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## **Identities Portrayed and Integrated. I. Crypto-Identities. Layers of Crypto-Jewish or Related Identities: A Typology Emerging from a Range of Situations**

**Abstract:** There is a spectrum of contextual situations and of degrees, between crypto-Judaism and overt Jewish identity. It is far from being the case that the latter is always feasible, even at the present time. Moreover, crypto-Jewish and related identities occur in an array of situations that far exceed the usual context of Iberian Converso or Marrano identities. This study develops a typology, based on a range of mostly modern situations from several countries.

**Key Words:** Crypto-identity; group identity self-initiated protective obfuscation or misrepresentation; Crypto-Judaism; Pakistan; Bangladesh; India; Burma (Myanmar); Central America; Caribbean; Jewish Moroccan traders on the Amazon in the Amazon rubber boom of 1850–1920; Jewish children deported as slaves to São Tomé; Zanzibar; Greek Evacuees from Egypt's Colony of Equatoria; Eduard Schnitzer, aka Emin Pasha; Jewish Ancestry in Mali in the Present; 15th-Century Jews of Songhai; Crypto-Jews in present-day Urfa; reemerging Crypto-Jews of Iraqi Kurdistan; Bahraini Jews; Islamic and Druze *Taqiyya*; non-Jewish minorities in Israel; the personal narrative of Shalom Oz; Iranian villagers.

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## **1. Motivation and Goals**

### **1.1. Some Current Ethnography by Way of Preamble**

Before the introduction to the structure of this essay, I am going to provide a sequence of tableaux in the first person, which will hopefully be read as eloquent ethnography. This will also make it clear why the subject of this article ought to be quite interesting to the sociology and ethnography of religion. The basic subject of the present essay is the interplay between Jewish

identity, and the degree to which it is disclosed, based on subjectively perceived considerations on social feasibility. Six tableaux follow:

1. It is often the case that a Jewish household, especially when isolated, would not volunteer information about their Jewish identity in given circumscribed spheres of their day-to-day life. For example, in professional contacts, I sometimes, when appropriate, disclose my Jewish identity, or let it be inferred. On the other hand, I do not disclose that identity of mine in my South East London neighbourhood, and let local residents entertain whatever assumption they wish concerning who I am.

2. As we have often been speaking Italian in the street among ourselves, not infrequently it has been assumed that we are Catholic. This in turn, in a mostly Anglican environment, sometimes offers advantages (either relative to being known to be Jewish instead, or in absolute terms: to us as ones with a background in Italy, an Irish neighbour was really very helpful). But is not without disadvantages, as can be imagined in a society where, in living memory, children to ask new acquaintances: “Church or chapel?”, so they would know whether to admit you into their group or mistreat you. (And if you answered that your prayer house is a synagogue, you would have been sorry.)

3. One thing you don’t want to happen, is that somebody would be pissing through the flap for incoming mail in the outer door. Therefore, there is information you don’t willingly disclose (not even when filling in your census data, once in a decade). But some total strangers think they know anyway. When Protestant missionaries knock at the door, and they do sometimes (and when they do, they also knock at the door of our Catholic neighbours), somehow they are already aware that they are addressing Italians, and their missionising line is the one adopted with conversionist purposes towards Catholics. Characteristically, they are enthusiastic but polite, and try to be ingratiating, and to extract information even as they boast of already having some. Uncharacteristically, one such lay preacher even went to the extent of assuring my mother that he has forgiven the Germans, the Italians, and the Japanese for the Second World War. (Arguably, implying: “I forgave you Italians. I am so obliging. Now let yourself be converted quickly.”) He also assured her that he even has Catholics among his own relatives. (So why didn’t he try to convert them first? It didn’t work. Oh, I see.) Then he proceeded to inveigh against the Jews, unaware that he was talking to one. Presumably, or at any rate hopefully, this would have been disapproved by his own ordained spiritual guide.

4. This is not supposed to be a borough were Jews are known to live. For many years, my mother has been overhearing Jewish songs, and sometimes liturgy during the Jewish festivals, coming from some unidentified house in the neighbourhood, until we were able to pinpoint it to just two houses away (these are semi-detached houses) in the same street, where a visibly Mediterranean couple with seven children live. She finally asked one of the children where he is originally from. He walked away, stood in the middle of the road instead of on the pavement, and reluctantly said: “Turkey”. Surely enough, on the next first evening of Passover she heard them singing at the festive banquet. Liturgical Jewish songs overheard by my mother (and on weekdays, from what are quite possibly audio cassettes), in the main are Sephardic indeed, and sometimes mix in some late Ottoman tune, an appropriation of profane music which is not unknown to be applied to Jewish hymns.

5. I recollect once walking to a synagogue in Israel, in a neighbourhood where I had been living for several years previously. I was accompanying a former neighbour and his sons, in their teens. That man had moved to Israel from Morocco at the time when I had moved to the same neighbourhood from Milan, Italy. I related to them that there was no synagogue in my new surroundings in London, and that when I was regularly praying at home, wearing a skullcap and, on weekday mornings, phylacteries (apart from the prayer shawl), I was careful to draw the curtains. They boys erupted in laughter. Their father reproached them, by confirming that this is what one does, in gentile surroundings. And he was referring to Morocco.

6. During my last few years, of the eighteen that I spent in Milan, the occupier of the apartment beneath ours was a youngish couple, who at the time had their first baby. The family name was Jewish, from the Mediterranean. My mother inquired with the man (without mentioning Judaism), and he said that his family was from Greece. I had myself gone up in the lift with his mother-in-law, and arrived to the supposition that she was Rumanian and Jewish. But the family was entirely secular. Then, one night, the man switched on his stereo (he almost never did), and apparently was dancing on his own, while his wife implored: "Giacomo! Giacomo!". The other apartments were silent. And you see, that was the evening on which the Jewish Day of Atonement starts. We came to the conclusions that our neighbour switched on the stereo and even danced on that night *because* he was Jewish and *because* he was in denial. It was no legal proof, of course. But our supposition about the couple's identity was "confirmed" to our (lay, not scholarly) satisfaction.

## 1.2. Structure of the Present Overview

The foregoing six tableaux preamble to the need, I am now stating, to recognise that even in advanced Western societies in the 21st century, it is far from being the case that Jewish identity is always overt. We are going to see, in this essay, that one still even finds crypto-Jewish identity proper (this is the case of the remnants of the Jewish community in Urfa, in southeastern Turkey).

Crypto-Judaism has typically been dealt, by scholarship, in relation to the remnants of Iberian Jewry (e.g., Netanyahu 1966, 1997), including in the American colonies of both Spain and Portugal. It has also been considered in an Italian context, e.g., in relation to 25 alleged relapsed Conversos who, as they refused to renege on Judaism, were burnt at the stake in Ancona in 1556, or to trials of the Inquisition in Sicily after the expulsion of 1492. Crypto-Judaism has also been sometimes discussed in relation to the Jewish community of Mashad in Iran, after its forced conversion in the 19th century. Another context in which it is sometimes mentioned is the early Almohade period in the Maghreb or in Spain.

Those listed above are categories we are going to leave out of the present study. It is the purpose of this article to bring together little known occurrences, especially from the 20th century, of such identities that are any of the following:

- Jewish, but keeping an extremely low profile in their surroundings;
- Crypto-Jewish, mimetised as a different denominational affiliation;

- Jewish ancestry claimed, especially if cherished, by groups now affiliated with a different denomination;
- Jewish but undercover because of very special circumstances requiring an assumed identity;
- Outwardly Jewish affiliation conveyed by *taqiyya* by individuals in a mostly Jewish environment.

Part I of this essay comprises Sections 1 to 13. Part II instead (Sections 14 to 17) considers covert denominational identity in the context of the Near East conflict between pre-state or independent Israel and her neighbours, and then the discussion zooms in on a particular oral testimony of a religious Jewish Jerusalemite man who used to outwardly live as a Sunni Muslim while an undercover agent in Palestine during two different periods: in the 1940s, and then during the 1950s or 1960s. In two short sections in Part III, we are concerned with relics of Jewish ancestry and culture recognised by Jews in others.

Part I emerged from a detailed review of the volumes of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, done for *Quaderni di Studi Indo-Mediterranei* (Nissan, in press). One thing that stood out, was that whereas there is knowledge, and there are reports and a scholarly literature about Jewish presence, past or present, in various regions of India, as well as in Burma/Myanmar (or even what is now Sri Lanka: a Bene Israel community expatriated from Maharashtra was reported in 1940 in Colombo) — and the flow of Israeli backpackers in Nepal is quite visible — nothing appears to be available concerning Pakistan and Bangladesh. And this, even though Karachi used to have a Jewish community before independence.<sup>1</sup> What is tantalising, is that whereas it is simply not known whether there is any Jewish presence in Pakistan, there have been very sporadic hints, or even a claim, about there being such a presence.

In this essay, I am going to refrain from a bibliographical survey of the various situations I am going to analyse. Rather, my purpose is to contrast situations, identify clusters if any even from regions far apart, and the delineate kinds of communal or individual behaviour, whether it consists of a Jewish identity keeping a very low profile, or rather Jewish ancestry being reclaimed by groups of families.

We provide an analysis of the problem of lack of data from Pakistan and Bangladesh (even though pre-independence Karachi had a tiny community, and albeit very sporadically hints come that Jews aren't altogether absent from Pakistan), in relation to different models of Jews keeping a very low profile: the models of crypto-Judaism in present day Urfa (in fear of private violence, not of the authorities) and pre-autonomy Iraqi Kurdistan (the change of regime in the 1990s enabled coming into the open); the willingly accepted ethnic label of Jewish ancestry vs. practised Islam among some present-day families in Mali, or vs. actual or assumed Catholicism in Central America and the Caribbean (a pattern that collapsed in the 1930s–1940s, but cf. Fidel Castro's revelations shortly before his retirement); the model of a low profile and a total reliance on cordial relations with the ruling family (for the tiny Jewish presence in Bahrain, and, in the 1960s, for one Iraqi Jewish household in Jordan, until after the 1969 hanging of Jews in

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<sup>1</sup> In the Wikipedia entry for 'History of Jews in Arab lands (Pre-1948)' (accessible at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish\\_exodus\\_from\\_Arab\\_lands](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_exodus_from_Arab_lands)), a table contrasting the Jewish population size in Arab or Islamic countries in 1948 vs. 2001, lists for Pakistan 2,000 in 1948, and "N/A" in 2001, as opposed to 5,000 vs. 1 (just one person) for Afghanistan, and either 35,000 or 38,000 for Libya in 1948, vs. 0 (zero) in 2001.

Baghdad, pressure as well as King Hussein's endangered position resulted in the young son of the only Jordanian Jewish family being tried on trumped charges and hanged).

## **Part I: A Collection of Situations**

### **2. Jewish Presence in Pakistan and Bangladesh**

#### **2.1. The Pre-Independence Community in Karachi, and Two Tantalising Broadcasts**

Concluding a suite of reviews for *Quaderni di Studi Indo-Mediterranei* concerning the various volumes of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* (Nissan 2010), an absence was noticeable. This is not because of any fault that may be found for it in that journal, that is excellent, but rather for objective reasons. Where is Pakistan, and where is Bangladesh? For sure, historically India encompassed them, too, up to the late 1940s. How to account for that absence? Let us see what is involved. There used to be a small Jewish community in Karachi, in the early 20th century. There is a sense in which Baghdadis used to view Karachi the way Britons view Newcastle upon Tyne — in this particular respect, that coal used to be shipped from there. A piece of coal used to be known as *kārāč'yyi* (*kārāč'yya*) in Baghdadi Judaeo-Arabic. The collective name for coal was *kārāč'i*. It is fair to say that there are no data about Jewish presence in Pakistan since independence to the present: not even about whether there actually is, or has been, any such presence. One could not confidently say that there is none.

During my own fifteen years of living here in London and listening to BBC Radio 4 on a daily basis, I became aware of two broadcasts to which I personally hadn't listened, but about which I was told by my mother, who did. In one of them, which was quite recently, an interviewee about Pakistan's current political troubles, apparently voicing the concerns of a relatively secularised segment of the middle class, remarked that the rights must be respected of the denominational minorities, and specifically mentioned Jews as being such a group. In the other broadcast, several years ago, an interviewee from Pakistan mentioned in passing his Jewish identity.

#### **2.2. Brief Reflections About the Two Broadcasts, Another Testimony, and Local Statements About Jewish Absence Put in Context**

Let us go back to the BBC broadcast, in which a Pakistani interviewee stated that the rights of the minorities, Christians and Jews, should be respected. Perhaps those two denominations were mentioned, because one is used to the main Abrahamic faiths being three. This is no evidence that there actually are any Jews in Pakistan.

