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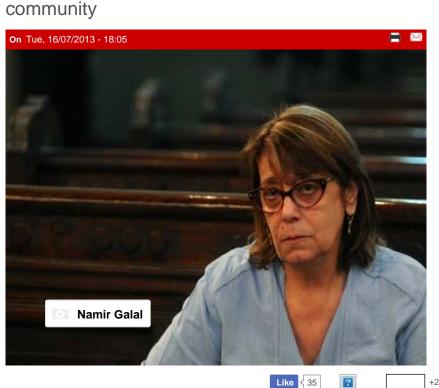
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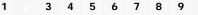
Interview: Magda Haroun, head of Egypt's Jewish

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#### Ahmed Belal

"The daughter of Israel's enemy has become the president of the Jewish community in Egypt." So said Yedioth Ahronoth, describing Magda Shehata Haroun, the daugher of a famous Egyptian-Jewish lawyer. She succeeded Carmen Weinstein as president of Egypt's Jewish community in mid-April.

Years ago, Magda's father - Shehata Haroun - refused to emigrate outside Egypt, claiming Cairo was his precious rock that he would not give up for pearls. Patriotism was not just his right, but a duty too, he would say. Shehata Haroun paid dearly by sticking to his principles. His freedom, security and stability were all compromised by staying in Egypt. As a result, his two daughters suffered. He even stayed in Egypt rather than accompany his eldest daughter Mona on a medical trip from which he might not have been able to return.

When Haroun died, Magda invited a French Rabbi to perform the funerary rites before his burial, rejecting one from the Israeli embassy. Her decision was a continuation of her father's struggle against Zionism, which he saw as a racist movement. Like her father, Magda refuses to emigrate overseas.

Al-Masry Al-Youm met with Magda Haroun at the Sha'ar Hashamayim ("Gate of Heaven"), or Adly Street synagogue in Cairo.

She said that she faced a huge, saddening responsibility in representing the Jewish community in its final chapter as part of the Egyptian nation. She fears she won't be able to provide a decent "end of life" to members of Egypt's Jewish community.

Q: How do you see the 30 June protests. Did you take part in them?

#### Interview: Magda Haroun, head of Egypt's Jewish community | Egypt Independent



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A: 30 June is the real revolution and of course I took part in it. I will go to join the protesters in their *lftar* in Tahrir [Square].

### Q: How do you see the Muslim Brotherhood's one year in power? And how do you see Egypt after 30 June?

A: That year was both a blessing and a curse--a blessing because the Egyptian people now know who their rulers were and know about their fascist dictatorship. But also a curse due to the economic problems that Egypt faced that year. But there is still a chance to fix things. The Jewish community in Egypt has donated money to the Support Egypt Fund despite their difficult living conditions. All members of the community have agreed to contribute to the fund. Hopefully, a new phase in the history of Egypt will begin, one where there will be no difference between Muslims, Christians and Jews. I hope this good spirit returns and we build our country together.

## Q: The Ministry of Social Affairs has canceled a grant-- of LE90,000 a year--which was previously given to the Jewish community. What do you have to say about this and were you officially notified of it?

A: Nobody notified me of it. I learned of it through the press and when I contacted the Shura Council's human rights committee, I learned that the decision has not yet been made. Then a friend told me that a Zionist website described the decision as a slap in the face of Magda Shehata Haroun who has always been proud of her loyalty to Egypt. I felt there was a need to fire back and so I sent a letter to the Shura Council's human rights committee to inquire about the reason why the grant was a secret item of the state budget even though it is an honor for the Egyptian state to be giving attention to the needs of the Jewish community - particularly since they are Egyptian citizens who have chosen to stay in Egypt and away from their families.

Most of the members of the community are elderly women with no source of living. It is not wrong for the state to help them, this is a right they have much like any Egyptian citizen.

In my letter, I said the grant should no longer remain a secret item in the state budget and that it should remain. In addition, I said we had constitutional rights to perform our religious rituals which require that a we have a Rabbi from an Arab country here in Egypt and that we have the food needed during fasting times, as things were under former President Mohamed Naguib.

### Q: These are not the first Israeli and Zionist attacks on you. Why do you think this happening?

A: Because I am holding on to my father's legacy which was perpetually attacked by the Zionist press. Many people do not understand that I belong to my country regardless of my religion. Zionism is a racist movement that discriminates between people on the basis of religion. They do not understand that I am loyal to my country, not Israel. It was our father that nurtured those feelings of fierce loyalty in us.

