

**THE MIGRATION EXPERIENCE OF THE JEWS OF EGYPT
TO AUSTRALIA, 1948 – 1967:
A model of acculturation**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis has tried to construct a comprehensive analysis of a clearly defined community of Egyptian Jews in Australia and France, based on the oral history of Egyptian born migrants. Built around the conceptual framework of forced emigration, integration and acculturation, it looks at the successful experience of this particular migrant group within both Australian and French societies.

Like the other Jewish communities of Arab lands, the Egyptian Jewish community no longer exists, as it was either expelled or forced into exile in the aftermath of the three Arab-Israeli wars (1948, 1956, 1967). This thesis argues that the rise of an exclusively Arab-Islamic type of nationalism, the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and the escalating Arab-Israeli conflict constituted the fundamental causes for the demise of Egyptian Jewry. As a consequence, almost half of the Jewish population of Egypt went to Israel. The rest dispersed throughout the Western world, mainly in France, North and South America. In Australia, a small group of around 2,000 found a new home.

Apart from those who migrated to Israel, the majority of Egyptian Jews experienced a waiting period in Europe before they were accepted by any of the countries of immigration, a period facilitated by international and local Jewish welfare agencies. My interviewees chose Australia mostly to be reunited with family members. They first had to overcome the racial discrimination of the 'White Australia' Immigration policy towards Jews of Middle Eastern origin, a hurdle surmounted thanks to the tireless efforts of some leaders of the Australian Jewish community. With their multiple language skills, multi-layered identity and innate ability to interact with a variety of ethnic groups, they succeeded in establishing themselves in an unfamiliar country that initially welcomed them reluctantly. As such, they can be said to have successfully acculturated and integrated into Australian society, whilst retaining their own cultural diversity.

The more numerous Egyptian Jews living in France also successfully acculturated. As a larger group, they were better equipped to assert themselves within the older Jewish/French community and retain their distinctive Sephardi culture.

Studies such as the present one provide insight into the process of integration and identity reconstruction, as well as the diverse strategies used to ensure a successful acculturation, and the value of a multi-layered identity.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|---------|--|
| AAHA | Amicale Alexandrie, Hier et Aujourd'hui |
| AHC | Adelaide Hebrew Congregation |
| AINB | Association Internationale Nébi Daniel |
| AIU | Alliance Israelite Universelle |
| AJE | Association of Jews from Egypt, UK |
| AJOE | Association des Juifs originaires d'Egypte |
| AJT | Australian Jewish Times |
| AJHS | Australian Jewish Historical Society, Journal & Proceedings |
| AJWS | Australian Jewish Welfare Society |
| AJW&RS | Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief Society |
| ALP | Australian Labor Party |
| ASPCJE | Association pour la Sauvegarde du Patrimoine Culturel des Juifs d'Egypte |
| COJASOR | Comité Juif d'Action Sociale et de Reconstruction |
| DPs | Displaced Persons |
| ECAJ | Executive Council of Australian Jewry |
| ESPCI | Ecole Supérieure de Physique et Chimie Industrielle |

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| FSJU | Fonds Social Juif Unifié |
| HIAS | Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society |
| HLM | Habitation à loyer modéré |
| HSJE | Historical Society of Jews from Egypt |
| IAJE | International Association of Jews from Egypt |
| ICRC | International Committee of the Red Cross |
| IRO | International Refugee Organisation |
| JIMENA | Jews indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa |
| JDC | American Joint Distribution Committee |
| JNF | Jewish National Fund |
| £E | (Livre Egyptienne) Egyptian Pound |
| LICA | Ligue Internationale Contre l'Antisémitisme |
| LISCA | Ligue Internationale Scolaire Contre l'Antisémitisme |
| MDLN | Mouvement Démocratique pour la Libération Nationale |
| MELN | Mouvement Egyptien pour la Libération Nationale |
| NAAFI | Navy Army Air Force Institute |
| NCJW | National Council of Jewish Women |
| OFPRA | Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides |

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| SSJ | Service Social des Jeunes |
| SJN | Sydney Jewish News |
| SMH | Sydney Morning Herald |
| UNHCR | United Nations Refugee Agency |
| UJE | Lycée de l'Union Juive pour l'Enseignement |
| WCJE | World Congress of Jews from Egypt |
| WJC | World Jewish Congress |
| WIZO | Women's International Zionist Organisation |

GLOSSARY

Aliyah (literally ‘going up’) – Immigration to Israel.

Ashkenazi (literally, German) – Jews originating from Central and Eastern Europe.

Barmitzvah – Religious ceremony to mark a Jewish boy’s religious maturity at the age of thirteen.

Batmitzvah – Religious ceremony to mark a Jewish girl’s religious maturity at the age of twelve.

Betar – Youth organisation of the Zionist Revisionist movement.

Bey - Turkish governor – Title granted to high government officials and public servants.

B’nai Brith (literally, Sons of the Covenant) – International Jewish service organisation.

B’nei Akiva (literally ‘Sons of Akiva’) – Religious Zionist youth movement.

Capitulations (chapter) – Regime of extraterritorial jurisdiction that shielded foreign nationals from the law of the land.

Dhimmi – Legal status of Jews and Christians in Muslim lands, denoting the relationship between protector and protected.

Diaspora – Greek word meaning ‘dispersion’, applied to Jewish settlement outside of Israel.

Dror – Marxist Zionist youth movement.

Effendi – Title of respect or courtesy in Turkey

Einsatzgruppen (‘Mobile Killing Squads’) -- paramilitary units which operated behind the Nazi Eastern Front, created by Himmler.

Emigré – Emigrant, especially political exile.

Fellah – Egyptian peasant.

Gabbai (literally, collector) – Communal official.

Hagana – Underground military organisation of the Yishuv in Palestine.

Hara or haret-al-Yahud – Separate Jewish quarters.

Haret-al-Yahud al-Qara’in – Karaites’s quarters.

Ha Shomer Ha-Tza’ir (literally, The Young Guard) – Communist Zionist youth movement.

Heder (literally, room) -- Religious elementary school.

Intifada – (literally, shudder, awakening) Palestinian uprising.

Jizya -- Poll tax imposed by Muslim rulers on their Jewish and Christian subjects in exchange for protection and freedom of religion.

Djihad – Holy struggle.

Karaite – ‘Readers of the Scriptures’. Jewish sect believed to originate in Bagdad in the eighth century. Karaites only follow the Written Law and deny the Rabbinical-Talmudic tradition.

Keren Yayasod – Palestine Foundation Fund, later United Israel Appeal.

Keren Kayemet le-Israel – Jewish National Fund.

Khawagat – Respectful or disdainful title in Arabic to designate Europeans.

Khedive – Turkish Vice-Roys who ruled Egypt between 1867 and 1914

Ladino or judesmo (known also as Judeo-Spanish) -- Ancient form of Castillian mixed with Hebrew and Turkish words and often written in *Rashi* script.

Laisser-passer -- Travelling permit granted to stateless.

Madrassah -- Koranic school.

Mamluk – (literally slave) Member of military body (originally Circassian slaves) that ruled Egypt from 1254-1811.

Millet – (people or nation) Ottoman Turkish term for a legally protected religious minority.

Minyan – Quorum of ten male adult Jews required for communal prayer.

Misrahim -- Oriental Jews.

Misr al-Fatat or ‘Young Egypt’ – Militant nationalist movement founded in 1933.

Mukhabarat – Egyptian secret police.

Nizam jadid (literally new system) – new army created by Muhammad Ali.

Pasha – Turkish officer of high rank, e.g. military commander, governor of province, politician or notable.

Pessah – Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, commemorates the exodus from Egypt.

Rabbanites (Rabbinites) – Name given by the Karaites to their Rabbinical opponents.

Reconquista – Reclaiming of Muslim Spain by the Christians.

Rehla bodun ragaa (literally ‘journey without return’) – Egyptian stamp affixed on travelling documents of Jews after 1956.

Romaniot – Greek Jews.

Rosh Hashana – (literally, Head of the Year) Jewish New Year.

Saint-Simonien – Disciple of the collectivism doctrine of Saint-Simon, French philosopher and sociologist (1760-1825).

Saraf – Moneychanger.

Sephardi (literally Spanish) – Jews originating from Spain, Portugal, the old Ottoman Empire and the Orient.

Schlecht – Derogatory Yiddish term for an Ashkenazi, meaning bad or evil.

Sepher Torah – Scroll of the Law containing the five Books of Moses.

Shari'ah – Body of Islamic Law, also known as the Law of Alla'h, that governs both the secular and religious life of the devout Muslim.

Simhat Torah (literally 'Rejoicing in the law' – Holy Day on which the annual completion of the reading of the Torah is celebrated.

Tarboush – *fez*, Turkish head-dress.

Umma – The community of all Muslims

Wafd – Delegation.

Yishuv – Jewish community in Palestine pre 1948.

Yom Kippur – *Day of Atonement*

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis sets out to explore key aspects of the modern history of Egyptian Jews by looking at three distinct topic areas. The first part of the work will shed light on the last three chapters of their lives in Egypt: a golden age under the protection of the colonial powers of England and France from the early 1900s until 1937, a gradual decline due to the abolition of foreigners' privileges under the Capitulation regime, the rise of Arab nationalism and the increasing problems in Palestine and finally the crisis period that followed the outbreak of the three successive Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1956 and 1967, all leading to the almost total demise of Egyptian Jewry by the early 1970s. The second part, which is the core of this thesis, will focus on the migration experience of a small group of Egyptian Jews to Australian shores, including the government policies related to their immigration and integration into Australian society while the third part will consist of a comparative case study addressing some of the more crucial themes linked to the migration experience of a select number of Egyptian Jews to France.

At first, this research project was undertaken for personal reasons, as I am also a Jew from Egypt, having arrived in Australia in 1958 and gone through very similar experiences to most of my compatriots. I strongly believed it was important to record the peregrinations of my group, since the Egyptian diaspora has truly come to an end, without any sign of a return community to Egypt, even after the signing of the 1979 peace accord between Egypt and Israel.

Together with a friend and compatriot, Lana Woolf née Golliger, I initially undertook this project as a community-minded mission and not as an academic task.¹ At that point in time, the purpose was to create a record of the experiences of the Egyptian Jews of Sydney. It was

¹ Lana Woolf and myself are both Egyptian-born of ethnically different Jewish backgrounds. We still have ageing parents with an amazing memory of their past history. The urgency and importance of the task of recording their story and the story of other Egyptian Jews with equally fascinating experiences, were compelling factors in our determination to create, through a series of personal interviews, a record of the history of those Jews. We devised a questionnaire and made the initial contacts. Most of the time, we were both present during the Sydney interviews while only one of us would conduct the actual interview. The rest of the work, such as recording, transcribing, and assessing the collated data was always my responsibility. When I decided to develop this project into a thesis for a PhD and expand my research to include the Egyptian migrants in Melbourne and Adelaide as well as a comparative case study of a similar group in France, I took charge of every step of the research. M/s Woolf was most cooperative, and continued to assist me with the interviews whenever her professional commitments as a high school teacher allowed her to do so.

felt that such a record would constitute a testimony to the richness of their past as well as recognition of their distinctiveness in the context of the broader Australian Jewish community. This record was meant to be mainly for the benefit of their descendants as well as prospective researchers in the future. The project was based on the assumption that every personal story was important and contributed to the development of an overall picture of the Jews in Egypt and from Egypt, especially in view of the fact that they were now dispersed all over the world and the Jewish presence in Egypt has dwindled to insignificance.

I gradually came to the conclusion that to do justice to the diversity and vibrancy of this particular diaspora and its exilic experiences, I needed the endorsement and the assistance of a university body. In view of the end of a continuous and significant Jewish presence in Egypt for the first time in twenty-five centuries, and the realisation that it will probably never be revived, the importance and urgency of the undertaking became paramount. As foreseen, once the project developed into serious academic research, under the auspices of the Department of Hebrew, Biblical and Jewish Studies at the University of Sydney, with the supervision of Associate Professor Suzanne D. Rutland, it gained more recognition within the group of Egyptian Jews and contacts with prospective respondents, both in Australia and overseas, were greatly facilitated.

The first task was to contextualise the diaspora that Jews had built for themselves in Egypt and establish what happened to that diaspora after 1948. On the dawn of the modern era, Egyptian Jewry had experienced cycles of golden and dark ages, of prosperity and decline, of honour and degradation. These cycles were repeated under every known ruler of Egypt, whether Persian, Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Ottoman or Mamluk. The relationship between the Jews and 'the dominant other' was mostly one of symbiosis and the Jewish condition often mirrored the general political, economic and social situation prevalent at the time in that part of the world. In spite of the numerous vicissitudes it endured, the community succeeded in maintaining its Jewishness while espousing outward signs of the dominant culture. Under medieval Islam, in a society that was mainly defined by religion, Jews remained marginalised as *dhimmi*s, protected but nevertheless second-class citizens, always at a distance from mainstream society but at the same time strengthened in their identity as Jews. Since the mid-nineteenth century, their status was greatly enhanced under the protection of the European colonial powers. However, the transformation of Egypt into a modern nation state increasingly destabilised the foundations of Jewish life in that country. The Jews of

Egypt had to respond to the dilemmas introduced by modernity with its long list of 'isms', such as, colonialism, liberalism, nationalism, secularism, Arabism, Islamism, communism, and Zionism. All these ideologies were pulling the fabric of their society in conflicting directions. They had to contend with a growing sense of alienation, with challenges to their national identity, and with political forces that eventually forced them into exile and dispersion. This study will investigate every one of these issues with the view of understanding the underlying reasons for the demise of the Jewish community of Egypt and assessing its integration and acculturation into such diverse diasporas as Australia and France.

Based on a detailed study of a sample group of Egyptian Jews who migrated to Australia, using oral history as a research tool reinforced by historical data, I tried to construct their social profile as a migrant group, showing how and why they integrated the way they did, how successful was their integration and how they reconstructed their identity to fit into their new context. Finally, by comparing and contrasting the Australian and French migration experiences, I hoped to demonstrate that the Jews of Egypt shared some remarkable attributes, such as an astonishing level of multilingual skills and therefore an innate ability to interact with people from different backgrounds as well as an ability to accommodate a multi-layered identity. My thesis was that this study would demonstrate firstly that the advancing tide of an exclusivist Egyptian nationalism had or should have somewhat forewarned and prepared them for their eventual exodus. Furthermore, because the Jews of Egypt, as part of a Levantine society, had personally experienced cultural pluralism as a way of life, they already possessed the necessary skills to achieve a smooth integration in whatever country or culture they would later implant themselves after their forced emigration. I raised some pointed questions on the degree of their acculturation to the dominant culture. How did their multilinguism serve them in the monolingual Australia of the 1950s and 1960s? How did they negotiate the different layers of their plural identity in their new country and did they retain a core identity in the process? According to my investigations, no other researcher until now has done a scientific study of Egyptian Jews in Australia based on those themes.

Before entering into the body of my topic, it was important to delineate the conceptual framework around which this study has been constructed by clearly defining such terms as forced emigration, assimilation, integration, acculturation and multiculturalism, in order to establish their relevancy to the present study. For instance, the act of forced emigration can be understood to refer to people or a group of people who are either physically expelled from

their native country by authority or compelled to leave their country because of political persecution, conflicts, economic problems, religious or ethnic discrimination, as opposed to voluntary emigration where there is an element of choice.² This phenomenon can also be defined as an ‘exodus’ that, in the biblical sense, is more than just ‘a mass departure’: it is ‘a journey by a large group to escape from a hostile environment.’³ The people who make up this group become refugees forced into seeking residence in any nation state that would accept them within its borders.⁴ My study will show that this was the case for Egyptian Jews.⁵

Once they are settled in that nation state, the newcomers are faced with a number of different strategies destined to make them feel part of their new country such as assimilation, integration, and acculturation.⁶ It is necessary at this point to outline the differences between the three strategies.⁷ In the words of historian Marion A. Kaplan, in her gender analysis of the Jews of Imperial Germany, assimilation is ‘assumed to be the process engaged in by a minority whose goal is fusion with the majority’.⁸ In the Jewish context, Kaplan uses the term ‘assimilation’ ‘to indicate the loss of a Jewish ethnic and religious identity’, the discarding of Jewish ties:⁹

“Assimilation” is an appropriate description for a small group of consciously and totally “Germanised Jews ...who lived in total estrangement from anything Jewish and who sought relationships only with Christians and other Jews like themselves,¹⁰

² The notion of forced emigration would thus be closer to the notion of exile, defined in *Websters’ Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, Springfield, Mass.: G. & C. Merriam & Co., 1976, as ‘a forced removal from one’s native country.’

³ *WorldReference.com English Dictionary, adapted from Worldnet 2.0 Copyright 2003 by Princeton University.*

⁴ According to Unesco’s definition, migrants, as opposed to refugees, ‘are people who make choices about when to leave and where to go, even though these choices are sometimes extremely constrained’.

⁵ Forced expulsion of an ethnic group has sometimes been considered as a form of ethnic cleansing. See definition of ethnic cleansing in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*: ‘ethnic cleansing can be understood as the forced expulsion of an “undesirable” population from a given territory as a result of religious or ethnic discrimination, political, strategic or ideological considerations, or as combination of these.’

⁶ According to the definition found in *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, the term *diaspora*... is used (without capitalisation) to refer to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional ethnic homelands; being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture.’

⁷ *Websters’ Third New International Dictionary* definition of assimilation is a ‘socio-cultural fusion wherein individuals and groups of differing ethnic heritage acquire the basic habits, attitudes, and mode of life of an embracing national culture’.

⁸ Marion A. Kaplan, ‘Tradition and Transition – The Acculturation, Assimilation and Integration of Jews in Imperial Germany – A Gender analysis’, *Yearbook of the Leo Beck Institute*, Vol. XXVII, 1982, p.4 and p.5.

⁹ For instance, Moses Mendelssohn (1729-86), a German Jew, was one of the main proponents of the assimilation of the Jews in the German cultural community.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3.

Kaplan's concept can apply to any Jewish diaspora, whether in Egypt, France or Australia. As will be demonstrated later in this work, assimilation was the policy of conformity advocated by the Australian government towards its non-British migrants of the immediate postwar period.¹¹ The understanding was that those migrants were to shed their cultures, traditions and languages and through socialisation away from their own ethnic group, and eventually, intermarriage, become undistinguishable from the host population.

Integration is also a social process of entering a host society engaged in by a minority but on a more egalitarian basis. The Oxford Dictionary defines integration as 'the bringing into equal membership of a common society those groups or persons previously discriminated against on racial or cultural grounds.'¹² For instance, from the mid-1960s to 1973, the Australian government policy in respect to its non-British migrant population gradually abandoned a failing assimilation strategy for the concept of integration. This new policy recognised the diverse needs of the migrant population and did not advocate the necessary loss of 'any individual's original language and customs but nevertheless, saw their principal value in their utility as a means to full participation in an integrated Australian culture.'¹³

From 1973, the notion of 'multiculturalism' was introduced to foster full integration whilst allowing each ethnic group to retain their unique cultural identity. Thus, the term has come to describe the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian society. As noted by Rutland, in a multicultural society, 'newcomers are encouraged to maintain and promote their ethnic heritage' with the view that 'a pluralistic approach will enrich the Australian way of life and cultural heritage.'¹⁴ For migrants such as the Jews from Egypt, considering the intrinsic multicultural and multilingual aspect of their identity, it is clear that this new policy promoted an even greater sense of comfort and belonging to Australian society. The acceptance of diversity leads to the next step in the process of socialisation of minority groups, which is acculturation. Acculturation refers to the concept of mutual contribution of both minority

¹¹ Janis Wilton and Richard Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia – The post-war migrant experience*, Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia, 1984, pp.17-22.

¹² *Oxford English Dictionary*, Second Edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

¹³ Australian Government immigration policies as set out by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs.

¹⁴ Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, p. 370. Rutland quoted Janis Wilton and Richard Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia: the post-war migrant experience*, Victoria: Penguin Australia, 1984, p. 34, where Wilton and Bosworth stated that the Whitlam era 'symbolised the acceptance that multiculturalism had replaced assimilationism or even integrationism as the basis of a national immigration policy.'

migrant groups and the dominant host society to the makeup of a common national identity.¹⁵ Kaplan, on the other hand, defined acculturation as:

the acceptance of many of the customs and cultural patterns of the majority of society and the simultaneous commitment (conscious or unconscious) to the preservation of ethnic and/or religious distinctiveness.¹⁶

Thus, Jews in Imperial Germany ‘acculturated’ by accepting ‘the standards of the dominant culture’ while recognising and maintaining ethnic separateness. It is the same process by which the group of Egyptian Jews became Australian or French and remained Jewish at the same time.

The present research and subsequent evaluation of the collected data have been conducted keeping in mind those definitions of the conceptual framework. The themes of assimilation, integration, acculturation and multiculturalism are central to postwar Australian history. This thesis aims to shed more light on the macro-situation through a micro-study of Egyptian Jews in Australia.

The first chapter of this thesis reviews what has been written on Egyptian Jews after their dispersion throughout the Western world and particularly Australia and France. Although their ‘second exodus’ has been the subject of a number of academic monographs and theses in Israel, Europe and the Americas, the specific character of their dispersion after 1948 has only interested a handful of scholars of Jewish history. The body of literature covering this topic is not extensive.¹⁷ The state of research on Egyptian Jews in Australia is understandably even more restricted in view of their small number and low profile. The few historians who dealt with this issue did so briefly, in the context of a broader study of Sephardim in Australia. In France, where the size of the Egyptian diaspora is much more important, personal migration stories have been the object of several memoirs but, even there, it seems that only a few researchers engaged in a serious and systematic study of the Egyptian Jews as a distinct migrant group.

Chapter II outlines the methodological strategies employed to construct the thesis including a description of the different approaches to the evaluation of the data, bearing in mind the basic

¹⁵ *Oxford English Dictionnary*.

¹⁶ Kaplan, *The Acculturation, Assimilation and Integration of Jews in Imperial Germany*, p.4.

