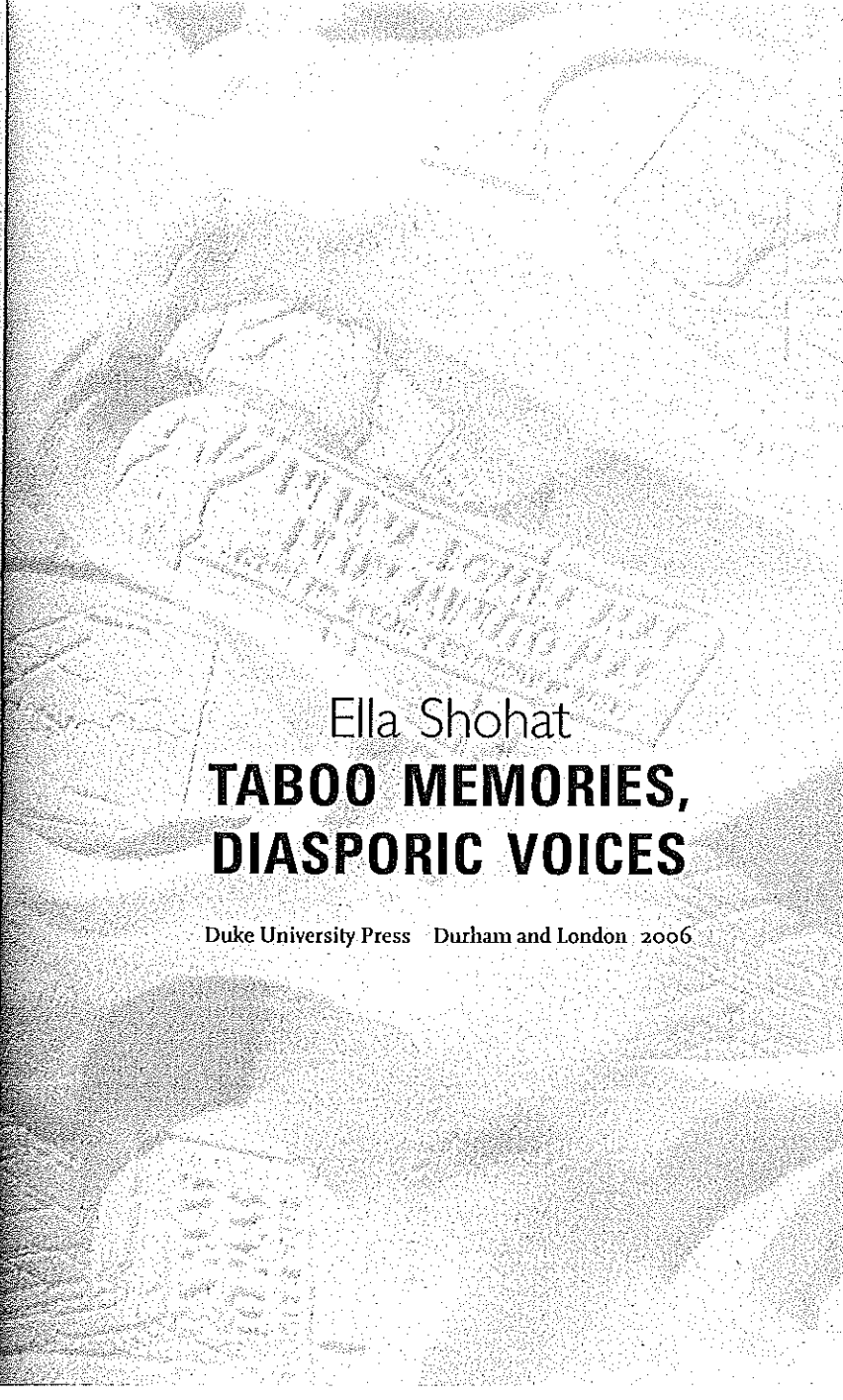

Ella Shohat

TABOO MEMORIES, DIASPORIC VOICES

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TABOO MEMORIES, DIASPORIC VISIONS

Columbus, Palestine, and Arab-Jews

Dr. Solomon Schechter [Cambridge expert in Rabbinical literature a century ago] agreed to look at them, but chiefly out of politeness, for he was still skeptical about the value of the "Egyptian fragments." But it so happened that he was taken completely by surprise. One of the documents immediately caught his interest, and next morning, after examining [it] . . . he realized that he had stumbled upon a sensational discovery. . . . The discovery has so excited Schechter that he had already begun thinking of travelling to Cairo to acquire whatever remained of the documents. . . . Schechter was fortunate that Cromer [the British administrator of Egypt] himself took interest in the success of his mission. The precise details of what transpired between Schechter and British officialdom and the leaders of the Cairo's Jewish community are hazy, but soon enough . . . they granted him permission to remove everything he wanted from the Geniza [a synagogue chamber where the community books, papers, and documents were kept for centuries], every last paper and parchment, without condition or payment. It has sometimes been suggested that Schechter succeeded so easily in his mission because

the custodians of the Synagogue of Ben Ezra had no idea of the real value of the Geniza documents—a species of argument that was widely used in the nineteenth century to justify the acquisition of historical artifacts by colonial powers. . . . Considering that there had been an active and lucrative trade in Geniza documents . . . and impoverished as they were, it is hard to believe that they would willingly have parted with a treasure which was, after all, the last remaining asset left to them by their ancestors. In all likelihood the decision was taken for them by the leaders of their community, and they were left with no alternative but acquiescence. As for those leaders . . . like the elites of so many other groups in the colonized world, they evidently decided to seize the main chance at a time when the balance of power—the ships and the guns—lay overwhelmingly with England. . . . Schechter . . . filled out about thirty sacks and boxes with the materials and with the help of the British embassy in Cairo he shipped them off to Cambridge. A few months later he returned himself—laden . . . "with spoils of the Egyptians."[1]

I begin my essay with the account of the emptying out of the Jewish Egyptian Geniza "archive" as narrated in Amitav Ghosh's *In an Antique Land*. The genealogy of the word "Geniza" in Hebrew, it is speculated, is rooted in the Persian word *ganje*, which refers to a storage place. Jews in the region commonly deposited unusable sacred manuscripts or even everyday documents, or fragments of them, in a specially designated room in the synagogue. Papers bearing the scriptural traces of God's name, no matter how decayed, could not be simply trashed. They had to be laid to rest, in a full burial ceremony. Storage was either a transitory place for documents or their permanent home. *In an Antique Land* calls attention to one such Judeo-Arabic document: the correspondence about family and trade affairs by a twelfth-century Jewish Tunisian merchant, Abraham Ben-Yiju, preserved in the Geniza of Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo. Ghosh traces the letters in an effort to piece together moments from the life of Ben-Yiju across the regions of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Like their forebears, the leaders of the old Cairo (Fustat) synagogue treated the community texts with great respect, placing them in the Geniza room built in 1025. The room was not emptied of its contents during a period of eight hundred years; the last document was deposited around 1875. The thoroughly hybrid documents were largely inscribed in Arabic and Hebrew, with some documents featuring both languages, where it was not uncommon to find the Arabic registered in Hebrew script and vice versa. The surviving fragments formed part of Cairo's Jewish community life and history, a tissue of its threaded connections to all those other worlds with which it had interacted. The Geniza did not function as an archive in the common definition of the word, but the dense layers of documents accumulated over the centuries, layers upon layers and generations upon generations, converted it, post factum, into an archive. The Geniza, furthermore, became "minutes," as it were, of a cultural meeting, a stenographic record of the historical interactions of this Cairo community.

Colonialism did not pass over Egypt's Jewish community. Egypt's strategic location turned it into the object of interest for imperial powers, soon becoming a focus of attraction not only for Napoleon's battalions and their British competitors, but also for an army of researchers, artists, and diverse travelers afflicted with Egyptomania. Egypt's past—its spoils of mummies, sphinxes, and pyramids—was visited by "discoverers" who dug, uncovered, and studied Egypt within assumptions produced by the Enlightenment's conceptual apparatus. The field of Egyptology was premised on the rescue of ancient Egypt from oblivion, legitimating the initiation of a new act within the ongoing drama: the transfer of cultural artifacts, and "treasures," from their original location to the centers of the West for scholarship and commerce. It is within this cultural-colonial context that the "discovery" of the Geniza took place, in a period when the digging of the Suez Canal under imperial orchestration was at its height. The Judaica antiquity collector Jacob Saphir, whose travel to Egypt led to the groundshaking discovery by Solomon Schechter of Cambridge University, had organized the first voyage that brought the Geniza treasure to the attention of scholars in the West, in 1864. It took thirty years for the implementation of the operation to transfer the Geniza's contents under Schechter, who received the British Crown signature from the administrator Evelyn Baring Cromer, the virtual ruler of Egypt. With the help of the British Embassy, the boxes were filled and sent to Cambridge and catalogued in the Taylor-Schechter collection. Other documents were taken from the Jewish burial ground in Egypt. By World War One, the Cairo Geniza was stripped of all of its documents, which were then distributed in Europe and America, with a large part of the documents going into private collections.