When someone asks why we have not left the country, I feel provoked. Why would we leave the country and emigrate? And where would we go? Why do some people think that all the Jews should emigrate to Israel? Do all Muslim emigrate to Saudi Arabia?

### Q: When your father, Shehata Haroun, was asked to choose between his country and his elder daughter Mona, he chose his country. Can you tell us more about this?

A: In 1954, my sister was diagnosed with leukemia when she was four years old. From what I hear from my family, my father loved her like crazy and he took her along with him to every place he went to. When she got sick, the only treatment available in Egypt was blood transfusion. My father donated blood to her every day because they shared the same blood group. But the doctors said they could not do anything more for her and told my father to to take her to France [for treatment]. He asked for permission to travel but was told he would not be allowed back. He said that nobody should force their will on him and Mona died.

## Q: How did you expect the conditions of the Jewish community in Egypt to be, and how did you actually find them, after you became the president of the Jewish community?

A: I used to say a lot that [Haroun's sister] Nadia and I will be the ones to close the door on the history of Jews in Egypt and my mother used to tell me that Shehata Haroun had prepared us for the day.

He nurtured our feelings of belonging to the country and he taught us about our rights and duties as Egyptian Jews. But the burden is heavy.

I did not mix much with members of the community, only at feasts and funerals. Just thinking about their affairs is difficult because it is all about trouble, from a humanitarian point of view. The elderly live in fear because of the image of Jews being promoted as traitors and spies. They fear people finding out they're Jews.

I fear I will not be able to provide them with a decent ending to their lives or to fulfill my pledge to safeguard the Jewish legacy and restore it. This legacy is part of me as an Egyptian Jew.

#### Q: What are the major problems that you face as the president of the community?

A: Besides what I just said, I have concerns regarding the determination of Jewish property. So far, I



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#### Interview: Magda Haroun, head of Egypt's Jewish community | Egypt Independent

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do not have all the required documents for that and I also fear my position will be politicised even though it is of a purely humanitarian nature.

#### Q: Many Egyptians frown upon the presence of Jews in Egypt. How do you explain this?

A: This is because Egypt's history has been falsified, not only with regards to the Jews but also many other things. If a person wants to progress then he or she must know their history well. It is time to correct the path, we have to know our history well. The youth have an opportunity and tools for knowledge which I hope they will use because they are our hope. Indeed, there were Jews in Egypt, most of whom have left Egypt but they did not do so willingly. They were forced to leave and only a few of those who left Egypt went to Israel. The establishment of Israel has put us, Egyptian Jews, in trouble because it is a country built on religious foundations. We paid the price. I hope this does not happen with other communities. I beg those leaving now not to leave because the burden is heavy and the sadness deep to be the one to close the door on the history of a section of the Egyptian society.

#### Q: Have you faced any problems as a result of the religion slot on your ID?

A: First, religion is about how you treat people, but that does not mean that the religion slot on my ID has not caused me trouble because of people's ignorance. For instance, I had to wait two years to get an ID. When I went to issue an ID, the employees were surprised about my religion and they kept inquiring if it was right to wrong. They even asked me if I were Egyptian or not. In the last step before the issuing of the ID, the employee sitting at her computer called her boss and pointed to the religion slot and he told her "to write it as it is, this is a religion of God." When I went to correct something in my birth certificate, the employee asked me if I were Egyptian and I said yes but then he objected, saying that I was born at al-Saqf al-Israeli Hospital—the name of the hospital would have a "railways nationality" or another born at the Italian Hospital an Italian nationality. He asked to see my passport. After he saw it he asked me to write down my address and phone number and when I asked why, he said for "security reasons." I refused to write them and he did not issue me a birth certificate.

### Q: How do you feel as an Egyptian Jew when you find the media, including state-owned media, attacking Jews and smearing their image?

A: We are not the only ones under attack. Christians and moderate Islam also come under fire.

### Q: Intentionally or not, some in Egypt (and beyond) believe the Jews are invariably loyal to Israel. What do you think?

A: My loyalty is to my country where I was educated, where I grew up, fell in love and got married. I am loyal to the country that made me. I do not think that a French or English Jew would be loyal to Israel. Indeed, he or she would defend their religion but would also defend his or her country. The same applies to Egyptian Jews.