¹⁷ Shimon Shamir, ‘Notes on researching the Modern History of Egytian Jewry’, in *Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Centre in Cairo*, no. 23, June 1998, p.3.

social concepts that have just been outlined. Oral history as a research tool is discussed with the view of identifying its inherent strengths and weaknesses, as well as explaining why it was particularly appropriate for this study. The use of archival records and secondary sources was also essential for comparing and contrasting the results of the collected data.

Based on primary and secondary sources, Chapter III proceeds to establish the history of the Jews of Egypt in the modern period, starting with the landing of Napoleon Bonaparte in 1798. Following a thematic approach, this section concentrates on the rise and fall of Egyptian Jewry, looking at the way the Jews of Egypt responded to the clashing ideologies of the interwar period and focussing on the chain of events that led to their mass exodus starting from 1948 and ending with the near-total demise of a viable Jewish community in Egypt.

Both Chapters IV and V deal with the oral history data, using a quantitative and qualitative approach by linking the questions to the findings. Chapter IV compares and contrasts elements of the Australian participants' stories and their personal perspective of the events that so dramatically changed their lives, to the official version of those same events. The analysis of their demographic, ethnic, socio-economic and cultural characteristics leads to a reconstruction of their experience as Jews in Egypt, evoking both the privileges they enjoyed earlier and the discrimination they suffered later. It also helps to define their identity as a pluralistic, multicultural and multilingual group. Chapter V examines the religious divisions of the sample group into Sephardim, Ashkenazim and Karaites, again comparing and contrasting their differences and similarities. It also looks at the themes of inclusion versus exclusion, and allegiance versus alienation, in terms of the participants' own perception of their place in an independent Egyptian nation and their level of involvement in the political scene.

In Chapter VI, the events of the three successive wars that triggered the exodus of Egyptian Jews are evaluated in relation to the participants' personal experience, clearly showing that the majority was more or less coerced into leaving the country, either through direct expulsion or economic strangulation. Some of the questions raised in this chapter are: did the participants expect that rejection, was it justified and how prepared were they for emigration?

Chapter VII proceeds to explore the process of migration of the sample group and the different stages of the journey to Australia. It outlines the impact of the restrictive 'White

Australia' policy and the various difficulties it imposed on Jews of Middle Eastern origin. It also sheds light on the crucial role played by Jewish institutions and their leaders in securing landing permits for Egyptian Jews. It evaluates their difficult beginnings in Australia, their gradual integration and contribution to both mainstream society and Jewish community. Chapter VIII elaborates on the concept of plural identities, revealing how Egyptian-Jewish migrants negotiated the various layers of their identity in Australia. It also assesses their interaction with other Jewish ethnic groups and their commitment to Jewish communal issues, linking up with the broad concepts of forced emigration, integration, acculturation and identity.

The analysis of all those aspects of migration, led me to widen the scope of my research in Australia with a comparative study of the immigration experience of a select number of Egyptian Jews to France, contrasting the two geographical, social and cultural contexts, again using oral history as a research tool. The differences and similarities between the two experiences will be discussed, taking into consideration the difficult socio-economic conditions both in Australia and France in the 1950s and 1960s, and the critical role played by international and local Jewish organizations in the migration and integration process of the Jewish refugees from Egypt. The crucial themes of culture, integration and acceptance by the host society, are central to this chapter as well as the themes of memory and transmission of the group's cultural heritage to the next generation.

In Australia, the Jews of Egypt have not particularly attracted the attention of sociologists as a migrant group. Within the context of Australian Jewry, their story is largely unknown. Therefore, my in-depth analysis of their migration experience in Australia, looking at their demographics, ethnic, national and religious profile, western education, multilinguism and other facets of their multi-layered identity, covers an area of the rich Australian history of migration that has remained unexplored.

Apart from the personal aim of preserving historical data and memoirs of a community which has almost disappeared, the objectives of this thesis are to evaluate the migration experience of a particular ethno-religious group, by looking into the history of the Jews of Egypt, past and present, and compare certain aspects of their experience with that of a similar group in France. At the same time, my work intends to shed more light on certain key issues of Australian immigration. The topics of forced emigration, memory, resettlement, and

reconstruction of identity of a minority migrant group into the dominant society, all fit into the realm of important concepts of social sciences. Through the use of my two sample groups as a successful example of a 'second time around' acculturation, I hope to contribute to the body of research on the exile and migration of minorities and on the policies that regulate the process of assimilation and integration of those minorities into the host society.

CHAPTER I:

State of Research

The modern history of the Jews of Egypt and their dispersion after 1948 has only recently started to attract the attention of scholars. Although serious research on that topic has made significant progress since the 1980s, the amount of published material dealing with this topic is still not extensive. Even less has been written on their migration experience to Australia owing to their small numbers and low profile. On the other hand, the study of Jews in the Islamic world has generated several publications from a number of scholars. The well-known Orientalist, Bernard Lewis delved into the complex and often paradoxical history of Jewish-Muslim relations from the late medieval to the early modern period in his 1984 publication *The Jews of Islam*.¹ Bat-Ye'or (pseudonym of Giselle Littman), an independent scholar and émigrée from Egypt living in Switzerland since 1956, published *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (1985) in which she re-evaluated the meaning of the 'dhimmi' status for Jews and Christians living under Islamic rule from the time of the prophet Muhammad until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. She argued that the protection the 'People of the Book' were supposed to enjoy according to *shari'a* law was far from idyllic and that, on the contrary, persecution was endemic in Muslim countries. To illustrate her point, she enumerated numerous incidents of anti-dhimmi riots, forced conversion and oppression due to the restrictive legislation that regulated the religious and economic activities of non-believers in the Muslim world. However, she seemed to overlook the long periods when Christians and Jews flourished under Muslim rule and discriminatory provisions were regularly flouted. Her conclusions, even when based on historical data, could be construed as too one-sided and polemical.² The American historian Mark R. Cohen called this style of gloomy representation of Jewish life under Islam 'a neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history', arguing that both this pessimistic interpretation and its opposite, an

¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Jews of Islam*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984. Lewis, Professor of Near Eastern Studies Emeritus at Princeton University, has published several books on Islam and on the relations between the Muslims, the Christians and the Jews in the modern period. They include *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice*, New York: Norton, 1986 and *Cultures in Conflict: Christians, Muslims and Jews in the Age of Discovery*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

² Bat Ye'or has authored three books on the topics of *djihad* and dhimmitude: *The Dhimmi – Jews and Christians under Islam*, Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985; *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam*, 1996; *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilisations collide*, Cranbury, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2002. Her earlier publication, *Les Juifs en Egypte: Aperçu sur 3000 ans d'histoire*, Genève: Editions de l'Avenir, 1971, gave the same critical perspective of Jewish-Arab relations throughout the ages.

inflated vision of an interfaith utopia are but a myth and countermyth, rooted in the current political discourse of Arab and Israeli historiography.³ Other scholars such as Harvey E. Goldberg and Michel Abitbol tend to agree that, with the winds of a new pan-Arabic nationalism blowing since the late 1930s and the identification of Jews as agents of the hated British and French colonialists, the discrimination against the Jews of Arab lands in the hands of their respective governments grew significantly worse.⁴ The argument whether they were genuine victims of persecution in their own land is at the heart of the issue of identification and feelings of belonging that I investigated in the course of my interviews.

The book of Professor Norman A. Stillman, whose special area of interest is Jewish and Islamic history and culture, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, was particularly relevant to my study because of its time frame. It focused on the far-reaching consequences of the sudden and brutal penetration of Europe into the Middle East, with the landing of Napoleon Bonaparte in Egypt in July 1798, and its impact on all the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa, particularly the non-Muslim minorities.⁵ Whereas the Muslims perceived that impact to be a threat to their civilisation, the Jews saw it as a way out of their subordinate status of dhimmis. In fact, Stillman pointed out that before the Europeans' arrival in the area, apart from a very small prosperous minority, the vast majority of Jews were not only poor and oppressed like most of the population but also 'had to bear the burden of social isolation, inferiority, and general opprobrium'.⁶ Whereas France had been the traditional protector of Catholics in the Levant since the sixteenth century, the Jews of the region had no Western protection until the 1830s when England started to take 'a protective interest in the welfare of Ottoman Jews as a group'.⁷ In addition, Stillman portrayed the conflicts faced by traditional Jewish communities in front of the challenges of modernity and the contending

³ See Mark R. Cohen, 'Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History,' *Jerusalem Quarterly* no. 38, Spring 1986, pp.125-37 and 'The Neo-Lachrymose Conception of Jewish-Arab History', *Tikkun* 6, May-June 1991, pp. 55-60. See the rebuttal of Cohen's argument in Norman A. Stillman, 'Myth, Countermyth, and Distortion', *Tikkun* 6, May-June 1991, pp.60-64.

⁴ To name just a few of the historians who researched the lives of Jewish communities of Arab countries, pointing to their chequered history: Renzo de Felice, *Jews in an Arab Land: Libya 1835-1970*, trans. Judith Roumani, Austin: University of Texas, 1985 and Harvey E. Goldberg, *Jewish Life in Muslim Libya: Rivals and Relatives*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. Michel Abitbol, *Le Passé d'une Discorde, Juifs et Arabes du VIIIe à nos jours*, Paris: Perrin, 1999. Shlomo Deshen & Walter P. Zenner, (eds.) *Jews among Muslims: Communities in the Precolonial Middle East*, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1996, and Michael Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria*, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1994.

⁵ See Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979 and *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1991, p.4.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

forces of Zionism, European colonialism and Arab nationalism. He discussed the darkening shadows of the interwar period, the trouble brewing in Palestine, the rise of Nazism and Jewish responses to the problem of antisemitism. He examined the increase of anti-Zionist agitation in the Arab world after 1943, which translated into anti-Jewish riots throughout several Arab countries. He presented the case of Egypt where mass demonstrations accompanied by looting and ransacking of the Jewish quarter and Jewish businesses, occurred on the anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, 2 November 1945.⁸ According to Stillman, by the time the State of Israel was established in 1948, the status of Jewish minorities in Arab lands was already considerably weakened, and their faith in a secure future in those countries significantly eroded. Therefore, one of his main contentions was that although the question of Palestine was certainly ‘a major contributing factor in all of this, ...it was by no means the only one’.⁹ He pointed to the strong ethnic and religious component of Arab nationalism, which was gradually excluding Jewish minorities from the national project, and to the first Arab-Israeli war, which led to the beginning of a mass exodus of Jewish populations from the Arab world.¹⁰ That exodus was resumed in force after the October 1956 war, which is considered to have been the *coup de grâce* for an Egyptian Jewry already destabilised by the uncovering in 1954 of a spy and sabotage ring composed of eleven young Egyptian Jews working for Israel.¹¹ Stillman also provided an invaluable collection of primary sources, selected from various archives, particularly from the records of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU)*, as well as from newspapers, correspondence and diaries. These documents bear testimony to the past vibrancy and diversity of the Jewish communities of the Arab world and their responses to the challenges of modernity. They speak for themselves by bringing to life the historical upheavals of the period and their influence on the local Jewish

⁸ Ibid., pp.142-3, added that, on that day, the Ashkenazi synagogue of Cairo was also ransacked and burned and that an apologetic government ‘offered to bear the expenses for rebuilding the ruined synagogue.’

⁹ Ibid., pp.149-50.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.164-5, stated that in the case of Egyptian Jewry, apart from the Zionist idealists, it was mostly the lower and lower middle class of Jews, particularly the ‘stateless individuals ...hurt by the 1947 Egyptianization laws’ who left at this time.

¹¹ Regarding the notorious ‘Lavon Affair’, Stillman recommended a series of different perspectives of the events, namely, Eliyahu Hasin and Dan Horowitz, *The Affair*, Tel Aviv, 1961 [Heb]; Avri El-ad with James Creech, *Decline of Honour*, Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1976; and Aviezer Golan, *Operation Suzannah: As Told to Aviezer Golan by Marcelle Ninio, Victor Levy, Robert Dassa and Philip Natanson*, trans. Peretz Kidron, New York: Harpers and Row, 1978. For more recent studies, see Uri Bar-Joseph, *Intelligence Intervention in the Politics of Democratic States: The United States, Israel, and Britain*, University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1995; and Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion's Spy: The Story of the Political Scandal that Shaped Modern Israel*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.

populations, providing the researcher with the opportunity to make his or her own assessment of the situation based on these primary sources.¹²

Specific study of modern Egyptian Jewry includes the works of scholars such as Joel Beinin, Maurice Fargeon, Jacques Hassoun, Gudrun Krämer, Jacob Landau, Michael Laskier, and Shimon Shamir, all of which were found to be invaluable tools for my own research. The 1938 monograph of Maurice Fargeon, *Les Juifs en Egypte: Depuis les origines jusqu'à ce jour*, was interesting because, as per its title, it claimed to cover the whole period of Jewish history in Egypt from biblical times until the onset of World War II.¹³ The section that was relevant to this thesis dealt with the ethnic characteristics and the demography of Egyptian Jewry, from the time of Mohammed Ali, Viceroy of Egypt (1805-1848) to the beginning of King Farouk's reign (1937-1952). The book endeavoured to paint a total picture by including both urban and rural Jewish communities, noting their religious, philanthropic, and cultural institutions, their communal leaders, their schools, their synagogues and the individual rabbis who served the different congregations. It also presented interesting statistics, listing Jews according to place of residence, gender, and personal status. The importance of this book as a social document related mainly in its perspective of a particularly golden era in the history of Egyptian Jewry. However, there are a number of problems associated with Fargeon's study. Firstly, some of his estimates have been challenged by modern-day scholars, especially in regard to the Napoleonic period.¹⁴ In addition, Fargeon did not offer any critical evaluation of the situation of Egyptian Jewry. He painted an idealised picture of a community very much in command of its own destiny, very comfortable in its Egyptian home without a hint of the rising tensions in the political and social arena. It is obvious that this picture reflected the worldview of the author as well as the general feeling of security and supreme confidence most Egyptian Jews basked in pre-1948.

¹² Stillman also expanded on the issue of Middle Eastern and North African Jewries and their confrontation with modernity 'as a result of the impact of an ascendant Europe upon the economic, political, and cultural life of the Islamic world' (p. 60). See also Harvey E. Goldberg (ed.), *Sephardi and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996, pp.59-72.

¹³ Maurice Fargeon, *Les Juifs en Egypte: depuis les origines jusqu'à ce jour*, Cairo: Paul Barbey, 1938. He also published a book on the contribution of Jewish doctors and lawyers to Egypt: *Médecins et Avocats juifs au service de l'Egypte*, Cairo: Imprimerie Lencioni, 1939, and edited two editions of the Jews of Egypt yearbooks: *Annuaire des Juifs d'Egypte et du Proche-Orient, 1942*, Cairo: La Société des Editions Historiques Juives d'Egypte, 1943 and *Annuaire des Juifs d'Egypte et du Proche-Orient, 5706/1945-1946*, Cairo: La Société des Editions Historiques Juives d'Egypte, 1945.

¹⁴ Jacob M. Landau, in *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, New York: New York University Press, 1969, p.4, stated that 'Fargeon's estimate that 30,000 Jews lived in Egypt at the time of the Napoleonic expedition is practically baseless'.

Jacob M. Landau's monograph, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, was found to be much more precise and scholarly in its study of demography, place of residence and occupation, based on solid literary sources and official censuses. These elements attested to the inferior social, economic and political status of Egyptian Jews in those days and shed light on the reasons why the Jews actively sought foreign protection. Landau meticulously outlined the community structure and its institutions as well as the inter-communal relations. He also reviewed the domain of intellectual and religious life, pointing out the paucity of literary works written by Jews and published in Egypt until the end of World War I, apart from a number of religious studies and didactic publications. Nevertheless, Landau noted the high level of literacy within the community and listed the different schools attended by Jewish children, highlighting the critical role played by the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in the realm of Jewish and secular education. He also commented on the gradual decline in religious observance amongst the young with the advent of modernity and the growing attraction of European culture. In addition, he looked into the initial struggle of an organised Zionist movement in Egypt up to World War I, attributing this struggle to the apolitical nature of most Egyptian Jews and their deep sense of security in the country. Like Stillman, Landau has included in his work a number of original documents either in Arabic, English, French or Hebrew, collected from various archives, that vividly illustrated the general situation of Jews in Egypt and their activities from about 1750 to 1916. In addition, Landau's book entitled *Middle Eastern Themes*, published in 1973, brought together a series of journal articles he had previously written.¹⁵ This collection included a number of chapters that concerned Egyptian Jewry. Namely, one chapter provided a review of the ritual murder accusations - mostly from the Greek Orthodox community - that occurred in Egypt during the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, based on archival records of the Foreign Ministries in London and Rome.¹⁶ Another chapter evaluated the part played by the Jewish community in the

¹⁵ Landau, *Middle Eastern Themes*, London: Frank Cass, 1973.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter 5, pp. 99-14. 'Ritual Murder Accusations in Nineteenth Century Egypt' was first published in *Sefunot* (Jerusalem), V: 1961, pp.417-460. Why the Greeks were the major inciters and instigators of these accusations against the Jews was one of the questions raised by Landau who saw the fundamental reason as economic competition between the two minority groups. With the political tension prevailing at the time and the deep resentment of foreign interference, it is likely that the Greeks - and later the Syrian Christians - wanted the Jews to be their scapegoat for the mob's hatred of foreigners and thus save their own position.' The documents also showed that the Greeks succeeded at times in recruiting local Arabs to their cause. The Jewish reaction was, for the most part, to ask the protection of foreign powers such as Britain, France and Italy. It was only with the establishment of British rule in Egypt in 1882, that the Jews of Egypt experienced a growing feeling of security. However, Landau concluded that most Egyptians still considered the Jews as foreigners 'identifying Zionism with the European infiltration of the Middle East'. Therefore, the perception of the Jews as an estranged group, along with 'the self-willed isolation of the Jews in Egypt...may have contributed to make it difficult for them to settle down as an integral element of the population in the following years.'

modernisation of education in nineteenth-century Egypt.¹⁷ The story of the most interesting figure among the leading Jewish supporters of Egyptian nationalism, Yacub Sanua, known as Abu Naddara (1839-1912) was also included. Landau highlighted the latter's importance in the literary and journalistic fields and in the Egyptian theatre where he introduced political satire using for the first time colloquial Arabic.¹⁸ By exposing the social and political context of the environment of Egyptian Jews in the pre-1914 period, Landau's work has significantly contributed to the understanding of the whole period and therefore was found to be extremely useful to the present study.

Another important study that dealt with different aspects of the Jewish society in modern Egypt, was Shimon Shamir's book, *The Jews of Egypt – A Mediterranean Society in Modern Times*, published in 1987. This publication incorporated a collection of papers by a number of Israeli and international scholars such as Aryeh Schmuelewitz, Jacob M. Landau, Shamir himself, Gudrun Krämer, Jacques Hassoun, Sasson Somekh and others, presented at a conference on 'the Jews of Egypt in Modern Times' convened at Tel Aviv University in June 1984. These authors have each selected topics within their sphere of interest, such as the Ottoman background of the Jews in Egypt, the extent of their political participation in Egyptian society, their contribution to the economy and to the Egyptian-Arabic culture, their diversity and finally 'the self-view of Egyptian Jews and the ways these Jews were viewed by the Egyptian majority and by the founders of Israeli society'.¹⁹ Shamir dealt with the complicated issue of Egyptian nationality, by looking at the evolution of the Egyptian nationality laws and how they were applied to the Jews, a topic that concerned quite a number of my respondents. The book also included in its appendix section an array of impressive primary sources related to the respective subject of each section.²⁰

¹⁷ Ibid., chapter 7, pp.157-171. 'The Beginnings of Modernization in Education: The Jewish Community of Egypt as a Case Study' was reprinted, with permission, from: William R. Polk and Richard L. Chambers, (eds), *Beginnings of Modernization in the Middle East: the nineteenth century*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968, pp.299-312.

¹⁸ Landau, *Middle Eastern Themes*, chapter 8, pp.172-188. 'Abu Naddara: An Egyptian Jewish Nationalist' was reprinted with permission, from *The Journal of Jewish Studies*, III (1), 1952, pp.30-44.

¹⁹ Shimon Shamir, (ed.) *The Jews of Egypt – A Mediterranean Society in Modern Times*, Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987, p.xviii. Shamir holds the Kaplan Chair in the History of Egypt and Israel at Tel Aviv University. He was the first Israeli ambassador to Egypt and the founder and first director of the Israeli Academic Centre in Cairo.

²⁰ Ibid., Appendix A, pp.215-35: two little-known chronicles in Portuguese about some anti-Jewish rioting that occurred in the mid-eighteenth century in Cairo; Appendix B, pp.237-242: the original text of the Egyptian Nationality Law of 1929 in French; Appendix C, pp.243-64: Sanua's correspondence in Arabic.