Within this Enlightenment project, under the banner of progress and science, there was not a shred of doubt about the legitimate right of archaeologists and antiquity traders to uproot papyruses, mummies, or tombstones. Within this ultimately Eurocentric framework, such acts were not conceived as theft or dispossession; on the contrary, they were perceived as applying the principles of universalism and humanism. The inhabitants, it

was assumed, did not understand or appreciate the value of the treasures around them. Within this context, there was nothing unusual about such a colonial raid on the archive—in this case, a very literal archive, indeed. What is unusual, however, is how the two groups of co-religionists, the European Ashkenazi Jews (British in this case) and Sephardi Arab-Jews (Egyptians), fell out on opposite sides of the colonial divide. European Jews' closeness to Western powers permitted the dispossession of Arab-Jews even before the advent of Zionism as a Eurocentric national project, which later would presume to take under its aegis the Eastern Jews. For the Geniza scholars, the documents represented a world devoid of life. They were not seen as part of a societal tissue, an organ in a breathing, living, and creating community body. The documents were torn from their historical producers without this violation provoking any debate.

The Jewish studies experts who organized the dislocation of the Geniza to Cambridge from its region of belonging in Cairo inadvertently began a process of symbolic displacement of Jews of the East from their geocultural space. In this historical episode, the culture of the Egyptian Jewish community was partially "disappeared" through the confiscation of its documents. At the time the Geniza was removed, two years after its "discovery" in 1896, Egyptian Jews for millennia had already been an ingrained part of the geocultural landscape of the region. The British Jewish scholars, like their non-Jewish compatriots, cast an imperial gaze at the Egyptian Jews, the very people who had produced and sustained the Geniza for almost a thousand years, and whose documents the scholars were appropriating, but whom the scholars described as "aborigines" and "scoundrels" whose religious leaders had the "unpleasant" habit of kissing other men "on the mouth."[2] While the Geniza documents testify to the rootedness of the Jews in a vast region stretching from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, the textual "witnesses" themselves ironically were uprooted and displaced. At times the actual pages from the same manuscript "wandered" to widely distant destinations: Cambridge, England, St. Petersburg, Russia, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The document as a proof or a testimony vanished from the Jewish Egyptian geography that invented it. The palimpsestic "archive" that provides a record of so many lives and ideas, and that tells of so many worlds, has enabled the writing of the past of Eastern Jews who created it. Yet, paradoxically, the Geniza's dislocation from the geocultural space in which it was created also made possible the erasure of the very tangible evidence of the Jewish past from that same geocultural space.

The phrase "the Geniza's discovery (*gilui ha-gniza*)" permeates dominant Jewish historiography. Echoing the colonialist term "discovery" that assumes a European point of view, the term "discovery" obscures the fact that the Geniza was known to its producers. While the word "archive" tends to be associated with a conscious act of accumulating, classifying, and organizing documents, the Geniza was perceived as an unconscious act of accumulation, and thus as a kind of a detritus site. In the introduction to his monumental work *A Mediterranean Society*, S. D. Goitein, the foremost Geniza scholar, contrasts the concept of the archive with the Geniza.[3] Whereas the former houses documents soon after their writing, made accessible for study, the latter were deposited after their owners lost interest in them, and often long after their writing. It is precisely because the Geniza is not an organized archive that Goitein dubs it a "treasure." In his definition, two worlds—the modern and the pre-modern—collide around the signification of preservation. Yet, this kind of salvage project is marked by erasure and fragmentation. The Geniza's discovery and rescue can be seen from another perspective: as its exiling. Indeed, in historical terms, the "diasporization" of the Geniza anticipated by half a century the exiling of its owners. In a traumatic turn of events in the wake of the Israeli-Arab conflict, Arab-Jews had to abandon the regions in which they had lived for millennia. After the British withdrawal from Palestine, and the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Arabs and Jews were newly staged as enemy identities. If at the time of the "Geniza discovery" Egyptian Jews were still seen as part of the colonized Arab world, with the partition of Palestine, Arab-Jews, in a historical shift, suddenly became simply "Jews."

The historical episode of emptying out the Geniza suggests not only that alliances and opposition between communities evolve historically, but also their narrativizations differ when seen in the light of the present. And as certain strands within a cultural fabric become taboo, this narrativization involves destroying connections that once existed. The process of constructing a national historical memory also entails destroying a different, prior historical memory at whose expense the nationalist narrative articulates itself. Although a large proportion of the Geniza texts were written in Judeo-Arabic, the process of dispersing the community resulted in the paradoxical effect of "disappearing" a language that the generation of displaced from Arab countries are the last to speak. The rupture that affected Judeo-Arabic culture was not merely a result of the dispersal of its people from the Arab world. Within Zionist discourse, Judeo-Arab culture was disdained as a sign of "*galut* (diaspora)"—a negative term within Euro-

Israeli Zionist discourse. The reemergence of new political maps therefore also brought about the emergence of different geographies of identity and a new rewriting of the boundaries of belonging.

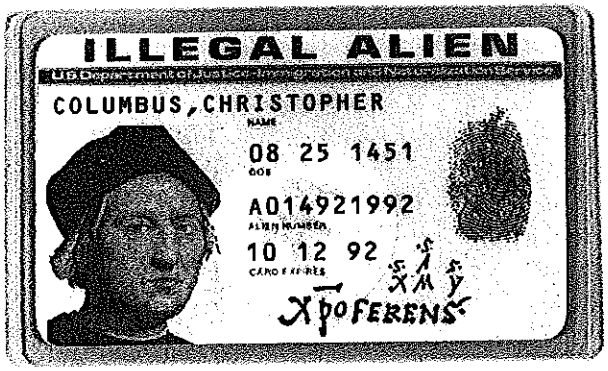
The European "discovery" and "rescue" of the Geniza from its Egyptian producers testifies to a dramatic turn in the relationship between Ashkenazi Jews and Levantine Jews in the modern era. Over the centuries, Ashkenazi Jewish religious scholars had corresponded and consulted with the Jewish religions centers of the Islamic world. But since the Enlightenment, with the partial secularization of European Jewry, Ashkenazi-Sephardi relations entered a new transcultural semantics. The traditional difference between these two cultural and liturgical worlds, even their mutual prejudices, had not been articulated before within a context of power relations under the auspices of colonialism and, later, Zionism, all part of the spreading Eurocentric vision of the world. In the post-Enlightenment era, the gradual integration of European Jews at the universities produced a new field of inquiry, Judaic studies, which was not simply secular but Eurocentric. Ashkenazi-Jewish scholars became central to the representation of Jewish history, including Arab-Jewish history. Eurocentric norms of scholarship established typically colonial relations that have taken a heavy toll on the representation of Arab-Jewish history and identity. In this essay, I will attempt to demonstrate some of the contradictions and antinomies produced for Arab-Jewish culture since the arrival of colonialism and nationalism. I hope to disentangle the complexities of Arab-Jewish identity by unsettling some of the borders erected by almost a century of Eurocentric Zionist historiography, with its fatal binarisms such as civilization versus savagery, modernity versus tradition, and West versus East.

TOWARD A RELATIONAL APPROACH TO IDENTITY

Recent postcolonial theory has at times shied away from grounding its writings in historical context and cultural specificity. While innumerable poststructuralist essays elaborate abstract versions of "difference" and "alterity," few offer a communally participatory and politicized knowledge of non-European cultures. At the same time, however, the professionalized study of compartmentalized historical periods and geographical regions (as in Middle East studies and Latin American studies) has often resulted in an overly specific focus that overlooks the interconnectedness of histories, geographies, and cultural identities. In *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, Robert Stam and I argue for a relational approach to multicultural studies that does not segregate historical periods and geographical regions into neatly fenced-off areas of expertise, and that speaks of communities not in isolation but, rather, "in relation."[4] Rather than pit a rotating chain of resisting communities against a Western dominant (a strategy that privileges the "West," if only as constant antagonist), we argue for stressing the horizontal and vertical links that thread communities and histories together in a conflictual network. Analyzing the overlapping multiplicities of identities and affiliations that link diverse resistant discourses helps us transcend some of the politically debilitating effects of disciplinary and community boundaries.