#### Q: Could that be because some do not differentiate between Judaism and Zionism?

A: The failure to draw a distinction between Judaism as a religion and the Israeli state is the result of ignorance, which is to blame on social science curricula and teachers... I remember that in a social sciences lesson, the teacher described Jews as dogs and I was the only Jew in class and all the students looked at me. I stood up and left the class. When I went back home, I told my father about what happened and he told me that children in Israel, too, are told that Arabs are dogs, so I felt better. The problem is that the person who said so is a teacher that is supposed to be raising children, so when someone like her says so it is a catastrophe. Much like some people mix up al-Qaeda and Islam, others mix Israel and Judaism up. Just like not every Muslim is a member of al-Qaeda, not every Jew is an Israeli. Regarding Israel's Law of Return, which states that all Jews should return to Israel, these are their own man-made laws.

# Q: For reasons related to the Egyptian government and the president of the Jewish community, the affairs of Egyptian Jews were shrouded in ambiguity. Is this ambiguity going to remain under your presidency?

A: Magda Shehata Haroun is an open book. I have to address this villification of Jews and remove the ambiguity surrounding the community. The Jewish synagogue has to remain open and receive people just like mosques and the churches. If there are security concerns that result from ignorance, such as fears that someone might walk into the synagogue and bomb it thinking he would go to heaven, the whole of Egypt will lose. Everyone should be open to everyone. I hope that one day I will see a Jewish Museum in Egypt, one that will contain artifacts and daily life tools so that the people would learn that we are not different. We eat, drink and pray and we have common traditions even when it comes to burial rituals. The coming generations need to know that we were part of this country. We have Islamic and Coptic museums and I hope there will be a Jewish one.

### Q: Egyptian officials were absent from the funeral of the former head of the Jewish community. How do you view this?

A: They may have been busy. The issue of Jews in Egypt is a marginal issue compared to other much more important issues. However, there are party officials who came and I thank them for their attendance.

Q: Were you concerned about the Jewish community when the Muslim Brotherhood rose to



#### power?

Tarzan swings again in screen tale of rescue and revenge



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A: I feared for the future of Egypt, just like every Egyptian fears for his or her country. The Jews are part of this country.

#### Q: To what extent has Egypt changed compared to the Egypt Magda Haroun knows?

A: Egypt has changed a lot. But Egyptians have not. Those beautiful Egyptians have not and we will return like we were in the past, where the people check on their neighbors and greet them in feats and kids play without asking each other about their religions. Mina will play with Mohamed but Maurice will no longer be there.

#### Q: You have not visited Israel so far, are you thinking of visiting it anytime soon?

A: Not now and not in the future. Like father, like daughter. Let me tell you, some people have been critical because the the Israeli ambassador attended the funeral of the last president of our community, but I say this man came to perform a duty and to pray, so was I expected to kick him out? This is the House of God. If I enter a mosque or church, I wouldn't want anyone to kick me out. But then, was I the one who accepted his presence in Egypt in the first place?

#### Q: Does the Jewish community receive any support from Israel, even if religious in nature?

A: Not at all. The community does not receive any support from Israel.

#### Q: The Jewish cemetery in Bassateen is one of the oldest in the world, and you said before it is in decrepit condition. Has its condition in any way improved?

A: Its condition is bad and the informally-built area around it is in even worse condition. The only thing I can do is build a fence around it but I have to have resources to do that. My dream is to see the entire Bassateen developed because it is in very bad condition. When the area will be developed, the residents of Bassateen will be the first to take care of the Jewish cemetery and we will participate in its development so they know that Jews are not devils or spies.

#### Edited translation from Al-Masry Al-Youm

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	Jane Seymour				is correct in c	pening the

I was most impressed with her answers, and she is correct in opening the synagogue to the Egyptians, hopefully they will learn that not all Jews are Israelis, and that Muslims, Jews and Christians are all people of the book, if Muslims really understood their Koran, they would know this. I wish to congratulate Magda Haroun on becoming head of her community and wish her the very best. It is obvious that she is a loyal and very patriotic Egyptian otherwise she would have immigrated many years ago!

Like · Reply · 🖒 16 · 16 July 2013 14:38

David K Campbell

#### I posted something about her earlier

Like · Reply · 16 July 2013 18:54

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كلية التجارة جامعة الاسكندرية Works at • اسلام العظيمي

yes she looks patriotic but she is jwes. sorry ,

Like · Reply · 16 July 2013 19:56

#### Rhea Karinina

Islam Mohamed so??? Why should she or her family have to prove any more then they already have that they are patriotic to Egypt you sound just like the people in the US who say I may look like I am loyal to the US but I am a Muslim therefore there is no way that I can be. People like you are the problem with the world and why there is still hatred and discrimination

Like · Reply · 🖞 17 · 17 July 2013 05:55

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#### David Ellison · Hammersmith and West London College

Unfortunately, this women sounds just like some of the German Jews who were so sure that the Germans would, some day accept them as German citizens. The gas chambers answered that question. Egyptian Jews as well as Copts and other minorities should understand the realities of the societies they live in and get away as soon as possible. All the signs are there...