One of the most comprehensive studies of the history of Egyptian Jewry in the first half of the twentieth century can be found in *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914-1952*, by Gudrun Krämer, published in 1989.²¹ Krämer chose to focus on the social and economic position of the Jews in Egyptian society as well as on their political activities, compared to the position of other non-Muslim minorities. Drawing on a number of primary and secondary sources, Krämer painted an extremely informative picture of the Jewish community with its diverse ethnic composition, its multiplicity of languages, its distinctive rites and regional origins and its occupational and social structure. Krämer also pointed to the stability and efficiency of the communal organisation in spite of the diversity of the Jewish population and looked at the complex issues of nationality and the privileged status of foreigners. Furthermore, Krämer reviewed the socio-economic and political change that occurred between 1915 and 1948, and its negative impact on the relations between the Muslim majority and the local Jewish minority from the late 1930s onwards. She argued – which is also my contention – that this was really the starting point for the beginning of the end for the Jews in Egypt, ‘not so much caused by new conditions or behaviour within the Jewish minority itself as by a gradual shift in the political climate in Egyptian society at large’.²² She raised the critical questions of integration and acculturation of Jews into Egyptian society in view of the inevitable alienation caused by their wholesale adoption of European languages and education. Her research seems to suggest that, even if, from the 1930s, the bulk of Egyptian Jews had opted for the Arabic language and culture and had actively participated in Egyptian life and politics, it was probably already too late for them as non-Muslims and non-Arabs to be accepted as full members of Egyptian society. Although she rejected Bat Ye’or’s thesis that Jews were consistently subjected to discrimination in Egypt, as in all Arab countries, she also argued against the postulation that it was mainly Zionism that created problems between the Muslim majority and the Jewish minority. Rather, she was of the opinion that there were periods of acceptance and rejection and, whilst Zionism played a part in the latter, it was not the only factor. The weakness of her book lies in the fact that she only briefly touched on the mass departure of the Jews after the Arab-Israeli wars of 1956 and 1967, and did not add anything

²¹ Gudrun Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt, 1914-1952*, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989. Originally, this study was a doctoral dissertation published in German in 1982 and then translated into English in 1985-87; ‘Political Participation of the Jews in Egypt Between World War I and the 1952 Revolution’ in Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt, A Mediterranean Society*, pp. 68-82; ‘“Radical” Nationalists, Fundamentalists, and the Jews in Egypt or, Who is a Real Egyptian’ in Gabirel R. Warburg and Uri M. Kupferschmidt (eds.), *Islam, Nationalism, and Radicalism in Egypt and the Sudan*, New York: Praeger Publishers, 1983, pp.354-371.

²² Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.116.

new to our understanding of the events after the 1948 war and its consequences for Egyptian Jewry.

The historian Michael Laskier provided a different perspective in his book, *The Jews of Egypt – 1920-1970*, published in 1992.²³ He focused on the last decades of Jewish life in Egypt, particularly on the Zionist activities of the community and the gradual disintegration and dispersal of the Jewish community in the wake of the three Arab-Israeli wars. Laskier argued that previous studies failed to examine the relationship between the Jews of Egypt and the Yishuv since the time of the granting of the Palestinian Mandate to Great Britain in 1920. He also maintained that the critical role of the French-language Jewish press was largely overlooked. Laskier ended his study in 1970, the date of the death of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, when Jewish communal life in the country had virtually come to an end. His main sources were the archives of American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) in Jerusalem and New York, the Israel State Archives for the period 1948-1958, as well as the Egyptian, Israeli and European press. Oral history methodology was used to gather the testimonies of former Israeli emissaries and members of Zionist youth movements. Laskier's examination of the issue of illegal immigration to Palestine prior to the establishment of the Jewish State in 1948, and the crucial role of the Yishuv's emissaries to Egypt, was particularly interesting as it authenticated the testimonies of some of my interviewees who reported having been involved in some of the covert operations mentioned by Laskier.²⁴ Even more relevant to my own work was Laskier's research on the aftermath of the 1948 War, with the arbitrary sequestration of the largest Jewish enterprises and the internment conditions of Zionist suspects at the Huckstep prison camp. Once again, the details he provided confirmed

²³ Michael M Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt – 1920-1970: In the Midst of Zionism, Anti-Semitism and the Middle East Conflict*, New York University Press, 1992. Laskier has also published a number of journal articles which expanded on the issues discussed in his book, namely: 'From War to War: The Jews of Egypt from 1948 to 1970,' *Studies in Zionism* 7, no. 1, 1986, pp.111-47; 'Egypt's Jewry in the Post-World War II Period: 1945-1948', *Revue des Etudes Juives* 148, July-Dec. 1989, pp.337-60; 'Egyptian Jewry Under the Nasser Regime, 1956-1970', *Middle Eastern Studies* 31, no.3, July 1995, pp.573-619; and 'In the aftermath of Israel's Sinai Campaign: the Leadership Crisis and Political and Economical decline of Egypt's Jewish Communities during the Late 1950s and 1960s', *Africana Journal*, Vol. XVII, 1998, pp.289-306. He has also written extensively on other Jewish communities of the Muslim world: *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco: 1862-1962*, Albany, 1983; 'From Hafsia to Bizerte: Tunisia's Nationalist Struggle and Tunisian Jewry, 1952-61', *Mediterranean Historical Review*, vol. 2, December 1987, No. 2, pp. 188-222; and 'North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria', *Middle Eastern Studies*, April 1995, v. 31, no. 2, p. 391.

²⁴ Laskier, in *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.114-6, mentioned the famed 'Operation Passover' when, in April 1946, just before Passover, a group of about one hundred Jewish youths illegally crossed the desert by train, under the nose of the British, wearing British army uniforms and carrying British identification cards. My respondent #62 was in that group and recalled feeling very elated to be in what was then Palestine on that very symbolic Jewish festival.

the testimonies of people I met through my research, who had personally endured those identical experiences.²⁵ The most interesting section of the book dealt with the previously mentioned Lavon Affair - also known as 'The Mishap' - when Egyptian authorities arrested and tried a group of young Egyptian Jews in 1954 on charges of espionage and sabotage on behalf of Israel. Laskier provided transcripts of the interrogation of the accused during the trial as well as reports on the political maneuverings of Israel and major Jewish and international organisations, once the individual verdicts were delivered.²⁶ Laskier was very critical of Israeli military intelligence handling of the whole matter, especially in view of the tragic outcome for the accused, calling it 'an irresponsible act politically'.²⁷ By providing such extensive primary sources relating to that highly embarrassing episode for the Israeli government, Laskier demonstrated that in spite of his empathy with the Zionist State, he was not an apologist and his coverage of the Lavon Affair was extensive and balanced. The last chapter of his book examined the deteriorating situation of Egyptian Jewry after the Suez War in 1956, highlighting the crucial role played by the Jewish Agency, American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), and the International Red Cross (ICRC), in the exodus and resettlement of the Jewish refugees from Egypt. One of the valuable aspects of Laskier's work was his analysis of the role of ICRC, which acted as the intermediary for the Jewish organisations, 'as no Jewish organization – Zionist or non-Zionist – could function in Egypt itself' and it was 'the cooperation between the UHS and ICRC that made it possible to accomplish movements of population'.²⁸ The crucial part played by HIAS, with the complicity of the Spanish Embassy in Cairo, in securing the release from jail of nearly all the Jews imprisoned by Nasser in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day War, has been documented by Tad Szulc, an award-winning journalist and author, in his book *The Secret Alliance*, published in 1991.²⁹

²⁵ Huckstep was an old American military camp left over from World War II, at Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo. It had been transformed into a detention centre for Zionists and Communists at the time of both the 1948 war and the 1956 war with Israel. A number of my case studies were detained at Huckstep.

²⁶ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.205-51. See also Laskier, 'A document on Anglo-Jewry's Intervention on behalf of Egyptian Jews on trial for espionage and sabotage; December 1954', *Michael X*, Tel Aviv, 1986, pp. 143-52.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.246. Two of the conspirators, Shmu'el Azhar and Moshe Marzuq, were executed. Me'ir Meyuhas and Me'ir Za'fran were sentenced to seven years. Robert Dassa, Victor Levy, Philip Natanson and Marcelle Ninio were still serving out their sentences when they were finally released in the prisoner exchange following the Six-Day War in 1967.

²⁸ Laskier, 'In the Aftermath of Israel's Sinai Campaign...' *Africana Journal*, Vol. XVII, 1998, pp.290-1.

²⁹ Tad Szulc, *The Secret Alliance: The Extraordinary Story of the Rescue of the Jews since World War II*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991, pp.281-3. I also came across an unpublished article, translated from French by Rabbi YL Cohen, of the Sephardi Synagogue of Melbourne. It seems that the son of Rabbi Isaac (Zaki) Acher Zal 91870-1963), who had worked together with the chief Rabbi of Cairo, Nahoum Effendi, was

The most incisive and provocative piece of scholarly work on the subject is undoubtedly Joel Beinin's book, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry – Culture, Politics and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, published in 1998.³⁰ This book focused on two critical periods in the life of the Jewish community in Egypt: the period immediately preceding 1948 until the 1956 Suez War and its aftermath, and the period from 1957 with its gradual deterioration until its nearly total disintegration after the 1967 War. The focus then shifts to the dispersion and re-establishment of Egyptian Jewish diasporas in Israel, France and the United States. Beinin also discussed the crucial question of identity, either reconstructed or retrieved, based on what he called the contested memories of life in Egypt obtained through oral history.

The author sketched out the diverse ethnic, linguistic, ideological, and socio-economic background of Egyptian Jews and their multiple identities. He pointed out the complex divisions between Sephardim, Ashkenazim and Karaites, between the Egyptianised and the Europeanised, and between the rich and the poor. He raised the conflicting themes of nationalism versus colonialism, demonstrating why most Egyptian Jews had difficulty in obtaining Egyptian citizenship and how a privileged few bought the security of European nationalities while the majority remained stateless. He argued that a large proportion of young middle class Jews, imbued in French education and socialist ideology, were highly politicised. However, only a small minority turned to Zionism, while a more significant number embraced Marxist ideology, which somewhat explains his focus on the Egyptian graduates of *Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir* - a politically left Zionist youth movement – in Israel and on the communist émigrés in France.³¹ According to Beinin's basic thesis, most Egyptian Jews were sympathetic to the idea of a Zionist state as a haven for European Jews after the Holocaust, but they did not believe they were in need of such a haven, in view of their own secure situation in Egypt. It was only after the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and more so after the 1956

the President of the Jewish Community of Cairo, and at the same time, the solicitor of the Spanish Embassy in Cairo. 'Due to his high position at the Spanish Embassy, Mayer Acher succeeded to assist a great number of Jews who had no Egyptian identity to leave for Israel by getting them Spanish passports.'

³⁰ Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998. Beinin is Professor of Middle Eastern History at Stanford University. He also authored a number of books on related topics, such as: *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987; *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report*, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989; *Was the Red Flag Flying There? Marxist Politics and the Arab-Israeli Conflict in Egypt and Israel, 1948-1965*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990; and *Workers and Peasants in the Modern Middle East*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

³¹ Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.142, stated that '1,000 or more Jews participated in the Egyptian communist party from the 1930s to the 1950s' whereas most of the older members of the middle and upper bourgeoisie rejected political Zionism and professed their loyalty to Egypt to protect their comfortable lifestyle.

Suez crisis, when that security was fatally compromised, that some reconsidered the option of immigrating to Israel.

Beinin was, therefore, highly critical of the overly negative representation of Jewish-Arab history promoted by Zionist historiography and adopted by writers such as Bat Ye'or, one of the earliest exponents of this perspective.³² He also pointed to other historians, namely Norman Stillman, Bernard Lewis, and Martin Gilbert, who, in his opinion, all tend to take the same view.³³ He claimed that prior to 1948, most leaders of the Jewish community, even those who considered themselves Zionists, were proud of the long and peaceful history of the Jews in Egypt. Although he rightly argued against the contention that Jewish life in Muslim countries was a story of continuous persecution³⁴, it is also undeniable that, since the decline of the Ottoman Empire and by the time of the French invasion of Egypt, Jewish life in those places was in a state of significant degradation. One only has to read Edward William Lane, who lived in Cairo in the 1830s, depicting the Jews as being 'held in the utmost contempt and abhorrence by the Mooslims in general' and their condition, apart from a privileged few, as 'wretched', many in this group depending on alms.³⁵ One could just as rightly argue that the gradual improvement of their social and legal position from the 1840s was facilitated by the intrusion and growing influence of Europe in the Middle East and that their personal welfare and economic security was insured by the presence of European governments.³⁶ Once these governments were removed or removed themselves from the area, that protection was no longer effective and the status of Jews plummeted. Beinin's proposition that 'the neo-lachrymose interpretation of Jewish Arab history distracted attention from Palestinian claims by constructing a narrative focusing on the eternal suffering of Jews under Islam'³⁷, could be construed to emanate from Beinin's personal ideological views rather than from solid

³² See footnote 2 on Bat-Ye'or.

³³ Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, pp.14-15. See Stillman, *the Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*; Lewis, *Semites and Anti-Semites*; Martin Gilbert, *The Jews of Arab Lands: Their History in Maps*, London: World Organisation of Jews from Arab countries and Board of Deputies of British Jews, 1976.

³⁴ See Krämer, *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.234-5, who postulated that Egyptian Jews experienced 'neither uninterrupted persecution and terror nor uninterrupted harmony.' See Philip Mendes' soon to be published essay, 'Voluntary Departure or Expulsion: The Jewish Exodus from Modern Egypt, 1948-1967', where he also examined the two perspectives used to explain the modern exodus from Egypt. The pro-Zionist perspective is based on the assumption that the vicarious persecution of the Jews by the Arabs eventually led to their wholesale expulsion whereas the anti-Zionist perspective 'portrays a harmonious historical relation between Jews and Muslims that was destroyed only by modern Zionist intervention.'

³⁵ Edward William Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians 1833-1835*, London: Natali, 1836, Vol. II, pp.344-49.

³⁶ As stated by Stillman in *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, 'no native group benefited more from Europe's intrusion into the Middle East than did the non-Muslim minorities.'

³⁷ Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.15.

evidence.³⁸ On the other hand, Beinín's own historical account validated the claims that the Jews of Egypt were encountering increasing difficulties in obtaining citizenship and in being recognised as 'real Egyptians' and were specifically targeted after each of the three wars between Egypt and Israel.³⁹ In the last chapter of his book, he even rejected, although not as vehemently, the claims of innocence and fairness of the Egyptian nationalist discourse regarding the fate of the Jews of the Arab world. Like Krämer, he tended to conclude that the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. It is, therefore, difficult to understand his rationalisation that since those 'occasional instances of socially structured discrimination against Jews in Egypt' were linked to the contextual political climate, they were not significant.⁴⁰ Even if, in the second half of the twentieth century, the Jews of Egypt were not discriminated upon for being Jewish but for being 'others' in the midst of an Arab Muslim world, the fact remains that they were forcibly driven out of that world and suffered considerably in the process.⁴¹ This is an issue that the present thesis addresses through the in-depth analysis of the various experiences of my interviewees.

The other controversial issue raised by Beinín is his retelling of the Israeli intelligence operation of July 1954, known as the Lavon Affair, already discussed in relation with Laskier's work. Beinín stated that it was 'the most salient symbol of the transformation of the status of the Jews in Egypt'.⁴² Again, from Beinín's own account of the so-called 'Affair', the official Egyptian representation tried to minimise the seriousness of the conspiracy, calling it 'child's play', and to stress that the accused were not on trial as Jews.⁴³ It is again difficult to see how this could be assumed to represent the defining moment for Egyptian Jewry. I would argue that, although this particular episode was certainly embarrassing and somewhat destabilising for the Jews of Egypt at the time, their future in the country could already have been forecast after the signing of the Treaty of Montreux in 1937, that abolished the privileges granted to foreign nationals and their protégés by the Capitulations regime. The first cracks

³⁸ Ibid., p.12.

³⁹ Ibid, p.250. Beinín pointed out that until 'the capitulations were cancelled by the 1937 Montreux Convention, there were few advantages to becoming an Egyptian citizen. This was a new political category that came into existence only in 1922, and those who had a choice were not eager to abandon foreign citizenship for it. However, by the late 1930s, when the advantages of Egyptian citizenship had become clear, the application of the 1929 citizenship law made it more difficult for Jews to claim Egyptian citizenship. Poor and middle-class autochthonous Jews found it difficult to prove that their families had resided continuously in Egypt since 1848, as the law required. They constituted the main group of Jews who were entitled to Egyptian citizenship, and they were often refused or subjected to lengthy bureaucratic delays when they officially applied for it.'

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp.17-18.

⁴¹ Their suffering does not negate the suffering of Palestinians in Israel.

⁴² Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.19.

⁴³ Ibid., pp.99-101.

started to appear straight after World War II with the riots in the streets of Cairo organised by the fundamentalist Muslim Brotherhood and the major blow came with the tripartite attack on Egypt by England, France and Israel in 1956.

The most interesting part of Beinín's work was his discussion of the crucial themes of identity, dispersion and struggle over the retrieval of identity, which are at the centre of the present study. He claimed that, as far as the Jews of Egypt were concerned, there was no single, authentic Egyptian Jewish identity, arguing – justly so - that 'the Jews of Egypt were always already a heterogeneous community of cosmopolitan hybrids. This was both the strength of the community and one of the factors in its ultimate demise'.⁴⁴ He tried to represent that heterogeneity through his selection of case studies: the graduates of the socialist Zionist movement *ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir* in Israel, the Communist émigrés in France, and the small community of Karaites in San Francisco. However, since all three case studies represented very marginal subgroups within Egyptian Jewry, one is left to wonder about the identity of the bulk of Jewish Egyptian émigrés, their destinations and their diverse post-exodus experiences, particularly since the title of Beinín's book promised the readers a history of 'the Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry'.⁴⁵ The present thesis intends to fill part of that void by listening to the stories of some of the more ordinary types of émigrés from Egypt.

Nevertheless, Beinín did present an argument based on a critical assessment of a variety of sources and texts. His knowledge of Hebrew and Arabic allowed him to delve extensively into the Egyptian and Israeli as well as the American and British archival collections. In addition to published and unpublished works, he also examined articles that appeared in the Egyptian and Israeli press, as well as films and television programs. He made extensive use of oral history as an additional investigative research tool and demonstrated an impressive insight particularly on the fundamental issue of identity conflict and resolution in minority groups. Beinín also offered an original perspective of the Levantine identity which, in his opinion, Egyptian Jews typified. He argued that they represented a model of how people handle multiple identities and loyalties in a turbulent political and cultural context, although Beinín recognised the drawbacks of marginal identities. Thus, his work constitutes an essential tool for researchers interested in the topic of Egyptian Jews and their recent

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp.131-41. Beinín's restricted and restrictive selection of material was possibly the result of his own personal experience which he divulged in the course of his narrative: his beginnings as a leftist American Zionist, his alienation from Zionism after a stay on a Marxist kibbutz and his scholarly research in Egypt on the Egyptian working class and the left.

dispersion, and I heavily relied on some of the data he provided. It is also critically important to the study of the formation of culture and identities and to the understanding of the complexities of the modern Middle East.

Any serious research into the profile of Egyptian Jews as a migrant group had to start with the examination of official records, namely the National Archives of Australia where the records of their landing permit applications and entry into the country as well as all related correspondence can be found. Turnbull's *Safe Haven, Records of the Jewish Experience in Australia*, (1999) greatly facilitated my access to those records. This publication is part of a series of Research Guides published by the National Archives with that specific aim.⁴⁶ For example, Chapter 2 of that guide provided an overview of government policy regarding the entry of Jews into Australia from the beginning of the twentieth century to 1974, with a listing of correspondence files, their reference number, their origin, their present location and their contents. The files A445, 325/5/9 included information on the 'Alleged discrimination against admission of Jews ... Question of Jewish or Not on departmental forms, 1939-54'; the files A446, 1972/77857 referred to the 'Admission of Jews of Middle East Origin, 1949-74'. Chapter 3 listed immigration case files that contained correspondence between individual migrants and the Department of Immigration 'on a range of issues, including the initial application to migrate, security and other assessments, travel arrangements, etc.'⁴⁷ Chapter 4 offered a representative sampling of series related to the naturalisation records of non-British Jewish immigrants and other sections dealt with different aspects of Jewish life in Australia, including a select bibliography as well as a list of Jewish research sites on the Internet.

Australian scholarship directly related to the topic of Egyptian Jewry was found to be very limited. In view of the tragic circumstances that befell European Jewry pre- and post-World War II, any study of Jewish migration has largely focused on the Jewish refugees from Europe. Small sub-groups such as the Jews from Egypt have not attracted the attention of migration researchers although they were also refugees when they arrived in this country. Their numbers were too small and their migration appeared too uneventful to attract the attention of people outside a restricted inner circle. Nevertheless, their immigration experience was a part, however small, of the broader picture of the history of postwar migration to Australia.

⁴⁶ Malcom J. Turnbull, *Safe Haven*, Canberra: National Archives, 12, 1999, p.5.

⁴⁷ In that section, I even found references to some of my interviewees' case files.

Postwar migration to Australia

The consultation of specific publications by historians such as Janis Wilton and Richard Bosworth⁴⁸, and James Jupp, all eminent experts on Australian immigration history, was critical in providing the understanding of the implementation of the White Australia policy in the postwar period and how it applied to non-British migrants, particularly non-Europeans.⁴⁹ For instance, in his book *Immigration*, Jupp reminded his readers that it was the Chifley Labor government that introduced for the first time ‘mass non-British immigration in 1947 and began the process that changed Australia from a monocultural to a multicultural society’.⁵⁰ The extensive recruiting program from the Displaced Persons (DP) camps of Europe, which were full of refugees looking for a new home, was not inclusive of all ethnic groups and Jupp stated that Jewish refugees ‘were actively discouraged in the early post-war stages, reflecting a fear of antisemitism in Australia’⁵¹. Suzanne Rutland, who has written extensively on Australian Jewish migration, already mentioned in her book, *The Edge of the Diaspora*, that Calwell imposed a quota system ‘which limited the number of Jews permitted to travel on any boat to twenty-five percent’.⁵² It was clear, therefore, according to Jupp, that the DP program, while allowing for the first time into Australia ‘large numbers of non-British aliens’, remained essentially true to the principles of the White Australia policy.⁵³

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to minimise the important part played by Australia in the DP resettlement scheme by welcoming over 170,000 refugees between 1947-54, followed by British, Dutch, German, Italian and Greek migrants. Panich’s publication, *Sanctuary? Remembering Postwar Immigration*, analysed the problems of transportation and reception of such a large intake of newcomers. While most of the expenses for transporting these refugees

⁴⁸ Janis Wilton and Richard Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia – The post-war migrant experience*, Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books Australia Ltd., 1984.

⁴⁹ James Jupp, *Immigration*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, in association with Oxford University Press, 1991, pp.69-81.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.70.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.72

⁵² Suzanne D. Rutland, *The Edge of the Diaspora: Two Centuries of Jewish Settlement in Australia*, Sydney: Collins, 1988 p.233; second ed. Sydney: Brandl & Schlesinger, 1997. See also her article ‘Subtle Exclusions: Postwar Jewish Emigration to Australia and the Impact of the IRO Scheme’, *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, Vol.10, No.1, Summer 2001, pp.50-66.