The kind of connections we have in mind operates on a number of levels. First, it is important to make connections in temporal terms. While postcolonial studies privilege the imperial era of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one might argue for grounding the discussion in a longer history of multiply located colonialisms and resistances, tracing the issues at least as far back as 1492. We propose connections, second, in spatial and geographical terms, placing debates about identity and representation in a broader context that embraces the Americas, Asia, and Africa. We also argue for connections in disciplinary and conceptual terms, forging links between debates usually compartmentalized (at least in the United States): on the one hand, postcolonial theory associated with issues of colonial discourse, imperial imaginary, and national narrations, and on the other, the diverse "ethnic studies" that focus on issues of "minorities," race, and multiculturalism. The point is to place the often ghettoized discourses about geographies ("here" versus "there") and about time ("now" versus "then") in illuminating dialogue. A relational approach, one that operates at once within, between, and beyond the nation-state framework, calls attention to the conflictual, hybrid interplay of communities within and across borders.

My subtitle "Columbus, Palestine, and Arab-Jews" already juxtaposes disparate entities to underline the ways in which nation-states have imposed a coherent sense of national identity precisely because of their fragile sense of cultural, even geographical, belonging. The formation of the postcolonial nation-state, especially in the wake of colonial partitions, often involved a double process of joining diverse ethnicities and regions that had been separate under colonialism and, at the same time, partitioning regions in a way that forced regional redefinitions (Iraq/Kuwait) or a cross-shuffling of populations (Pakistan/India or Israel/Palestine in relation



40 *Green Card* (1992), artwork by Inigo Manglano-Ovalle, laminated c-print

to Palestinians and Arab-Jews). Given the "minority"/"majority" battles "from within" and the war waged by border crossers (refugees, exiles, immigrants) "from without," Eurocentric historiography has played a crucial role in handing out passports to its legitimate races, ethnicities, nations. In the words of the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish's well-known poem, "Jawaz Safar (Passport)": "Stripped of my name, my identity? On a soil I nourished with my own hands?" The same colonial logic that dismantled Palestine had already dismantled the "Turtle Island" of the Americas. Thus, the first illegal alien, Columbus,[5] remains a celebrated discoverer, while indigenous Mexicans "infiltrate" a barbed border to a homeland that was once theirs and Native Americans are exiled in their own land (figure 40).

By way of demonstration of the "relational" method, I will focus on Sephardi Arab-Jewish (known in the Israeli context as Mizrahi) identity as it intersects with other communities and discourses in diverse contexts over time. I will take as a point of departure the 1992 quincentennial commemorations of the expulsion of Sephardi Jews from Spain to argue that any revisionist effort to articulate Arab-Jewish identity in a contemporary context that has posited Arab and Jew as antonyms can be disentangled only through a series of positionings vis-à-vis diverse communities and identities (Arab Muslim, Arab Christian, Palestinian, Euro-Israeli, Euro-American Jewish, indigenous American, African American, Chicano/a) that would challenge the devastating consequences that the Zionist-Orientalist binarism of East versus West, Arab versus Jew, has had for Arab-Jews (or Jewish Arabs). Linking, delinking, and relinking, at once

spatially and temporally, thus becomes part of adversary scholarship working against taboo formulations, policed identities, and censored affiliations.

STAGING THE QUINCENTENARY

"Your Highnesses completed the war against the Moors," Columbus wrote in a letter addressed to the Spanish throne, "after having chased all the Jews . . . and sent me to the said regions of India in order to convert the people there to our Holy Faith."[6] In 1492, the defeat of the Muslims and the expulsion of Sephardi Jews from Spain converged with the conquest of what came to be called the New World. But while the celebrations of Columbus's voyages have provoked lively opposition (ranging from multicultural debates about the Eurocentric notion of "discovery" to satirical performances by Native Americans landing in Europe and claiming it as their discovered continent), the Eurocentric framing of the "other 1492" has not been questioned. Apart from some enthusiastic scholastic energy dedicated to the dubious pride in whether Columbus once and for all can be claimed as a (secret) Jew, expulsion events navigated within the calm seas of Old World paradigms. Furthermore, the two separate quincentenary commemorations, both of which took place in the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East, have seldom acknowledged the historical and discursive linkages between these two constellations of events. To examine the relationship between contemporary discourses about the two "1492s" might therefore illuminate the role that scholarly and popular narratives of history play in nation-building myths and geopolitical alliances.

The Spanish Christian war against Muslims and Jews was politically, economically, and ideologically linked to the caravels' arrival in Hispaniola. Triumphant over the Muslims, Spain invested in the project of Columbus, whose voyages were financed partly by wealth taken from the defeated Muslims and confiscated from Jews through the Inquisition.[7] The Reconquista's policies of settling Christians in the newly (re)conquered areas of Spain, as well as the gradual institutionalization of expulsion, conversion, and killing of Muslims and Jews in Christian territories, prepared the grounds for similar Conquista practices across the Atlantic. Under the marital-political union of Ferdinand (Aragon) and Isabella (Castille), victorious Christian Spain, soon to become an empire, strengthened its sense of nationhood, subjugating indigenous Americans and Africans. Discourses about Muslims and Jews during Spain's continental expansion crossed the Atlantic, arming the conquistadors with a ready-made "us

versus them" ideology aimed at the regions of India, but in fact applied first toward the indigenous of the accidentally "discovered" continent. The colonial misrecognition inherent in the name "Indian" underlines the linked imaginaries of the East and West Indies. (Perhaps not coincidentally, in Ridley Scott's film *1492: The Conquest of Paradise* [1992], Orientalist, "Ali Baba"–style music accompanies the encounter with Caribbean "Indians.") India awaited its colonized turn with the arrival of Vasco de Gama (1498) and the Portuguese conquest of Goa (1510). If in the fifteenth century the only European hope for conquering the East—given the Muslim domination of the continental route—was via sailing to the West, the nineteenth-century consolidation of European imperialism in the East was facilitated by Europe's previous self-aggrandizing at the expense of the Americas and Africa. The colonization of the Americas and Africa made possible Europe's modernization, subsequently allowing the colonization of North Africa (the Maghreb) and the so-called Near East (Mashreq.) "The Indian Ocean trade, and the Culture that supported it," writes Amitav Ghosh, "had long since been destroyed by European navies. Transcontinental trade was no longer a shared enterprise; the merchant shipping of the high seas was now entirely controlled by the naval powers of Europe."[8]

Although Moorish Spain testifies to syncretic multiculturalism *avant la lettre*, the Reconquista ideology of "Limpieza de Sangre" (cleansing of the blood) as an early exercise in European "self-purification," sought to expel, or forcibly convert, Muslims and Jews. The Crusades, which inaugurated "Europe" by reconquering the Mediterranean area, catalyzed Europeans' awareness of their own geocultural identity and established the principle that wars conducted in the interests of the Holy Church were axiomatically just. The campaigns against Muslims and Jews as well as against other "agents of Satan," heretics and witches, made available a mammoth apparatus of racism and sexism for recycling in the "new" continents. Anti-Semitism and anti-infidelism provided a conceptual and disciplinary framework that, after being turned against Europe's immediate or internal others, was then projected outward against Europe's distant or external others.[9] Prince Henry ("the Navigator"), the pioneer of Portuguese exploration, had himself been a Crusader against the Moors at the battle of Ceuta. Amerigo Vespucci, writing about his voyages, similarly drew on the stock of Jewish and Muslim stereotypes to characterize the savage, the infidel, the indigenous man as a dangerous sexual omnivore and the indigenous woman as a luringly yielding nature.[10] In this sense,

the metonymic links between Jews and Muslims—their literal neighboring and shared histories—are turned into metaphorical and analogical links in relation to the peoples of the Americas.[11] The point is not that there is a complete equivalence between Europe's oppressive relations toward Jews and Muslims and toward indigenous peoples. The point is that European Christian demonology prefigured colonialist racism. Indeed, we can even discern a partial congruency between the phantasmatic imagery projected onto the Jewish and Muslim "enemy" and onto the indigenous American and Black African "savage," all imaged to various degrees as "blood drinkers," "cannibals," "sorcerers," and "devils."[12]

One of the rare contemporary representations that expose ecclesiastic participation in genocidal measures, the Mexican film *El Santo Oficio* (The Holy Office, 1973), features the attempt by the Holy See to spread the Inquisition into the New World. Although the film focuses on the recently converted Sephardis, the Conversos, it also shows that they are persecuted alongside heretics, witches, and indigenous infidels. Consumed by enthusiastic spectators, their burning at the stake is performed as a public spectacle of discipline and punishment, just as lynching was consumed as a popular entertainment by some whites in the United States. Screened at a Los Angeles ceremonial opening for a conference dedicated to the quincentennial expulsion of Sephardi Jews (organized by the International Jewish Committee Sepharad '92), *El Santo Oficio* provoked strong emotions. Its documentation of Sephardi Jewish rituals practiced in secrecy, and its visual details of torture, rape, and massacre were not received, however, in the spirit of the linkages I have charted here. The audience, consisting largely of Euro-American, Jewish, and a substantially smaller number of Sephardi American educators, scholars, and community workers, was eager to consume the narrative evidence of the singular nature of the Jewish experience. To point out the links between the Inquisition and the genocide of the indigenous peoples of the Americas, and the devastation of African peoples, would have been tantamount to promiscuously intermingling the sacred with the profane. At the reception that followed the film, Chicano waiters plied the guests with food. The simplistic category of "them" (Spanish Christians), however, stood in remarkably ironic relation to the indigenous faces of the waiters; their presence suggesting that the charting of Sephardi Conversos' history must be negotiated in relation to that of other Conversos.