As to the earlier BBC broadcast, when an interviewee from Pakistan stated he was Jewish, this calls for a pause for reflection. This doesn't mean he is a professing Jew, or one that rabbinic Judaism would recognise as being Jewish. Perhaps his was simply memory of ancestry, thus an

ethnic label — something that used to be the pattern of groups in Central America and the Caribbean.

Concerning whether there are any Jews at present in Pakistan, Nathan Katz, the editor of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, answered my question as follows (pers. comm., 24 March 2009): “Pakistan? Complex. I am of the opinion there remain isolated families in northern Pakistan, mostly Jews of Persian/Afghan/Bukharan heritage. I have met some people who claim to be. Long story.”

The following appears in the *Journal of the Sutlej Campaign of 1845–6* (Sutlej, retr. 2009): “I understand that there are no Jews in Lahore. There were a few some years ago, but they have all left.” (*ibid.*, p. 94). One may remember that there was a massive Sikh exodus from Lahore during the Partition, in 1947, but until the last it had been a city where different religious denominations had co-existed.

The following, instead, concerns current perceptions in Pakistan. A photograph purporting to show “Girls Celebrating Holi in Lahore”<sup>2</sup> elicited 100 comments within four months since it had been posted. The first such comment was signed by a certain Taimur:

Are they muslims shame on them for celebrating holi. This is all unislamic and most Lahoris say that islam has come into there lives and what are they doing they are celebrating a hindu festival. I am shocked to see that i expected them to dance in dance parties and many things but never expected that they would openly start celebrating a hindu festival they should be punished. SHAME ON ALL THOSE LAHORI GIRLS SHAME SHAME SHAME.

Bear in mind that such a reaction is not extreme, or unwarranted. Unless the girls were not Muslim, then their celebrating a festival of another religious faith would elicit strong reactions from Muslim or, *mutatis mutandis*, from Jews if Jews were observed to act likewise.

Within five hours, Taimur’s posting drew this response, signed “Babarzm”:

Nothing wrong really, my family always celebrate Chrismis [sic] with Christian co-workers and Dewali with Hindu community in Lahore. Same way as they celebrate Eid with us. I wish there were some Jews in Lahore so we could all celebrate Hanukkah as well.

Apparently, this rather eirenic Muslim derived the notion that Hanukkah is the main Jewish festival, from the temporal quasi-overlap with the December Christmas festivities, something that receives attention in the West because of the cultural and social prominence of the latter, rather than of the former. Apart from the foregoing, bear in mind that, e.g., in Baghdad before radical anti-Jewish sentiment became the norm and erased the formerly prominent Jewish presence, Muslim friends would bring presents to hang in the *sukkah* (booth) at the Feast of Tabernacles, or then leavened food, especially sweets, to mark the end of Passover, or then again, some especially friendly Muslim neighbours would come and listen to a musical performance during the Jewish festival of Purim.

To better understand the attitude of the poster signing himself “Babarz” (apparently he is a man), consider that poster “Plant a tree” responded: “What is the big fuss about Taimur?”, and then “irfanazafar” remarked: “My concern is more towards these girls putting their pics on the net.”

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.buzzvines.com/girls-celebrating-holi-lahore> , accessed in 2009)

“Babarzm” retorted: “Would it be alright if they were boys instead of gals?”, and “irfanzafar” pointed out: “Keeping in view pakistani culture, girls are more vulnerable because of social taboos. The stakes in case of Girls are higher in pakistan as people start analyzing their morality.” “Babarzm” disagreed: “So lets challenge those taboos. From look of it these girls are between 14 to 18yrs old. How bad can a person between that age bracket be? Lets give them some space to breath, they will learn with time.” Eventually, “umar.baig” posted a lewd comment: “these girls look good when they do the holi thing. specially when they wear WHITE shalwar kameez (skin tight pyjama) that becomes transparent when colour and water is thrown. its a yummy sight. such events should be held more widely.” “Babarzm” protested: “And people such as yourself must be made to sit on donkey with face painted black.” Then “umar.baig” accused him of hypocrisy, but at the same time also elucidated his own edonistic attitude to cultural otherness being displayed:

babarazm

what wrong have i said?

am i stopping girls from celebrating holi?

am i judging themm in moral terms and saying these girls are “fahaash” ?

am i saying “its against islam” and should be banned

all i know is that when they play holi they look good. my friend studied in “lyceum school” and they used to have this event. they wore white shalwar kameez, all the girls, and were throwing water and colour on each other and it was an enjoyable sight to see the girls. whats wrong with that.....now YOU are judging me in moral terms you hypocrite !! and secondly there is a rule “if its showing its there to be seen”.

if you have a problem with that ....you have a problem with reality.

“Babarzm” retorted: “I have a problem with people discussing female body when the purpose is to malign the character of that individual. In anticipation to your next argument, I don’t agree with your notion of punish the victim by banning their entertainment but to punish the indecent devil who made such comments. Making em sit on donkey with face painted black sounds very appropriate in such situations. A public humiliation similar to the one you were causing the victim girl.”

This exchange strongly suggests, as character evidence, that the selfsame poster who expressed the wish there were Jews in Lahore, so he would celebrate with them their Hanukkah, is basically moved by an impulse of being decent to everybody. This is a traditional attitude in the Islamic world, and goes along with devotion, instead of being a humanisitic alternative to religion. This was also the basis on which Jewish life in Islamic-majority lands was possible, until the mid twentieth century.



### 2.3. The Case of Bangladesh

As for Bangladesh, again: it may, just may be that some Jews from Calcutta had lived at a time in Dacca and Chittagong, and perhaps there are remnants. The same considerations apply as for Pakistan. A non-Jewish Bangladeshi journalist who proposed normalising relations with Israel was imprisoned for that, and risked the death penalty.

And yet, I remember from the 1980s a Bangaldeshi professor attending a scholarly conference in Israel. It was said that he had taken the precaution of not seeing to it that no stamp would appear in his passport, bearing witness to where he had been. That is common practice in such cases.

On 6 April 2009, answering questions of mine concerning a claim made on the Web to the effect that there are 250 Jewish families in Bangladesh, I got this reply from Nathan Katz, editor of *Indo-Judaic Studies*: “There are a lot of wild claims. But in fact the Bangladeshi Parliament building was designed by Jewish architect Louis Khan.” Add to this what I gleaned from a report by David Bitel, to which we shall return: namely, there used to be a “Mr Cohen, who was the newsreader in the 1960s on East Pakistan television” (Bitel 2005).

The following exchange appeared at the *Jewish Travel Advisor* blog (at the webpage <http://www.jewishtraveladvisor.com/jewish-travel-forum-answers.php?qa=94>). On 23 July 2008, a blogger signing herself as “Lisa” posted this question:

Hi, there! I will be in Bangladesh over Yom Kippur and I would love to find a shul. I’ve been googling for two days now -- all combinations of “jews” “dhaka” “bangladesh” “synagogue” and have come up with some compelling stories about a Bangladeshi journalist who was imprisoned for pro-Israel sentiments, but no actual information about any Jewish life in Bangladesh. Any thoughts or ideas would be much appreciated. Thanks!

On 22 September 2008, a blogger signing himself as “Tony” provided this answer:

There is no shul in Dhaka. There are a few Jews among the expatriate community. There is a small group gathering for erev RH [i.e., the eve of Rosh HaShanah, the Jewish New Year]. There will probably be a very lean observance of Yom Kippur among a few people, we simply have to make do. The closest shul/service options are Bangkok, HK [i.e., Hong Kong], Singapore and India (Delhi or Cochin) Call 01731156945 when you come to town, we might have more info.

On 17 January 2009, a blogger signing himself “Akib” (*‘Aqīb* is a Muslim first name) remarked as follows:

250+ jews livin in bangladesh...who have textile business in bangladesh.  
I know few russian people who are jewish.

The URL at which I found this is <http://www.jewishtraveladvisor.com/jewish-travel-forum-answers.php?qa=94> but I also found similar, yet fuller information at a Lubavitch Hasidic outreach website.<sup>3</sup> Under the headline “The Rebbe’s Reach”, subheadlined “two stories”, a link

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<sup>3</sup> At [http://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/AID/3235/ShowFeedback/true](http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/AID/3235/ShowFeedback/true)

appeared to text described as “A Mexican rabbi visiting Teheran; a Jew in Chaitong, Bangladesh.” Then, under the headline Reader comments”, the following exchange appeared.

Jews in Bangladesh (Posted: Feb 28, 2007)

There are about 250 Jewish families in Bangladesh, mostly uber secular My mother is Bangladeshi but my father is Temani Jewish, i have undergone orthodox conversion and I know a lot of Russian jews in Dhaka :)

Posted By Anonymous, Brooklyn, NY

Jews in Bangladesh? (Posted: May 26, 2008)

I wonder how they are treated in this country, while for I know the Bangladeshis are in general peaceful, nice people, Islamic extremism is on the rise on that country. This article [i.e., “a Jew in Chaitong, Bangladesh”] doesn’t convey any fear or anxiety whatsoever, but I would fear for my life telling someone I was Jewish were I visiting Bangladesh.

Posted By David

Not a problem (Posted: July 7, 2008)

I am the Jewish member of the board of one of the largest ISPs in the country. I have never felt the slightest tinge of Antisemitism in Dhaka, despite people’s religious or political views. I have felt more antisemitism, frankly, in Western Europe. All my colleagues here know that I am Jewish, and they are more intrigued and interested by Judaism than anything else.

Posted By Anonymous

i agree (Posted: July 7, 2008)

I am openly Sephardic Jewish , my family has business there ( textile ) and I am even visitng in August...can not wait to go shopping for dresses in Dhaka , its soooo cheap! I was thinking of even having events at the ARA for Jews as there are plenty...

Posted By Pmizrahi, Brooklyn, NY

Israel (Posted: July 8, 2008)

So, despite people’s political/religious views ... I wonder what they would say if you said “I support Israel” haha. Although I doubt that's such a good idea!

Hey Pmizrahi, just wondering, you wrote “for Jews as there are plenty...” There are plenty of Jews in Dhaka? This is all news to me!!!

Posted By David

The blogger who answered the latter, apparently jumbled stereotypes based on Bangladeshi resentment against Pakistan, on perceptions indirectly derived from disappointed emigrants perhaps to the Gulf area, and on the pragmatism of some individuals faced with somebody who is perceived to be a Westerner and has declared Jewish identity:

Supporting Israel in Bangladesh (Posted: July 9, 2008)

Actually, the people I do business with know that I am a Zionist. People are pretty open in Dhaka, and most of them really don't care about Israel one way or another, and this includes people who are religious Muslims, pray 5 times a day, etc. This is seen as an Arab problem, and the Arabs treat Bangladeshi laborers like garbage, so there is no automatic report for Palestinians. A few of them would love to visit if they legally could. It really isn't a fundamentalist country. (They are VERY different than Pakistanis - when I actually mentioned I was thinking of going to Karachi, they all argued with me to stop me from going)

Posted By Anonymous

The latter was answered by "David" on 9 July, under the headline "Wow". Out the outset, he pointed out one's stereotypes as well as ignorance: "Thanks for your post. As you said, Bangladeshis are less fundamentalist than Pakistanis, and while I know neither groups of people very well, I think you are correct." He then also expressed rumours about unpleasant treatment of immigrants to the Gulf states: "In addition, Arab Muslims, so I have heard, tend to treat other Muslims (Pakistanis, Indians, Turks, etc.) a bit "differently" if you know what I mean, especially the South Asian laborers who work in the gulf states." He then inquired about Karachi: "So did you ever go to Karachi? I'm wondering what it's like \*there\* as opposed to BD." [i.e., Bangladesh]. And finally, "David" wondered: "And they would love to visit? Really? Did they say that to you? Just wondering..." (Personally, as mentioned earlier, I once saw a professor from Bangladesh who attended a conference in Israel, apparently taking care for the visit not appearing on his passport.)

On July the 11th, "Anonymous" provided this reply:

No, I never went to Karachi, partially because of my Bangladeshi friends. (One of whom told me, "within hours there will be rumors...There is a Jew in the city') And yes, a couple of my contacts there told me they would love to visit, just out of curiosity...The 'word on the street' in Dhaka is that Bangladesh came close to recognizing Israel many times, but never did because of Saudi pressure (We'll stop giving you aid, we'll make you [sic] send your workers home, etc.) I am a pretty committed Zionist - I mean, I believe in theory, in the two state solution, but don't think it can be implemented right now - and people there know my views - it's just a country without much antisemitism.