⁵³ Jupp, *Immigration*, p. 72. For a dissenting view of Australia’s treatment of the Jewish refugees, see W. D. Rubinstein ‘Australia and The Refugee Jews of Europe, 1933-1954: a Dissenting View’, *AJHS Journal*, Vol. 10, Part 6, 1989, pp.500-523. Rubinstein is of the opinion that the conclusions drawn by Rutland and other historians such as Michael Blakeney in *Australia and the Jewish Refugees, 1933-1948*, Kent: Croon Helm, 1985, were ‘seriously and perhaps fundamentally flawed by ... a failure to place the small numbers who came in their proper contextual framework, above all (but not exclusively) in its failure ... to acknowledge the force of Zionist opposition to refugee migration to Australia.’

were covered by the IRO (International Refugee Organisation) supplemented by an *ex gratis* payment of £10 per head by Australia, and British migrants enjoyed the privilege of the 1946 ‘U.K. Free and Assisted Passage Agreement’ for which they paid £10, this was not the case for the 15,000 Jewish refugees who came to Australia by 1949 as noted by Panich:

Because Calwell did not wish to be seen to discriminate in favour of Jews, the Australian government did not give assisted passages to Jewish immigrants. Instead, two American-Jewish organizations, JOINT (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) and HIAS (Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Society), financed the shipping charters and were repaid by Australian sponsors.⁵⁴

Using oral history, photographs, original documents and general memorabilia, Panich recorded the early experiences of over 100 refugees/migrants who were seeking to restart their lives in Australia. The very personal accounts of their voyage in ‘refugee class’ and the living conditions in the reception and holding centres where they were first settled provided a fascinating insight into a unique era in the history of Australian immigration.

The issues raised by Panich were applicable to all non-British migrants of the postwar period and, therefore, her study of European refugees in the immediate postwar period was just as relevant for the Egyptian Jews who arrived in Australia from 1948 onwards. The issue of assimilation, which dominated the postwar immigration program and ‘demanded that all previous allegiances be relinquished, along with traditions and languages’ was very much at the heart of Egyptian Jews’ early experience, as revealed by my own research.⁵⁵ Panich pointed to the fundamental differences between the mindset of a refugee and that of an economic migrant and how the different motivation impacted on the way they adapted to their new environment and on their sense of identity, which was also relevant to my own research.

Through the oral testimonies of ‘New Australians’, Panich recorded the culture shock they experienced when confronted with the mentality, habits and customs of ‘Old Australians’, an experience that was very similar to that of the Egyptian refugees. Conversely, many ‘Old Australians’, faced with such an intense immigrant influx from vastly differing backgrounds, saw the newcomers as a threat to their British way of life and therefore harboured feelings of resentment and suspicion. Another crucial issue raised by Panich was the problem of

⁵⁴ Catherine Panich, *Sanctuary? Remembering Postwar Immigration*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin Australia, 1988, p.xv. Interestingly, this is the only reference in the book to Jewish postwar migration to Australia.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p.171.

language: ‘Many Europeans who had a poor command of English or who spoke with a heavy accent were treated unsympathetically’ and discriminated against in the workplace.⁵⁶

Being herself the daughter of postwar migrants, Panich’s connection with the subject matter was deeply personal as well as scholarly. Her examples were varied, interesting and clear. She identified very succinctly the problems raised by such an intense immigration scheme, which makes her book extremely valuable for researchers interested in the history of Australian migration policies. As she stated in her conclusion, ‘unless closely associated with someone who did come to Australia after the war, one can have little understanding of the conditions and experiences shared by these immigrants.’⁵⁷

Those conditions and experiences were also the object of a detailed and comprehensive study of Bonegilla, one of the most important ‘Reception and Training’ Centres, as part of a series of history monographs, promoted by the Department of History at the University of Melbourne. Glenda Sluga’s *Bonegilla ‘A Place of No Hope’*, published in 1988, was largely based on oral sources such as formal and informal interviews, conversations and personal letters, complemented by research into government archives.⁵⁸ Three hundred thousand people from all over Europe passed through Bonegilla from its opening in 1947 to its closure in 1971. The monograph clearly illustrated how integral the role of a reception centre such as Bonegilla was to the overall postwar immigration program. It was run according to the principles upon which the program was implemented. For instance, its geographical isolation from metropolitan centres - eight miles from Albury, the nearest town – was considered essential to maximise ‘the immigrants’ potential as a directable and controllable pool of labour’.⁵⁹ It was a place where, within a period of six weeks, the newcomers would be taught English, familiarised with the Australian way of life and then placed in ‘suitable’ jobs.⁶⁰

Jewish migration

In her book, *The Edge of the Diaspora*, Rutland discussed at length the issue of postwar Jewish migration to Australia. She outlined the negative reactions to Calwell’s initially

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 162.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 186

⁵⁸ Glenda Sluga, *Bonegilla ‘A Place of No Hope’*, Melbourne: University of Melbourne History Department, 1988.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.x.

⁶⁰ Ibid., pp.ix-xi. The occupational classifications were mostly ‘labourer’ or ‘domestic’. Since those refugees/migrants had undertaken to work for two years in exchange for their assisted or free passage to Australia, they could be placed in jobs Australians did not want to do and wherever the economy needed them.

generous policy on Jewish refugee migration by politicians, members of the press and the general public. Consequently, Calwell imposed a quota system ‘which limited the number of Jews permitted to travel on any boat to twenty-five percent’ and made travel to Australia from Europe ‘almost an impossibility’.⁶¹ Furthermore, Rutland pointed out in her 1990 doctoral dissertation, that the Australian government, ‘both Labor and Liberal, insisted that the reception and integration of Jewish refugees was the sole responsibility of the Jewish community’.⁶² In fact, very few Jewish refugees went through the government-run migrant reception centres. Assistance came from their families in Australia and the American Jewish refugees agencies, such as HIAS and JDC, together with the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS).⁶³ A network was developed to welcome and help the newcomers to acclimatise to their new life. Amongst many others, migrant hostels such as Camberwell House in Melbourne, the Chip Chase Hostel – later Komlos - in Sydney and Welfare House in Brisbane, were quickly established and played a crucial role in the reception and accommodation of refugees.⁶⁴ In the course of my research, some of my respondents confirmed being welcomed by representatives of Jewish institutions as soon as they landed on Australian soil, whilst others were offered low interest loans by the Jewish Welfare Building Society when the time came for them to buy their first house. The history of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, Sydney was researched by Anne Andgel and published in 1989.⁶⁵

Rutland also dealt briefly with the question of the migration of Sephardi Jews in her study of Jewish settlement in Australia, pointing out that after 1948 and throughout the early 1950s, the official policy of the Australian Government was to prohibit entry to all Jews of Middle Eastern background on the presumption that many were ‘non-European in appearance’.⁶⁶ Egyptian Jews who sought to migrate to Australia in 1956 fell in that category and it has been suggested that it was only on humanitarian grounds that the admission of relatives was agreed

⁶¹ Rutland, *The Edge of the Diaspora*, pp.227-43.

⁶² Rutland, ‘The History of Australian Jewry 1945-1960’, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sydney, 1990, pp.104-160; see also *The Edge of the Diaspora*, pp.251-6. Amongst my respondents, I only had one (#7) who went through the transit camp of Bonegilla although he arrived in Australia much later, in 1968, as a government-assisted migrant with a two-year contract.

⁶³ Rutland, *The Edge of the Diaspora*, 1997, p.233.

⁶⁴ For complete list of Jewish hostels, see Rutland, *The Jews in Australia*, 2005, Appendix 3. The great majority of my sample group did not go through the Jewish hostels and seem to have relied on family and friends for their initial accommodation needs. Only one of my respondents (#76) reported being accommodated with her family in the Komlos hostel in Greenwich when they landed in Sydney with a refugee status. All the financial support during their transit period in Paris and their travel expenses to Australia had been provided by HIAS.

⁶⁵ Anne Andgel, *Fifty Years of Caring: The History of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, 1936-1986*, Sydney, 1988.

⁶⁶ Rutland, *The Edge of the Diaspora*, pp.242-3.

upon. Gouttman published an interesting article on that very issue where he analysed the rationale behind the 1949 secret decision by the Australian Department of Immigration to prohibit entry into Australia to Jews of 'Middle East Origin'. This decision was based on a warning in 1948 emanating from an Australian immigration officer in India that a large number of 'coloured' Jews from the Middle East were considering immigrating to Australia. As late as 1954, this policy of exclusion was still being implemented.⁶⁷ The question on immigration forms No. 40 and No. 47, 'Are you Jewish', was only deleted in 1954 as noted by Rutland.⁶⁸ Gouttman pointed out that the question of the admission of the Jews from Egypt arose at a time when the Department of Immigration was unable 'to maintain its traditional stand' on a preferred migration from Great Britain and had to look to other sources of migrants. Since a significant number of the applicants from Egypt held Italian or Spanish passports, they could not be classified as being of Middle Eastern origin, and on that basis, were granted landing permits. Gouttman agreed that the intense lobbying mainly by the small Jewish community of Adelaide on behalf of family and friends in Egypt could have contributed to their admission to Australia. However, his contention was that the failure of the exclusionist policy was inevitable once the religious question was removed from the application forms 40 and 47 and the Jews of Middle Eastern origin 'blended into the common pool of potential immigrants'.⁶⁹ This paper succinctly and clearly analysed the restrictive aspects of the White Australia policy on the postwar immigration of Jews in general and particularly those suspected to be coloured, but it did not touch upon other critical issues related to the settlement of minorities, such as acceptance by and acculturation to the host society.

Migration of Egyptian Jews

In 1984, Rutland was the first Australian scholar to conduct a case study of a relatively large group of Egyptian Jews from Egypt who settled in Adelaide where they made a significant impact on the existing Jewish community. Based on oral testimonies by a number of key individuals and an examination of the records of various communal institutions such as Adelaide Masada College, the South Australia branch of the Australian Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), the South Australia Jewish Board of Deputies and the Australian Jewish

⁶⁷ Question 17 on a 1950 Incoming Passenger Card that had to be filled by incoming migrants asked for racial origin: European, Asiatic, African, Polynesian (National Archives of Australia).

⁶⁸ See Rutland, 'Are you Jewish?: Post-war Jewish immigration to Australia, 1945-1954', *The Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, 1991, pp.35-58.

⁶⁹ Rodney Gouttman, 'A Jew and Coloured Too! Immigration of "Jews of Middle East Origin" to Australia 1949-58', *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol. 12, 1, 1993.

Welfare Society, Rutland briefly related the intense lobbying ‘on the part of Adelaide Jewry to facilitate the admission of relatives from Egypt into Australia’ and the significant help provided by the Labour Member of Parliament, Patrick Galvin, in that respect. Rutland reported on their smooth integration within the ranks of the South Australian Jewish community, in spite of some initial tensions. In that case study, Rutland discussed the value of oral history as an investigative tool, showing how it helps to better understand ‘the adjustment and interaction of the immigrant culture with the host society’, while recognising its limitations.⁷⁰

The topic of the settlement of a numerically significant group of Egyptian Jews in Adelaide was only taken up again in 1998 as part of a study of Adelaide Jewry and its institutions by Bernard Hyams who reported that, in spite of their difficult beginnings, the Egyptian Jews ‘maintained a degree of internal social solidarity’ because of their emphasis on family hospitality. He also indicated that, according to the records of the local Jewish Welfare Society, that institution provided a lot of support to the Egyptian refugees when they first arrived.⁷¹ However, given the numerical importance of Egyptian Jews in Adelaide, Hyams’ discussion of their contribution was superficial and he did not add anything new to the existing scholarship.

It is mainly through the study of Sephardim in Australia that the specific case of Egyptian Jews, as a major Sephardi group, came to be investigated. Aaron Aaron, founder of the New South Wales Association of Sephardim, published his book, *The Sephardim of Australia & New Zealand*, in 1979, where he retraced their early steps in Australasia from 1788. He briefly noted the influx of Egyptian Jews to Adelaide since 1956 and their active contribution to the Jewish life of the community but most of his study concentrated on the Sydney Sephardim and the events that led to the formation of the Association in 1954 and the subsequent building of the Sephardi synagogue in 1962. Although this section was obviously based on personal experience, Aaron made extensive use of primary sources, such as correspondence, brochures, minutes and articles in the Jewish press. He acknowledged the important part played by Max D. Friedman, General Secretary of the Zionist Organisation, and Rabbi Dr. Israel Porush, the Chief Minister of the Great Synagogue in organising the

⁷⁰ Rutland, ‘Egyptian Jews in Adelaide: a Case Study in Oral History’, *The Oral History Association of Australia Journal*. Vol.6, 1984, pp.19-24. This article was also included as an appendix to Rutland’s doctorate thesis, ‘The History of Australian Jewry’.

⁷¹ Bernard Hyams, *Surviving, A History of the Institutions and Organisations of the Adelaide Jewish Community*, Adelaide: Hyde Park Press, 1998, pp. 102-05.

Sydney Sephardim. He also acknowledged the vital role of Sydney D. Einfeld in overcoming the initial reluctance of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) to approach the Federal Government on the matter of Sephardi immigration, and in securing landing permits for Sephardim from Egypt and Asia. However, when it came to relating the various inner conflicts and rifts that occurred within the Association's membership and between the Association and other communal bodies such as ECAJ and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies in the late 1960s and 1970s, the author chose to deal with these controversial issues by reproducing editorials or articles that appeared in the Jewish press at the time or through copies of related correspondence between the various communal bodies, without further comment or evaluation on his part. He demonstrated that the Association had to fight for the right of a representative to sit on the board of ECAJ and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies. He revealed the Association's grievances about the lack of action by those institutions regarding the freedom of Syrian Jewry, suggesting a climate of discrimination by the Ashkenazi majority against the Sephardi sections of the community. The same methodology was used to report on the various activities of the Sydney Sephardi community through brochures, invitations and photos.

The merit of this book related largely to its collection of these invaluable primary sources, which succeeded in painting a fascinating picture of a man who worked tirelessly to bring to the predominantly Ashkenazi Jewish community an awareness of a different but worthy Jewish tradition. In his conclusion, the author stated that he hoped that his book, in addition to recording the past and present history of the Sephardi community, would intensify 'the historical consciousness of many Sephardim in Australia, inspiring them...to preserve the continuity of their noble customs and traditions by establishing Sephardi institutions in Australia'.⁷²

It was in the context of an extensive academic study of the Sephardim of Sydney that Naomi Gale's doctoral research also dealt with some of the issues relating to the immigration of the Jews of Egypt who settled in Sydney.⁷³ Gale reviewed the racially motivated Australian

⁷² Aaron Aaron, *The Sephardim of Australia & New Zealand*, Sydney: Aaraon Aaron, 1979, p.279.

⁷³ Naomi Gale, 'From the Homeland to Sydney: Kinship, Religion, and Ethnicity among Sephardim', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sydney, 1990 (to be published in May 2006). See also her journal articles: 'Sephardim and Sephardic Identity in Sydney' *AJHS Journal*, Vol.11, Part 2, pp.332-50, 1991; 'A Case of double rejection: the immigration of Sephardim to Australia', *New Community*, 20 (2), pp.269-286, Jan. 94; 'Religious involution: sacred and secular conflict among Sephardi Jews in Australia', *Ethnology*, Vol. 36, 1997; and 'Residence, social mobility and practice theory: the case of Sephardic Jews of Sydney', *Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 35, 1999. Her

immigration policy vis-à-vis Sephardim of Middle Eastern origin, that labelled them ‘an undesirable class of Jews’ because of their dark complexion. She explored their past history and experiences as new immigrants in an Anglo-Australian society. According to their oral testimonies, apart from the help provided by prominent Ashkenazim such as Sydney D. Einfeld and Abram Landa, there was a general lack of enthusiasm shown by Jewish philanthropic institutions towards the Sephardi newcomers whether they were from Egypt, India or Iraq. This attitude caused some lingering bitterness amongst a number of Sephardim who arrived in Australia after 1956, especially when they compared it to the preferential treatment granted to the Hungarian refugees around the same period.

Gale raised the complex issue of Sephardi identity as a combination of self-identification and identification by others. She argued that the Sephardim themselves often viewed their ethnicity as an obstacle to acceptance by the dominant Ashkenazi community, resulting in a negative ethnic identity and self-rejection. Gale also noted that the process of acculturation or ‘Ashkenization’ – as she called it - of the young accelerated through the attendance of Jewish day schools, which I also found to be true in the sample group I interviewed. On the other hand, it seems that the Ashkenazim, who considered themselves a part of ‘White Australia’ and feared an antisemitic backlash, displayed a superior attitude towards Afro-Asian Sephardi Jews, based on cultural and racial criteria. Linked to the problem of retrieval of identity, Gale looked into the fundamental reasons for the emergence of tension between Sephardim of Iraqi or Indian origin and those of Egyptian origin, pointing to the lack of a common past between the two sub-groups apart from their ethnic heterogeneity, some variation in their rituals and different levels of religiosity. Gale deduced that the tension was rooted in the perception that the Egyptians considered themselves as being superior, more cultured and generally more westernised than the Iraqis. The major reasons for her concern were the lack of productive communication, a general climate of apathy, and the continual process of assimilation to Ashkenazi and Australian societies particularly within the younger group. Gale’s conclusions were not too optimistic regarding the viability of the Sephardi community and the maintenance of a distinctive Sephardi identity in the next generation. She also pointed to the Sephardi leadership’s failure to develop ‘strong social and cultural strategies to permit them

[the Sephardim] to implement their distinctiveness either formally or informally within the general Jewish community'.⁷⁴

Although Gale's research focused on the Sydney Sephardi community and most of her findings referred mainly to the Iraqi/Indian component, her perceptive and informative views on the many facets of Sephardi identity and her inferences seemed just as valid for the other Sephardi communities of Melbourne and Adelaide and therefore constituted an essential tool for an in-depth study of these communities, including the Egyptian one.

Another important doctoral dissertation on the topic of Sephardi Jewry of NSW is Myer Samra's 'Yisrael Rhammana: Constructions of Identity among Iraqi Jews in Sydney, Australia', which recorded 'the experience of the [Iraqi] community during its first generations in Australia' from the point of view of an insider, and addressed the question of Sephardi identity and the problems of cross-cultural communication between minority and dominant groups.⁷⁵ Although the focus of Samra's study was his own community, he included some comparative research on the group of Egyptian Jews. For instance, he found that the interaction between Iraqis and Egyptian Jews, apart from their common involvement in the Synagogue, was limited due to 'differences in cultural taste and education', particularly the common use of French in the Egyptian milieu.⁷⁶

Like Gale, Samra discussed the Australian immigration policy pertaining to its discrimination against Sephardi Jews and the various representations that were made to the government to allow them into the country on the basis that they were not 'coloured'.⁷⁷ He tried to establish a profile of the Sephardi community of NSW based on its ethnic background and demographic features as well as the analysis of the residential distribution of Sephardi

⁷⁴ Gale, 'From the Homeland to Sydney...', pp. 409-11.

⁷⁵ Myer Samra, 'Yisrael Rhammana: Constructions of Identity among Iraqi Jews in Sydney, Australia', Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sydney, 1988, p.vii. Samra explained that the dictum *Yisrael Rhammana* meaning 'the Jews are a pomegranate' was 'central to the Iraqi Jews' interpretation of their own identity. Apart from his work on Sephardi Jews in Australia, Samra has also conducted research and published on the Lost tribes of Israel and the Benei Menashe tribe in India.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.180.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp.127-8, mentioned a particular meeting arranged by Sydney Einfeld, 'in his dual capacity as President of the AJWS and Vice-President of the ECAJ', where he took Aaron Aaron, President of the NSW Association of Sephardim and his Secretary Monte Moss, to meet personally with the Secretary for Immigration, Sir Tasman Heyes, and plead their case.

households, including the Egyptian component, within the metropolitan regions of Sydney.⁷⁸ According to his research, there are around 3,000 Sephardi Jews in NSW and the Egyptian Jews are the second largest segment of this category after the Iraqis although he did not provide exact figures pertaining to the relative size of the two groups.

In his examination of the issues of identity and identification, Samra argued that in order to be better accepted by the dominant Australian/Ashkenazi Jewish community as European Jews and not as Arab Jews, the Iraqi Jews, who were ethnically a very homogeneous group, constructed for themselves a new identity as Sephardim, strictly meaning from Spain, although they were not of Spanish ancestry. This reconstructed identity was not favourably looked at by the Egyptian Sephardim who claimed a variety of ethnic origins but still perceived themselves as authentic Sephardim unlike their Iraqi brethren. As for the issue of identification with Israel, Samra's research has shown that while Israel was important to 'Sydney's Sephardi Jews at virtually all levels and phases of their identity', the fact that it was central to the identity of all Jews, whether Sephardi or Ashkenazi, created a bond between the two groups.⁷⁹

The split within the Sephardi community into two different institutions, the NSW Association of Sephardim (NAS) and the Eastern Jewish Association (EJA), as well as the political features of their relationship and the often strained relationship with the wider Jewish community were also extensively dealt with in the course of Samra's work. He raised other issues at the heart of the community's concerns, namely Sephardi prestige and education, involvement in communal institutions at an executive level and the plight of Jews in Arab lands.