The importance of rupturing the boundaries of these histories becomes even clearer in the actual intersection of diverse histories of forced conver-

sions in the Americas. For example, the case of Chicano and Mexican families of partly Sephardi Jewish origins suggests that at times the links are quite literal. Recent research by the Southwest Jewish Archives in the United States points out that Sephardi traditions remain alive in predominantly Roman Catholic Mexican American families, although the family members are not always conscious of the origins of the rituals. They are uncertain why, for example, their grandmothers make unleavened bread called "*pan semita*," or Semite bread, and why their rural grandparents in New Mexico or Texas slaughter a lamb in the spring and smear its blood on the doorway. Revealing that some Chicanos and Mexicans are the descendants of secret Jews is a taboo that results in contemporary secrecy even among those who are aware of their ancestry.[13] The issue of forced conversions in the Americas and the consequent cultural syncretism implicates and challenges Jewish as well as Catholic Euro-indigenous institutions. The hybridity of Chicano and Mexican culture, however, does not necessarily facilitate the admission of another complex hybridity, one crossing Jewish-Catholic boundaries.

If the genocide of indigenous Americans and Africans is no more than a bit of historical marginalia, the linked persecutions in Iberia of Sephardi Jews and Muslims, of Conversos and Moriscos,[14] are also submerged. The quincentennial elision of the Arab Muslim part of the narrative was especially striking. During the centuries-long Reconquista, not all Muslims and Jews withdrew with the Arab forces. Those Muslims who remained after the change of rule were known as *mudejars*, deriving from the Arabic *mudajjin*, "permitted to remain," with a suggestion of "tamed," "domesticated." The Spanish Inquisition, institutionalized in 1478, did not pass over the Muslims. Apart from the 1492 expulsion of 3 million Muslims and 300,000 Sephardi Jews, in 1499 mass burning of Islamic books and forced conversions took place, and in 1502 the Muslims of Granada were given the choice of baptism or exile. In 1525–26, Muslims of other provinces were given the same choice. In 1566, there was a revival of anti-Muslim legislation, and between 1609 and 1614 came edicts of expulsions. In other words, the same inquisitional measures taken against the Jewish Conversos who were found to be practicing Judaism secretly were taken against the Moriscos found to be practicing Islam, measures that culminated in edicts of expulsion addressed specifically to Muslims. As a result, many fled to North Africa, where, like Sephardi Jews, they maintained certain aspects of their Hispanicized Arab culture.[15]

This well-documented history[16] found little echo in the events promoted by the International Jewish Committee Sepharad '92, whose major funds came from the United States, Spain, and Israel. Spain, which still has to come to terms with its present-day racist immigration policies toward—among others—Arab North Africans, embraced its "Golden Age" after centuries of denial, while reserving a mea culpa only for the official spokespeople of "the Jews." As for all other representatives, including conservative upper-middle-class Zionist Sephardim, the elision of comparative discussions of the Muslim and Jewish (Sephardi) situations in Christian Spain was largely rooted, I would argue, in present-day Middle Eastern politics. The 1992 commemorations entailed a serious contemporary battle over the representations of "Jewish identity" in terms of an East–West axis, a battle that dates back to the nineteenth-century beginnings of Zionist nationalism.

THE TRAUMA OF DISMEMBERMENT

When Zionist historiography does refer to Islamic–Jewish history, it consists of a morbidly selective "tracing the dots" from pogrom to pogrom. (The word "pogrom" itself derives from and reflects the Eastern European Jewish experience.)[17] Subordinated to a Eurocentric historiography, most quincentenary events lamented yet another tragic episode in a homogeneous, static history of relentless persecution. Not surprisingly, the screening of *El Santo Oficio* at the expulsion conference elicited such overheard remarks as: "You think it's different today?" and "That's also what the Nazis did to us. That's what the Arabs would do if they could." (This is a curious claim, since the Arab Muslims had a millennium-long opportunity to install an inquisition against Middle Eastern Jews—or against Christian minorities—but never did.) Such common remarks underline the commemoration's role as a stage for demonstrating (Euro-)Israeli nationalism as the only possible logical answer to horrific events in the history of Jews. The inquisition of Sephardi Jews is seen merely as a foreshadowing of the Jewish Holocaust. In this paradigm, the traumas left by Nazi genocidal practices are simplistically projected onto the experiences of Jews in Muslim countries and onto the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.[18]

My point here is not to idealize the situation of the Jews within Islam but, rather, to suggest that Zionist discourse has subsumed Islamic–Jewish history into a Christian–Jewish history while also undermining comparative studies of Middle Eastern Jews in the context of diverse religious and ethnic minorities in Muslim geographies. On the occasion of

the quincentenary, the Zionist perspective privileged Sephardi Jewish relations with European Christianity over those with Arab Islam, projecting Eurocentric maps of Christians and Jews as West and Muslims as East and ignoring the fact that, at the time of the expulsion, syncretic Jewish communities were flourishing within Muslim spaces. Quincentennial events not only rendered the interrelations between Jewish Conversos and indigenous American Conversos invisible, but they also undermined the Sephardi Jewish and Muslim cultural syncreticism. The only Muslim country that received quincentennial attention was Turkey, partly because Sultan Beyazid II ordered his governors in 1492 to receive the expelled Jews cordially. But no less important are Turkey's contemporary regional alliances, its fissured national identity between East and West. Unlike Arab Muslim countries, where expelled Sephardim also settled (Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt), Turkey has not participated in the Israeli–Arab conflict or in the non-allied embargo that for decades regionally isolated Israel until the recent orchestration of Arab diplomatic recognition. Yet even in the case of Turkey, the quincentennial's emphasis was less on Muslim-Jewish relations than on the voyages of refuge and, anachronistically, on the Turkish (national) as opposed to Muslim (religious) shelter.

In this rewriting of history, present-day Muslim Arabs constitute merely one more "non-Jewish" obstacle to the Jewish Israeli national trajectory. The idea of the unique, common victimization of all Jews at all times provides a crucial underpinning of official Israeli discourse. The notion of uniqueness precludes analogies and metonymies, thus producing a selective reading of "Jewish history"—one that hijacks Mashreqian and Maghrebian Jews from their Judeo-Islamic geography and subordinates that geography to that of the European Ashkenazi *shtetl*. This double process entails the performance of commonalities among Jews in the public sphere so as to suggest a homogeneous national past, while silencing any deviance into a more globalized and historicized narrative that would see Jews not simply through their religious commonalities but also in relation to their contextual cultures, institutions, and practices. Given this approach, and given the Israeli-Arab conflict, no wonder that the Jews of Islam—and, more specifically, Arab-Jews—have posed a challenge to any simplistic definition of Jewish and, particularly, of the emergent Jewish Euro-Israeli identity.