On July the 11th, "David" was answered also by "pmizrahi" under the headline "yuh plenty":

Yes David, I would consider around 45 Jews plenty in a place like BD , and Anonymous is right BD was indeed very close to recognizing Israel right after Indian [sic] but Saudi and Malaysian pressure stopped them. Both SA [i.e., Saudi Arabia] and Malaysia take a lot of labours form [*quod corrige*: from] BD so they had to succumb to that pressure...it is also true that to my knowledge BD people do not really care about Palestinians...although there are a few palestinians in Dhaka as well..and I know some Israelis who are in the garment business and are in dhaka with different papers , that includes my family

"David" responded on July the 13th, and his posting concluded expressing relief that some "Arabs and Muslims" have sober opinions: "they realize the economic dependence they have on these wealthy "donors" they do have their own opinions, one of them being that Israel is not the solitary, perennial bad guy in this conflict."

## 2.4. Bangladeshis Abroad, and the Old Country: Two Perspectives

On 19 December 2007, Walter Ruby published in *The Jewish Week* of New York a report (Ruby 2007) acclaiming an interviewee, Hassan Askari, “a thoughtful 20-year-old Bangladeshi”, born in America but raised in Bangladesh, where his upper-class family had become relatively impoverished after land reforms. “He was born in the U.S. to Bangladeshi parents, but spent most of his youth in the Bangladeshi capital of Dacca, returning to the U.S. in 2006 to attend Berkeley College.”

Askari had been for a few days in the media glare as a hero. By the time Ruby interviewed him, he had “returned to his life as a Berkeley College accounting student and a deliveryman for two East Village Indian restaurants”. Askari was “hailed as a hero for coming to the defense of several Jews who were the victims of an anti-Semitic attack on Dec. 7 on the Q train”. “Askari, a slender young man with long hair who still had two black eyes and a swollen face, continued to insist, ‘I don’t consider myself a hero. I did what anyone would do.’” — for all of the fact that “he was the only person on the subway car who intervened on behalf of the victims”. “Askari said of the attack on the Q train: “I watched the situation develop. This big group of kids was cussing at the others and then started pushing them. I grabbed one of the attackers and said, ‘Are you crazy’? Then someone jumped me. It was a nasty scene, with blood all over the floor.”” Askari “was pleased to read in the media last weekend that prosecutors plan to charge the attackers in the subway incident with hate crimes.”

“The subway attack landed Askari and Walter Adler, 23, one of the Jewish victims, on the front page of the tabloids.” “Mayor Michael Bloomberg was scheduled to host Askari at City Hall on Wednesday, and the Anti-Defamation League was scheduled to make him the inaugural recipient of its “Stand-Up New Yorker Award” the same day, an award established to honor Askari.” Other organisations had also honoured Askari, whose upbringing and attitudes have been both religious and tolerant. In Bangladesh, he had done an internship at the Grameen Bank, headed by Nobel Peace Prize awardee Muhammed Yunis, famous for his pioneering work with no-interest microcredits that have a major effect on the lives of local poor people. During the interview, Askari declared:

Askari sees little irony in the tableau of a Muslim leaping into the breach to save Jews. “I have always had friends of all backgrounds, including Jews,” he said in the interview. “Two of my closest friends in New York are Bengali Jews from Dacca. While living in Bangladesh, I also had Hindu and Buddhist friends, and my fiancé, Cannelle Cuvalier, who is from Belgium but lives in Bangladesh, is from a Christian background.[”] “Unfortunately, most people are not willing to learn about other religions and respect them,” he continued. “I believe that no one religion has a monopoly on truth. My dad always taught me, ‘You will never know the truth before you die and stand before God.’” Of the ties between Jews and Muslims, Askari added, “Judaism is the faith that is closest to Islam. It seems to me that Jews and Muslims are kissing cousins with a lot of similarities in the way we practice and the rules we observe. I really hope Jews and Muslims can come together as friends and allies and this incident helps to inspire that. If we can come together here in New York, it will set example for other places, like the Middle East.”

An Australian immigration lawyer, David Bitel, is or was also part time judicial member of the New South Wales (NSW) NSW Administrative Decisions Tribunal in its equal opportunity division, and has been on the Executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies from 1999 to 2007. He also has been advisor to community groups notably in the Filipino, Bangladesh and Nepalese communities in NSW. In February 2005, he gave a talk at the Conference on Anti-Semitism in the Contemporary World, held at Monash University in Melbourne. The paper (Bitel 2005) is still unpublished, but is posted at the website of Bitel's legal firm, of Parish Patience Immigration Lawyers.

Basically his paper consists of three parts: general background about Bangladesh (and Jews in India), a personal narrative of his frequent visits to Bangladesh, and then the results of a survey he conducted among typically well-educated immigrants from Bangladesh. The survey tried to ascertain their attitudes towards Jews and Israel. The outcome was that they held moderate views, albeit not infrequently uninformed. (It is unclear to me, however, whether respondents were trying to be polite.)

Let us turn now to the part of Bitel's article that deals with these Bangladeshi's old country. Bitel, surveying the Jewish presence in India in colonial times, remarks in Section 1.2 about "the complete absence of Jews from the Eastern part of Bengal, the part which became first East Pakistan and then Bangladesh. There are close to 300 million Bengali speakers, approximately half of whom live in West Bengal, and the other half in Bangladesh. Although Calcutta was the capital of and the largest city in Anglo India with a sizeable largely Iraqi Jewish community of traders, there appears to have been almost no movement east of these Jews into what has become Bangladesh."

Section 1.5 in Bitel's paper is concerned with the extreme anti-Israel attitude of the Bangladeshi authorities:

The Bangladesh passport is valid to travel to all countries in the world, except Israel. Indeed Mr Salah Choudhury, a Bangladesh journalist and editor of the magazine Blitz has been imprisoned for a violation of Bangladesh immigration laws since his arrest on 3 November 2003 because he was about to board a plane to address a human rights symposium in Israel. He has been labelled a traitor and anti-Islam and has been threatened by police agents with charges of treason and anti-religious activities. [...] Some years ago Muslim imams from Israel were almost prevented from attending a world Muslim religious conference in Bangladesh until international Muslim pressure forced the Bangladesh government to let them in.

Apart from the foregoing, Bitel remarks: "Conspiracy theories abound in Bangladesh. [...] and media commentators in Bangladesh often suggest the involvement of Mossad with the Indian State in subversive activities in Bangladesh."

Section 1.6 in Bitel's article is titled "A Personal Story". It relates, among the other things, the following:

Between 1990 and 2004 I have travelled to Bangladesh over 30 times, spending several weeks on each trip in that land. Without pomposity, I think I understand the people of Bangladesh. I have made lasting and sincere friendships. I have never sought to hide the fact I am Jewish and in early visits sought to locate the existence of a local Jewish population, without any success. No-one I met in that country or have met in Australia has been able to identify any Jews living in Bangladesh,

other than expats there on work assignment. There was one exception, a Mr Cohen, who was the newsreader in the 1960s on East Pakistan television. This week I have discovered in fact that Mr Cohen's brother lives in Sydney. I have yet to meet him and share experiences. [...] my visits to Bangladesh to give advice to many thousands interested in pursuing emigration to Australia have been largely uneventful. [...] However, during my last visit to Bangladesh in May 2004 I found myself being heavily monitored by Special Branch Police from the moment of my arrival at Dhaka airport, and throughout the period of my stay. Although questioned for about an hour after 7 days, I was unable to find out the cause for this overbearing and in fact quite frightening surveillance. Attempts to ascertain the basis for this since returning to Australia have however led to the unconfirmed suggestion that the reason for this monitoring was an apparent perception that I was in Bangladesh attempting to foster the interests of Israel, organising a Mossad spy ring there.

Based on the data in the present subsection in my present paper, as well as the previous subsection, it would appear that there are contradictory patterns or trends in Bangladesh, some that adopt a hard line, and some that at a private level are pragmatic and tolerant towards the Jewish identity of foreigners who are perceived to be Western.

## **2.5. Crossed Boundaries: Pakistan, India, Burma**

Whereas Jewish presence in India and Burma (now Myanmar) has been documented and researched, much less is known about Jewish presence in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Bear in mind that complex identities, as well as crossed denominational boundaries, have also been described sometimes. For example, in Vol. 10 (2009) of the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, on pp. 107–109 one reads about a Jewish woman from the Bene Israel community of Pune, India, who eloped from her father's house and married a Muslim prior to the Partition, and then moved with him and his other wives to Karachi.

On pp. 93–94 and especially on p. 99 in the same journal issue, one reads about mixed ménages and mixed identities in Burma, involving a male Jewish partner. I once read in a newspaper that the remnants of an Iraqi-Jewish family in Burma were a young man who appeared at the Israeli embassy, seeking immigration to Israel, and his uncle who accompanied him, and was a Buddhist monk.

Also bear in mind that from the early 1990s, Brigadier-General D.O. Abel, a Protestant of Jewish ancestry, has been a prominent member of the Burmese ruling junta. It would appear that the rise in Abel's political fortunes was in relation to the partial change of guard when the previous leader of the junta, Ne Win, was made to retire. An interview with David Abel appeared in an Israeli newspaper supplement (Yerushalmi and Ben-Knaan 2001). The interviewee was cooperative, but turned antagonistic for a while when it appeared that the problematic political situation in Burma (Myanmar) may be broached. "Brigadier-General Abel, it turns out, is of Jewish origin, from a family that immigrated from India, even though he now defines himself as being a Christian. In years past, eventually all of his brothers and sisters left Myanmar, and three of them live in Australia as Jews for all purposes. Abel has relatives in Israel, these being the Daniels, Ezekiel, and Abrahams families" (*ibid.*). It was also related that he was still in contact with a cousin: she was, at the time, a clinical psychiatrist living in Israel. It was also related that he was still in contact with a cousin: she was, at the time, a clinical psychiatrist living in

Israel.”Brigadier-General Abel is a rather cordial man, bespectacled, speaking with sharp hand movements, he raises his voice in total contrast to the culture of whispering of Burmese society. He is married to «Q’ yng Dhyn Mw», a devout Baptist, and the two of them raise eight adopted children, gathered from poor families from northern Myanmar” (*ibid.*, my trans. from Hebrew). Concerning Myanmar and especially adjoining Indian states, Nathan Katz has written (2005, p. 5007, col. 2):

In the mid-twentieth century several shamans and leaders of tribal people in extreme eastern India (the states of Mizoram, Manipur, and Tripura) and western Myanmar (formerly Burma) began having dreams and visions that told them of their lost, true identity — that they were Jews of the tribe of Menashe who had wandered from ancient Israel along the Silk Route to Kaifeng, China, then through Southeast Asia, finally settling in their current, remote mountainous homes. Their religious enthusiasm spread, such that in the early twenty-first century there are thousands of Kuki tribals on both sides of the border who are living as Jews. Some traveled to Israel, where they learned Hebrew, studied, and converted to Judaism; some later returned home as religious leaders. A number of synagogues sprouted up, and there are regular visits from Israeli and American coreligionists. Several hundred Kuki tribals now live in Israel, especially in the Yesha (settlements), but most wait for redemption at home. In the 1990s a similar group, who called themselves B’nai Ephraim, emerged in Andhra Pradesh, a state on the Bay of Bengal on India’s southeast coast.

### **3. Considerations About Central America and the Caribbean**

There is a scholarly realisation of a widespread pattern by which, in the 19th and early 20th centuries, well integrated, and sometimes socially well positioned families in Central America were more or less practising Catholics, but nevertheless willingly let themselves be identified as being Jewish, because of their ancestry.

Fidel Castro’s recent admission, shortly before he resigned, of his own Jewish ancestry is a cogent explanation of why during his tenure in office he protected Cuba’s Jews (and even, sporadically and strictly off the record, voiced sympathy for Israel, even though his foreign policies dictate otherwise, other than in the very first days of his rule, when mutual sympathy between Cuba and Israel was overt. This was muted on both parts, as both parts were client states of antagonistic superpowers, and could not afford to antagonise their respective patron. Besides, refer to Margalit Bejarano studies on antisemitism in Cuba (Bejarano 1990, 1992).)

In a sense, Castro’s coming out of the closet as one who cherishes his Jewish origins is disappointing, as it shouldn’t require such ancestry for explaining his decent behaviour *vis-à-vis* Cuba’s Jews, which is in striking contrast to Hugo Chávez’s whipping up hatred for Venezuela’s Jews through governmental media, or even by unleashing the police to intimidate the community.