As noted earlier, the focus of Samra's study was mainly on the Iraqi community, and the Egyptian Jews were only mentioned in the context of their relationship with the Iraqis, as fellow Sephardim. Nevertheless, Samra's incisive analysis of his community was extremely useful for my own research, since the two communities shared important cultural and

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp.151-3. He remarked on the relative concentration of Egyptian Jews in the St. George area, removed from the main centres of Jewish population, which might explain their under representation in the membership list of the NSW Association of Sephardim (NAS),

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 251.

religious similarities, in spite of their ethnic differences. His conclusions about the future of Sephardim in Australia appear more optimistic than Gale's predictions.⁸⁰

Australia and the 1956 Suez Crisis

What was the Australian political context around the time of the arrival of Egyptian Jews, which was mainly in the wake of the Suez crisis of 1956? Again, the study of official documents and correspondence files of the Department of External Affairs, held at the National Archives, revealed Australia's close monitoring of the situation and its firm siding with Great Britain in the matter of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal in July 1956 by Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. For example, Series A1209/23, Item 57/5736 PT2 contained a confidential report addressed to the Prime Minister R.G. Menzies briefing him on the personality of Gamal Abdel Nasser, before his official meeting with the latter in August 1956. This file also included a message from the president of Egypt to the Australian prime minister, agreeing to meet with him and other representatives of the eighteen user countries of the Canal and the subsequent exchanges between the Australian Legation in Cairo and Canberra about the failure of the talks between Nasser and that Committee. W. J. Hudson's work, *Blind Loyalty*, revealed the leading part taken by Australia through Menzies' mission to Cairo and his seemingly blind and extraordinary loyalty to the British cause, in spite of dissenting opinions within the ranks of his own government, notably by his foreign minister, Richard Casey and his defence minister, Philip MacBride.⁸¹ Hudson argued that this kind of devotion to the mother country was symptomatic of:

the generation born late in Victoria's reign and educated in Edward's ... at the end of several decades of prodigious development in the colonies and when the British Empire reigned supreme. The major figures in the Australian cabinet of 1956 were men of that generation.⁸²

A further proof of this unswerving devotion to the mother country by the Menzies government was provided in the recent work of Chanan Reich, *Australia and Israel, An*

⁸⁰ Ibid., p.283. Samra noted that 'despite the divisions and the conflicts apparent within the community, we [the Iraqis and Egyptians] find a shared value of Sephardi unity.' See also Samra's unpublished essay 'The Founding of Bet Yosef: Conflict and Community among Sephardi Jews' in which he related the history of the split of the Sydney Sephardi community into four congregations, the Sephardi Synagogue run by the NSW Association of Sephardim, the Eastern Jewish Association, the Bet Yosef Synagogue and the Rambam Synagogue. He also commented on the future of the Sephardi community, in view of these internal divisions, predicting that there should be 'room for the development of a federation of Sephardi organizations in Sydney'.

⁸¹ W.J. Hudson, *Blind Loyalty - Australia and the Suez Crisis, 1956*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1989.

⁸² Ibid., p.8.

Ambiguous relationship. Reich countered the commonly held belief that ‘Australia, in contrast with Britain, sympathised with Jewish national aspirations in Palestine before 1948’, particularly in view of the active role of H.V. Evatt, as chairman of the United Nations Ad Hoc Committee on Palestine, ‘in bringing about the partition resolution of 29 November 1947’.⁸³ Reich’s examination of recently declassified documents both in Israel and Australia revealed that the United Australia Party (UAP) – predecessor of the Liberal Party - headed by R.G. Menzies in 1939-41, unequivocally supported British policy in Palestine, including its opposition to the migration of Jewish refugees to Palestine. It was, therefore, very hostile to the *Yishuv* because of its anti-British feelings. The records showed that Menzies had even opposed the partition of Palestine in 1947, and ‘vehemently resisted the establishment of the State of Israel.’⁸⁴ This harsh attitude from the Menzies government of 1939-1941 was reflected in its restrictive immigration policy concerning Jewish European refugees seeking entry into Australia before 1939.⁸⁵ In the early 1950s, Australia’s Middle East policy continued to mirror that of Britain and the United States regardless of Israel’s interests and in spite of a number of representations by leaders of Australian Jewry asking their government for more support of the Israeli position.

At the time of the 1956 Suez campaign and its aftermath, the familiar pattern of ‘Menzies agreeing, often uncritically, with the policies of the British Government’, was again obvious, except that this time, Britain and France were allies of Israel and the three had acted in collusion. In spite of the fact that Menzies had been left largely in the dark about the whole operation and although he found himself almost isolated, he immediately declared his support of those three countries at the United Nations and even ‘expressed in Parliament an understanding of Israeli position’.⁸⁶ In fact, Reich pointed out that ‘Canberra’s support for Israel coincided with Egypt’s decision to break off diplomatic relations with Australia’.⁸⁷ The stand taken by Australia in this instance could be considered a watershed event in the relations between Australia and Israel as they entered a more cordial phase.

⁸³ Chanan Reich, *Australia and Israel, An Ambiguous Relationship*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002, p.1. H.V. Evatt was at the time the Minister for External Affairs.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.58.

⁸⁵ It was only when the new Labor government headed by John Curtin came into power in October 1941 that ‘the Australian labour movement expressed its solidarity with the Zionist ideal of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine and pledged itself to accommodate as many refugees as possible in Australia after the war.’ See *ibid.*, p.16.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

Reich has produced a comprehensive and important study of the early history of the Liberal Party relationship with Israel before and after its inception, its reaction to the conflict in the Middle East and the role of the Australian Jewish leadership. Although this book did not deal specifically with the issue of Egyptian Jews, I found particularly interesting the fact that it was the Suez crisis of 1956, precisely the event that triggered the ‘second exodus’ from Egypt and the arrival in Australia of most of the Egyptian refugees, that marked the beginning of close and warm bilateral relations between the Liberal Party and Israel.

Other Egyptian Diasporas

Because the Jews of Egypt have been perceived as part of the broader Sephardi group although they had different ethnic origins and a substantial minority amongst them was Ashkenazi, the circumstances surrounding their migration to Australia have not generated a large volume of publications, contrary to what has been happening from the 1980s in the various diasporas where Jews from Egypt settled after their exodus, particularly France, the United States, Brazil and, of course, Israel. When I delved into the state of research on Egyptian Jews in France, I discovered that some of them were actively involved in promoting their specificity as Jews in and from Egypt. The name of Jacques Hassoun emerged as the one of the most significant amongst the many expatriate Egyptian Jews who have written about their past history or given oral testimonies. Hassoun was one of the founding members of the *Association pour la Sauvegarde du Patrimoine Culturel des Juifs d’Egypte* (ASPCJE), created in Paris in 1979.⁸⁸ His significant contribution to the publication of the Association’s quarterly bulletin, *Nahar Misraïm* (River of Egypt), remained constant for the nine years of its existence from 1980 to 1989.⁸⁹ All the issues covered in the bulletin, whether historical, religious, political or personal, concerned the Jews of Egypt before and after their so-called second exodus. In 1984, Hassoun also collaborated with other members of the Association in the publication of a popular ‘coffee-table’ book, *Juifs d’Egypte, Images et Textes*, that traced the long history of the Jews in Egypt through an impressive collection of photographs, images

⁸⁸ Jacques Hassoun, born in Egypt in 1936, joined the largest of the clandestine Egyptian communist organisations headed by Henri Curiel in 1953, at age seventeen. Shortly after, he was arrested together with other members of the group and spent six months in prison before being expelled. He relocated in Paris in 1954 where he became a well-known psychiatrist. After his first trip back to Egypt in 1975, he became very involved with a group of Jewish émigrés from Egypt and within the framework of the ASPCJE and its Bulletin *Nahar Misraïm*, he remained very committed to the preservation of the Jewish Egyptian cultural heritage. He edited two books on that same topic, *Juifs du Nil*, Paris: Le Sycomore, 1981 and *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, Paris: Minerve, 1990. Joel Beinin, in his book *the Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry* has added in appendix an interview he had with Hassoun in November 1995. Hassoun died in Paris in April 1999.

⁸⁹ *Nahar Misraïm*, No. 1-33, December 1980 to May 1989.

and accompanying texts.⁹⁰ As the editor of *Histoire des Juifs du Nil* (1990), a book that included a collection of scholarly articles referring to the various stages of Jewish life in Egypt from antiquity to modern times, Hassoun wanted to demonstrate the continuity of a Jewish presence in the land of Egypt going back to the sixth century BCE and up to the mid-twentieth century.⁹¹ The Islamic period was covered by the Egyptian-born historian Alfred Morabia, in a chapter called ‘A l’ombre “protectrice” de l’Islam: les Juifs d’Egypte, de la conquête arabe à l’expédition de Bonaparte (641-1798)’, where he discussed the varying fortunes of Jews in Egypt under Islamic rule until the arrival of the French expedition in 1798, insisting on the fluctuation between the good and the bad times.⁹² Morabia also collaborated with Gudrun Krämer in the covering of the modern period. In the chapter ‘Face à la modernité: les Juifs d’Egypte aux XIXe et XXe siècles’, the two historians assessed the responses of Egyptian Jewry to the challenges of modernity and to the social and political changes that transformed the face of Egypt from the period of Mohammed Ali (1805-1849) to the Six-Day war of 1967. Hassoun’s noteworthy contribution, ‘Chroniques de la vie quotidienne’ presented a chronicle of Jewish life in Egypt in the first half of the twentieth century, looking at the occupations, the customs and religious traditions of ordinary Jews, Rabbanites and Karaites, in their urban or rural environment, while revealing the dichotomy between their primary Egyptian dimension and their emerging Western dimension. The last chapter of the book very fittingly symbolised the end for the Jews in Egypt after a continuous presence of more than twenty-five centuries. It reproduced the personal testimony of an Egyptian Jew as it appeared in the French weekly *L’Express*, in December 1967, relating a story of torture, suffering and humiliations very reminiscent of Holocaust survivors’ narratives. Like most Jewish males over the age of 15, he had been arbitrarily arrested a few weeks after the Six-Day war in June 1967 and spent four difficult months in the notorious Cairo prison of Abou Zaabal, before being simultaneously released and expelled from the country.

⁹⁰ Gilbert Cabasso et al., *Juifs d’Egypte, Images et Textes*, Paris: Editions du Scribe, 1984.

⁹¹ In Hassoun, *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, chapter I, pp.15-45: ‘Splendeurs grecques et misères romaines: les Juifs d’Egypte dans l’Antiquité’ by Joseph Méléze-Modrzejewski. The latter, Ancient History Professor at the Sorbonne, expanded on his research of the ancient history of the Jews in Egypt in his book, *Les Juifs d’Egypte de Ramsès II à Hadrien*, Paris: Presse Universitaire de France, 1997, which was translated into English by Robert Cornman and published by Princeton University Press in 1997 under the title *Jews of Egypt: From Ramses II to Emperor Hadrian*.

⁹² Alfred Morabia, born in Cairo in 1931 and Head of Arabic and Islamic studies at the University of Toulouse-Mirail, wrote an extensive study of the history of Islam and the classic notion of *djihad*, called *Gihad dans l’Islam medieval*. He died in 1986 and his book was published *a posteriori* in 1993 by Albin Michel.

Another Egyptian Jew, Maurice Mizrahi, who saw himself as a committed Jew and an Egyptian citizen, published a book entitled *L’Egypte et ses Juifs – Le Temps Révolu* in 1977, as a testimony to the vital role played by leading Jewish families in the modernisation of Egypt, in the development of the sugar and textile industries, in the banking and transport system, as well as in the building of housing projects and international trade. Mizrahi’s main argument was that through all these economic initiatives, Jews have contributed out of proportion to their numbers to the welfare of Egypt and therefore have more than repaid Egypt’s hospitality.⁹³ Nearly twenty years later, an Egyptian social historian, Samir W. Raafat, who wrote extensively on different aspects of Cairo’s history, seem to share Mizrahi’s perspective in his book *Maadi 1904-1962 - Society and History in a Cairo Suburb*, (1994) by relating how that ‘suburban paradise’ was the result of meticulous planning by British and Jewish companies in the heyday of the British protectorate and free enterprise initiatives amongst privileged minorities. Raafat also wrote several articles that appeared in the Egyptian press, evoking the lives and achievements of famous Jewish families, the history of Egyptian synagogues, and the current status of the few remaining Jews in Egypt.⁹⁴

The Israeli Academic Centre in Cairo, which is the representative in Egypt of the major Israeli universities, has published its own Bulletin since 1982. In 1998, a special issue of that Bulletin was dedicated to the history of the Jews of modern Egypt.⁹⁵ Professor Shimon Shamir, who was the Centre’s founder and first director, has written widely on the topic of modern Egypt as indicated earlier in this chapter.⁹⁶ Shamir contributed the introductory article, in which he examined major trends in current research of that history, highlighting the

⁹³ Maurice Mizrahi was politically active in the so-called ‘liberal’ period of Egyptian nationalism. He was also the founder of the Cairo branch of LICA (*Ligue Internationale contre l’Antisémitisme*) and the initiator of the anti-German boycott of 1933-1939 (see Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp.128-39.)

⁹⁴ Samir W. Raafat, *Maadi 1904-1962 - Society and History in a Cairo Suburb*, Cairo: the Palm Press, 1994. Raafat has also published the following articles - all related to the Jews of Egypt - in the Egyptian press: ‘Dynasty: The House of Yacoub Cattai’, *Egyptian Mail*, 2 April, 1994, p.3; ‘The House Soares Built and How it Became the Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil Museum’, *Egyptian Mail*, 6 May, 1995; ‘Garden City’s Finzi-Continis: a Look at this Neighbourhood’s Last Garden’, *Egyptian Mail*, 17 June, 1995; ‘The National Bank of Egypt, 1898-1956’, *Egyptian Mail*, 11 and 25 May, 1996; ‘The House of Cicurel’, *Al Ahram Weekly*, 15 December, 1994; ‘Ignace Tiegerman’, *Egyptian Mail*, 20 September, 1997; ‘The Maadi Synagogue: If it lights up then it’s Yom Kippur’, *Cairo Times*, 2 October, 1997; ‘Robert Nahman – End of his Era’, *Cairo Times*, 10 November, 1999. Raafat has also managed the Cairo Jewish community website, and the Community Newsletter, Bassatine News, since October 1995.

⁹⁵ Shamir, ‘Notes on Researching the Modern History of Egyptian Jews’, *Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Centre in Cairo*, no. 23, June 1998, pp.3-7. A number of other researchers of Egyptian Jewry’s history also contributed articles to that special edition, including Jacques Hassoun ‘Can Egyptian-Jewish Identity Be Reconstructed in France’, Michael Laskier ‘The Jewish Press in Egypt’, Inbal Perlson ‘Jewish Musicians in Egypt’ and Jacqueline Kahanoff, in ‘My first Passover’.

⁹⁶ As previously indicated, Shamir has published a number of books on Egyptian Jewry, namely, *Self-Views in Historical Perspective in Egypt and Israel*; *The Jews of Egypt: A Mediterranean Society*; and *Egypt from Monarchy to Republic*.

difficulty of studying a community that is dispersed and thus the crucial importance of oral history projects.

The Centre for Studies of the Jewish Egyptian Heritage, founded by Egyptian-born Dr. Arie Schlosberg in 1999, based in Tel Aviv, publishes a bulletin reporting on scholarly and cultural activities in the area of modern Egyptian Jewish history, such as weekly meetings, monthly lectures, films, plays and related publications.⁹⁷ One of the most important aspects of the Centre's function is to grant scholarships to students interested in postgraduate research into the history of modern Egyptian Jewry. Its Bulletin No.4 (Autumn 2004) reported on the 'International Research Conference on the Jews of Egypt in Modern Times' in January 2004, organised by the Department of Jewish Studies of Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv, and opened by Professor Shamir. Most of the speakers were either directly or indirectly connected to the Jewish experience in modern Egypt and their papers covered a variety of social, political, cultural and religious topics.⁹⁸

The International Association of Jews from Egypt (IAJE) based in New York, also produces a newsletter, edited by Dr. Victor D. Sanua, its founder and president, with the specific objective of placing 'the Jews from Egypt on the map' and documenting the history of Egyptian Jewry in modern times.⁹⁹ In addition, a number of articles on the various emigration experiences and memories of Egyptian Jews have appeared in the Jewish press wherever

⁹⁷ Arie Schlosberg was a member of the Zionist youth movement *Hehalutz Hatzair* in Egypt, when it was still legal to do so, prior to 1948. Upon the declaration of the State of Israel on 15 May of that year, he was arrested together with a group of approximately 350 Jews, including Zionists, Communists, community leaders and wealthy businessmen. He was interned at the camp of Abukir, an old British Airforce military camp situated 20 kilometres from Alexandria. When released, Schlosberg immigrated to Israel and is now Professor of Psychiatry at the Faculty of Medicine of Tel Aviv University. Through the numerous activities of the Centre he has founded, he remains totally committed to the preservation and transmission of the Egyptian Jewish heritage.

⁹⁸ Professor Michael Laskier spoke about the 'Inter-Communal Problems and Conflicts within the Jewish community of Cairo: the Mid-1950s to the Mid-1960s'. The historian Dr. Rami Guinat discussed the communist movement in Egypt from a Jewish perspective and Dr. Joseph Marzouq presented a paper on Murad Farag Lishaa (1867-1956), the most distinguished Karaite personality in Egypt who contributed to the writing of the first Egyptian Constitution. The issue of migration was covered by a representative of the Egyptian Jewish community in Brazil and the paper I presented 'Exodus II – from Egypt to Australia' dealt mainly with the Australian Immigration policy of the 1950s and its impact on Egyptian Jewish migrants and the reason why such a great proportion chose to settle in Adelaide.

⁹⁹ See editorial of IAJE Newsletter, Vo.1, no.1, 1999. Dr. Victor D. Sanua, an Egyptian Jew, born in Cairo, left Egypt after 1956 and migrated to the United States. He is a Research Professor in Psychology at St. John's University, Queens N.Y. As the editor of the IAJE Newsletter, he is very active in promoting cultural activities related to the past and present history of Egyptian Jews. He has also written extensively on that topic namely: 'A Study of the adjustment of Sephardi Jews in the New York Metropolitan Area', *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, Vol. IX, No.1, June 1967; 'Immigration of Sephardic Jews from Egypt', *Sephardic History*, May 1997; '“Egypt for the Egyptians” - The story of Abu Naddara (James Sanua) 1839-1912 - A Jewish Egyptian Patriot', *Los Muestrros*, No.32, September 1998; 'Haim Nahum Effendi (1872-1960), Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Egypt', *Los Muestrros*, No.46, March 2002.

Egyptian Jews have settled after their exodus. *Nahar Misraïm*, the revived newsletter of the French *ASPCJE*,¹⁰⁰ the periodical *Los Muestrros – the Sephardic Voice*, published in three languages, Ladino, French and English edited by the author Moïse Rahmani¹⁰¹ in Brussels and the *Jewish Renaissance*¹⁰² in London, have all published oral testimonies of ex-Egyptian Jews or provided primary or secondary sources illustrating Egyptian Jewish history.

It is significant to note that, notwithstanding all the revived interest in the story of Egyptian Jews, a formal and systematic study of Egyptian Jews as a migrant group in France seems to have attracted the attention of only a small number of researchers, although the size of the Egyptian community in that country – over 10,000 – was relatively important. Egyptian-born Ethel Carasso, now living in Paris, presented a Master thesis on the Jewish community of Egypt from 1948 to 1957'.¹⁰³ Her quest was both scholarly and personal since she was only two-years old when her parents left Egypt in 1957 and her connection with Egypt belonged more to the mythical realm. She tried to uncover the fundamental reasons for the liquidation of Egyptian Jewry, besides the obvious and direct link with the 1948 and 1956 Arab-Israeli conflicts.

Carasso first examined the demographic, socio-economic and legal status of the Jewish community before the outbreak of 1948 war with Israel, using primary sources such as government census, and community year books (*l'Annuaire du judaïsme égyptien, Le Caire*,

¹⁰⁰ For instance, in *Nahar Misraïm*, No.20, September 2004, an article appeared recalling the Lavon Affair and its consequences, after announcing the death of Philippe Nathanson, one of the members of the spy ring, who had spent nearly fourteen years in an Egyptian prison before being released in the wake of the 1967 War. *ASPCJE* also encourages budding writers in writing their memoirs and promoted the publication of a book written in 2003 by an ex-Egyptian Jew, Albert Pardo, *L'Égypte que j'ai connue* as a testimonial and a homage to the life in Egypt prior to the Suez crisis of 1956.

¹⁰¹ Moïse Rahmani's latest book, *L'Exode oublié, Juifs des pays arabes (The Forgotten Exodus – Jews of Arab Countries)*, Paris: Editions Raphaël, 2003, retraced the modern history of the Jews in Arab countries and looked at the reasons for their mass exodus between 1948 and 1960. One chapter of this book is devoted to Egypt's Jews (pp.79-203). Rahmani was born in Cairo. His family came from Rhodes and emigrated to Egypt at the end of the nineteenth century. Rahmani left in 1956 just before the Suez crisis and now lives in Brussels after spending his teenage years in the ex-Belgian Congo in a Rhodesli environment. He was awarded the Marcel Marinower Prize 2003 for the publication of a number of books on Sephardi Judaism and Sephardi Jews.

¹⁰² In *Jewish Renaissance*, a quarterly magazine of Jewish culture published in the U.K., Vol. 2, Issue 3, Spring 2003, pp.16-30, a feature on the Jews from Egypt was published with the assistance of *The Association of Jews from Egypt UK*. Egyptian-born British Jews contributed pieces on topics such as 'From Exodus to Exodus' by Alec Nacamuli, which was an exploration of what happened to the Jews of Egypt between the biblical Exodus and the 'second Exodus' in the twentieth century. Other topics included 'The Cairo Genizah' by Maurice Maleh, 'Jewish Alexandria' by Roger Bilboul, and 'Egypt in Israel' by Victor Sanua. More personal contributions were about Teddy Nahmias' bitter-sweet memories of 'A Leavened Passover' on a boat leaving Alexandria as a refugee in 1957, with 'no matzah, no harosset, no maror' but instead a huge cake made with flour and yeast, graciously provided by the Captain and crew to their Jewish passengers.

¹⁰³ Ethel Carasso, 'La Communauté juive d'Égypte de 1948 à 1957', Master thesis, Modern History, Université de Paris X Nanterre, 1982.