Like · Reply · 🖒 9 · 16 July 2013 17:55

Mohamed Tarek · Founder, Trainer & Coach at Lucid Training

That's your own opinion, I believe most Jews & Copts living in Egypt, disagree with you since they are still here, what you hear in the media is not always true, I suggest you leave that decision to them since they live here and can better judge.

Like · Reply · 🖞 14 · 17 July 2013 05:38



#### John Kamal

No sir, nobody is going anywhere. Egypt is for Egyptians and I mean all Egyptians regardless of their religious background. This woman has gone through untold hardships to remain in Egypt and yet she is still discriminated against in a country she calls home.

Like · Reply · 🖞 15 · 17 July 2013 05:39



**Omri Schwarz** - Engineer at Fraunhofer Center for Sustainable Energy Systems CSE

There are no Jews younger than 50 years old living in Egypt. Decades of wicked oppression have proved that Egypt is not a land for all Egyptians. The United States is receiving more and more Coptic immigrants every day, and we can all see why.

Like · Reply · 19 July 2013 08:17

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#### كلية التجارة جامعة الاسكندرية Works at . اسلام العظيمي

say waht you want to say , but I want to say to you that the egyptain and the whole arbes hate jwes and the will never be with you.soory , the right place you must live is in uorpe not in medle est. don't diceve your selfes , you must ont be here.

Like · Reply · 16 July 2013 20:02

#### Michaela Schuberg

Europe is a collection of people not a specific religion and Arabia is also a collection of people not a specific religion. By definition the Arab identity is defined independently of religious identity, and pre-dates the rise of Islam, with historically attested Arab Christian kingdoms and Arab Jewish tribes. Today, however, most Arabs are Muslim. How did this come about if not through expansionist Islam, itself a colonial Imperialist Apartheid ideology. What is interesting, and nearly if not always over looked by the main stream media is how the Arabian landscape out side the borders of I... See more

Like · Reply · 🖞 3 · 16 July 2013 22:45

#### John Kamal

How would you like it if the same was said to Arabs in the US

Like · Reply · 🖒 2 · 17 July 2013 02:14



Ramy Habib · Alexandria, Egypt

I am asking myself how this woman is living among persons like you! What a Shame!She is brave. Now no wonder how radical Islam got to power!

Like · Reply · 17 July 2013 05:31 · Edited

Show 10 more replies in this thread **T** 



#### Michaela Schuberg

Why are Jews called Settlers? Makes no sense what so ever!

By definition the Arab identity is defined independently of religious identity, and pre-dates the rise of Islam, with historically attested Arab Christian kingdoms and Arab Jew...ish tribes. Today, however, most Arabs are Muslim. How did this come about if not through expansionist Islam that itself is a colonial Imperialist ideology. In other words when the media says "Israeli Occupation" they really mean Jews given that Arab Jews, the kind that came from Iraq or any other Arab country along with Muslim and Christian Arabs are also ca... See more

Like · Reply · 16 July 2013 22:34



#### Michaela Schuberg

So she is against Zionism? That is her choice! Jews do not have apostasy laws? Jews don't get thrown in Jail or murdered because they have their personal opinions on how to live their lives? The real question is 'what is Zionism?

Zionism, in a religious context, is well rooted in the Bible or, as the Qur'an identifies: the Torah. For example in the Book of Genesis Abraham (meaning "the father loves" in the Akkad language); Ibrahim to Muslims in the Qur'an, took his family from Your in Mesopotamia, or modern day "Iraq", to the lands of Canaan on God's or Islam's Allah's behest. Now these ... See more