Thinking again of the apparently fluid and inclusive identity of the Pakistani interviewee of the BBC, who stated he was Jewish, consider that Castro’s coming out of the closet in old age doesn’t contradict anti-Castro propaganda — voiced decades ago in the *Reader’s Digest* — to the effect that as a teenager he voiced pro-Nazi sympathies. Quite on the contrary, it provides confirmation for current scholarly insights into the progressive fading of crypto-Judaism or then

its reverse, Catholicism with overtly admitted Jewish ancestry in the Central American and Caribbean region: it has been maintained that first, the immigration of Jews from the Ottoman empire had tended to make the label 'Jewish' imply 'foreigner', something undesirable for those deeply rooted Catholic families that had cultivated the Jewish ethnic label, and finally, that kind of identity had collapsed as an affect of Nazi propaganda in the 1930s and 1940s, when such an identity had become a liability that was easily discarded for the given group.

The literature about Mesoamerican and Caribbean Jews or Crypto-Jews includes, e.g., Giselle Monge-Urpí's book (2002) on the crypto-Jews of Costa Rica, and, of course, former ambassador Mordechai Arbell's several works about the Caribbean, but also continental Central America and the northern parts of South America (e.g., Arbell 2002).

Bear in mind that hiding Jewish identity or ancestry has sometimes quite recent origins, which is the case of some Jewish refugees to Guatemala. Avi Richman posted, in December 2007, a personal narrative at the blog *Connecting the Dots*. He related about an episode in his experience as a student in Guatemala. Until then, he only knew one family in the country, and then he discovered that his teacher had learnt about him from acquaintances:

Another Monday, another crop of new students, another new teacher for me. This marks teacher number three and it led to an interesting development. About midway through my first class, my teacher, Maria Eugenia de Soto, asks me if I have any friends at home who I am able to practice with. I respond that I do but not really sure who speaks Spanish well but that I can practice with my two friends from Guatemala City. Her eyes went big and then she said in these exact words, "Oh you are Avi, I know who you are!" I am immediately taken aback and wonder what the hell is going on. She then begins to explain to me that she knows who my friend, Lorena, is in Guatemala City because her husband is best friends with Lorena's uncle and they know the Bianchi family well. I had completely forgotten but the Bianchis had given me the name of what turns out to be her husband to call if I ever needed a new place to stay in Xela. So, I had the telephone number of my new teacher! You really need to tell me if you can think of anything that is a stranger coincidence than this. So I know one family in the entire country and it turns out that my new Spanish teacher has heard about me from them and already knows a bit about me! Seriously, this world is tiny!

Invited for lunch, Richman makes a discovery:

Today, Wednesday, I was invited over to my teacher's house for lunch in order to meet her husband and the rest of the family. We had a nice lunch and afterwards I began talking with Quique, her husband, about his family originally being Jewish. In class, I had already talked about Judaism with my teacher and then she began to tell me this bizarre story about her husband's ancestry. Anyways, as I would talk to Quique about, his grandfather was Jewish and his great aunts and uncles were killed in the Holocaust. Yet, the family never learned about any of this until well after his death when an Israeli investigator started writing letters to his mother about the ancestry of his family. This investigator named Mordechai Arbell was doing research on Caribbean Jews and had traced back his family to the 1700s and then tracked down his mother to learn more information. Quique also showed me all the letters that were exchanged between his mother and the investigator in the early 90s. He also told me a chilling story that the only way his grandfather found out about the deaths of his siblings in the Holocaust was by receiving a letter with "Salvame", Save Me, written on the back of the stamp. If all of this is confusing you at all, then rest assured that I am also still a tad confused but the story is incredible.



Apparently, concealing Jewish identity was common practice:

Now, the family is Christian, partially due to the fact that his grandfather never revealed his true identity to anyone. Apparently, this is the case for many people in Guatemala. A lot of people of Jewish origin came here fleeing Germany and then completely renounced their Judaism and converted to Christianity. But I did learn that there are a few Jews left in Xela who never converted and Quique is going to try to set up a meeting with one of them. He said that none of them practice Judaism anymore but still it would be interesting to hear their stories.

Such situations occurred in North America as well. Back in the 1990s, I learnt from a Canadian acquaintance who converted to Judaism, that her Dutch grandmother refused to reveal her Jewish identity to her progeny even on her deathbed, but that on carrying out research in the Netherlands, it transpired that the great-grandparents had perished during the Holocaust.

#### **4. Jewish Minimalism Among Moroccan Traders on the Amazon**

Miller (1996) has discussed the emigration of young Jewish males from northern Morocco to the Amazon, to tread in rubber, especially in the final two decades of the 19th century, and in the first of the 20th. This fits in the Amazon rubber boom of 1850–1920 (Weinstein 1983). These youngsters had finished school, and while in South America used to send money to their families in Morocco. Many of them eventually went back to Morocco, which was what was originally intended indeed.

While on the Amazon, they would only celebrate the Jewish Day of Atonement (Kippur), for which purpose they would gather together. In fact, there even was such an expectation *a priori*, judging from written testimony from which Miller quotes, and according to which emigrants from Morocco in that category used to take with them specifically the prayer book for the Day of Atonement: “Lest we forget the religion of our fathers so far away, each of us left Tangier carrying with us the Book of Kippur in order to celebrate this day as it should be” (Miller, *ibid.*, p. 204, citing Pinto n.d., p. 11).

Miller recognises that some other immigrants eventually proceeded from the Amazon to other destinations in the Americas. Based on information from Jewish South American acquaintances in Israel, information not specifically about Moroccans, in fact many Jews spread capillary throughout the continent, and many of them were eventually lost to Judaism.

This reminds me of Jewish traders in the United States’ Mid West in the mid 19th century. In Frontier America, “peddling became predominantly a Jewish occupation as the immigration of business-minded German Jews began to swell” (Lipset and Raab, p. 15). Keeping kosher was a problem. “In some Indian tribes on the frontier, Jews came to be known as ‘the egg-eaters’ because so many of the Jewish peddlers trading with them refused to eat their unkosher meat” (Lipset and Raab, p. 57. Nissan 2007 contrasts this to *yahúdi abulbéda*, ‘the Jew with the egg’ in Baghdad). And yet, the same passage (Lipset and Raab, p. 57) also quotes “one Jewish peddler” (Lipset and Raab, citing in n. 28 on p. 217 Cohen 1984, p. 20) to the effect that “leading such a life, none of us is able to observe the simplest commandment ... thousands of peddlers ...

have given up their religion for the pack which is on their backs” (Lipset and Raab, p. 57). The various types of relations between Jews and Native Americans in the United States, in the 19th and 20th century, are discussed in Davuid Koffman’s 2019 book *The Jews’ Indian*.

A throwback to the 18th century, when Jews were not supposed to reside in continental South America, makes one realise that the German Jew Zucker nevertheless moved there, eventually fathering in Venezuela a liberation hero of Nueva Granada (i.e., northern South America), namely, Antonio Jose de Sucre (1795–1830), whose name is borne by the capital of Bolivia. But in that case, Judaism had been jettisoned altogether.

There is a different aspect to claims of Jewish presence. Take Alaska. The entry for Alaska in the *Encyclopaedia Hebraica* (vol. 3, col. 717) states (my trans.): “It is conjectured that the earliest Jews in Alaska came there on board of Russian fishing ships in the 1830s and 1840s. Evidence for that is that some Eskimo families in Alaska claim that they are of Jewish origin, and moreover, there are in Alaska descendants of Jewish fishers from Russia.”

## 5. Some African Settings

### 5.1. A Glimpse at Early Modern West Africa

Tobias Green (2008) contrasts acculturation among Jews in different coastal parts of West Africa, and the acculturation of Africans in Amsterdam, in the 17th century. Our present readers are strongly encouraged to read his article, that is easily accessible on the Web (what is more, at a refereed e-journal of which I am joint editor). Suffice is to quote from it here three passages. In the first one of these passages, we are faced with a situation in which Catholic clergy was under the impression that Africans had converted to Judaism, whereas they quite possibly had not:

This general evidence related to the conversion of Africans to Judaism on the Guinea Coast can be supplemented by other findings in the relevant archives. Mulatto Jews belonged to the congregation of Sephardim established in Portudal, Senegambia, in the 1610s (IAN/TT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Livro 58, folio 155r; IAN/TT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Livro 205, folio 583v). And moreover there was a widespread anxiety among the Christian community of the Portuguese settlements of West Africa regarding the religious activities of the Sephardim. Thus in a letter of July 30<sup>th</sup> 1635, the Bishop of Cabo Verde recounted a story which, for him, had all the hallmarks of another Jewish conversion in West Africa. Three African servants had circumcised themselves, although they were Christians; this was a matter of perplexity, since they gave signs of being good Christians: nonetheless, they were put in the stocks and given harsh penance as a warning to others (IAN/TT, Inquisição de Lisboa, Livro 217, folio 475v).

In this last case emerge many of the difficulties which emerge when trying to understand this question of conversion by Africans to Judaism. The bishop of Cabo Verde appeared to assume that circumcision was an irrefutable sign of Jewish influence, and was therefore somewhat confused by the strong signs of Christian faith among these “converts”. Yet circumcision was just as strong a cultural practice for the peoples of the coasts of Senegambia and Guinea as it was for Sephardim. It may well be that there was nothing “Jewish” about this last trait at all, and that the auto-circumcision of these three Africans was merely a melding of their ancestral practice with Christianity.

The problem with such cases, in other words, is that of the perceptions and preconceptions of the sources.

In this other passage, we are concerned with Portugal's *Christãos Novos*:

Indeed, the trajectory of the New Christians in this region of West Africa in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century centuries is largely that of a small minority group gradually being assimilated. While in the 17<sup>th</sup> century New Christian escapees from the Inquisition such as Alvaro Gonçalves Frances and João Rodrigues Freire continued to practice Jewish rituals in the region, and to convert New Christians to crypto-Judaism, their children became fully assimilated. [footnote: A full account of the practices and activities of these activities is found in Green (200[7]): for Alvaro Gonçalves Frances see Part III, Chapter 3; for João Rodrigues Freire, see Part IV, Chapter 3.] Alvaro's son Jorge, for instance, married a certain Crispina Peres who was later tried by the Inquisition in Lisbon on charges of witchcraft, having performed certain local religious practices in the port of Cacheu; in his testimony to the inquisitors, written in the mid-1660s, Jorge Gonçalves Frances recounted how there were only four people in Cacheu who followed the Catholic ritual without incorporating any pagan rituals. [footnote: The best account of this is Havik (2004), 107–20. Peres was accused of sorcery and worshipping fetishes, of organising pagan ceremonies on one of Jorge Gonçalves Frances's boats which involved a libation with cow's blood, of using local healers when her daughter fell ill in an attempt to discover who had poisoned her, and of keeping a bewitched snake.] As there remained not an inconsiderable population of New Christians there at this date, this is evidence that many of them had adopted African religious practice.

The religious world which the Sephardim found on the coast of Guinea was one that was both familiar and strange. During her trial by the Inquisition in the 1660s, Jorge Gonçalves Frances's wife, Crispina Peres, was accused of sorcery and worshipping fetishes, of organising pagan ceremonies on one of Jorge Gonçalves Frances's boats which involved a libation with cow's blood, of using local healers when her daughter fell ill in an attempt to discover who had poisoned her, and of keeping a bewitched snake.

This shows that there were indeed such *Christãos Novos* who, while Catholics with real or imaginary connections to Judaism, actually deviated from Catholicism towards native West African forms of religion.

[T]he only region in this part of West Africa which had a recognised synagogue, Senegambia, was a region where many of these cultural characteristics did not pertain. The cultures in Senegambia were patrilineal, not matrilineal like those of Guinea [...] This was moreover a region heavily influenced by Islam, the religion of the dominant Wolof people of the region. These cultural factors were crucial to the existence of the Jewish community in Senegambia. Judaism was a faith recognised and discussed in the *Qur'an*, while the existence of a patrilineal culture made intermarriage and integration into the host community difficult [...] In these circumstances, it was much easier for the Sephardim to retain their own community and their separate practices which were recognised by the dominant religion of the region, Islam.

Paradoxically, it was in fact precisely the cultural points of similarity in the region of Guinea south of the Gambia river – the matrilineality in particular – which made it easier for Sephardim to assimilate into the host culture and to lose their distinctive Jewishness. The conversion of the Jews to African religious practice was, therefore, whilst apparently a choice on their part, influenced by complex cultural factors which depended upon African realities and decisions.

## 5.2. The Children Deported to São Tomé

John II (Don João II), King of Portugal, a few years after the Jewish community in his country was doubled in size because of the influx of refugees from Spain in 1492, decreed the forcible conversion of all of them, with no option for them to leave. He also sent about two thousand Jewish children as slaves to the newly discovered island of São Tomé, off the coast of West Africa.