1943) that provided useful information on the professions, nationalities, and levels of education of the Jewish *haute bourgeoisie*. She looked at the *Bottin Mondain du Proche-Orient (Le Caire 1954)*, which was a general directory listing all Egyptian notables, both Jews and non-Jews, and finally she examined the British Foreign office archives regarding the Zionist activities of the Jewish community in Egypt. For the second part of her thesis, which traced the gradual decline of the community after 1948, she examined official Egyptian government sources as well as the Arab, international and Jewish press. She studied the various laws enacted by the Egyptian government of the time and their implications for Egyptian Jewry, such as the abolition of the Mixed Tribunals, the martial law of May 1948, the nationality law of 1950 and the text of the Egyptian Constitution of 1956. She particularly noted the creation in 1955 of a special department within the Ministry of Interior in charge of Jewish affairs that implied an official intention to regulate the process of targeting specifically the Jews. To document the mass arrival of Egyptian Jews in France in 1957, she consulted the French Jewish press, mainly the *Arche*, a monthly publication by the umbrella Jewish institution called *Fonds Social Juif Unifié*, as well as the Egyptian and the world press. To collect the data concerning the reasons for their mass exodus and their choice of destination, Carasso used a brief questionnaire divided in two sections. One was quantitative, addressing the demographical details and the other was qualitative addressing the subjective issues of integration, degree of involvement in Zionism, reason for departure and others. This questionnaire was sent to Egyptian Jews who had settled mainly in France, but also in Israel, Switzerland, Great Britain, Italy, Belgium, United States and Australia. Out of 100 questionnaires, 35 were returned including 20 from France, showing that the majority of respondents migrated to their host country mainly because of family reasons. As far as France was concerned, the reason was primarily cultural affinity, which somewhat confirmed my own study of Egyptian Jews in France. There were no follow-up interviews and Carasso's whole thesis was primarily based on the examination of official records, government edicts and the general press, with a very brief section dealing with the answers to the questionnaire. It would have been interesting to have a more comprehensive analysis of that particular data. Nevertheless, the selection of primary sources was broad and instructive. It objectively exposed the political situation in Egypt during the period under examination and the mindset of its leaders regarding the Jewish minority.

Alain Lévy, sociologist, presented an interesting doctoral thesis on the itinerary of an Alexandrian family between 1920 and 1962 in Egypt, North Africa, Western Europe and

Brazil, in the socio-political context of that period.¹⁰⁴ Using what he called '*l'approche biographique*', Lévy's main primary sources were eight members of that family. In the course of several meetings and over a period of several months, alternating between formal, recorded sessions and informal discussions, the interviewees were asked to help reconstruct the history of their family through their personal memories.¹⁰⁵ Lévy's aim was to depict, through those individual stories, their migrating process in its totality by exploring the fundamental reasons for their sudden exile from Alexandria. He argued that the growing feeling of insecurity experienced by the community around them, prepared them to the idea of migration long before they were forced to do so. Lévy's impressive work is a reflection on the conditions of cultural pluralism, in the different socio-economic and political contexts in which this family gravitated, such as cosmopolitan Alexandria, the colonial circles of Upper Egypt, and Algeria in the last years of French rule. In his view, the experience of living in these diverse milieux engendered a special way of behaving and of looking at the world. The notion that Alexandria as a social environment has created an exemplary society capable of co-existing and functioning in harmony with heterogenous ethnic, religious, cultural and national groups anywhere in the world, has been raised by some of the participants of my own research.¹⁰⁶ These are the only two formal studies on the general topic of the immigration of the Jews of Egypt to France that seem to have been undertaken up to this moment, although I have located another such thesis that is still being written. This penury of academic research in that area could be due to the fact that the migration of Egyptian Jews to France was often identified with the much broader North African Jewish migration with whom they shared a number of features, such as languages – French and Arabic – Western education, and lifestyle as well as religious and ethnic traditions. From Algeria alone, 120,000 Jews fled to France. It is understandable that the 10-12,000 Jews from Egypt – although not a negligible number – who settled in France were somewhat overlooked as a distinct group. For instance, when it came to discuss their impact on French Jewry, the historian Michael Laskier, who has researched extensively the fate of Egyptian Jewry post 1948, as already mentioned, included them in his research paper on the immigration and integration of North African Jews into France.¹⁰⁷ Another reason could be their low profile and tendency to adapt and quietly blend

¹⁰⁴ Alain Lévy, 'Topologie sociale d'une migration familiale (Egypte, Algérie, France, Grande Bretagne, Brésil)', Doctorat, Université Paris 7, 1994.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.18.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., pp.22-3.

¹⁰⁷ Laskier, 'The Regeneration of French Jewry: The Influx and Integration of North African Jews into France, 1955-1965', *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol.10, no.1-2, Spring 1998, pp.37-72; 'France – An Unexpected Centre of Jewish Life', *Judaism*, Vol. XXXIV, no.2, Spring 1985, pp.231-36.

into their new environment without attracting attention, which was very much the case in Australia.

An interesting thesis on the emigration of Egyptian Jews to Brazil, entitled '*Nuits d'été au parfum de jasmin: Souvenirs des Juifs d'Égypte à Rio de Janeiro – 1956/57*', translated into French, has been presented by an Alexandrian-born journalist and researcher, Joëlle Rouchou from Brazil. Although the study of Egyptian Jews in Brazil was not meant to be a part of my research, a brief examination of Rouchou's research and methodology was deemed important since the thesis was based on the oral testimonies of a small number of émigrés and some of their children.¹⁰⁸ It looked at the construction of identity and memory by the exiled Jews of Egypt and the process of transmission of these memories to the first generation born in Brazil.¹⁰⁹ The author focused on the subjective reactions of her respondents who lived through political and social upheavals that had a determining effect on their future. She found that the shock of being more or less forced to leave one's familiar surroundings was still remembered with a high degree of distress after more than forty years, although the Egypt that was evoked did not exist any more. Contrary to the immigration policy of Australia, the government of Juscelino Kubitschek opened the doors of Brazil to the Jews from Egypt without restriction. However, the cost of transporting and settling in the refugees was entirely undertaken by HIAS, without the Brazilian government bearing any of the related costs, which was exactly the same situation in Australia. This study also contributed to the understanding of how the Egyptian group interrelated with the diverse ethnic communities that co-exist in Brazilian society and presented an informed and remarkable study of the themes of loss, exile, identity and memory.¹¹⁰

Several novels, written in French and English by expatriate Egyptian Jews, have provided further insight and colour to the life of the community both in Egypt and in their adopted countries. In France, Paula Jacques, who left Egypt as a little girl, was one of the first to write in that genre, evoking the modern exodus of Egyptian Jews in her semi-autobiographical novels *Lumière de l'oeil* (1980) and *Baiser froid comme la lune* (1983). These particular novels have painted a critical but sympathetic picture of Jewish society in Egypt prior to the

¹⁰⁸ According to the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971, 15,000 Egyptian Jews settled in Brazil in the aftermath of the Suez War.

¹⁰⁹ Joëlle Rouchou, '*Nuits d'été au parfum de jasmin: Souvenirs des Juifs d'Égypte à Rio de Janeiro – 1956/57*', PhD. Thesis, Communication and Culture, University of Sao Paulo, 2003. Rouchou mentioned two other theses that were written on the topic of the Egyptian community of Sao Paulo but these were not translated from Portuguese.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.21.

Suez crisis of 1956, based on the personal and often collective memories of the author. In a tragi-comical style, using a particular form of ‘Egyptian-French’ which often borrowed literally from Arabic or from other surrounding cultures, Paula Jacques exposed the problems of forced emigration of a typically westernised Jewish family to France, the unforeseen difficulties of integration in what was presumed to be a friendly and culturally familiar environment, particularly for the older generation, and the identity crisis experienced by such émigrés.¹¹¹

Alexandria-born André Aciman, who left Egypt in the early 1960s as a teenager and currently teaches French Literature at Princeton University, wrote a highly acclaimed book on the subject of exile, entitled *Out of Egypt, A Memoir* (1994).¹¹² Set in cosmopolitan Alexandria, a city ‘teeming with people of a dozen ethnic groups, creeds, rules and habits’, Aciman told the story of his eccentric and flamboyant Sephardic family from the time of its arrival from Turkey at the beginning of the twentieth century to its expulsion in 1964. Mixing memory and imagination in a style reminiscent of Marcel Proust, Aciman strove to recapture the charm of a now-vanished world while revealing the permanent sense of loss and dislocation that exile often brings in its trail. The characters are larger than life, the tone of the narration is witty and humorous as the narrator is now an adult, exploring his memories as a young boy ‘who even as he longs for the wider world, does not want to be led, forever, out of Egypt’. Through this very personal perspective and a continuous back and forth in time and space, the book succeeded in recreating the haunting atmosphere of that last period of Jewish life in Egypt after the Suez War.

A growing number of similar semi-autobiographical novels in Hebrew, French and English have been published in Israel, France, the United States, and Great Britain. Some have been

¹¹¹ Paula Jacques was born in Egypt in a Jewish family expelled in 1957 in the aftermath of the Suez crisis. She spent her early childhood in Israel on a kibbutz and now lives in Paris. She is a journalist and a producer at Radio France. In those two novels, *Lumière de l’oeil*, and *Un baiser froid comme la lune*, published by Mercure de France, in 1980 and 1983 respectively, her characters were made to endure the trauma of exile and dislocation, just like the émigrés of her parents’ generation. These books also constituted the basis of my research for my B.A. Honours (1987), on the privileged connection between the Jewish community of Egypt and the French culture and its representation in literary works by Jewish/Egyptian writers. Jacques has published a number of other novels that also dealt with the themes of emigration and integration: *L’héritage de tante Carlotta*, 1987; *Déborah et les anges dissipés*, 1991, Prix Fémina 1991; *La descente au paradis*, 1995; *Les femmes avec leur amour*, 1997.

¹¹² André Aciman, *Out of Egypt*, New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1994. Aciman was born in Alexandria, raised in Egypt, Italy and France. A Harvard graduate, he now teaches French literature at Bard College. He has also written *False Papers*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000, a series of essays on the subject of loss based on his own personal experience: a forced departure from Egypt, an early education in Europe and college years in the United States where he finally made his home. Aciman also edited *Letters of Transit*, New York: the New Press, 1999, a book that again looked at exile, home and memory.

well received by the literary press.¹¹³ The common themes of the majority of these novels were memory, dislocation and loss, the inevitable consequences of any forced emigration and the loss of and search for an identity. Just to name a few of the more recent publications, *The One Facing Us* (1995) by Ronit Matalon from Israel, is about a young girl who, in the context of postcolonial Africa, through old photographs and scraps of letters, tried to reconstruct the story of her Egyptian-Jewish family and their displacement from Cairo in the 1950s to Israel, Cameroon and New York.¹¹⁴ *Apricots on the Nile* (2001) by Colette Rossant from New York, is a mosaic of memories and mouth-watering recipes of Colette as a young girl in Cairo and her afternoons with her grandmother in the kitchen or in the bazaar.¹¹⁵ In fact, the traditional cuisine of Egyptian Jews, which is an integral part of their cultural heritage, occupies an important place in the collection of Sephardi recipes gathered by the celebrated food writer, Claudia Roden, in *The Book of Jewish Food* published in 1997. Claudia Roden described her work as ‘A celebration of roots: of generations past, vanished worlds and identity’.¹¹⁶ Based in London, she was born and raised in Cairo in a privileged Jewish family from Aleppo and the Suez War marked the end of that period of her life. Finally, Victor Teboul from Canada wrote *La Lente Découverte de l’Etrangeté* (2002), based on the author’s painful memories of the family’s expulsion from Egypt. Seen through the prism of the main character’s childhood diary, the book is a recollection of life in cosmopolitan Alexandria leading up to the events of 1956, which represented the tragic moment of rupture with what he believed was his home. The voyage from Alexandria to Montreal via France became a personal voyage of discovery

¹¹³ Since the present thesis could not include the Jews of Egypt who settled in Israel, as this would constitute the subject of another separate thesis, the numerous novels and poems written by Egyptian-born Israelis based on their past experiences in Egypt and their migration to Israel, have not been reviewed in this section. However, these authors will be included in the bibliography.

¹¹⁴ Ronit Matalon was born in Israel to Jewish Egyptian parents in a new immigrant town near Tel Aviv. She has worked as a journalist and now teaches literature at Haifa University. She is also a member of the Council for Culture and Art at the Ministry of Education. Her first novel, *The One Facing Us*, New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, 1998, translated from Hebrew, was highly praised in Israeli literary circles and has also been translated into Dutch and German.

¹¹⁵ Colette Rossant, born in Paris, landed in Cairo at the age of five with her Egyptian-born father and French mother. After her father’s death, she was left in the care of her wealthy grandparents until the age of fifteen when she was brought back to Paris. *Apricots on the Nile*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 1999, described as a memoir with recipes, evokes an Egypt that used to be. Rossant is the author of several cookbooks and is a James Beard award-nominated journalist.

¹¹⁶ Claudia Roden, *The Book of Jewish Food*, London: Viking, 1997. Roden has won numerous prizes as a food writer. Her seminal book, *A Book of Middle Eastern Food*, was first published by Thomas Nelson in 1968, and by Penguin books in 1970, with a revised edition in 1985. It is a regular fixture of most Jewish/Egyptian households around the world.

of a multiple and complex identity, or as the title indicated ‘the slow discovery of being a stranger’.¹¹⁷

In Australia, I only came across one such semi-autobiographical book that dealt with the cosmopolitan world of Alexandria in the 1950s, but not specifically the Jewish world, written by Alexandria-born Victoria Thompson, *Losing Alexandria. A Memoir*, Sydney: Picador, 1998, as well as a short autobiography, *Second Exodus*, by Cairo-born Melburnian Meyer Harari, published in 1999 as part of a Jewish community project.¹¹⁸ I was also given two unpublished autobiographical manuscripts written by another Jew from Egypt, the late Freddy E. Dayan, who was a professor of French literature at the University of Hobart.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, Australian-born Andrew Strum, whose mother came from Cairo and who is particularly interested in the history of the Jews in Egypt, has published a few articles originating from his research into his ancestry, such as ‘The Livro de cantares de Baruch Bentata’¹²⁰ and others on specifically Egyptian religious customs such as ‘Wheat, Chickens and the Expiation of Sin, or Vegetarian *Kapparot*: The Ancient Origins of an obscure Egyptian Jewish High Holy Day Customs’ but nothing on the Jew from Egypt after emigration.¹²¹ All of these publications were valuable personal recollections but none of these writers addressed systematically the wider issues of forced emigration and acculturation.

Non-Jewish Egyptian émigrés have written extensively on the peregrinations of their own communities in modern Egypt and their particular exodus experiences, evoking the same themes of memory and loss as Aciman, Matalon and Teboul. One of the most prolific and

¹¹⁷ *La Lente Découverte de l’Étrangeté*, Montréal: Editions Les Intouchables, 2002. Victor Teboul was born in Alexandria. After the 1956 Suez War, his father was jailed and subsequently the whole family expelled. They arrived in France as refugees and six years later migrated to Canada. Teboul, who holds a Ph.D in French studies from the University of Montreal and is now professor of French literature at Lionel-Groulx College, has also written about the representation of the Jew in French Canadian literature: *Mythe et Image du juif au Québec*, Montréal: Delagrave, 1977. The main character of *La Lente Découverte*, Maurice, was already introduced in Teboul’s first novel *Que Dieu vous garde de l’homme silencieux quand il se met soudain à parler*, Montréal: Editions Les Intouchables, 2000, which was about the cultural shock experienced by a Sephardi Jew from Egypt when he lands in the province of Quebec, a place with its own identity issues.

¹¹⁸ Meyer Harari, *Second Exodus*, Melbourne: Makor Jewish Community Library, 1999. Harari’s family, originally from Damascus, had been granted British nationality in Egypt in exchange for services rendered to the Crown. Harari served in the British army during World War II and as a British subject, was able to migrate to Australia very soon after the end of the war. In his memoir, Harari recounted the story of his life as a young man in Egypt, his early immigration to Australia with his wife and their difficult beginnings in Melbourne.

¹¹⁹ Freddy E. Dayan, ‘Growing up in Egypt in the Thirties’ translated from the French by Ian Kenneth Smith and ‘From the Banks of the Nile to the Shores of the Derwent, 1940-1988’, translated from the French by Ian Kenneth Smith. These two manuscripts were given to me by the author’s son, now living in Melbourne.

¹²⁰ Andrew Strum, ‘The Livro de cantares of Baruch Bentata’, in *Los Muestrros*, no.29, December 1997.

¹²¹ Strum, (ed), ‘Wheat, Chickens and the Expiation of Sin, or Vegetarian *Kapparot*: The Ancient Origins of an obscure Egyptian Jewish High Holy Day Custom’, in *Eshkolot: Essays in Memory of Rabbi Ronald Lubofsky*, Melbourne: Hybrid Publishers, 2002.

popular writers in that category is Robert Solé, who won a French literary prize ‘*Prix Méditerranée*’ for his novel *Le Tarbouche* (1992). It is a nostalgic and tender tale of a Syrian Christian family who emigrated to Egypt in the nineteenth century, and became prosperous by manufacturing a type of head-covering that was popular throughout the Ottoman empire, the fez or *tarbouche* in French. However, like the Jews, even after four generations in the country, Syrian Christians were not considered true Egyptians and when the military came to power, they were ruined and left the country. For Solé, the fez became the symbol of those happy days and the sweet memories of an Egypt that was no more. Solé also published reference books on modern Egyptian history. *L’Egypte, passion française*, (1997) documented the special relationship between Egypt and France since Napoleon’s military expedition to Egypt in 1798; *Les Savants de Bonaparte*, (1998) evoked the great achievements of the prominent scholars and scientists, artists and technicians who accompanied Napoleon’s army on that expedition, and *La Pierre de Rosette*, (1999), written in collaboration with Dominique Valbelle, recounted the remarkable story of the deciphering of the hieroglyphs by the Frenchman, Jean-François Champollion.¹²²

It is clear from the study of this corpus of writings that the state of research on the history of modern Egyptian Jewry has attracted renewed interest recently, particularly as a part of the bigger picture of the history of Jews from Arab lands. Besides the scholarly research, associations of ex-Egyptian Jews have been created in different parts of the world, publishing newsletters, organising cultural events, social activities, writing about their migration experiences, trying to reconnect with their memories of the past and giving a voice to their stories. However this was not the case in Australia for a number of reasons including the small size of the group and its low profile, but mainly because of a self-perception that their immigration experience as Jews from Egypt was not special enough to warrant being exposed in a written form. This thesis has tried to reconstruct their history through the memories of a cross section of Jews from Egypt, to assess their level of integration into and contribution to their host country and to their ethnic and religious community, and to demonstrate the value of their multi-faceted identity.

¹²² Egyptian-born Robert Solé moved to France at age 18. Currently, he is joint editor-in-chief at *Le Monde* and has published both fiction and non-fiction works. *Le Tarbouche*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1992, was his first novel followed by *Le Sémaphore d’Alexandrie*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1994 and *La Mamelouka*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1996. His reference books, *L’Egypte, Passion française*, 1997, *Les Savants de Bonaparte*, 1998 and *La Pierre de Rosette*, 1999 were also published by Editions du Seuil.

CHAPTER II: Methodology

This chapter will examine the methodology employed to construct the present thesis. It will include my method of approach, how I dealt with the current concepts and models of immigration, social and cultural integration and the kind of tools I used to answer the questions raised by my research. The consultation of primary sources such as archives and memoirs, the mode of gathering the literature and evaluating the data, the comparative approach used for the analysis of the oral testimonies will also be part of the methodology used to reconstruct the history of the group under examination with the ultimate aim of shedding light on its specific features.

This study sought to understand the socio-historical background of Egyptian Jews and how this background affected their migration to Australia. Thus, the research approach focused both on their experiences and lifestyle in Egypt before their forced emigration as well as their experiences of integrating into their new life in Australia. By exploring the multicultural dimension of their identity in Egypt, this study tried to assess their level of acculturation both in Egypt and Australia. As Egyptian Jews in Australia constituted a fairly small group, their experiences were compared and contrasted with the largest Egyptian Jewish diaspora community in France.

I decided to approach the socio-historical topic of my thesis thematically, through the examination of a certain number of concepts related to the experience of forced exile, migration, and acculturation with the view of enriching one's understanding of those general concepts. For instance, I looked at those concepts in terms of binary oppositions such as exclusion versus acceptance, liberalism versus exclusivism, alienation versus acculturation, integration versus assimilation and multiculturalism versus monoculturalism. I examined the issue of construction and reconstruction of identity faced by migrants from minority groups, differentiating between self-identity and identification by others and I looked at the issue of cultural heritage and its transmission to the next generation.

My primary form of research was verbal data obtained in the course of both random and selective interviewing of Egyptian Jews in Australia and France, using them as 'oral historians'. Thus, it was important to take a critical look at oral history as a tool for the social

researcher, defining precisely its meaning and usefulness in relation to the present study, appreciating its importance and recognising its limitations. Beth M Robertson, who, in her *Oral History Handbook*, recommended a step-by-step *modus operandi* for that mode of investigation, suggested a basic and practical definition:

- a recorded interview in question-and-answer-format,
- conducted by an interviewer who has some knowledge of the subject to be discussed
- with a knowledgeable interviewee speaking from personal participation,
- on subjects of historical interest, and
- which is made accessible to other researchers.¹

Another definition offered by the British historian, David Lance, regarding the use of this methodology as a primary source in the sociology of ethnic relations, seemed particularly appropriate:

oral history is formed from the personal reminiscences of people who were participants in or witnesses of the events or experiences they recount and - by present conventions - information is obtained by interviewing methods and recorded verbatim by one means or another.²

The utilisation of oral history as a scientific tool is a fairly recent phenomenon. The use of verbal data is considered to be one of the keystones of contemporary social science and was crucial to the accomplishment of this thesis.³ Since the number of Jewish migrants from Egypt was very small compared to the overall Jewish population, and the written sources were scarce, the choice of an oral methodology was considered to be the best and only way to bring to the fore their past history, their personal experiences, their cultural diversity and their feelings of identity. The British historian, Paul Thompson, who is regarded as one of the pioneers of oral history as a research methodology, stated why this methodology is so valuable:

Oral history is a history built around people. It thrusts life into history itself and it widens its scope. It allows heroes not just from the leaders, but from the unknown

¹ Beth M Robertson, *Oral History Handbook*, fourth edition, Adelaide: Oral History Association of Australia (South Australian Branch), 2000, p.2.