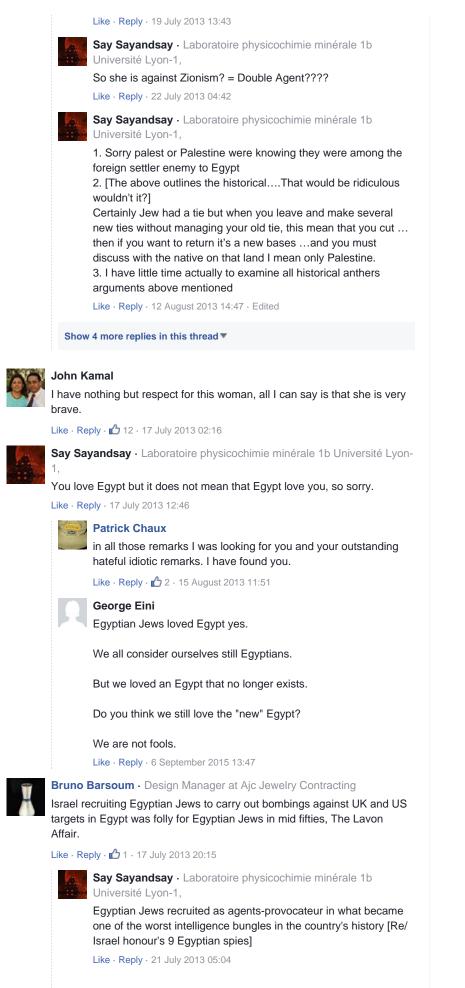
Like · Reply · 🖒 2 · 16 July 2013 22:42



Nadim Jacquemond · Edinburgh, United Kingdom

there is no such thing as "arabians" or "arabs". look at historical sources, such notions only appear at the beginning of the 20th century. The arab identity is a fake identity created to fool people into letting go of their actual historical heritage, in order to fulfill yet another group's political goals.

Nations don't exist and never have. People can live together anywhere, anytime. Tolerance is the key. Pseudo-historic arguments such as your own are the venom that destroys the tissue of our humanity.



### Arthur C. Hurwitz Eli Cohen, for example.... Like · Reply · 1 October 2014 14:54 George Eini LOL 3 Egyptian teenagers were recruited. They failed thank goodness. So Egypt robs and expels the remain

So Egypt robs and expels the remaining 60,000 Jews who decided to stay after 1948?

20,000 left in 1948.... See more

Like · Reply · 6 September 2015 13:45

#### openid

The main point this woman makes, over and over, is that she loathes Israel, as did her late father. So in a situation where Egyptians have massively (and magnificently!) rejected Islamism, and where so much more can now be accomplished in the middle east to the extent that Egyptians reject fear and hatred of Jews and Israel, Al-Masry Al-Youm posts not one but two stories on Ms. Haroun, who allows people to say: 'See? She's a Jew and hates Israel, so it isn't a form of bigotry.' But in fact the hatred of Israel IS rooted in bigotry. books and newspapers and TV shows like Dream TV's "Horseman w... See more

Like · Reply · 🖒 3 · 17 July 2013 21:51



Say Sayandsay · Laboratoire physicochimie minérale 1b Université Lyon-1,

Sorry nothing common,

Like · Reply · 21 July 2013 05:03 · Edited

#### Amina Niazi

Arabs are Semites. Israel is racist in that it is the only cuntry in the world FOUNDED on that basis in modern history. It is in the Balfour Declaration. Sephardic Jews are targeted in Israel by Ashkenazi Jews because the Sephardim are Middle Eastern Jews descended from the lineage of Abraham pbu.

Like · Reply · 🖞 1 · 15 March 2014 18:22

#### Arthur C. Hurwitz

Isreal is not like these other states because in these other states, there is no legal distinction between "Jew" and everyone else. In these other states, there is one secular citizenship for all of their citizens. In Israel, there is not.....

Like · Reply · 1 October 2014 14:54

#### Show 1 more reply in this thread▼



1.

Say Sayandsay · Laboratoire physicochimie minérale 1b Université Lyon-

She is in Egypt to guard the treasures of Jews left in EGYPT and she is paid by them the owners, that is to end the story.

Like · Reply · 18 July 2013 03:19



Sherif E Issa · Cairo, Egypt

A lot of respect for this brave Egyptian woman. GOD bless her..

Like · Reply · 🖞 4 · 18 July 2013 03:20 · Edited

Mohamed Awadalla · El Mansoura Gamal Abdel Nasser Military school She is so smart, I'm proud that we still have her, I wish I could know her in



person, there is a lot the Egyptian Jewish Community added to the country, there is a conflict between Egypt and Israel, Arabs and Israel, and still, Magda is great Egyptian woman.

Like · Reply · 🖒 12 · 18 July 2013 10:43



**Omri Schwarz** · Engineer at Fraunhofer Center for Sustainable Energy Systems CSE

Shocking. That a man would sacrifice his daughter to a country that is so obviously unworthy of anyone's loyalty.