Claims are now heard that it was from this initial population, along with some Old Christian Portuguese whites and African slaves, that the island's present population originated. A conference on the subject of those Jewish child slaves was held in São Tomé on July 11–12, 1995, and proceedings were published much later (Liba 2003). In particular, see on this subject the papers by Mark Mitchell Serels (2000), Elias Lipiner (2003), and Gerhard Seibert (2003). An earlier paper was Garfield (1994).

Jewish chroniclers in the 16th century were convinced that the children did not survive, and that most of them were eaten by crocodiles. Samuel Usque authored a historiosophical poem in prose, eclogues being a debate among three wise shepherds, the *Consolação às Tribulações de Israel* (*Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*: 1st ed., Ferrara, 1553; trans. Martin A. Cohen, Philadelphia, 1965). See on it, e.g., Preto-Rodas (1990). In the prologue (ed. Cohen, 38–40), he reported: “When those innocent children arrived at the wilderness of São Tomé, which was to be their grave, [...] almost all were swallowed up by the big lizards, [...] and the remainder [...] wasted away from hunger” (quoted by Efron 2001: 54). Actually Pijning (2001) reflects: “Although exile to São Tomé was virtually a death sentence, some New Christian children did survive” (Pijning 2001: 487).

Also in the mid 16th century, Joseph ha-Kohen was a major Hebrew-language chronicler, especially known for his *Séfer 'Émeq ha-Bakhá* (*Vale of Tears*). He also wrote about Turcica: an Ottoman chronicle that soon appeared in print. One work of his on Americana hasn't appeared in press even now: it is *Metzív Gevulót 'Ammím* (*He Who Maketh the Peoples' Borders Stand*, so titled after *Deuteronomy* 32:8, cf. *Psalms* 74:17 and *Isaiah* 10:13), a compendium of edited translations of voyages and geographical literature about the new discoveries. In that work, a passage he authored himself expresses the belief that the Jews in São Tomé survived, even though it was those condemned to death who were sent there, owing to its being infested with “the great fish that comes out from the seas that are called *Lagartos* and snakes and vermin and vipers” (quoted in Efron 2001: 56). Noah Efron explains: “*Lagarto* is a generic term for a lizard. Joseph ha-Kohen was probably referring to alligators, known then as *lagarto de Indias*” (Efron 2001: 69, note 43).

Another Hebrew-language early modern chronicler, Gedaliah ibn Yah□ya, claimed in *Séfer Shalshélet ha-Qabbaláh* (*The Chain of Tradition*, a Jewish history from Adam to the 16th century, Jerusalem, 1981; 1st ed., Venice, 1587): “and the [Portuguese] King investigated whether the exiles [from Spain] had paid the requisite head tax, and he found many of them who had not, and he was infuriated with them, and he took min bond, because they were poor, their sons from ages three to ten, and led them to an island called *Stomi* which was a thankless wasteland, owing to the alligators, which are poisonous snakes and serpents that kill. And he

wanted to settle this island, but it was not worth his while, because most of them died from the snakes and some from hunger” (quoted by Efron 2001, p. 69, note 46).

Having supplied an impassioned description of the children banishment from Lisbon, Usque longed for the ability to also relate poetic justice for this tale of crime against parental sentiment (in line with notions like Dante’s *contrappasso*, the medieval *recirculatio*, or the rabbinic homiletic ‘measure for measure’). He established a causal link with John II’s loss of his own son, but temporal relations were inverted. Efron (2001, p. 68, note 28) remarks about Usque’s account: “See, too, the coda to this story, in which John II’s son Alphonse was thrown off a horse and died at his own wedding in Divine retribution for this act of cruelty, Part III, 29. (Alphonse in fact died two years before the banishment from Lisbon).”

The context in Pijning (2001: 487) is as follows:

The New Christian presence on Madeira continued until the early seventeenth century. Jews and later New Christians who settled on the island in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were primarily engaged in the sugar trade, but only a few were sugar mill owners. Subsequently, Madeira’s New Christian population declined rapidly, particularly following the Inquisition’s three visits to the island (in 1591, 1612, and 1620), in conjunction with the effects of declining sugar cultivation. Most New Christians left for Brazil and Northern Europe.

The São Tomé case demonstrates that the New Christian presence was not always voluntary. The island served as a dumping ground for the children of Jewish emigrants who were expelled from Spain in 1492 and forcibly converted to Catholicism in Portugal. The Portuguese king banished to São Tomé all Spanish Sephardic children who had not paid a tax for entering the country. Banishment was part of a royal policy to settle the island. Although exile to São Tomé was virtually a death sentence, some New Christian children did survive, but given their young age upon arrival, it is unlikely that they had continued to adhere to their former religion. [Here Pijning cites Garfield (1994).] Their role was important, since all trade became dependent on the local population, who were immune to tropical diseases. {Presumably, any who wasn’t immune would have already died off. — E.N.]

In São Tomé, New Christians became integrated into local society. Given the island’s small white population, New Christian status presented no obstacle to marriage; similarly, persons of Jewish descent did not hesitate to marry Old Christians. Thus, men of Jewish descent ended up becoming sugar cane owners, officials, and traders.

Here Pijning turned out to be overconfident in assuming that even the earliest arrivals of Jewish ancestry in São Tomé, if surviving, once grown up would have married white people, but this does not appear to have necessarily have been the case, if only because of the unfree status of the children.

Drescher’s account (2001, p. 444) points out:

The volatile nature of the New Christian position was symbolized by the first mass deportation of European children to the tropics. Following the flight of Jews to Portugal after the Spanish expulsion of 1492, the Portuguese monarch had two thousand children abducted from their Jewish families. They were baptized and deported to São Tomé, an island off the coast of Africa at the latitude of the equator. In a few years, only six hundred children remained alive. The continent that was soon to be called “the white man’s grave” was first a “white child’s grave.” This first cohort of New Christians in Africa was mated at maturity with Africans. Their descendents, along

with New and Old Christian Portuguese immigrants who arrived both involuntarily and voluntarily, became São Tomé's principal inhabitants and traders.

In an endnote, Drescher (2001, p. 463, n. 11), cites for this a dissertation by Coates, on forced and state-sponsored colonisers in the Portuguese empire. He then cites Bensaúde and Baião (1940, p. 122) for “the rapid intermixing of Africans and Europeans”, and next he writes, citing Garfield (1994) and de Oliveira Marques (1972, vol. 1, pp. 374–375): “Robert Garfield concludes that by 1530 most of the surviving original children were probably Christian in fact. At the peak of São Tomé's role in the New World slave trade, it had ‘a thoroughly Portuguese mulatto population.’”

### **5.3. Intermarriage in Zanzibar**

In his study of Jews or *Christãos Novos* in West Africa in the 17th century, Green (2008) found that in such regions of coastal West Africa (namely, among the Wolof) where the dominant religion was Islam, boundary maintenance apparently was more effective. For comparison, consider the following, much more recent anecdote, also about seafaring to Black Muslim Africa, but in this case, to East Africa.

I was told that particular Jews in Baghdad in the first half of the 20th century were aware of somebody who in their own generation, perhaps in the first decade of the century, had moved to Zanzibar, just as another one had moved to Warsaw — not obvious outlets for Baghdadi Jews, who often migrated instead to India or the Far East.

I tried to make sure that this was not the town of Zinjibar in southern Iraq, and it was confirmed to me that it was the island of Zanzibar (then under British rule). I was told that the given man is known to have married a local woman, whom he converted to Judaism. I wonder whether these people staid there and assimilated, or perhaps moved to Aden or Bombay. At any rate, it looks like there is a common element, with the pattern you describe from Senegambia. Neither I, nor my informer know anything else about who was the person who moved and married as described.

### **5.4. Jewish and Greek Evacuees from Egypt's Colony of Equatoria, and Its Jewish-Born Governor, Eduard Schnitzer, aka Emin Pasha**

The Republic of Sudan used to be known as the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. To the extent that there were Jews in Khartoum or the contiguous Omdurman in the early 20th century, these were from Egypt. In the 1980s, Israel's President Haim (Vivian) Herzog (himself born in Belfast and raised in Dublin) being a *mechuttan* of (in-laws with) a Sudanese Jewish magnate was in the Israeli or Jewish information press. After the Jewish exodus from Egypt, Egyptian Jews were scattered far apart: when I attended high school at the Jewish day school in Milan in the early 1970s, of my classmates, one volunteered that she had an uncle in Brazzaville (in the former French Congo), and another one, that she had an uncle in Bogotá, Colombia. Both these classmates were from Egyptian background.

What is almost unknown, is that when, in the late 19th century, Egypt's ruling Khedive established the short-lived colony of Equatoria, there were both Jews and Greeks among the settlers who had come from Egypt. Pakenham (1991) has told the story of how the British army eventually co-ordinated the evacuation of Equatoria. He quotes from a British officer's memoirs, in which disparaging reference is made to the Jewish and Greek civilians being evacuated (disparaging, because deemed unfit and contrasted to the martial attitudes of their military saviours).

Nevertheless, after the fall of the Mahdists, the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (set up in 1899) came to incorporate what had been the Egyptian extreme southern province, on the upper reaches of the Nile near Lake Albert, of Equatoria — the southern part of Bahr al-Ghazal, the marshy region west of Ethiopia's borders, and that has in recent years become independent South Sudan. (Ethiopia's emperor refrained from going as far and conquering it, as he expanded his domains west, burning villages whose territory is now still part of Ethiopia; but he deliberately deceived and sabotaged the French, when they in turn had been interested in taking possession: he supplied them with information that sent them into the most unpassable marshes). Bahr al-Ghazal is literally "the River of the Gazelles" (it is typical of the Nilotic region, that the Arabic noun *baḥr* for 'sea' is also applied to either the Nile, or other local rivers, as far as the borders of the Centrafrican Republic), but it names the southern part of the Republic of Sudan. After a secession war, it was granted autonomy in 1972, but war broke out again during the 1980s, and an agreement was only reached during the early 2000s, thus freeing up the Sudanese military to take on Darfur, in the west of the country, and that had been a sultanate only annexated to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan during the 1920s.

From a Jewish viewpoint, and concerning denied or hidden Jewish identities as being of interest in the context of the present article, the interest of Egypt's colony of Equatoria is twofold. There were Jews from Egypt, but unawareness only affected the outer world, whereas locally they had been conspicuous, on the evidence of memoirs of the evacuation as most recently relayed by Pakenham (1991), but that came to the British public's notice once Stanley's published his controversial account of his Emin Pasha Relief Expedition. Other memoirs were published subsequently: the diaries of various Western members of the expedition.

The governor of the sparsely garrisoned colony of Equatoria, appointed by Egypt's Khedive, was Mehmet Emin Pasha, a Jewish-born physician, naturalist, and adventurer, who was born Jewish in Opole, Silesia, in 1840, as Isaak Eduard Schnitzer, and raised in Neisse, and was baptised into Lutheranism as a child (around 1847, as Eduard Carl Oscar Theodor Schnitzer), when his widowed mother married a Gentile. It was later assumed that he was a Muslim, but it is uncertain whether he ever convert to Islam. At any rate, his newest identity paved the way for social integration and political appointments. It was arguably adopted out of pragmatic considerations.

Eduard had qualified as a medical doctor in 1864, but was disqualified from practice, so he moved to the Ottoman Empire, becoming the quarantine officer of the port of Antivari, Montenegro. In 1870 he joined the staff of Ismail Hakki Pasha, governor of northern Albania, who died in 1873. Eduard, aka Emin, moved with his widow and children back to Neisse as though they were his own, but left them there, and reappeared in Cairo. He practised medicine, and as a naturalist he supplied European museums, and in May 1876 he reached Equatoria as the medical officer of the province, upon invitation by the provincial governor, Charles George

Gordon, whom he succeeded in that role in 1878, when he was given the title of Bey by the Khedive of Egypt. He was always referred to as Emin Pasha once the title of Pasha was conferred on him in 1886.

The Mahdist revolt that started in 1881 cut off Equatoria from Egypt by 1883. By 1884, Mahdist troops were marching on Equatoria, and in 1885 (the year when Khartoum was captured by the Mahdist and General Gordon met his fate there), Emin Bey withdrew with his troops further south, near Lake Albert, still being able to exchange correspondence with Zanzibar through Buganda. In February 1886, Emin was informed that the Egyptian government would abandon Equatoria.<sup>4</sup> Emin intended to remain in Equatoria, and notwithstanding this — following Emin's call on the British government to annex Equatoria, and mounting public concern concerning Emin's fate (and British sense of guilt over failure to rescue Gordon) — Henry Morton Stanley mounted a relief expedition through the Congo Basin, that cost the lives of local people as well as of many members of the expedition. Stanley managed to reach Emin in April 1888, but Emin would rather stay put, and was eventually imprisoned during a mutiny. In 1890, Stanley, Emin and others reached the Tanganika coast at Bagamoyo. Emin remained in Africa, entered the service of the German East Africa Company, and during an expedition, he was eventually captured and murdered by slave raiders in October 1892. The literature about Emin Pasha includes Emin Pasha (1888, 1898), Jephson (1890, 1969), Smith (1972), Liebowitz and Pearson (2005).