The selective readings of Middle Eastern history, in other words, make two processes apparent: the rejection of an Arab and Muslim context for Jewish institutions, identity, and history, and their unproblematized subordination into a "universal" Jewish experience. In the Zionist "proof" of a

41 Yemeni Jews arriving in the "Promised Land" (1949)

single Jewish experience, there are no parallels or overlappings with other religious and ethnic communities, whether in terms of a Jewish hyphenated and syncretic culture or in terms of linked analogous oppressions. All Jews are defined as closer to each other than to the cultures of which they have been a part. Thus, the religious Jewish aspect of diverse, intricate, and interwoven Jewish identities has been given primacy, a categorization tantamount to dismembering the identity of a community. And indeed, the Euro-Israeli separation of the "Jewish" part from the "Middle Eastern" part in the case of Middle Eastern Jews has resulted in practically dismantling the Jewish communities of the Muslim world, as well as in pressures exerted on Mizrahim (Orientals) to realign their Jewish identity according to Zionist Euro-Israeli paradigms (figure 41). Since the beginnings of European Zionism, the Jews of Islam have faced, for the first time in their history, the imposed dilemma of choosing between Jewishness and Arabness in a geopolitical context that has perpetuated the equation between Arabness and Middle Easternness and Islam, on the one hand, and between Jewishness and Europeanness and Westernness, on the other.[19]

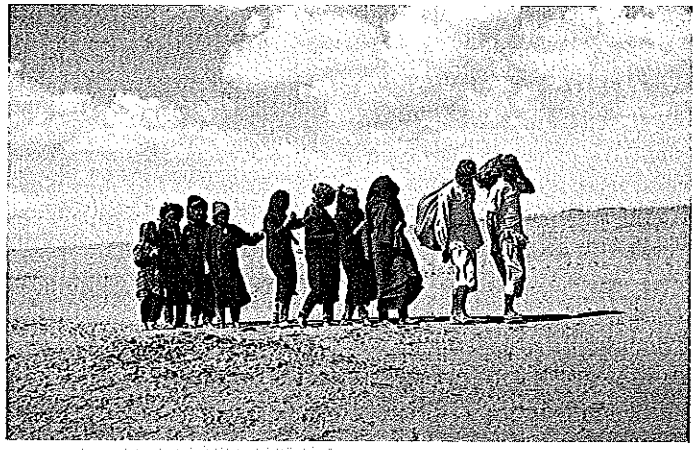
The master narrative of universal Jewish victimization has been crucial for legitimizing an anomalous nationalist project of "ingathering of the Diaspora from the four corners of the globe," but it can also be defined as forcing displacements of peoples from such diverse geographies, languages, cultures, and histories—a project in which, in other words, a state created a nation. It has also been crucial for the claim that the "Jewish nation" faces a common "historical enemy"—the Muslim Arab—implying a

double-edged amnesia with regard to both the Judeo-Islamic history and the colonial partition of Palestine. False analogies between the Arabs and Nazis—and, in 1992, Inquisitors—becomes not merely a staple of Zionist rhetoric, but also a symptom of a Jewish European nightmare projected onto the structurally distinct political dynamics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In a historical context of Jews experiencing an utterly distinct history within the Muslim world from that which haunted the European memories of Jews, and in a context of the massacres and dispossession of Palestinian people, the conflation of the Muslim Arab with the archetypical (European) oppressors of Jew downplays the colonial-settler history of Euro-Israel itself.

The neat division of Israel as West and Palestine as East, I would argue, ignores some of the fundamental contradictions within Zionist discourse itself.[20] Central to Zionism is the notion of return to origins located in the Middle East.[21] Thus, Zionism often points to its linguistic return to Semitic Hebrew, and to its sustaining of a religious idiom intimately linked with the topography of the Middle East, as a "proof" of the Eastern origins of European Jews—a crucial aspect of the Zionist claim for the land. And although Jews have often been depicted in anti-Semitic discourse as an alien "Eastern" people within the West, the paradox of Israel is that it presumed to "end a diaspora" characterized by Jewish ritualistic nostalgia for the East, only to found a state whose ideological and geopolitical orientation has been almost exclusively Western. Theodor Herzl called for a Western-style capitalist-democratic miniature state, to be made possible by the grace of imperial patrons such as England or Germany, while David Ben-Gurion formulated his visionary utopia of Israel as that of a "Switzerland of the Middle East." Although European Jews have historically been the victims of anti-Semitic Orientalism, Israel as a state has become the perpetrator of Orientalist attitudes and actions whose consequences have been the dispossession of Palestinians. The ideological roots of Zionism can be traced to the conditions of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Enrope, not only as a reaction against anti-Semitism, but also to the rapid expansion of capitalism and of European empire building. Israel, in this sense, has clearly been allied to First World imperialist interests, has deployed Eurocentric-inflected discourse, and has exercised colonialist policies toward Palestinian land and people.

The question is further complicated by the socialist pretensions—and, at times, socialist achievements—of Zionism. In nationalist Zionist disconrse, the conflict between the socialist ideology of Zionism and the real praxis of Euro-Jewish colonization in Palestine was resolved through the reassuring thesis that the Arab masses, subjected to feudalism and exploited by their own countrymen, could only benefit from the emanation of Zionist praxis.[22] This presentation embodies the historically positive self-image of Israelis as involved in a non-colonial enterprise and therefore morally superior in their aspirations. Furthermore, the hegemonic socialist-humanist discourse has hidden the negative dialectics of wealth and poverty between First World and Third World Jews behind a mystifying facade of egalitarianism. The Zionist mission of ending the Jewish exile from the "Promised Land" was never the beneficent enterprise portrayed by official discourse, since from the first decade of the twentieth century Arab-Jews were perceived as a source of cheap labor that could replace the dispossessed Palestinian fellahin (figure 42).[23] The "Jews in the form of Arabs"[24] thus could prevent any Palestinian declaration that the land belongs to those who work it and contribute to the Jewish national demographic needs. The Eurocentric projection of Middle Eastern Jews as coming to the "land of milk and honey" from desolate backwaters, from societies lacking all contact with scientific-technological civilization, once again set up an Orientalist rescue trope. Zionist discourse has cultivated the impression that Arab-Jewish culture before Zionism was static and passive and, like the fallow land of Palestine, as suggested by Edward Said, lying in wait for the impregnating infusion of European dynamism.[25] While presenting Palestine as an empty land to be transformed by Jewish labor, the Zionist "Founding Fathers" presented Arab-Jews as passive vessels to be shaped by the revivifying spirit of Promethean Zionism.

The Euro-Zionist problematic relation to the question of East and West has generated a deployment of opposing paradigms that often results in hysterical responses to any questioning of its projected "Western identity." Zionism viewed Europe both as ideal ego and as the signifier of ghettoes, persecutions, and Holocaust. Within this perspective, the "Diaspora Jew" was an extraterritorial, rootless wanderer, someone living "outside of history." Posited in gendered language as the masculine redeemer of the passive Diaspora Jew, the mythologized sabra simultaneously signified the destruction of the diasporic Jewish entity. The prototypical newly emerging Jew in Palestine—physically strong with blond hair and blue eyes; healthy looking and cleansed of all "Jewish inferiority complexes"; and a cultivator of the land—was conceived as an antithesis to the virtually anti-Semitic Zionist image of the "Diaspora Jew." The sabra prototype (figure 43), partly influenced by the Romantic ideals of German *Jugendkultur*, generated a



42 The path to modernization: Yeminis on the way to the Joint Transitional Camp, Aden, 1949 (top); Moroccans entering housing project in Mitzpe Ramon, Israel, 1964 (bottom)

43 The *sabra* embraces the land: *Oded the Wanderer* (1933)

culture in which any expression of weakness came to be disdained as *galuti*, or that which belongs to the Diaspora. Zionism, in other words, viewed itself as an embodiment of European nationalist ideals to be realized outside Europe, in the East, and in relation to the pariahs of Europe, the Jews. Thus, the sabra was celebrated as eternal youth devoid of parents, as though born from a spontaneous generation of nature, as, for example, in Moshe Shamir's key nationalist novel of the 1948 generation *Bemo Yadav* (In His Own Hands), which introduces the hero as follows: "Elik was born from the sea." In this paradoxical, idiosyncratic version of the Freudian *Familienroman*, Euro-Zionist parents raised their children to see themselves as historical foundlings worthy of more dignified, romantic, and powerful progenitors. Zionism posited itself as an extension of Europe in the Middle East, carrying its Enlightenment banner of the civilizing mission.

If the West has been viewed ambivalently as the place of oppression to be liberated from as well as a kind of an object of desire to form a "normal" part of it, the East has also signified a contemporary ambivalence. On the one hand, is it a place associated with "backwardness," "underdevelopment," a land swamped, in the words of 1950s propaganda films, with "mosquitoes, scorpions, and Arabs." On the other hand, the East has symbolized solace, the return to geographical origins, and reunification with biblical history. The obsessive negation of the "Diaspora," which began

with the Haskalah (European Jewish Enlightenment) and the return to the homeland of Zion, led at times to the exotic affirmation of Arab "primitiveness" as a desirable image to be appropriated by the native-born sabra. The Arab was projected as the incarnation of the ancient, the pre-exiled Jews, the Semite not yet corrupted by wanderings in exile, and therefore, to a certain extent, as the authentic Jew.[26] The Arab as presumably preserving archaic ways and rootedness in the land of the Bible, in contrast with the landless ghetto Jew, provoked a qualified identification with the Arab as a desired object of imitation for Zionist youth in Palestine/Eretz Israel and as a reunification with the remnant of the free and proud ancient Hebrew.