² L. Douglas and P. Spearrit, 'Talking History: the Use of Oral Sources' in G. Osborne and W. Mandle (eds), *New History: Studying Australia Today*, Sydney, London and Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1982, pp.51-68.

³ William Foddy, *Constructing Questions for Interviews and Questionnaires: Theory and Practice in Social Research*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, p.11.

majority of the people... It helps the less privileged, and especially the old, towards dignity and self-confidence.⁴

The use of oral history and interviewing techniques has been central for developing a picture of many ethnic groups in Australia. For example, the research in the field of ethnic relations conducted by Lois Foster and Anne Seitz, on German migrants in Victoria, illustrates the fact that ‘only intensive interviewing could obtain data on aspects such as the use of standard or dialect German, use of English, reasons for emigrating, reactions to a new place and culture, retention of German culture, and not least, information regarding German culture.’⁵ It is clear that the contribution of oral testimonies remains crucial to the development of a history of postwar immigration and to a wider understanding of the fabric of the Australian nation.

As a first step, I looked at the use of oral history as a tool in the context of my own research, in order to identify its inherent strengths and weaknesses, as well as explain why it was particularly appropriate for this study. I addressed the structural side of the research, its technical difficulties and how they were handled. The value of a preliminary questionnaire, both as a selection tool and as a guide for the interview, was assessed together with other factors such as the structure and the nature of the questions, whether those questions were qualitative or quantitative and how they helped to construct the respondent’s profile and define his or her worldview. The differences between the field conditions in Australia and those in France, regarding the building of a database of potential respondents and the mode of selection of suitable interviewees, were evaluated in regard to the time factor and accessibility of the target group. The problems that occurred mid-stream and necessitated changes were reviewed, since it was not always possible to strictly adhere to the chosen methodological path. The various methods of processing the raw material such as tape recording, note taking and telephone interviewing were also considered as to their advantages and disadvantages.

The second section of this chapter dealt with the actual data provided by the various oral testimonies and the type of analysis the data was subjected to, how it was checked against government archives material and other primary and secondary socio-historical and literary sources. The aim was in order to detect the elements of distortion and understand the motivations of the interviewees in relation to these distortions.

⁴ Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.

⁵ Lois Foster and Ann Seitz, ‘Applications of Oral History in the Sociology of Ethnic Relations’, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol. 6, No.3, 1985, pp.5-15.

One of the initial tasks was to acquire appropriate interviewing skills, thanks to a special training course provided by the Oral History Association of Australia at the State Library of New South Wales, in order to learn how to extract the best possible results from one single interview. Different methods were empirically demonstrated regarding the importance of body language, eye contact and proximity to the interviewer. Various modes of how to ask questions that move the interview along, how to allow the respondent to answer without interrupting or commenting, how to refrain from making moral judgments or putting forward one's opinion or version of the facts, were all raised during the sessions. The technique of narrowing the focus of the interview without making the interviewee uncomfortable about answering pointed questions was also practised during group exercises. These acquired skills were found to be very helpful and were built upon as the interviews progressed. They allowed an early detection and subsequent avoidance of common mistakes, such as interrupting the flow of information too soon by asking a new question or commenting at length with one's own interpretation. As argued by Robertson in her *Oral History Handbook*, interviewers 'who talk too much, or impose their own ideas or opinions, will inhibit communication and miss out on important information.'⁶ At the same time, an interviewer must not fall into the trap of allowing a more verbose interviewee to wander away from the focus of the interview by providing tangential and superfluous details, thus sidestepping more important information.

Following the guidelines of ethical practice established by the Oral History Association in 1978, at the beginning of every session, a clarification of the purposes of the inquiry was provided to reassure the interviewee and dispel any misapprehension. An assurance was given that a copy of the tape would be made available to the interviewee upon request. Each participant was given an agreement to sign, allowing the interviewer to use the information for the purpose of further research, while protecting the identity and privacy of the respondent.⁷ Generally the response to those guidelines was positive and encouraging. At the end of each meeting, a brief evaluation of the meeting was noted down until such time as proper transcribing could be carried out, always using a copy while the master tape was kept in a safe place.

⁶ Robertson, *Oral History Handbook*, p. 6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Appendix 1, p.78.

The study was divided into two phases: an initial questionnaire that was sent by mail, followed by a personal interview. The questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter outlining the goal of the project and its importance, and asking for the cooperation of the recipient in the form of a personal interview at a time to be determined and in the language of choice, English, French or Italian (see Appendix 1). It was presumed that such a questionnaire would facilitate the identification of those interested enough in the topic to grant a meaningful interview to the researcher. Once the questionnaire was returned, an appointment was arranged. If the questionnaire was not answered within a reasonable amount of time, a discreet reminder was made over the telephone or via common contacts, as age, idiosyncrasies and other sensitivities of the potential interviewees had to be taken into account. Some addressees never answered. Some answered the questions very minimally and sent back the questionnaire indicating they did not wish to be interviewed. A few stated they were totally disinterested in reviving the past. Others even considered the project as an intrusion in their private lives by well meaning but meddling ‘amateurs’. Others refused to participate, arguing, for example, that the questions related to their departure from Egypt such as: ‘did you leave all your possessions behind or did you manage to salvage your money and belongings’ were too intrusive. Sometimes they could not see the cultural relevance of the questions related to their lifestyle in Egypt such as: ‘type of cooking at home, Western or Middle Eastern and mode of dress, Western or Middle Eastern’. In light of those objections, a few of the more confronting questions were slightly revised and assurances were given that there was no obligation to answer all questions if one did not wish to do so and that any contribution was valuable.

In spite of those few negative reactions, the mailing of the preliminary questionnaire was generally favourably received. As the initial project progressed, it revealed an unsuspected depth and wealth of information, apart from the ‘human interest’ angle. Each interview brought in a fresh perspective or a unique element, with the added realisation that this method of gathering information gave a voice to those who were never able or willing to tell their story outside the immediate family circle. By acquiring a voice as well as a sympathetic and empathetic listener, the interviewees felt suddenly empowered by the fact that ‘outsiders’ could be interested in their memories. As a consequence, it made them more eager to share those memories with the interviewer. It validated their cultural heritage as something worth imparting to others without it being perceived as incompatible with the new culture they had more or less adopted.

In addition, the interview method constituted an undeniable asset as far as immediacy of information and interaction with the interviewees. This mode of gathering people's memories proved especially valuable when compared with data obtained via other more 'objective' primary and secondary sources, such as media and government archives and literary material, history books, journals and novels. This comparative exercise allowed me to check for any possible distortion conveyed by the interviewee and to recognise that even distortion of individual reminiscences could add another perspective to the overall research. The goal was to paint a picture of a pre and post migration experience as it was lived by the individuals concerned and not only as it was recorded in history books, keeping in mind that the results of such an investigation could never be totally conclusive.

In fact, when one adopts the oral history approach, one has to take into consideration the notoriously selective nature of memory and the difference between reality and perception. The issue of distortion, whether conscious or unconscious, can be considered as a possible clue in itself, but it is still an element of misinformation that has to be taken into account. Although it is debatable whether any such truth exists, distortion of the strictly historical truth is a common problem with oral history. The limitations of human memory are well documented, as stressed by William Foddy: 'even when respondents have been exposed to a particular event, there is no guarantee that they will have taken in much information about it or, if they have, that they will have remembered it'.⁸ People generally remember things they understand or things they are interested in. They might remember places, events, feelings or attitudes but not facts or dates or even chronology. They will remember more if they played an active role in the event under scrutiny. Charles Thompson has stressed this aspect concerning the role of involvement in event memory:

One of the ...ways to explore personal memory is to look at the relation between memory and the subject's level of involvement in the event.... One can actually play in it, one can watch it, or one can read about it in the newspaper. These three methods of information again vary on at least two dimensions, the level of mental involvement in the event and the level of physical involvement in the event.⁹

The determining impact of active involvement was clearly demonstrated by the nature of the various testimonies gathered for the purpose of the present research. For instance, one of the questions asked in the course of the interview related to a specific event, the burning of Cairo

⁸ Foddy, *Constructing Questions*, p.90.

⁹ Charles P. Thompson, *Autobiographical Memory, Remembering What and When*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996, p.59.

on 26 January 1952 by an out-of-control mob, to try and establish if that particular incident played a seminal role in the decision to leave Egypt.¹⁰ It was found that when the subject had witnessed the event personally or suffered some direct trauma resulting from the rioting, the memory was not only clear and precise but it also re-awakened the fear experienced on that day. One such witness was able to recall, even after forty-five years, the exact details of what he saw and what he was doing on that particular date, at that particular time. Since he lived across from the British Turf Club in Cairo, on that so-called 'Black Saturday', he reported watching with horror from the roof top of his apartment building, as British soldiers were thrown out of windows, amidst the burning and the looting. He had seen the devastation first hand and therefore was able to describe it graphically.¹¹ In contrast, other interviewees who lived away from the centre of Cairo and had not personally witnessed the scenes of destruction, could only relate, at best, a mediated account of the day based on what they heard or read after the event. The same principle applied to the respondents who were imprisoned or expelled in 1948 and/or in 1956 by Egyptian authorities, for various reasons of national security. The reasons ranged from a suspected involvement in Zionist or communist groups, or simply, as was the case in the wake of the 1956 Suez War, for being a French or British national, or again for being at the head of large enterprises. The first-hand witnesses inevitably conveyed a different perspective of the period than those who did not personally experience the trauma associated with arbitrary arrest or immediate expulsion, although the whole of the Jewish community of Egypt would have suffered some level of trauma by being forced into exile either overtly or covertly.

There is always a problem when interviewees are asked to recall events many years after they happened. Some level of distortion will naturally occur when the period between the actual event and its reporting is too far-stretched. To cover up for memory failure or even confusion over the details, the respondent might subconsciously over compensate by inflating or deflating certain aspects according to how much he or she remembers. On the other hand, with the passage of time, subsequent events often colour the memory of a particularly salient period in one's life and cloud one's initial experience or perception. In the case of the present

¹⁰ Jacques Berque, in *Egypt Imperialism and Revolution*, London: Faber & Faber, 1972, pp.670-1, wrote: 'On the morning of 26th January, ... an immense mob poured into the wealthy districts, setting fire, as though by a prearranged plan, to any establishments displaying a certain degree of luxury or suggesting collusion with the foreigner.'

¹¹ Samir W. Raafat, in *Maadi 1904-1962*, Cairo: The Palm Press, 1994, pp.212-14, also noted what the press had to say about the events of that fateful Saturday: 'the following day, the media announced that crowds on the rampage in Cairo had set fire to cafés, cinemas, shops, the Shepherds Hotel and British-owned businesses. Ten Britishers lost their lives in the Turf Club fire on Maghrabi Street (now Adly Street).'

study, it was found that the telescoping phenomenon, as described by Sudman and Bradburn, was very common since the events in question took place over forty years ago.¹² This phenomenon refers to a distortion of the time frame within which a certain event has occurred by setting it either earlier or later in the past. In order to try and overcome this problem, my questions had to be very specific, focusing on a particular issue or event, such as: when was emigration from Egypt envisaged and why; date of arrival; whether the interviewee travelled alone or with family and/or friends; place and initial type of accommodation; and occupation then and now. The method of aided recall, also discussed by Sudman and Bradburn, was used sparingly and only when necessary to prompt the respondent's failing memory by providing easy clues to the topic under investigation, so as not to influence unduly his or her response.¹³ The problem with this type of approach is that it could suggest to the interviewee a quick and easy response, thus sidestepping interesting and significant details.

Distortion can also be caused by a different perception of self between one respondent and the other. For example, when asked about their sense of identity while in Egypt, depending on their ethnic background and social standing, some middle class participants saw themselves as foreigners living in Egypt and felt alienated from their Middle-Eastern milieu. Other respondents who belonged to lower socio-economic strata, felt closer to their Egyptian roots and were more likely to consider Egypt as their home. In spite of the gap between the two perspectives, it is not impossible that the respondents, in hindsight, were subconsciously reinterpreting how they posited themselves in Egyptian society, because the new interpretation would be more politically correct nowadays. Therefore, in the final evaluation of those responses, the psychological factors of denial and projection had to be kept in mind.

On the other hand, I took into consideration the fact that the respondents were aware that I was part of their 'in group'. Thus, there was a distinct possibility that their answers would have been somewhat different if solicited by an outsider. Upon reflection, I concluded that, on the contrary, the odds were more in favour of them not being as candid about their true feelings of identity to an outsider, for fear of being adversely judged, whereas an insider would be deemed more understanding of any sign of ambivalence in this respect.

¹² Seymour Sudman and Norman M. Bradburn, *Asking Questions*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1982, p.22.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp.36-9. Sudman and Bradburn explained: 'In its most general sense, an aided-recall procedure is one that provides one or more memory cues to the respondent as part of the question.'

Suppression could also be considered a form of distortion. It might be deliberate or self-protecting, with the aim of repressing uncomfortable memories. For instance, one subject was happily relating all about his early life in Egypt but when it came to the crucial time of the 1956 Suez War, he became very agitated and refused outright to discuss his personal experience during that period. He claimed it was still too painful for him to evoke. In another instance, a woman apologised for not participating in the project, although she understood the motivation behind it. She explained she could never talk about her past life in Egypt, because of the suffering she had endured there. She only wanted to forget her memories of that time. The challenge facing the researcher was to identify the various modes of distortion and suppression, understand the underlying reasons, and subsequently insert them into the wider historical context to be reassessed.

At the onset, as was mentioned earlier, the chosen methodology of oral history was not the result of theoretical studies and abstract notions based on formal sociological models. Rather, it was conceived as a practical, ‘user friendly’ exercise, in order not to frighten away participants. The questionnaire that was developed was based on personal experience and closeness to the Egyptian Jewish community. Sharing the same ethnic background, the same migrant status, and the same languages as the respondents created a climate of complicity between the interviewer¹⁴ and the interviewee, very similar to the findings of Foster and Seitz who, in their 1985 work on German migrants in Victoria, commented:

The researcher’s ethnicity (evidenced in language and cultural knowledge), status (being a migrant, identification with and perceived sponsorship by a university, experience of adjusting to Australian life over a lengthy period of time) and gender facilitated initial contact with interviewees and rapidly established a situation in which the interviewees were at ease, offering many reminiscences quite spontaneously.¹⁵

For instance, my fluency in French and Italian and my understanding of Arabic often broke down any linguistic and psychological barriers when the respondent did not feel confident enough to express him or herself in English or when he or she would borrow an expression from one of those languages to make a particular point. In fact, some of the interviews in Australia, particularly with older participants – and obviously all the interviews in France -

¹⁴ As mentioned previously, both my friend and myself conducted most of the Sydney interviews, whereas the interviews in Melbourne, Adelaide and later Paris, were my sole responsibility.

¹⁵ Foster and Seitz, ‘Applications of Oral History in the Sociology of Ethnic Relations’, p.7.

were conducted in French, the *lingua franca* of the minorities in Egypt at least until the late 1950s. Italian was sometimes used in conjunction with French depending on the particular ethnic background of the interviewee whereas the use of Arabic was restricted to a few comments. The underlying reasons for the multilingualism of the Jews of Egypt and the privileged status enjoyed by the French language in that context will be discussed at length in the historical background chapter.¹⁶ Furthermore, the issue of my gender facilitated communication with most of the older respondents. Male respondents saw me as less confronting and female respondents as more reassuring.

In planning this research, there were a number of key issues that had to be considered. The first issue was how to identify and then reach the target group. The project was initiated in Sydney because it was the hometown of both my friend Lana Woolf and myself. An advertisement was placed in the Jewish press, explaining the aim of the project and asking for volunteers to come forward. An initial list of 68 names was established from personal contact, with the view of enlarging it as more contacts were made on the basis of word of mouth. When the project grew to become part of a doctoral thesis, the other two Egyptian-Jewish communities of Adelaide and Melbourne were also targeted. With the help of a network of friends and active members of the Sephardi Association of Victoria, the Sassoon Yehuda Sephardi synagogue in Melbourne, the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation, and the Adelaide Progressive Jewish Congregation, I was able to establish several contacts in those two cities followed up by a three-week visit and a full program of formal interviews and informal meetings with Jews from Egypt. By the end of the exercise, the Australian sample totalled officially 92 people plus another approximate 20 to 30 who did not wish to be interviewed at length but still answered a few pointed questions outside the structure of a planned interview. As for the French sample, the selection was planned and the interviewing executed over two field trips to Paris, three years apart. A short trip to Egypt was also undertaken to contact the few remaining members of a dying Jewish community as well as a short tour of other Diasporas of Jews from Egypt in the United States and Great Britain, to complement the overall data.

¹⁶ To understand this phenomena, one has to go back to the French Expedition in Egypt in 1798 led by Napoleon, the building of the Suez Canal in 1869 by the French, the British occupation of Egypt in 1882 and the privileged status held by foreigners until the late 1940s. All these events impacted greatly on the education of the minorities. The combined role of the Christian missionaries, the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and other secular and ethnic schools catering for the different communities contributed to the rise of a cosmopolitan society, especially within the middle and upper class, that spoke predominantly French.

In view of the period of time that has elapsed since arrival in Australia, priority for the setting up of the interviews was given to the older members of the group. Obviously, the Egyptian Jews who migrated to Australia around 1956, in their late 30s or early 40s, were already in their 80s by the time this particular research started. It was felt that for these cases, haste was essential before memories of the past became too faded and distorted because of ill health and before death prevailed. Such was the sad case of one subject interviewed in Montefiore Home, a Sydney Jewish retirement home in Hunters Hill. The respondent, who usually displayed a relatively clear recollection of the past without prompting, was totally disorientated by the sudden re-emergence of that past life brought on by the questions, and kept confusing self with mother and sister. That person died not long after the meeting. The interview in itself was not very useful at the time but it was ultimately salvaged by the fact that her son was able to fill in the gaps and clarify some of the confusion. It also proved the urgency of the situation as far as older respondents were concerned. They were gradually disappearing with their memories of a vanished Jewish world where they had been born and raised and the researcher had to rely on data obtained via the second generation, with all its inherent limitations. In fact, by the end of my study, six of the respondents were deceased.

The overall aim of the written questionnaire was to cover the relevant issues quantitatively and qualitatively, while keeping to a chronological order with an underlying thematic and conceptual thread. For example, it was first divided into two broad sections: life in Egypt and life in Australia or France according to the case. Within those sections, a number of fundamental concepts were raised, such as acculturation, alienation, inclusion, identity and identification, importance of memory and transmission of memory. Wherever possible, closed questions were given preference over open-ended ones in order to keep the questionnaire simple and not frighten away the respondents. The procedure of aided recall mentioned earlier, was found to be very effective in that instance. For instance, the question related to the number of languages spoken at home contained a list of eight possibilities. The same applied to the question on domestic help in Egypt where five options were offered. The questionnaire was only used as a guide during the actual interview, when open questions would be asked. The respondent would then be invited to elaborate and clarify certain points raised in the preliminary written questionnaire such as, for instance, the extent of communal involvement in Egypt and Australia, personal experiences of antisemitic incidents, and feelings of identity.

The main preoccupation was to ensure that the respondent clearly understood each question and was encouraged to provide as much information as possible. Therefore, the questionnaire had to be concise, simple and direct but also sensitive since it was directed at individuals who had gone through the trauma of forced emigration, loss and displacement. The area that needed to be dealt with special care was the recounting of the events immediately preceding the departure from Egypt. As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire was constructed chronologically and thematically. The section on life in Egypt dealt with the standard demographic questions about name, age, socio-economic status, ethnic origin, level of education, and culture. It then focused on what it meant being Jewish in Egypt before and after 1948, on the degree of involvement in Jewish communal affairs and/or in the Egyptian political arena and the sense of belonging as well as the circumstances of final departure and whether it was imposed by government policy, by loss of livelihood or just by the realisation that Jews had no place left for them in Egypt.

The next section dealt mainly with the issue of transit in Europe followed by immigration to Australia, the reason why it was chosen as a destination and the hurdles that had to be overcome as far housing, work, language and culture were concerned. The concluding section inquired about the present feeling of identity of the respondents, the way they saw themselves as well as the way others saw them. This issue was crucial for the final analysis of the integration, acculturation and contribution of Egyptian Jews at the level of both the Jewish social microcosm and the broader Australian macrocosm.

When it came to the comparative research in France, the second section of the questionnaire was modified to fit in with the different national context. The main difference with the Australian approach was that the two procedures, questionnaire and interview were fused into a single process, whereby the interviewer controlled both the written and oral sections. Although early contacts were made from Australia, the actual list of potential respondents and appointments was only finalised after arrival in Paris. Therefore, I could not afford the delay required to mail the questionnaires ahead of the interview. This procedure extended the whole exercise by about an hour compared to the interviews conducted in Sydney, which usually took between one and half to two hours. It also meant that the respondent did not have the flexibility to reflect or to come back to problem questions at his or her own pace, which could have affected the nature of the answers provided. On the other hand, given the limited time that I was able to spend in Paris, the chosen method was considered to be the

most appropriate. Once the contact was made, the time and place of the interview were immediately set, which did not give the respondent the opportunity to change his or her mind. I had already used that particular methodology for the Melbourne and Adelaide interviews, where time was also of the essence, and found it to be useful.

Considering the relatively much larger migration of Egyptian Jews to France and the unavoidable restrictions imposed by geographical distance and time taken in locating and interviewing a proportionally comparable number of respondents, my objectives were not to reproduce the same quantitative and qualitative study already undertaken for Australia. Only such an exact study could have lead to an equitable and sustainable comparison on all fronts.¹⁷ Therefore, the present research focused mainly on the themes considered to be the cornerstones of any migration story: culture, identity, integration and contribution to the host society through the case study of an elite group of individuals, located in Paris for the most part, although some had moved from France to England or to the United States. It was felt that the French sample, although much smaller in size, was particularly interesting because, on one hand, it was representative of the characteristics specific to the Jews of Egypt as revealed by the study of the Australian sample and on the other hand, it was singularly committed to the preservation and transmission of their cultural heritage and actively promoted these issues.