From the viewpoint of our present interest in faded, concealed, or inconspicuous Jewish identities, Schnitzer had relinquished Judaism while a minor, but arguably this made it easier for him to conspicuously relinquish his German Lutheran identity while in the service of the Ottoman and Egyptian authorities. In contrast, the Egyptian Jewish and Greek evacuees were conspicuously members of their respective background identities, in the eyes of the rescue officer who made stereotypical considerations about their being total foreigners to the martial way of life and frame of mind.

### **5.5. Jewish Ancestry in Mali in the Present, and the Unrelated 15th-Century Jews of Songhai**

A model somewhat related to the one from Central America and the Caribbean is the current situation in Mali. In the capital Bamako and in Timbuktu, in the last two decades several Muslim families have been coming into the open and even celebrating their shared ancestry from 19th-century Moroccan Jews. Apparently this was possible because they did not fear that harm would come to them because of that. It is important that the Jewish ancestry concerned is not older than the 19th century. A book about the surviving written documentation of Jewish trade in Timbuktu in the 19th century has been published (Haidara, 1999).

Actually, the Niger Bend, the northward convexity of the course of the River Niger that features so prominently in the geography of Mali, was the centre of the empire of Songhai, whose ruler Askia Muhammad, in the late 1490s, not only banned Jews, but even seized the assets of such Muslims who had been business associates of Jews.

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<sup>4</sup> See in Italian Gaetano Casati's memoirs (1891) of Equatoria and Emin Pasha.



Whereas Jewish presence had been because of the trans-Saharan trade, Askia Muḥammad when acting in that manner was (conveniently for a general turned usurper on his return from the Ḥajj) under the spell of the cleric Muḥammad ibn ‘Abd al-Karīm al-Maghīlī (d. 1503/4), who not being heeded on his native Algerian coast, had moved to the Sahara and then to Songhai, leaving a trail of destruction for the local Jewish communities. (See Hunwick 2005; cf. Hunwick 1985a).

## 6. A Piece of “Usable Past”?

It has been argued that al-Maghīlī was partly responding to the increasing Christian power and dwindling Islamic territory in Spain, even before the fall of Granada in 1492. Already in the 1480s, he was pursuing his anti-Jewish campaign in the Sahara. See Hunwick (1985b). Arguably al-Maghīlī was further irked by the arrival of Jewish refugees from Spain into Algeria in 1492. “In the 1480s when al-Maghīlī was pursuing his campaign, Muslim power in Spain was at its last gasp. In the wake of Muslims fleeing from Catholic persecution came Jews also and together the two groups of refugees exerted considerable demographic pressure on urban centres in Morocco.” (*ibid.*, p. 166). Hunwick does identify external factors prodding al-Maghīlī: “Deplorable as they were, his anti-Jewish (more accurately his anti-*dhimmī*) activities must be seen against the background of the political instability in the Maghrib in the late fifteenth century and the effects, both psychological and economic, of the continuing exodus of Muslims from their ever diminishing territories in Andalusia, compounded by the active encroachment of the Christian Iberians on Muslim territory in the Maghrib” (*ibid.*). But Hunwick is also at pains to identify some compatibility within the culture, some source enabling al-Maghīlī’s extreme views: “Despite these activities, it would be wrong to think of al-Maghīlī as no more than a rabble-rouser of ‘Jew-baiter’. With a single exception (which only affected Muslims), his views could find support within the broad range of Mālikī opinions, even if it was necessary to search out minority views or apply rulings inflexibly.” (*ibid.*).

Perhaps eventually al-Maghīlī was also prompted to emulate Spain’s policies, not unlike the deleterious impact of the German model in the 1930s and 1940s on the fate of Near Eastern Jewry. Whether or not Al Azhar clerics in Cairo would at present agree, such influence and even syncretistic value system, denying the traditional protections afforded to the *dhimmīs*, constitute a *bid’a* (an unlawful innovation) for the Sunna.

A piece of “usable past” is that another Algerian cleric responded to al-Maghīlī with a *fatwa* that defined one who would not abide by the duty to protect the minorities a *kāfir*, an apostate. But to that cleric, it was important to minimise the risk of casualties among Muslims and the *dhimmīs* alike, whereas al-Maghīlī’s argument was that (as his own goal was that no matter how inferior the status of the Jews was, it should be even lower) the Jews were insolent, not being as humiliated as their *dhimmī* status required, and that therefore they had forfeited the protection afforded by that status. (The *fatwa* against al-Maghīlī appears in Hunwick (2005).

As to Askia Muḥammad, my opinion is that the route he took when he went on the Ḥajj, was all-important. Had he reached Cairo, for example, then he would have seen that a Jewish community was being tolerated. But as a sub-Saharan West African, the pilgrimage route would rather take him to Kanem beyond Lake Chad, and then through Djibouti, and Jewish absence meant he didn’t see tolerance.

## **7. The Urfa Model**

Another model, one that is likelier to apply to the very few Jewish households or individuals that there still may be in Pakistan, is the Urfa model. In the mid-1930s, pogroms erupted in various small towns in Turkey where there was a Jewish community (in Turkish Thrace, or then in Çanakkale on the Dardanelles), scaring the local Jews into fleeing to Istanbul. This was within the governmental desiderata of the time, to the effect that the religio-ethnic minorities would concentrate in Istanbul.

Urfa, in eastern Anatolia, was a different story, and also eastern Anatolian Jewry was quite different from the Hispanicised Jewish communities of the Aegean coast. Urfa Jews, who had a record of a trickle of them moving to Jerusalem in late Ottoman times, mostly left Urfa ca. 1950, shortly after the establishment of the State of Israel, where they moved. In recent years it turned out (through a non-Jewish informant, and then a newspaper report in Israel) that there is a remnant who still live as crypto-Jews in Urfa. They hadn't left Urfa, but instead of being overtly Jewish as they had been for two millennia, they are hiding that identity.

On learning that, the mayor of Urfa stated they are welcome to be overtly Jewish, but this had no effect. It is easy to see why: if violent radicals harm you, the authorities could do nothing for you. (The spread of such attitudes in the Turkish immigrant community in Germany is now driving bullied Jewish children out of state-run education in Germany, to Jewish faith schools, and teachers find themselves almost unable to have an impact and stem the phenomenon.)

## **8. Publicly Voiced Animosity, Along with Violence, as Being Intimidating Factors**

In the case of Pakistan, anti-Jewish demonising rhetoric is freely voiced and socially acceptable, in newspapers and films. Of course, as Jews are not visible locally, the target is made into World Jewry, or Israel. Also bear in mind that almost four decades ago, during the India–Pakistan wars, there was a Jewish general in the Indian army who was involved in military operations, but this arguably is no longer relevant, as it is the nature of propaganda that actual facts are of little value, as much more can be done out of myth and fabrications.

An example of behavioural shift stemming from an identity shift that caused a (minor) scandal in Britain was when a British journalist — the daughter and heiress of a lord who because of his name, was typically believed to be Jewish by Britons (whereas only his grandfather was) — after moving to Pakistan with her husband, a famous football player, engaged in publishing anti-Jewish opinions in Pakistan's press. This was just a minor scandal in Britain, and mostly in the remit of Anglo-Jewish concerns. Unfortunately, with the general public, earlier on, it was more of a scandal that she had married a Pakistani in the first place, as this kind of racism is still around, for all of the contributions that Britain's Pakistani community has contributed to British economy. Eventually, that lady divorced, moved countries again, and her propaganda record was conveniently forgotten.

Something that provides interillumination for Urfa's crypto-Jews and the mystery of Pakistan's evanescent Jewry (if any), is the internationally conspicuous fate of journalist Daniel Pearl. He was videoed while having his throat slashed by laughing extremists (some of whom he had known as friends from his university days). Right before dying, he said: "I am Jewish". He was indeed, and that is also the identity of his parents. His mother being from Iraq prompted Baghdadi-born Israeli Orientalist and poet Shmuel Moreh to publish an elegy for both the intercommunal violence in Iraq, and Daniel Pearl and his mother. Another highly visible case was the hostage-taking and massacres that was perpetrated by terrorists coming from Pakistan at various sites in Mumbai (Bombay) at the end of November 2008. A Jewish religious centre was especially targeted.

Even without such events, if there are crypto-Jews in Pakistan, they would be motivated to keep such a low profile by the difficulties and, sometimes, persecution that communities of overt Christians have faced there sometimes. No matter how many good people from the majority denomination there are around, it is the ones intent on harm that ultimately determine the quality of life of minorities. At any rate, given the climate and the potential for harm, even though it is by no means the case that everybody around would behave badly, it is easy to see that like in Urfa, any remaining Jew, if any, would be wary of volunteering his identity. After all, even I, in the far more benign London, don't volunteer mine in my neighbourhood.

### **9. The Reemerging Crypto-Jews of Iraqi Kurdistan (1990s)**

Let us put some order in the typology. Pakistan and Bangladesh fit in the same pattern, that can be related to, but is not related to the Urfa model. In Urfa, there is no risk from the authorities, but there is a risk from the social environment. A non-Jewish Kurdish student here in London once told me that after Kurdish autonomy emerged in northern Iraq in the 1990s, some crypto-Jews came out into the open. (These were Jews who hadn't emigrated to Israel in the mass exodus of 1950 from Iraq, when up to 24 out of every 25 Jews left the country, leaving their assets behind. But this count depends on the time span you adopt.)

In that case, the change of regime, and the emergence of Kurdish self-rule with a lack of hostility on the part of the political class, enabled their openness. An Israeli academic, whom I told that much, told me in turn that some Israelis who are Kurdish Jews actually moved back to Kurdistan, and this confirms that it was the achieved quasi-independence of Iraqi Kurdistan that had enabled such behaviour.

### **10. Keeping a Low Profile in Bahrain, and the Only Jewish Household of 1960s Jordan**

There is yet another situation for Jews to keep an extremely low profile. It is the case of the tiny Jewish presence in Bahrain (or Iraqi origin), a presence whose being possible entirely depends on the good will of the ruling family, a good will generated through personal friendly relations of at least some of the individuals from the minority.

Just as we established clusters pairing Pakistan and Bangladesh, and then Mali and Central America and the Caribbean, and then again Urfa and Kurdistan with an important difference

between those two, there is yet another cluster to be formed out of Bahrain and Jordan. But there is a subtle difference between the latter two.

In Jordan, in the 1960s, there only was one Jewish household (from Iraq), but after the 1969 public, festive hangings of several Jews in Baghdad, the King of Jordan — whose own position was in danger — apparently felt no longer able to protect his friend. At any rate, the old man's young son was tried on trumped charges and hanged.

## 11. A Strange Story from the Gulf Area

*The Scribe* is a newsletter (originally in print, but at present online) catering to Jews of Iraqi descent, and published (now online rather than in print) by the Dangoor family in London. It was established in 1971. Naim Dangoor is a philanthropist to Jewish and non-Jewish causes. Issue no. 71, of April 1999, had on p. 37 this passage (from an the unsigned text “from a recent lecture at the Montefiore Hall, London”): “Curiously enough, Naim Dangoor told me that a Saudi Arabian father of many children from the Gulf area visited him with his family, about 8 years ago to ask for help in emigrating to Israel. He claimed to be one of a large group of Muslims of Jewish origin who had always maintained a separate identity, praying together and marrying only amongst themselves. Naim believed the story and contacted the Israeli Embassy on the man's behalf — but without success.” One is left to wonder what the truth of the matter may be.

It is unclear whether the man referred to had come to London especially for the purpose of seeking help in reaching Israel. Was this a long-time resident in Britain? Clearly, the political and social context on the Saudi coast of the Gulf is quite different from society in the Southwestern U.S., with several families overtly reclaiming their Jewish ancestry and identity (see, e.g., Kunin 2001; Golden 2004; Alexy 2003), with something somewhat related to be found in Mexico, e.g. in Venta Prieta, a town 55 miles north of Mexico City (Patai 1950, 1965; Loewe and Hoffman 2002; Ross 1982; Liebman 1967). [Note that this is quite different from, say, immigrant Jews in New Mexico in the mid-19th century and later (O'Brien 2006).]