This projection, however, coexisted with a simultaneous denial of Palestine. The role of archaeology in Israeli culture, it should be pointed out, has been crucial in disinterring remnants of the biblical past of Palestine, at times enlisted in the political effort to demonstrate a historical right to the "land of Israel." In dramatic contrast to Jewish archaeology of the text,[27] this idea of physical archaeology as demonstrating a geography of identity carries with it the obverse notion of the physical homeland as text to be allegorically read, within Zionist hermeneutics, as a "deed to the land." Corollary to this is the notion of historical "strata" within a political geology. The deep stratum, in the literal and figurative sense, is associated with the Israeli Jews, while the surface level is associated with the Arabs, as a recent "superficial" historical element without millennial "roots." Since the Arabs are seen as "guests" in the land, their presence must be downplayed, much as the surface of the land has at times been "remodeled" to hide or bury remnants of Arab life and Palestinian villages, in certain instances, have been replaced with Israeli ones or completely erased. The linguistic, lexical expression of this digging into the land is the toponymic archaeology of place names. Some Arabic names of villages, it was discovered, were close to or based on the biblical Hebrew names; in some cases, therefore, Arabic names were replaced with old-new Hebrew ones.

PARTING WORLDS, SUBVERSIVE RETURNS

Yet despite the importance of the idea of return, it is no less important to see Zionist representation of Palestine in relation to other settlers' narratives. Palestine is linked to the Americas in more ways than would at first appear. The Columbus masternarrative prepared the ground for an enthusiastic reception of Zionist discourse within Euro-America. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a whole touches, I would argue, on some sensitive

historical nerves within "America" itself. As a product of schizophrenic masternarratives—colonial settler state on the one hand, and anticolonial republic on the other—"America" has been subliminally more attuned to the Zionist than to the Palestinian nationalist discourse. Zionist discourse contains a liberatory narrative vis-à-vis Europe that in many ways is pertinent to the Puritans. The New World of the Middle East, like the New World of America, was concerned with creating a New Man. The image of the sabra as a new (Jewish) man evokes the American Adam. The American hero was celebrated as prelapsarian Adam, as a New Man emancipated from history (i.e., European history) before whom all the world and time lay available, much as the sabra was conceived as the antithesis of the "Old World" European Jew. In this sense, one might suggest an analogy between the cultural discourse about the innocent national beginning of America and that of Israel. The American Adam and the sabra masculinist archetypes implied not only their status as creators, blessed with the divine prerogative of naming the elements of the scene about them, but also their fundamental innocence. The notions of an American Adam and an Israeli sabra elided a number of crucial facts—notably, that there were other civilizations in the Promised Land; that the settlers were not creating "being from nothingness"; and that the settlers, in both cases, had scarcely jettisoned all their Old World cultural baggage, their deeply ingrained Eurocentric attitudes and discourses. Here the gendered metaphor of the "virgin land," present both in Zionist and American pioneer discourses, suggests that the land is implicitly available for defloration and fecundation. Assumed to lack owners, the land therefore becomes the property of its "discoverer" and cultivators, who transform the wilderness into a garden, those who "make the desert bloom."

In the case of Zionist discourse, the concept of "return to the motherland," as I have pointed out, suggests a double relation to the land, having to do with an ambivalent relation to the "East" as the place of Judaic origins and as the locus for implementing the "West." The sabra embodied the humanitarian and liberationist project of Zionism, carrying the same banner of the "civilizing mission" that European powers proclaimed during their surge into "found lands." The classical images of sabra pioneers as settlers on the Middle Eastern frontiers, fighting Indian-like Arabs, along with the reverberations of the early American biblical discourse encapsulated in such notions as "Adam," "(New) Canaan," and "Promised Land," have all facilitated the feeling of Israel as an extension of "us"—the United States. Furthermore, both the United States and Israel fought against Brit-

44 Repression of a Black Panthers' demonstration, Jerusalem (1971): Photograph by Shimshon Wigoder

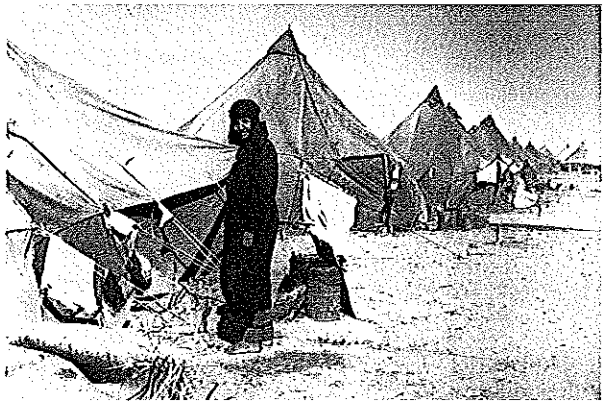
ish colonialism while also practicing colonial policies toward the indigenous peoples. Finally, I would argue for a triangular structural analogy by which the Palestinians represent the aboriginal "Indians" of Euro-Israeli discourse, while the Sephardim or Mizrahim, as imported cheap labor, constitute the "blacks" of Israel.[28] (Taking their name from the American movement, the Israeli "Black Panthers," for example, sabotaged the myth of the melting pot by showing that there was in Israel not one but two Jewish communities—one white, one black; figure 44.) The manifest Palestinian refusal to play the assigned role of the presumably doomed "Indians" of the transplanted (far) Western narrative has testified to an alternative. The story of the Jewish victims of Zionism also remains to be heard.[29]

The same historical process that dispossessed Palestinians of their property, lands, and national-political rights was intimately linked to the process that affected the dispossession of Arab-Jews from their property, lands, and rootedness in Arab countries, as well as their uprootedness from that history and culture within Israel itself.[30] But while Palestinians have fostered the collective militancy of nostalgia in exile (be it *fil dakhel*, under Israeli occupation, or *fil kharij*, under Syrian, Egyptian, American passports or on the basis of laissez-passer), Arab-Jews, trapped in a no-exit situation, have been forbidden to nourish memories of at least partially belonging to the peoples across the river Jordan, across the mountains of Lebanon, and across the Sinai desert and Suez Canal. The pervasive notion of "one people" reunited in their ancient homeland actively disauthorizes

any affectionate memory of life before the State of Israel. Quincentennial events luxuriated in the landscapes, sounds, and smells of the lost Andalusian home, but silence muffled an even longer historical imaginary in Cairo, Baghdad, and Damascus, and hid an even more recent loss. For centuries, both Muslim and Jewish poets eulogized Andalusia by referring to the keys they persisted carrying in exile. Yet in contemporary Palestinian poetry, Andalusia is far from being only a closed chapter of Arab grandeur, for it allegorizes Palestine. In the words of Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Al Kamanjat (The Violins)": "The violins weep with the gypsies heading for Andalusia / the violins weep for the Arabs departing Andalusia. / The violins weep for a lost epoch that will not return / the violins weep for a lost homeland that could be regained." But the parallelism between Andalusia and Palestine stops precisely at the point of reclaiming a Palestinian future, for Andalusia remains in the past.

The 1992 discussions of expulsion brought out the "wandering Jew" motif as perennially displaced people. But the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa for the most part had stable, "non-wandering" lives in the Islamic world. As splendidly captured in *In an Antique Land*, the Sephardim or the Jews-within-Islam who moved within the regions of Asia and Africa, from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, did so more for commercial, religious, or scholarly purposes than for reasons of persecution. Ironically, the major traumatic displacement took place in recent years when Arab-Jews were uprooted, dispossessed, and dislodged due to the collaboration between Israel and some of the Arab governments under the orchestration of Western colonial powers who termed their solution to the "question of Palestine" a "population exchange" (figure 45).[31] That no one asked either the Palestinians or the Arab-Jews whether they wished to be exchanged is yet another typical narrative of Third World histories of partition. Sephardim/Mizrahim who have managed to leave Israel, often in (an indirect) response to institutionalized racism there, have dislocated themselves yet again, this time to the United States, Europe, and Latin America. In a sudden historical twist, today it is to the Muslim Arab countries of their origins to which most Middle Eastern Jews cannot travel, let alone fantasize a return—the ultimate taboo.[32]

The cultural commonalities between Middle Eastern Jews and Muslims are a thorny reminder of the Middle Eastern/North African character of the majority of Jews in Israel today. Not surprisingly, quincentenary events in Europe, the Middle East, and the Americas have centered on the Spanishness of Sephardi culture (largely on Ladino or Judeo-Español language,



45 Like Arab, like Jew: A Yemeni woman in an Israeli transit camp (1949)

cuisine, and music) while marginalizing the fact that Jews in Iberia formed part of a larger Judeo-Islamic civilizational space of North Africa and the European Balkan area of the Ottoman Empire. Major Sephardi texts in philosophy, linguistics, poetry, and medicine were written in Arabic. They reflect specific Muslim influences as well as a strong sense of Jewish Arab cultural identity, seen especially in the development of the Judeo-Arab script used in religious correspondence between Jewish scholars across the regions of Islam, as well as in the emergence of some specific local Jewish-Arabic dialects.[33] The Jews of Iberia had come from the East and South of the Mediterranean—some with the Romans; others largely with the Muslims—and returned there when they fled the Inquisition. Over 70 percent returned to the regions of the Ottoman Empire, while the rest went to western Europe and the Americas.[34] Thus, a historiography that speaks of a pan-Jewish culture is often the same historiography that speaks of "Arab versus Jew" without acknowledging Arab-Jewish existence.

