where are the Jews? Any Jews around here?' And we would hide in the basement, turn all the lights off, just shivering, shaking of fear."...

PERSPECTIVES

1. ["The Untold Story of the Middle East: Justice for Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries"](#) - Panel Discussion. 21 Sep 2012.

Panel discussion on "The untold story of the Middle East: Justice for Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries" (organized by the Permanent Mission of Israel)

2. Eli E. Hertz, ["Arab and Jewish Refugees: the Contrast."](#) 2007.

How and why did Palestinian Arabs leave and who was responsible?

It is important to set the historical record straight. The overwhelming majority of Palestinian refugees left what was the newly-established State of Israel on their own accord due to structural weaknesses within Palestinian society and their leadership ...

3. Carole Basri. ["The Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: An Examination of Legal Rights - A Case Study of the Human Rights Violations of Iraqi Jews."](#) Fordham International Law Journal. Vol 26, Issue 3 Article 6. 2002.

JEWISH REFUGEES FROM ARAB LANDS:JUSTICE DENIED

isranet-publications

Israzine, April 30, 2013

<https://www.isranet.org/israzine/jewish-refugees-arab-landsjustice-denied/>

Although the issues surrounding the Palestinian refugees are frequently addressed at the United Nations ("U.N."), in the news media, and in legal journals, very little has been written about the Jews displaced from Arab lands. In light of the little known fact that approximately 50% of Israelis are Jews from Arab lands or their descendents, this Article will use Jews from Iraq as a case study in examining the history and rights of Jews from Arab countries, who were expelled or forced to seek refuge elsewhere. Part I of this Article examines the historical legal status of Jews in Iraq and the discriminatory and prosecutorial events that triggered the expulsion of Jews from Iraq. Part II demonstrates that actions taken by Iraq against Jews violated international law standards and other laws applicable now and at that time. Part III addresses the question of whether Jews from Arab lands currently have any available remedies for these violations of their rights. Finally, the Article concludes that a full accounting of the rights of Jews from Arab lands must accompany any discussions aimed at providing a regional peace agreement for the Middle East, if such an agreement is to have strength and legitimacy under international law ..

4. David Mattas and Stanley A. Urman, prepared by. ["Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: The Case for Rights and Redress."](#) Justice for Jews from Arab Countries. 2012.

Historically, Jews and Jewish communities have existed in the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf region for more than 2,500 years.

Jews in substantial numbers resided in what are today Arab countries over 1,000 years before the advent of Islam. Following the Muslim conquest of the region, for centuries, while relegated to second-class status, Jews were, nonetheless, permitted limited religious, educational, professional, and business opportunities ...

5 ["Jewish refugees from Arab and Muslim countries - Background and Guidelines for Action."](#) The State of Israel.

To: All departments and overseas representations

Cc: Foreign Minister's Office

Prime Minister's Office

National Security Council

Ministry for Senior Citizens

National Council for Jewish *Restitution*

Ministry of Justice

From: Deputy Foreign Minister Bureau

Subject: Jewish refugees from Arab and Muslim countries - Background and Guidelines for Action

LINKS

1. Ashrawi, Hanan. ["Israel's Cynical Definition of Refugee."](#) Huffington Post. September 6, 2012.

2. ["Fact Sheet: Jewish Refugees from Arab Lands."](#) Jewish Virtual Library. September 2012.

3. [“Middle East Refugees.”](#) Israel Science and Technology Homepage

- 4.. [“Arab-Jewish Refugees: The other Middle=Eastern Refugee Problem.”](#) Eretz Yisroel.org

- 5.. [“The Forgotten Refugees Collection”.](#)

6. [“A Challenge to opponents of Jewish refugee status.”](#) Video. September 25, 2012.

- 7.. [“Arab Jews: A Forgotten Exodus.”](#) Heart and Soul. BBC. October 15, 2012. Audio.

- 8.. [“Justice for Jews from Arab Lands: Official Website.”](#)

9. Cotler, Irwin, David Matas and Stanley A. Urman. [“Jewish Refugees from Arab Countries: The Case for Rights and Redress.”](#) Justice for Jews from Arab Lands. November 5, 2007.

- 10.. Sharon, Jeremy. [“Cotler to Canada: Recognize Jewish Refugee Rights.”](#). Jerusalem Post. November 11, 2012.

11. [“Justice for Middle East Refugees.”](#) The David Project. Israpundit. Videos. July

25, 2012.

12. ["Exodus: The Jews of Yemen."](#) Yemen Post. January 21, 2013.

CHARIVARI

1. Wolfe, Gregory. ["Whispers of Faith in a Post-Modern World."](#) Wall St. Journal. Jan. 11, 2013.

2. Day, Anna Therese. ["Memories of Jews Linger in Rubble of Syria's Second City."](#) Jewish Daily Forward. Nov. 27, 2012.

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