Like · Reply · 🖒 1 · 19 July 2013 08:15

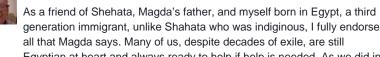
#### George Eini

You know she would have died anyway.

No one survives Leukemia especially even more so in the 50s.

Like · Reply · 6 September 2015 13:40

Jimmy Jancovich · Camborne School of Mines - Mount Isa Oldboys



Egyptian at heart and always ready to help if help is needed. As we did in the past.

And don't forget that in Pharaonic times there were Judeans in Egypt as well as Greeks. As traders and as hiredy frontier guards. There's an alter to Yahweh in an Egyptian Temple in Elephanite Island hat is almost 3000 years old.... Not as slaves, either...

Like · Reply · 🖒 8 · 19 July 2013 08:32



You're a friend of that vile man? A man who would stay loyal to the country that so cruelly killed his little girl?

Like · Reply · 🖞 2 · 19 July 2013 11:05



Fortunately they are went

Like · Reply · 21 July 2013 04:06



Say Sayandsay · Laboratoire physicochimie minérale 1b Université Lyon-1,

Re/ Israel honors 9 Egyptian spies

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Like · Reply · 21 July 2013 16:00
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Show 8 more replies in this thread **T** 



#### Anne Dorra · Cairo, Egypt

bravo Madame, i also would like to see the way history is being taught to Egyptian children changed, and I wish we could live one day all together with no discriminations against each other and most important no hypocrisy

Like · Reply · 🖒 5 · 19 July 2013 10:19



Say Sayandsay · Laboratoire physicochimie minérale 1b Université Lyon-1,

Not that

Like · Reply · 19 July 2013 14:08

Usman Harun · Works at Self employed



muslims must help her.

Like · Reply · 🖒 2 · 19 July 2013 20:43



1,

Say Sayandsay · Laboratoire physicochimie minérale 1b Université Lyon-

Change the disc! Like · Reply · 20 July 2013 00:39



SAdrien Levy · Brasil, Sao Paulo, Brazil

Egypt saw 2 exoduses the 2nd. started, to all practical effects, in 1954/1955 and NO JEW SHOULD HAVE REMAINED THERE! There's no way "infidels" can come to an understanding or agreement with Muslims and the dogmas of their Al Quran!

Like · Reply · 21 July 2013 17:59

#### George Eini

No it started in 1948 when 25% left.

Like · Reply · 6 September 2015 13:37

SAdrien Levy · Brasil, Sao Paulo, Brazil

George Eini Thanks George, I stand corrected, I indicated that period because that's when I and all my friends and family were confiscated and kicked out of the countryWHICH WE HELPED BUILD AND MODERNIZE.

Like · Reply · 6 September 2015 13:41



#### Nestor Miguel Gorojovsky · Universidad de Buenos Aires

Hatred of Jews is the building block of Zionism. Both are Siamese twins. Both believe that Jews will be forever different from the rest of humankind. Their only dissent is around the solution to the issue. As a Jew, I bow at this great woman and fighter for human equality and I hope her ideals are adopted by all of the Egyptian community. It would be excellent that the Israeli Jewish community did the same, but for the time being and who knows for how long, this is unthinkable. To everyone's grief.

Like · Reply · 🖞 1 · 22 July 2013 11:06

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Nestor Miguel Gorojovsky · Universidad de Buenos Aires

Say Sayandsay, je ne te comprends pas

Like · Reply · 24 July 2013 15:28



Say Sayandsay · Laboratoire physicochimie minérale 1b Université Lyon-1,

It's closed question since more than3000 Years, , May be Just far distanced friends on other land ,I had so many Jew friends, it was so difficult to understand each other's, but once defined a limit's it was good developed, but their was some attempts to...it's sp relation between Egyptian & Jew?

Like · Reply · 12 August 2013 09:19 · Edited



Say Sayandsay · Laboratoire physicochimie minérale 1b Université Lyon-1,

Néstor Gorojovsky sadly think that theirs certainly a reason that much of societies refuse Jew, at this point the question is does this thing (s) is able to be self-adapted to the situation or not, so sorry to be direct in my analysis but I hope for them good luck as human being.

Also I add, the question of god and religions had started in this geographic point and certainly it suffered Extinctive progression and retrogression attitude, it's politic.

Like · Reply · 12 December 2013 18:09 · Edited

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http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/interview-magda-haroun-head-egypt-s-jewish-community[7/3/2016 11:24:13 PM]
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Like · Reply · 7 September 2015 12:04

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