The erasure of the Arab dimension of Sephardim-Mizrahim has been crucial to the Zionist perspective since the Middle Easternness of Jews questions the very definitions and boundaries of the Euro-Israeli national project. Euro-Israel has ended up in a paradoxical situation in which its "Orientals" have had closer cultural and historical links to the presumed enemy—the "Arab"—than to the Ashkenazi Jews with whom they were coaxed and coerced into nationhood. The taboo around the Arabness of Sephardi history and culture is clearly manifested in Israeli academic and media attacks on Sephardi/Mizrahi intellectuals who refuse to define themselves simply as Israelis and who dare to assert their Arabness in the public sphere.[35] The Ashkenazi-Israeli anxiety about Sephardi-Mizrahi identity (expressed by both right and left) underlines that Sephardi Jews have represented a problematic entity for Euro-Israeli hegemony. Although Zionism collapses the Sephardim/Mizrahim and the Ashkenazim into a single people, at the same time the Mizrahi difference has destabilized Zionist claims that it represents a single Jewish people, premised not only on a common religious background but also on common nationality. The strong cultural and historical links that Middle Eastern Jews have shared with the Arab Muslim world—stronger in many respects than those they shared with the European Jews—threatened the conception of a homogeneous nation akin to those on which European nationalist movements were based. As an integral part of the topography, language, culture, and history of the Middle East, Mizrahim have also threatened the Euro-Israeli self-image that sees itself as a prolongation of Europe "in" the Middle East, but not "of" it.

Fearing an encroachment from the East on the West, the Israeli establishment attempted to repress the Middle Easternness of Jews as part of an effort to Westernize the Israeli nation and to mark clear borders of identity between Jews as Westerners and Arabs as Easterners. Arabness and Orientalness have been consistently stigmatized as evils to be uprooted, creating a situation in which Arab-Jews were urged to see Judaism and Zionism as synonyms and Jewishness and Arabness as antonyms. Thus, Arab-Jews were prodded to choose between anti-Zionist Arabness and a pro-Zionist Jewishness for the first time in history. Distinguishing the "evil" East (the Muslim Arab) from the "good East" (the Jewish Arab), Israel has taken upon itself the "cleansing" of Arab-Jews of their Arabness and redeeming them from their "primal sin" of belonging to the Orient. This conceptualization of East and West has important implications in this age of the "peace process," since it avoids the inherent question of the majority of the population within Israel being from the Middle East—Palestinians citizens of Israel as well as Mizrahi-Sephardi Jews. For peace as it is defined now does not entail a true democracy in terms of adequate representation of these populations and in terms of changing the educational, cultural, and political orientation within the State of Israel.

The leitmotif of Zionist texts was the cry to be a "normal civilized nation," without the presumably myriad "distortions" and forms of pariahdom typical of the *gola* (Diaspora), of the state of being a non-nation-state.

The *Ostjuden*, perennially marginalized by Europe, realized their desire to become Europe, ironically, in the Middle East, this time on the back of their own *Ostjuden*, the Eastern Jews. The Israeli establishment therefore has made systematic efforts to suppress Sephardi-Mizrahi cultural identity. The Zionist establishment, since its early encounter with Palestinian (Sephardi) Jews, has systematically attempted to eradicate the Middle Easternness of those other Jews—for example, by marginalizing their histories in school curricula and by rendering Mizrahi cultural production and grassroots political activities invisible in the media. However, Mizrahi popular culture, despite its obvious shifts since the partition of Palestine, has clearly manifested its vibrant intertextual dialogue with Arab, Turkish, Iranian, and Indian popular cultures. Oriental Arabic music produced by Mizrahim—at times in collaboration with Israeli Palestinians—is consumed by Palestinians in Israel and across the borders in the Arab world, often without being labeled as originating in Israel. This creativity is partly nourished through an enthusiastic consumption of Jordanian, Lebanese, and Egyptian television programs, films, and Arabic video-music performances, which rupture the Euro-Israeli public sphere in a kind of subliminal transgression of a forbidden nostalgia. In fact, recent musical groups such as the Moroccan Israeli Sfatayim (Lips) traveled to Morocco to produce a music video sung in Moroccan Arabic against the scenery of the cities and villages that Moroccan Jews have left behind, just as Israeli-born Iraqi singers such as Ya'aqub Nishawi sing old and contemporary Iraqi music. This desire for "return of the Diaspora" ironically evokes an attitude that reverses the biblical expression of nostalgia for Zion. Now it becomes: "By the waters of Zion, where we sat down, and there we wept, when we remembered Babylon."[36]

Arab Muslim historiography, meanwhile, has ironically echoed the logic of Zionist paradigms, looking only superficially into the culture and identity of Arab-Jews both in the Arab world and, more recently, within Israel. Thus, Ghosh, the visiting Indian anthropologist, notices what is otherwise unnoticeable: that in the Geniza's home country, Egypt, "nobody took the slightest notice of its dispersal. In some profound sense, the Islamic high culture of Masr [Arabic for Egypt] has never really noticed, never found a place for the parallel history the Geniza represented, and its removal only confirmed a particular vision of the past. . . . Now it was Masr, which had sustained the Geniza for almost a millennium, that was left with no traces of its riches: not a single scrap or shred of paper to remind her of the aspect of her past. It was as though the borders that were to divide Palestine several decades later had already been drawn, through time rather than territory, to allocate a choice of Histories."[37] The amnesia of this recent history in most contemporary Arab culture has fed into an Israeli and Arab refusal of the hybrid, the in-between. Even Israeli Arab-Jews, such as the Iraqi Israeli writer Samir Naqash, who still writes his novels in Arabic, are "rejected" from membership in the Arab geocultural region seen simply as "Israeli." The "Jews of Islam" thus exist today as part of a historiography in which their relations to the Arab Islamic world exist only in the past tense. Colonial partitions and nationalist ideologies have left little room for the inconvenient "minority" of Arab-Jews. Even the Geniza itself, presumably rescued from obscurity and decay at the hands of its own producers, has been used to mobilize a nationalist narrative in which every text or fragmented document is to be deciphered for a Zionist transformation "*mi-gola le-geoola* (from Diaspora to redemption)."

The historiographical work of Euro-Jewish scholars such as S. D. Goitein and E. Strauss might have facilitated the entry of an Indian anthropologist such as Ghosh into the Indian Ocean world of the twelfth-century Tunisian Jewish trader Abraham Ben-Yiju, who, unlike Ghosh, traveled in an era when "Europe" did not dominate the channels of scholarly communication. But the Geniza scholarship was shaped and used within a context of Zionist Enlightenment readings of the otherized Jews of the Levant—the very same Jews whose cultural practices made possible the Geniza scholarship of Western academic institutions. Within these asymmetrical power relations, Euro-Jewish scholars infused the colonized history with national meaning and telos, while, ironically, Arab-Jews were simultaneously being displaced and, in Israel, subjected to a school system in which Jewish history textbooks featured barely a single chapter on their history (figure 46).

Today, Mizrahim inhabit the pages of Euro-Israeli sociological and anthropological accounts as maladjusted criminals and superstitious exotics, firmly detached from Arab history that looms only as deformed vestiges in the lives of Israelis of Asian and African origins. Sociology and anthropology detect such traces of underdevelopment, while national historiography tells the story of the past as a moral tale full of national purpose. Such scholarly bifurcation cannot possibly account for an Arab-Jewish identity that is at once past and present, here and there. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that the author of *In an Antique Land*, a hybrid of anthropology and history, ends up splitting the subjects of ethnography and historiography: the first focusing on present-day Egyptian Muslims, and the second on past Arab-Jews. At the end of his book, Ghosh somehow ends his narrative

46 Meir Gal, "Nine Out of Four Hundred" (1997): The title refers to the number of pages dedicated to Mizrahim in Jewish history textbooks in Israel

at the very point where the subject of his historiography could have turned into a subject of his ethnography. The anthropological accounts of Ghosh's visits to Egypt are paralleled by the historiographical chronicle of Ben-Yiju's travel within the Judeo-Islamic world. On his final trip to Egypt, Ghosh notices Arab-Jewish pilgrims from Israel coming to Egypt to visit the tomb of the cabbalist mystic Sidi Abu-Hasira, a site holy for both Muslims and Jews, with many similar festivities. Yet for one reason or another, he never meets them. Perhaps Ghosh's missed rendezvous, his packing up and leaving Egypt precisely as the Arab-Jews visit Abu-Haseira's holy site, is revelatory of the difficulties of representing a multi-diasporic identity, the dangers of border crossing in the war zone. Arab-Jews thus continue to "travel" in historical narratives, inextricable from a legendary Islamic civilization. As the postcolonial story unfolds, however, Arab-Jews suddenly cease to exist, as though they have reached their final destination—the State of Israel—and nothing more needs to be said.