In the January 1989 issue of *The Scribe*, a letter was published from “Maurice J Elias / Doctor in law” from Paris. It was entitled “Saudi Jews”. It stated:

I was interested to read in your two recent issues about Saudi Jews. In 1948 I was detained at Ain al-Tamr, an isolated desert village an hour's drive from Karbala in the south of Iraq where I joined a group of political deportees. We were free to move in the village but could not go outside.<sup>5</sup>

On Ramadhan nights we went to the house of the chief tribal sheikh for dinner and chat. Once the sheikh [sic] took me aside and asked me: “You are a nice fellow. Why don't you embrace Islam?” I answered: “Why should I become a Moslem when the Koran itself says ‘We (Allah) preferred the sons of Israel over the whole world’?”

Then the sheikh told me that he and his tribe were originally Jews converted to Islam by coercion, many generations before. He said that if I went a half an hour's walk in the adjoining desert I would find old Jewish ruins with the “Magen David” [Star of David] depicted on them.

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<sup>5</sup> This is like the *confino* in Italy.

## **12. Crypto-Jews in Present-Day Indonesia**

In Indonesia, life for a Jew has been made almost impossible in the last several decades, except as a fleeting inconspicuous presence on the tourist resort island of Bali (a place where Hinduised Malay culture is conspicuous). As for remnants of an older Jewish presence in Indonesia, “it is of great importance for them not to be recognized as Jews in public” (Franke 2013, p. 43), to the extent that on their identity cards, they tend to be registered as Christians or Muslims (*ibid.*, p. 45). Protests and riots in 2008-2009 drove out some remaining Jews, and some others remain but make themselves invisible. “The general public in the Straits [...] has been made to believe that at the tsunami relief operations in Aceh, the entire world, except Israel, showed its humanitarian face and sent rescue and aid operations to the area” (Kamsma 2013, p. 162). Israel did intervene: an Israeli plane was allowed to land, “[a]lthough the aid would ‘bau-bau Israel’” (*ibid.*, p. 181), i.e., in Indonesia, would smell or stink of that country. Israeli rescue teams are appreciated internationally as being quick and highly effective. “Israeli or Jewish presence in the Straits seems, so to speak, ‘artfully deleted’” (Kamsma 2013, p. 181, citing Law 2004, p. 88). In Nissan (2019a), I wrote:

As one who was raised in a family whose traditional vernacular is Baghdadi Judaeo-Arabic, it comes rather as a shock that Indonesia has recently made it a punishable offence for any non-Muslim to refer to God by saying or writing “Allah”. (In my family’s dialect, as for all speakers of Judaeo-Arabic, that word is the standard name for God. Besides, Jews of Iraqi descent were a major component within what used to be the Indonesian Jewish community.) Until recent generations, I think, to Arabic-speaking Muslims such a prohibition would have seemed an insult to reason, and actually contrary to Islam. Factors involved in that recent legal development in Indonesia appear to involve: (a) the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, being part of the Malay lingueme, with Arabic only being a liturgical language of Muslims; (b) a kind of fundamentalist radicalisation that is modernist and ahistorical and as such has also involved loss of Islamic tradition; and (c) the demographic and cultural makeup of Indonesia also comprising a strong influence of Hindu belief systems and traditions, with a conspicuous segment of the population associated with what in Islamic law is outside the boundaries of the People of the Book, i.e., monotheists (including tolerated non-Muslim ones). (d) It is possible that there has been a perceived threat of appropriative syncretism (as familiar from the irenic, harmonising mythical fusion through allegory as propagated by the Ahmadiyya), and that some members of Hindu-related cultures would refer to a deity from their belief system by using the Arabic and pan-Muslim name of the Muslim God.

## **13. A Better Future?**

In the sections of Part I, we have come across a variety of distressing situations. It may be that in generations to come, the situation is going to be much better. Germany today is quite unlike what it had been in 1933–1945. And then perhaps there would no longer be any reason that in a journal about the Indian subcontinent such as the *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, Pakistan and Bangladesh would be absent.

The Indian subcontinent, like the lands in Asia (but also in the Balkans) of the former Ottoman empire, has been marked by Partition. Successor states have experienced essentialist self-definition, and bitter and persistent conflict. This is a tragic mode of eventuation of the following statement: “Gellner’s famous pictorial metaphor is still unparalleled in its descriptive capacity: the premodern world resembled an impressionist painting of Kokoschka, where all colours intermingled and faded into each other; the modern World resembles rather a picture of Modigliani, where each colour is sharply separated from the others and no mixture is allowed” (Conversi 1995, p. 84, n. 22, citing pp. 139–140 in Gellner 1983).

#### **14. Chinese to Russian and “Jewish” Identity in Post-Soviet Birobidzhan: An Individual Case**

On 4 August 2009, in Turin, Italy, the prestigious daily newspaper *La Stampa* published a report from Siberia’s Far East, by Piotr Smolar (2009). The occasion was the 75th anniversary of the Jewish autonomous republic in Birobidzhan. The report was headlined ‘Nella Sion di Stalin colonizzata dai cinesi’ (‘In Stalin’s Zion, Colonised by the Chinese’). It reported about the much diminished Jewish minority in Birobidzhan, about the local Lubavitch Hasidic emissary among the entirely secularised Jews of Birobidzhan (he arrived from Israel, six years earlier), and about the influx of Chinese workers, from beyond the River Amur. Contacts with China are economically quite important for Birobidzhan, the city and the region. Chinese tenants have come to occupy 16% of cultivated lands in the region. And yet, Chinese workers in Birobidzhan are just a few thousands. A bridge across the River Amur is planned.

What perhaps most typifies what is specific about Jewish identity in post-Soviet Birobidzhan, apart from the very possibility for a Lubavitch rabbi to be present and to preach openly, is an individual case that Smolar relates at the very end of his report:

Il progetto che suscita le più grandi speranze è la costruzione di un ponte attraverso l’Amur. Il più contento di tutti è Wan Baolin, proprietario del ristorante Teatralny. Dice di essere più ebreo degli ebrei, porta la kippah e si fa chiamare Nikolai Vladimirovitch, per ragioni che i suoi biografi un giorno forse spiegheranno. L’assimilazione continua.

[The project that rouses the biggest hopes is the construction of a bridge across the Amur. The one happiest is Wan Baolin, the owner of the Teatralny restaurant. He says he is more Jewish than the Jews, he wears a skullcap, and he passes himself as Nikolai Vladimirovitch, out of reasons that perhaps his biographers would explain someday. Assimilation continues.]

Apparently this is not a convert to Judaism in any sense, even informal. There is no mention of the restaurant being kosher, and yet, its Chinese owner wears a skullcap, claims he is more Jewish than the local Jews (perhaps because he wears a skullcap, like the Lubavitch emissary). He also gave himself a Russian first name and patronymic. Arguably this testifies to a wish to integrate by claiming local identities that are relevant for Birobidzhan: Russian, and Jewish (because of the place’s historically institutionalised status in the early Soviet era). Being the

owner of a restaurant, this same immigrant is self-employed and relatively well-to-do, so he can afford to be an eccentric, in his displays of his wish “to go native”.

## **Part II: Blurred Identities in Communal Societies in Israel**

### **15. Covert Practice of a Religion: *Taqiyya*. Even in an Israeli Context?**

In Muslim culture, and especially in the history of Shi‘ism, the practice of *taqiyya* played a significant role.<sup>6</sup> *Taqiyya*, literally ‘dissimulation’, is the covert practice of one’s religion when there would be danger or utter inconvenience for the individual at overt practice. *Taqiyya* consists of living within a majority community, without making it evident that you belong to a particular, different denominational identity. *Taqiyya* has been considered permissible, in such Muslim denominations whose members lived in such social contexts, that their members were living under the intolerant rule of another denomination (possibly, also Muslim). *Taqiyya* involves, e.g., praying at a mosque (or shrine) of the dominant (historically, typically Sunni) religious community.

In particular, *taqiyya* has historically being focal to the Druze experience. In Israel, the Druze are recognised as a separate community, have long been considered the allies of the Jews, and are conscribed into the army (unlike Sunni Muslims other than the Circassians; Bedouin volunteers also serve in the Israeli army). I recall reading about a Druze father, married to a Jewish woman and living in a Jewish environment, who had lost a soldier son. What the father’s current identity was, was rather ambivalent. In a sense, arguably Druze culture *may*, just *may* accommodate an outwardly “Jewish” identity on the part of one of its members who was living in isolation among Jews, as this is amenable to *taqiyya*.

I also recall that in 2000, in the days before the eruption of the Second Intifada (when even inside Israel, especially in the Galilee, Israeli Sunni rioters blocked roads and marched towards the town Carmiel with arsonist intent), I was on vacation in Israel. This was right before the Jewish New Year, in the town of Beer-Sheva. I was attending service, in those days, at a mainly Moroccan synagogue, and the revolt erupted, at least one congregant offered to come to service carrying a submachine gun (that he had as a member of the reserve), but was dissuaded. It may be that his sense of alarm was made more acute, because of a visitor at the synagogue on the previous several days.

A slim, middle-aged, dishevelled man had been attending service. The man was neither reading from, nor holding a prayer book, nor saying “Amen” or the like. Quite possibly, he was illiterate. He didn’t understand the service, but was sitting there, without being integrated (and with an undercurrent of suspicion). On one occasion, he was given a honour congregants are sometimes given (and that popular religion expects to bring good luck to them), and he was very, very gratified. Aside, somebody had mentioned that he was a Druze. (Actually, he appeared to be from a lower class than any Druze I had ever known, but these came from the upper class of their community. Whereas there are many Bedouins in Beer-Sheva, the appearance of some Druze

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<sup>6</sup> See e.g. an article by Straface (1998–2002), “La *taqiyya* nell’Islām: valenze e connotazioni”.

from the north is quite sporadic. Since the 1970s, there were bad Bedouin–Druze relations in Israel, after a political alliance had gone awfully wrong, but there is a historical record of animosity).

In my interpretation, it is quite possible indeed that the occasional congregant was not Jewish. He nevertheless felt the need to be with a congregation, even though this wasn't actually his own religion, providing it was a monotheistic congregation. Being given the honour of opening the Holy Ark or the like, was compatible with his feeling that this would do him good.

Bear in mind however that the Druze community is far from lenient towards members who are felt to have abandoned their ancestral affiliation in order to accommodate themselves in the dominant society, e.g. by intermarrying, but especially by formally converting away. A former fellow graduate student and colleague from Israel, visiting in London, showed me a photograph taken at the majority ceremony (*bat-mitzvah*) of one of his daughters. Among the persons portrayed in that snapshot, there was a couple, and my guest explained that the husband was a Druze who became Jewish in order to wed his Jewish wife. My guest stated, in general terms applying to this particular instance, that among the Druze, if a member of their community converts to another faith, they sever all contacts with him.

## 16. Undercover Agents: The *Mista'arevim*

During the 1950s and 1960s, but actually already in pre-state Israel during the 1940s, there was a military practice of sending Arabic-speaking agents to live as Arabs in the midst of an Arab population, and this is especially known to have taken place *inside* Palestine rather than abroad. (Of course, a famous example of such an agent being active abroad was Eli Cohen, who even managed to become a member of the Syrian ruling group in the 1960s, but was discovered to be a spy, and executed, after very sensitive information about a meeting had been disclosed on Israeli radio. As a child, I listened to that broadcast, and even I wondered why such news was given. Many years later, somebody made the allegation that Eli Cohen was exposed shortly before returning to Israel, because of internecine rivalry in intelligence circles. In 2019, his body was returned to Israel, thanks to the intervention of Russia in Syria.)

During the 1990s, the morally quite problematic issue of a category of Israeli undercover agents, the *Mista'arevim* as they came to be known, came to the fore in Israeli media discourse. Such men had even married Muslim women, and after years of marriage had to tell them they were leaving, possibly revealing that their identity was other than what the wife had thought it was.

In this section however I would like to relate about a particular old man, whom I knew as a congregant in Beer-Sheva in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

This is of interest, here, because during the 1940s he had been an agent under cover indeed, and he was a very religious practising Jew. He was a native of Jerusalem, Shalom 'Oz, and his original family name was 'Anzeh. He was able to speak Yiddish, too, albeit with an Oriental accent. The congregation was of mostly old people, and on a Rosh Hashanah evening, he talked to elderly ladies in Yiddish indeed, for the purposes of commemorating the dead. His talking in Yiddish delighted them, and immediately after that they were weeping at the mention of the dead (some of whom had perished during the Shoah).



This co-congregant would often tell personal narratives engagingly, waiting for service to start. In the early 1990s, I had Mr. Oz interviewed by the Tuviahu Archive of Ben-Gurion University, that holds a tape, but not having listened to it, I cannot tell whether it includes the samples from his narratives retold here.

### **17. The Personal Narrative of Shalom Oz: The Pre-State Israel Years**

In the late 1920s, Shalom Oz had been a member of the Hashomer, the first Jewish militia in Palestine (and the precursor organisation of the Haganah). This Levantine Jerusalemite was old enough to remember a little girl hanged outside her home's window, as he was entering Hebron with fellow militiamen of the Hashomer in order to assess the damage in the aftermath of the massacre, on the part of a local mob, of about eighty Jews in Hebron in the summer of 1929 (warned beforehand by Hashomer of the impending danger, the community refused to accept weapons, fearing this would exacerbate the situation. The centuries-old Jewish community of Hebron was deported by the British in 1936, the reason given being that they could not be protected, but also according to a policy aiming to exclude Jews from that area).

He lived undercover in the Arab sector both before and after 1948, and in relating this he used to display an empathetic attitude of fair play to both camps, stressing the need for a *modus vivendi*. Or rather as a game, whose actors or players are very human. While working as a self-styled Arab among Arabs at the Dead Sea Works (which also had Jewish workers) — at a time when he was courting in Jerusalem (in his real identity) his future (Jewish) wife Margo — Arab young ladies among co-workers travelling with him and others in a lorry chided him: “Don't date Jewish girls”, as apparently he had been seen dating Margo in Jerusalem.

During the traumatic period leading to the 1948 war (at a time when the Attlee government was spitefully foreseeing chaos at the expiry of the British mandate over Palestine, and, while adamantly repelling Jewish would-be immigrants — detaining those coming by sea in detention camps in Cyprus, on Mauritius Island, or in Germany — was tacitly tolerating the influx of Arab militiamen through the land borders), Mr. Oz under his assumed identity welcomed into Palestine a lorry of young Jewish men, native speakers of Arabic (in the several years after the 1–2 June 1941 massacre in Baghdad, a Zionist underground had become popular among part of the Iraqi Jewish youths). These were posturing as militiamen coming to kill off the Jews. The British guards on the bridge on the River Jordan reportedly didn't bother them at all (and are believed to have been instructed to behave so). A welcoming Arab crowd cheered the newcomers. Oz placed them as workers at an Arab workshop, where he, too, was working. Soon afterwards, one night, he had them leave surreptitiously, and move to the Jewish side. A fellow worker eventually inquired: “Whatever happened to those lads who were working here?” His answer was: “The Jews threw them into the river”.

During the Independence War itself, Shalom Oz was a combatant in a unit under the command of Moshe Dayan. Dayan (a secularist) had decided that on Yom Kippur, his unit would travel to Bethlehem and try to conquer the town. Some vehicle broke down, and the operation was discontinued. Shalom Oz, when relating this episode, did not question Dayan's choice of date, violating Judaism's holiest holiday. He just stated that other combatants ate, but he refrained from eating even during the operation. Once he related, with a sad face, that after the

Independence War he was moved from the army into the police. He was said while relating this, but did not complain. It is my understanding that there was such a pattern, to avoid retaining promising and promotable Eastern Jews in the army. In the police, they were more acceptable. (Dayan's prejudiced credentials came to the fore shortly before he died of cancer: he berated the substantial presence of Black people in the U.S. army; when asked to apologise, Dayan refused. Given this attitude, I am not surprised he didn't retain Levantine people like Shalom Oz in the Israeli army.)

### **18. The Personal Narrative of Shalom Oz: Undercover Again, and a Tale About Elijah**

In the early decades of Israel, Shalom Oz served not only in the police, but also, again, as an undercover agent, as though he was a Muslim, in the West Bank. This is quite relevant to our main thrust in this article. It shows an untraditional kind of crypto-Judaism. This is a man who harboured no hatred against Arabs. Once a congregant expressed such animosity, at the time of Saddam Hussain's invasion of Kuwait. Shalom Oz retorted: "No, some way must be found for living together."

Let us consider another example, that shows how Shalom Oz's Jewish religiosity impinged on how he perceived events while a combatant. Mention of an intervention by Elijah turns out, albeit dubitatively, in his autobiographical narration. Once he was recollecting, with no epic pretensions, two battles in 1948–9 in which his unit was faced with an enemy unit whose soldiers would not budge. In one case, these were Iraqi soldiers who, when his own unit approached, were found to have been chained by their commanders in their trench, so they would stay put. In the other incident, as his unit was approaching the enemy, contrary to expectation the latter didn't fire. The Israelis asked the Arab combatants: "Why didn't you shoot?", and were told they had just had another skirmish before, in which they had finished their ammunition. The narrator mused: there hadn't been other Israeli units around; may it have been a Palmach unit? He found it puzzling that those Jewish fighters had been described as bearded men by the Arab combatants he questioned. And then he wondered whether it (i.e., the exchange of fire of the previous Jewish unit from nowhere) had been a supernatural providential intervention: "Elijah?", he asked hesitatingly, waiting for no answer. In this example, the hypothetical supernatural intervention consisted in behaviour prompting the exhaustion, by the enemy unit, of ammunitions to could have been lethal to his own unit.

What is of particular interest, here, is that Elijah was available in the repertoire of aetiological devices of the narrator. Ethnography often concerns itself with present-day narratives; as a particular class of these, it collects present-day stories of miracles. In recent years, while commuting here in South East London, a group of Italian schoolgirls on my bus in Woolwich were sharing a story about what they took to be a supernatural intervention *post mortem* of a famous modern miracle-maker, in providing cure for cancer to a man who after a dream, felt the affected area warm up, after which it was healed.) For tales of the supernatural in Israeli society, see Yassif (1994).

### **Part III: Relics Recognised by Jews in Others**

#### **19. Non-Functional Relics of Covert Practice, Among Villagers That No Longer Identified with Their Ancestry**

I would also like to mention something that I have heard from an uncle of mine, who was born in Baghdad. Apparently there were Muslim villagers in Iraq, that until either the early part of the 20th century, or some time earlier, used to have a non-standard ritual, of saying (according to Jews) “kulla shakranan (or: shukranan), kulla kazzaban”, before Coranic readings. Then a religious authority made them conform, and stop the practice. Apparently they didn’t understand what they were saying. But this is somewhat dubious. In Arabic, they may have mistaken ‘shukranan’ (lies, in Aramaic with a Hebrew influence) for ‘shukran’ (thanks, in Arabic), but it’s surprising that they could not see the connection between ‘kazzaban’ and ‘kadhab’, i.e., to lie, in Arabic.

This makes this story somewhat suspicious. The conduit for the account is Jewish. It may be that there is some link to medieval apologetics, and in particular, to Jewish oral counternarratives for internal consumption about the Other. For example, a modern oral tradition has it that some poets told Muḥammad “These are things *ḥanifa*”, and once asked what it meant to them, allegedly said it meant “beautiful things” (as per the sense that exists in Arabic, at least since that episode), whereas they meant *ḥanuppah*, i.e., flattery in Hebrew. Those supposedly were converts.

It may also be that standardisation on the part of Muslim clerics was reinterpreted by some Jews as though this was intended to do away with the last relics of a Jewish past that congregants no longer recognised even as they practised them. Bear in mind that in southern Iraq, intra-Islamic denominational identities were somewhat fluid, in the 19th century. It is unclear to me whether the episode related earlier was about Muslim or Shi‘i villagers.

A fluid history especially concerns the make-up of what is now Iraq’s Shi‘i community, a majority among Iraqi Arabs (rather than Kurds), and a majority even in Baghdad, where there were during the 1960s some attempts to stem immigration from the southern marshlands, by cruel deterrence (some people were allegedly crushed to death to give the example), but to no avail. According to the 1920 census, there were just 250,000 inhabitants in the Baghdad district; of these, 50,000 were Jewish, 15,000 Christian, 130,000 Sunni, and 54,000 Shi‘is. Remarkably, there were almost as many Jews in Baghdad, as there were Shi‘is: the present demographics of Baghdad has changed altogether, because of the Jewish exodus in 1950, and of the huge inurbation that was already taking place before, but especially in the subsequent decades. About two dozen Jews remain.

The urban Shi‘is of Baghdad, or Arab background, were but one of the components of Iraq’s Shi‘i community. There were at least two other components, one of them urban, and the other one rural. “A major immigration of Persian Shi‘is to the shrine cities of Iraq [Karbala and Najaf] (both rank-and-file and ulama) took place in the 1720s, largely as a result of the Safavids and the

rise to power of Nadir Shah, who wishes to promote Sunni Islam as the ‘state religion’ of Iran” (Sluglett 1997, p. 140), thus, reversing Safavid policies that had made Shi‘i the state religion of Iran (at one time also producing crypto-Jewish communities that had been forcibly converted for a while).

The other component was Sunni immigrants tribalists from Arabia who converted to Shi‘ism while in Iraq: “Nakash advances, and proves, the thesis that the conversion of the tribes of southern Iraq to Shi‘ism did not antedate the beginning of the 19th century. Two events or series of events were crucial here: the Wahhabi movement, which forced a number of Sunni nomadic tribes from central and northern Arabia to migrate northward into what is now southern Iraq, and the reimposition of direct Ottoman control after the removal of the last Mamluk governor, Da‘ud Pasha, in 1831. The conversion of these tribes to Shi‘ism was facilitated first by the proximity of Karbala and Najaf, whose ulama sent out ‘missionaries’ for the purpose, and second by their becoming sedentary cultivators” (*ibid.*).

“Although the tribes that converted at this time [...] had been nominally Sunni, contemporary writers suggest (although one cannot help suspecting a general disdain for nomads on the part of urban religious intellectuals) that they were largely ignorant of the tenets of high Islam. Whatever the state of their previous beliefs may have been, their ‘conversion’ represented their first contact with institutionalized forms of Islam — meaning, in their case, visits to the tombs of the imams and the ‘*ashūra* commemoration ceremonies” (*ibid.*). These quotations are from Peter Sluglett’s review (1997) of a book by Yitzhak Nakash (1994), *The Shi‘is of Iraq*.

## 20. Residual Onomastics, and Rival Villages

Let us turn to another narrative. I recall a radio broadcast in Israel, perhaps ca. 1990, I think with the Iranian-Jewish, Israeli scholar Prof. Amnon Netzer (1934–2008), or some other Iranologist. Apparently he was in eastern Iran, and inhabitants of two rival villages would blame the other village with Jewish ancestry. He had one villager tell him about his lineage, and it came to an ancestor whose name was *Modocai* (Mordechai). The Israeli professor then asked him what kind of name it was, and the other one offered that it was a Turkish name.

Ascribing Jewish ancestry to opponents was standard in internecine polemics among Islamic authors as early as the Middle Ages, so this kind of casting aspersions in the form of ascribing Jewish ancestry must be taken with a grain of salt. But in the anecdote related, a given personal name was understood by the Jewish professor to be Jewish, whereas the villager would offer some other explanation that is not cogent.

## 21. Concluding Remarks

This article consists of two parts, and is itself the first part, “Identities Portrayed and Integrated. I. Crypto-Identities”, of a couple of articles. In Part I of the present paper, we have considered disparate situations concerning Jewish, crypto-Jewish, or formerly Jewish groups, or even their merely suspected presence, in several countries. We have clustered Pakistan with Bangladesh,

Urfa in eastern Anatolia with Iraqi Kurdistan, Bahrain with Jordan, Mali with Mesoamerica, while also pointing out differences in the various pairs.

In Part II of the present paper, we have considered the deliberate blurring of identities that some Jews and non-Jews have undergone in pre-state Israel as well as in Israeli society in more recent times. Again, we have been able to see quite different situations. We have also briefly considered, in Part III of this article, how some non-Jewish communities have sometimes maintained relics of a Jewish background that they themselves have not been recognising.

This essay is primarily intended as food for thought. It may be of some help for giving some structure to further lines of investigation. We have not dealt, here, with the better known cases of forced conversion or crypto-Judaism, such as in the world of Iberian or southern Italian cultures, or then the 19th-century forced conversion in Mashad, Iran. We only made an exception in the form of a brief mention of Central America and the Caribbean.

May I signal here my review essay (Nissan 2019b) whose point of departure is an autobiographical book by an Tunisian-born Italian author (Gabriele 2003) of Pantesque extraction, i.e., from Pantelleria, an island off Sicily. He mentions relics of crypto-Jewish practices carried out by a Catholic grandmother, but interestingly, her own extraction was from Portuguese Marranos, not from Sicilian post-1492 converts. The latter are the subject of, e.g., Zeldes (2000, 2003), and Renda (1993).

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