In contrast to the negatively connoted term "Orientals" (in the United States), in Israel, "Orientals (Mizrahim)" signifies radical politics, evoking a common experience shared by all Asian and African Jews in Israel, despite their different origins. On the part of radical Sephardi movements, this new term also suggests a resistant discourse that calls for linkages to the East as opposed to the hegemonic discourse of "we of the West." The names of the 1980s movements East for Peace and the Oriental Front in Israel; Perspectives Judeo-Arabes in France; and World Organization of Jews from Islamic Countries in the United States point to the assertion of the past and a future interwovenness with the East. Mizrahim, along with Palestinians within Israel proper (Israeli Palestinians), compose the majority of the citizens of a state that has rigidly imposed an anti–Middle Eastern agenda. In a first-of-its-kind meeting with Palestinians held at the symbolic site of Toledo, Spain, in 1989, Sephardi/Arab-Jewish representatives insisted that a comprehensive peace would mean more than settling political borders: It would require the erasure of the East-West cultural borders between Israel and Palestine and the remapping of national and ethnic-racial identities against the deep scars of colonizing partitions. A critical examination of national histories may thus open a cultural space for working against taboo memories and fostering diasporic visions.

NOTES

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1 Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 89–94. Some of my comments here were made in a public conversation with Ghosh dedicated to his book. The conversation also included Tim Mitchell and was organized and moderated by Kamala Visweswaran and Parag Amladi, CUNY TV, March 1994.

2 Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 85, 93

3 See S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, revised and edited by Jacob Lassner (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

4 I thank Robert Stam for allowing me to use some "shared territory" from our book *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London: Routledge, 1994).

5 See, for example, "Green Card" artwork by Inigo Manglano-Ovalle.

6 As quoted in Jean Comby, "1492: Le Choc des Cultures et l'Evagelization du Monde," *Dossiers del'episcopat Francais*, no. 14 (October 1990).

7 See Charles Duff, *The Truth about Columbus* (New York: Random House, 1936).

8 Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 81.

9 Jan Pieterse makes the more general point that many of the themes of European imperialism traced antecedents to the European and Mediterranean

sphere. Thus the theme of civilization against barbarism was a carry over from Greek and Roman antiquity; the theme of Christianity against pagans was the keynote of European expansion culminating in the Crusades; and the Christian theme of "mission" was fused with "civilization" in the *mission civilisatrice*. See Jan P. Nederveen Pieterse, *Empire and Emancipation* (London: Pluto, 1990), 240.

10 For details, see Jan Carew, *Fulcrums of Change: Origins of Racism in the Americas and Other Essays* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1988).

11 The indigenous peoples of the Americas similarly were officially protected from massacres by the throne only once they converted to Christianity.

12 The presumed "godlessness" of the indigenous people became a pretext for enslavement and dispossession. While Jews and Muslims were diabolized, the indigenous Americans were accused of devil worship. The brutalities practiced by official Christianity toward Jews and Muslims have to be seen therefore on the same continuum as the forced conversions of indigenous peoples of the Americas who, like the Jews and Muslims in Christian Spain, were obliged to feign allegiance to Catholicism.

13 Pat Kossan, "Jewish Roots of Hispanics-Delicate Topic," *Phoenix Gazette*, 14 April 1992, sec. C.

14 Moors who converted to Christianity.

15 Spanish Muslim culture in Christian Spain, like Sephardi Jewish culture, was expressed in Spanish, as well.

16 On that history, see, for example, W. Montgomery Watt and Pierre Cachia, *A History of Islamic Spain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1977); James T. Monroe, *Hispano-Arabic Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).

17 This picture of an ageless and relentless oppression and humiliation ignores the fact that, on the whole, Jews of Islam—a minority among several other religious and ethnic communities in the Middle East and North Africa—lived relatively comfortably within Arab Muslim society.

18 For a more complex analysis, see, for example, Ilan Halevi, *A History of the Jews: Ancient and Modern* (London: Zed Books, 1987); Maxime Rodinson, *Cult, Ghetto, and State: The Persistence of the Jewish Question* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1983); Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

19 See Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish Victims" *Social Text* 19–20 (Fall 1988).

20 For more on the question of East and West in Zionist discourse, see Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989).

21 In the early days of Zionism, other "empty" territories were proposed for Jewish settlement; typically they were located in the colonized world. However, one of Herzl's famous proposals for settlement—Uganda—created a crisis for the Zionist Congress known as the Uganda crisis.

22 See Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* Translated by David Thorstad. (New York: Monad Press, 1973).

23 See Yoseff Meir, *Ha-Tnu'a ha-Tzionit ve-Yehudei Teman* (The Zionist Movement and the Jews of Yemen) (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Afikim, 1982); G. N. Giladi, *Discord in Zion: Conflict between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews in Israel* (London: Scorpion Publishing, 1990).

24 The phrase was already in use in the first decade of this century by the early engineers (such as Shmuel Yaveneb) of "Aliya" of Jews from the regions of the Ottoman Empire. See Meir, *The Zionist Movement and the Jews of Yemen*.

25 See Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Times Books, 1979).

26 For a similar discourse addressed to bedouins, see Smadar Lavie, *The Poetics of Military Occupation: Mezina Allegories of Bedouin Identity under Israeli and Egyptian Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

27 See, for example, Jacques Derrida, "Edmund Jabès and the Question of the Book," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 64–78; George Steiner, "Our Homeland, the Text," *Salmagundi* 66 (Winter–Spring 1985): 4–25.

28 In recent years, the term *shhorim* (blacks) has also applied to the Orthodox religious Ashkenazi codes of dressing. I should point out that the sartorial codes favoring dark colors of centuries-ago Poland were never part of Judeo Levantine culture. And over the past decade, since the massive arrival of Ethiopian Jews, the pejorative term "blacks," or *kushim*, has been used against Ethiopian Jews.

29 I specifically address the relationship between the Palestinian and the Sephardi-Mizrahi questions vis-à-vis Zionism in my essay on Sephardi identity in Israel, "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text* 19–20 (Fall 1988). The title of that article refers to Edward Said's "Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Victims," *Social Text* 1 (1979), which also appeared as a chapter in his book *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992). Both essays have been republished in Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti, and Ella Shohat, eds., *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

30 Neither Palestinians nor Arab-Jews have been compensated for their lost property.

31 See, for example, Abbas Shiblak, *The Lure of Zion: The Case of the Iraqi Jews* (London: Al Saqi Books, 1986); Giladi, *Discord in Zion*.

32 Thus, for example, when Shimon Ballas wrote the novel *Vehu Aher* (And He Is an Other) (Tel Aviv: Zmora Bitan, 1991), which partially concerned an Iraqi Jew who remained in Iraq after the dislodging of his community and converted to Islam, he was vehemently attacked in a rush to censor the imaginary.

33 Jewish Arabic language was written in Hebrew script, but the script differs from the contemporary Hebrew script that became a lingua franca after the revival of modern Hebrew and its spread through Zionist institutions. Young Sephardim have largely lost familiarity with this script. Today, Sephardi prayer texts are printed in the common (Ashkenazi) script, even when the text is in Judeo-Arabic.

34 Most cultural expression in the Arab world, needless to say, was not in Ladino/Español. In fact, it makes one wonder whether this widespread misrepresentation of Arab-Jewish history led Bharati Mukerjee, author of *The Middleman and Other Stories*, to have her Iraqi Jewish protagonist Alfie Judah say that

"[speaking] a form of Spanish" in "old Baghdad" was good preparation for the Southwest."

35 For example, attacks on Ballas after the publication of *And He Is an Other* and on myself after the publication of my book *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* in Hebrew (*Ha-Kolno'a ha-Israeli: Historia ve-Idiologia* [Israeli Cinema: History and Ideology] [Tel Aviv: Breirot, 1991]).

36 See Ella Shohat, "Dislocated Identities: Reflections of an Arab-Jew," published in *Movement Research: Performance Journal* 5 (fall–winter 1992).

37 Ghosh, *In an Antique Land*, 95.