My work was based on 21 formal interviews conducted during two different periods, 1999 and 2003, as well as numerous informal meetings and personal discussions with Egyptian Jews in France, in England and in the United States. Although the sample size of the French émigrés was much smaller than the Australian sample, it represented a much larger community as will be discussed in the last chapter of this thesis. It was felt that the introduction of such a comparative group would enrich and give more substance to the Australian side of the research. The gap of three years between interviews, was particularly significant as the second lot of interviews reflected the change of climate in France, with the rise of antisemitic incidents following the start of the *al-Aqsa Intifada* (the second Palestinian Uprising), often disguised as legitimate expressions of anti-Zionism. For the first time, a French respondent admitted being pessimistic about his future as a Jew in France, a reaction somewhat similar to what some respondents had expressed about their feelings towards Egypt

¹⁷ The number of Jews from Egypt who eventually settled in France is between 10 to 12,000. See chapter 10 on the Jewish/Egyptian migration experience in France.

after 1948 and 1956. It was, therefore, deemed necessary to reassess some of the earlier responses by revisiting the first group of interviewees whenever possible.

The interview itself was basically on a one to one basis although a third party was often present, either as a co-interviewer or as the respondent's spouse. The latter case was found to be disruptive at times and helpful at others, depending on the relationship between the spouses. As argued by Bradburn and Sudman, 'response effects are more likely to occur when the third party knows the respondent.'¹⁸ This was found to be true in cases where both spouses were to be interviewed in succession, and one would interrupt the other to correct a statement or provide more information.

With regard to the value of the questionnaire versus the interview, generally the two procedures were found to be complementary. For example, the more open type of questions asked during the interview sometimes revealed experiences that were totally buried in the subject's memory and therefore never mentioned in the written response. In some situations, the respondent considered filling in the questionnaire a tedious exercise and preferred the interview method whereas, in other cases, the respondent would shy away from talking to a stranger and just filled in the questionnaire. By using the written and oral approaches, the collated data was maximised.

Telephone interviews were sometimes conducted when the respondent was unable to meet personally with the interviewer. This method did not always yield very satisfactory results as the respondent often sounded distracted or rushed, which in turn inhibited the exchange of information. It was only adopted in very special cases, for example, when I finally managed to convince a reluctant respondent to relate her experience in a Jewish hostel, or when the respondent could not make the time for a personal interview face to face, due to work or personal commitments.¹⁹

The various stages of processing the raw material included the assessment of the filled-in questionnaire followed by the tape recording of the subsequent interview. The interview was then either transcribed verbatim if the information was considered too sensitive to be edited simultaneously, or summarised in a succinct account of the more relevant issues that were

¹⁸ Sudman & Bradburn, *Asking Questions*, p.136.

¹⁹ This was the case of my interview with possibly the first Egyptian Jew who migrated to Australia and settled in Adelaide. He was responsible for the settlement of the largest group of Jews from Egypt in Adelaide.

raised in the course of the meeting. The information was then grouped under different titles and according to themes. When recording was not possible because the respondent refused to be taped or if it was impractical to do so because of the location of the actual interview, the note taking method was adopted although at first, this did not occur very often. It was thought that this last procedure inhibited the exchange of information between the interviewer and the respondent as it created a more formal structure to the interview. On the other hand, it had the advantage of greatly facilitating the transcription process. This method was more frequently used on field trips overseas, particularly in the case of impromptu encounters with prospective respondents.

As often happens, as the work progressed, new elements surfaced from experience in the field. Some issues were initially missed, such as the effect of migration on the children of this particular group of migrants and their own integration into Australia society. This kind of omission was difficult to rectify as far as the past interviews but in the course of subsequent sessions, those topics were introduced to try and compensate for these omissions.

All the data gathered through the questionnaires and the interviews was then entered into a database using a special computer program (see Appendix #2). It was then imported onto an Excel chart and organised into categories, thus leading to a multi-dimensional poly-variable analysis. For instance, it enabled me to check at a glance the predominant reason for migrating to Australia, the age of the migrants, their date and place of arrival and whether they received assistance. This chart also allowed me to verify whether there was a connection between linguistic skills, occupation, and positive feelings of identity, thus combining both the quantitative and the qualitative approaches. This type of analysis helped me to outline a tentative profile of the Jew 'in' Egypt based on gender, occupation, social class, education and ideology and compare it to the profile of the same Jew 'from' Egypt 'in' Australia, using the same criteria.

Accessing other major primary sources such as Australian government archives, Jewish institutional archives and the records of the Jewish and general press complemented the use of the oral history methodology for this study. Official government records were invaluable as they provided the backbone to the data gathered through others means. Whether archival material validated the personal data or discredited it was not the core issue; what mattered most was the fact that by presenting their version of the facts, they gave me as the researcher

the ability to distinguish between reality and myth, without discounting the input of people's perception of a particular occurrence. Reading the transcripts of Australian ministers' memos at the time of the Suez Crisis of 1956 was particularly enlightening as they opened up a new window into the official Australian politics of the time, a perspective that would have been obviously inaccessible to the people directly affected by those policies.²⁰

Concurrently, the records of Australian Jewish institutions uncovered details of the immediate reactions of the local community to the events in far away Egypt and the proactive stand adopted by those institutions. At the time of the Suez war in particular, both the general and the Jewish press covered the events in the Middle East extensively. Considering the usual hyperbolicism and inaccuracies often found in such reports, their representation of the plight of Egyptian Jews during that period closely reflected the testimonies of my interviewees.

For the comparative study of the French sample group, I used the same thematic approach, but I did not attempt to delve extensively into primary sources and archives as that would have been the subject of another thesis. I consulted mainly secondary sources such as books and journal articles to obtain background information on the contextual conditions in France after World War II and the implementation of its social and immigration policies. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the two postgraduate theses on the topic of the Jews in modern Egypt pre and post emigration, which have been submitted in Paris, also relied heavily on oral history.²¹ Nevertheless, I was able to add considerably to my knowledge and understanding of the French conditions and learn about the interaction between members of this uprooted community and their diverse interests and preoccupations through the various contributions to *Nahar Misraïm*, the bulletin of *L'Association Pour La Sauvegarde Du Patrimoine Culturel des Juifs d'Egypte* (ASPCJE). This Bulletin also conveyed valuable information on the past and present achievements of the Jews of Egypt in the socio-economic, literary, political, and religious domains, both in that country and in France.²² The works of Michael Laskier and

²⁰ Suzanne Rutland, 'Egyptian Jews in Adelaide: A Case Study in Oral History', *Oral History Association of Australia Journal*, No.6, 1984. Rutland's research clearly showed that in the days of the White Australia Policy, there was a great reluctance to grant landing permits to Jews from Egypt because 'at an official government level it was widely believed that Sephardi (Oriental) Jews were "black" in appearance'.

²¹ Ethel Carasso, 'La Communauté juive d'Egypte de 1948-1957', *Maitrise d'histoire contemporaine*, Université de Paris X, 1982; Alain Lévy, 'Topologie sociale d'une migration familiale (Egypte, Algerie, France, Grande-Bretagne, Brésil)', *Thèse de doctorat, Sociologie*, Université de Paris 7, 1994.

²² For example. the *Nahar Misraïm* issue No.32-33, of May 1989, included a short story from an out-of-print book written by an Egyptian Jew, Robert Blum, *Histoires d'enfants pour grandes personnes*, Cairo: Théolevi G. & Co, 1942; a chapter out of Egyptian-born Elian Finbert's book, *Les plus belles histoires d'oiseaux*, Paris: Fayard, 1957; a report on the recent opening of a new Jewish library by the Jewish Community of Cairo in

Michel Abitbol on the integration of North African Jews into France added another dimension to my research by looking at a migration story that was both contemporary and comparable to the Egyptian story. In addition, the numerous published testimonies, memoirs and books of fiction written by Egyptian-Jewish émigrés in France, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Americas, enumerated in the previous chapter, contributed in reconstructing a picture of difficult beginnings followed by satisfactory achievements on an individual and collective basis in preserving and transmitting the heritage of the Jews of Egypt.²³ The availability of this material helped to consolidate the findings resulting from the examination of the small French sample. On the other hand, all the material published in Israel or Egypt on the topic of Egyptian Jews, was virtually inaccessible unless it was translated into English or French, due to my very basic Hebrew reading skills and my poor knowledge of literary Arabic. Therefore, once the stage of drawing relevant conclusions was reached, this study had to take into account the inevitable gaps in the information at hand.

I have tried to outline all the strategies I used in my research. As has been indicated, the thematic and conceptual perspective constituted the backbone of this thesis. Oral history was the primary tool and the strength of this type of methodology has been highlighted as far as its economy, direct approach, immediacy and ability to maximise the flow of information. Its weaknesses such as distortion, omission, telescoping have been taken into consideration and turned into positive input. My insider's knowledge, being of the same ethnic background, has been shown to be fundamental to the understanding of the cultural behaviour of the group. The procedure adopted to check all this information against government and community archives, the press and literary sources, was obviously crucial to the drawing of any authoritative conclusion. However, it had its limitations, as the list of publications can never be exhaustive. The distance in time and space was also an impediment in the collating of all

January 1989; a recounting of the mysterious assassination of a prominent Jew in Cairo in 1926; the 1918 statutes of a Jewish philanthropic institution for the sick in Alexandria; poems by Egyptian-born renowned Israeli writer Ada Aharoni; and a critical review of the latest book on the history of the Jews of Egypt in the Ottoman period, by Jacob Landau (ed.), published in Israel by Misgav Yerushalaim, in 1988. Next to these intellectual and scholarly contributions, other more mundane items such as traditional cooking recipes from Egypt were also included as they were deemed to be just as essential to the transmission of the cultural heritage of the Jews of Egypt.

²³ To name just a few of those Egyptian-born French Jews, who published their memoirs: Frederic Galimidi in *Alexandrie sur Seine*, Collection l'Echelle de Jacob IV, Tarascon: Cousins de Salonique Editeurs, 1999, related the story of his exile from Egypt and the long process of integration in French society; Albert Pardo wrote his first book, *L'Egypte que j'ai connue*, published by *Nahar Misraïm* in 1999, in which he remembered with nostalgia the Egypt of pre-1956. He intermingled his own story with little vignettes about Egyptian lifestyle such as the unusual occupations, the customs and superstitions. I also found more testimonies in the newly revived *Bulletin de liaison* of the ASPCJE, in the section '*les textes de la mémoire*', where personal memories of Egypt and of the early days in France, are evoked by the owners of those memories, in the form of a short text.

relevant data and I had to contend with what was available and accessible. The methodology I adopted has taken into consideration those limitations, and aimed to construct, through a socio-historical thematic approach backed by personal testimonies, primary and secondary sources, a clear and informed picture of my topic, allowing for more valid conclusions.

CHAPTER III:

The Jews of Egypt in the Modern Age - A Chequered History

The present chapter focuses mainly on the conditions leading to the forced emigration of the Jews of Egypt post 1948. It is, therefore, essential to look at the political situation in Egypt as it evolved and impacted on its Jewish population. The documented history of Jewish settlement in Egypt stretches back to twenty-five centuries without interruption. However, this study does not claim that today's Egyptian Jews are the descendants of those ancient Israelites and the gap between the mythical history and the historical reality is not disputed. As recognised by most specialists in the subject such as the historian Shimon Shamir, 'the majority of modern Egyptian Jewry was the product of waves of immigration...when Egypt became a land of opportunity' in the 1860s.¹ Nevertheless, in the collective memory of Jews from Egypt now dispersed throughout the world, the feeling of continuity between them and their forebears, whether it is justified or not, constitutes an integral part of their perception of self, of their identity. Thus, both the mythical and historical forces have contributed to the shaping of the Egyptian Jewish identity.

The 1798 French Expedition and its consequences

According to convention, the modern history of Egypt begins in 1798, with the landing of a French expeditionary force led by Napoleon Bonaparte. This invasion has traditionally been viewed by historians as the catalyst that first exposed Egypt to modernity and Western influence. Obviously this exposure has had a profound socio-economic impact on the various population groups. I have, therefore, chosen this period as a starting point for my study of the modern experience of Egyptian Jewry.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Egypt stood ravaged by internecine wars between the local Mamluk rulers, trying to throw off the yoke of the Ottoman Sultan. Inefficiency and disorder were widespread and the country was plunged into anarchy. From about 1780, 'a state of quasi-permanent civil war' reigned, which led to a severe financial crisis.² Epidemics and famine decimated an already destitute general population. Economically and culturally,

¹ Shimon Shamir. 'Notes on researching the modern history of Egyptian Jewry', pp.3-7.

² Afaf Lutfi Al-Sayid Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, p.15.

Egypt was in a state of total disintegration. Various sources mention a depleted Jewish community of about six or seven thousand, subjected ‘to the whim of the local rulers, who maltreated them and confiscated their property’.³ For the most part, the Jews lived in extreme poverty, confined to restricted quarters, working as small artisans, pawnbrokers and moneychangers.

This was the situation Napoleon Bonaparte was confronted with when he landed in Egypt in 1798, wearing the mantle of liberator of the oppressed. There is historical debate about the aims of the young French Republic in launching this expedition. Some claimed that it was politically motivated by Franco-British rivalry and by the desire to impact on Britain’s trade with India.⁴ Others argued that the object was both commercial and scientific since Bonaparte ‘devoted a great deal of his attention to the means of developing the commerce and agriculture of that rich country’.⁵ Another rather spurious reason was the avenging of the honour of France, because of the constant harassment and humiliation imposed by the Mamluk *beys*⁶ on resident French merchants.⁷ Whatever the real reasons were, underlying the political and economic pragmatism, the young Republic, self-appointed champion of human rights, needed to invoke a much more noble ideal to justify its occupation of Egypt, the republican ideal of a *mission civilisatrice et régénatrice*.⁸

This imported idea of civilising and regenerating Egypt proved to be the cornerstone of Egypt’s future from then on. An array of scientists – 167 altogether – joined the French army of 54,000 men embarking from the port of Toulon on the 19 May 1798. They included orientalist scholars, engineers, administrators, mathematicians, zoologists, astronomers, draughtsmen, architects, printers, interpreters, health officers and even musicians.⁹ The French forces landed in Alexandria with great fanfare, after succeeding to escape British naval surveillance. In spite of an initial military victory against the Mamluks at the pyramids, the French army was left stranded in Egypt when the entire French fleet was destroyed by the British at the Bay of Aboukir on the first of August 1798. A year later, because of the

³ Jacob Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, New York: New York University Press, 1969, p.3.

⁴ Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, p.18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁶ Turkish title given to governors.

⁷ Robert Solé, *L’Egypte, passion française*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1997, pp.28-30.

⁸ Mort Rosenblum, in *Mission to Civilize – The French Way*, pointed to the historical meaning of *civiliser*, according to *Oxford Historical Dictionary*: ‘to bring out of a state of barbarism, to instruct in the arts of life and thus elevate in the scale of humanity’.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.32.

urgency of the political situation back in France, Napoleon was forced to flee the country secretly, leaving behind the bulk of his forces, under the command of General Kléber. The new commander tried in vain to negotiate with the Ottomans and the British an honourable repatriation of his men. His successor, General Jacques Menou, a French convert to Islam and an able administrator, attempted to focus on some of the early objectives of the expedition, such as instituting land and tax reforms.¹⁰ However, his plans did not come to fruition due to the surrender of the French forces after the Anglo-Ottoman invasion of 1801. He ended up overseeing the evacuation of the humiliated French troops on board British ships as well as the confiscation by the British of most of the treasures gathered by the French scientists. Amongst those treasures, was the famous Rosetta Stone which proved later to be the key to the deciphering of the hieroglyphs.¹¹

In spite of the military setback, the French scholars and scientists pursued their avowed task of discovering Egypt and revealing it to Europe, while bringing Western *savoir-faire* and civilisation to what they considered a backward part of the world. Their achievements were numerous. The French were responsible for introducing in the Middle East the first Arabic and French printing press.¹² ‘The absence of printing over the preceding centuries has often been cited as evidence of the backwardness and isolation of the Arab world that the French occupation was to shatter’, wrote the Orientalist professor from New York University, Timothy Mitchell.¹³ The *Institut d’Egypte* was created in August 1798, modelled on the famous *Institut de France*.¹⁴ This is where the embryo of the encyclopedic work *Description de l’Egypte*, was born. It was published in 1809. Undeniably, the most important French contribution was in the field of archaeology with the deciphering of the hieroglyphs by the orientalist Jean-François Champollion in 1822.

Apart from all the achievements of the scientists and the scholars, one might ask if the French Expedition had any significant impact on Egypt, after a presence of a mere three years and three months. Although the Egyptian historian Al-Sayyid Marsot claimed there was nothing

¹⁰ Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, p.20.

¹¹ Robert Solé, Dominique Valbelle, *La Pierre de Rosette*, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1999.

¹² The Arabic printing press was part of the treasures Napoleon had plundered from the Vatican during his Italian Campaign.

¹³ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p.133.

¹⁴ Solé in *L’Egypte, passion française*, pp.39-43, pointed out that some of the problems raised during the working sessions of the Institute concerned the improvement of the judiciary and the education system, the purification of the Nile water and most importantly, the project of joining the Mediterranean to the Red Sea by the digging of a canal.

of substance, she acknowledged that the importance of the expedition lay elsewhere and was not to be discounted:

It broke the last links between Mamluk beys and the indigenous population when the former showed that they were incapable of saving Egypt from invasion. It also brought French technocrats to the country, many of whom were St Simonians, and inspired them to offer their services to Muhammad Ali after 1815... Lastly, it brought the British into the Mediterranean... This last factor was to have more enduring effects on Egypt than anything else.¹⁵

From the British perspective, analysts also seem to agree that in spite of the utter failure of the French Expedition, it had far reaching consequences both for the future of Egypt and for the penetration of European influence and trade in that part of the world. The British historian, Henry Dodwell confirms that ‘French occupation of Egypt came to an inglorious end. But it had been far from fruitless. It had shaken Mamluk power; it had fully awakened English minds to the strategic importance of a country placed midway between East and West; it had illustrated Turkish incompetence; and incidentally it had brought to Egypt an Albanian adventurer, Muhammad Ali.’¹⁶ This so-called Albanian adventurer, who first set foot in Egypt in 1801 with the Anglo-Ottoman expeditionary forces and who had ‘no cultural identity other than the Ottoman one’, ended up ruling the country and founding a dynasty that would endure until 1954.

As far as the Egyptian Jews were concerned, their first contact with modernity embodied by the French invaders was not altogether positive. In his usual autocratic way, Bonaparte ordered them to organise themselves on the same basis as the Jews of France, in an institution called the *Consistoire*, headed by two rabbis (*Grands Prêtres de la Nation Juive*) and seven Councillors (*Conseillers*). This body would be responsible for the whole of the Jewish community, in case of any disturbance or reprehensible behaviour.¹⁷ There is no evidence that this order was followed after Bonaparte’s departure. One document, dated 17 September

¹⁵ Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, pp. 20-1.

¹⁶ Henry Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931, and New York: AMS Press, 1977, pp. 9-21. Muhammad Ali, born in Kavala in 1769, was sent to Egypt in 1801 as head of the strong Albanian contingent of the Turkish forces assembled to expel the French with the help of the British. After the surrender of the French and the subsequent withdrawal of the British, Muhammad Ali manoeuvred himself into power and was granted official recognition by the Sultan. By 1811, he dealt the Mamluk beys a final blow when he lured them inside the Cairo Citadel and had them all massacred.

¹⁷ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, p.135. Landau found in the archives of the Alexandria Jewish Community, the original order issued by Bonaparte, dated 7 September 1798, nominating the various members of the *Consistoire*.

1854, written in Arabic, outlined the statutes of the Alexandria Jewish Community and they did not appear to follow the Napoleonic model.¹⁸

Bonaparte was also reputed to have ruthlessly bombarded a synagogue that stood on the present site of the *Eliahou Hannavi* Synagogue in Alexandria, on the pretext that it was obstructing the operation of his cannons. The real reason is thought to have been one of retaliation for the non-payment of a heavy monetary imposition on an impecunious Jewish community.¹⁹ However, in spite of the victimisation of Egyptian Jews by the French invaders at the time, and in view of the privileged role French culture has played in Egypt from thereon, especially vis-à-vis the minorities, including the Egyptian Jews, it is clear that the French expedition, albeit indirectly, deeply affected the future destinies of Egyptian Jewry.

Muhammad Ali and the modernisation of Egypt

Muhammad Ali's reign over Egypt spanned nearly half a century, from 1805 to 1849 and proved crucial for the development of the country. During the first years of his rule, he established his authority by ruthlessly eliminating any opposition and massacring his sworn enemies, the Mamluk beys. He was then free to fully occupy himself with his plans of modernising Egypt's socio-economic base. According to Al-Sayyid Marsot, he firmly believed 'in the value of specialists. He searched them out, learned from them and made use of that knowledge.'²⁰ He found them initially amongst ethno-religious minority groups such as the Armenians who served as 'translators, interpreters and high officials in the bureaucracy' or the Syrian Christians, regarded as experts at tax levying and as astute merchants.²¹ However, it was mostly towards France that Muhammad Ali turned for financial and technical expertise to help him realise his ambitious plans of administrative and economic reforms. From as early as 1805, the French had recognised that he was the only possible ruler for Egypt and their local agents cultivated privileged relations with the Pasha.²² He used the

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 161-5. See copy of the French translation from the original Arabic document (probably lost), in *Revue Israélite d'Egypte*, V (21): November 15-25, 1916, pp.193-6.

¹⁹ Emile Gabbay, in *Juifs d'Egypte, Images et Textes*, Paris: Editions du Scribe, 1984, p.138, wrote: 'Certains écrits rapportent que Napoléon fit bombarder ce temple sous prétexte qu'il constituait un obstacle au tir de ses canons entre le fort de Kom-El-Dick et la mer, mais ce bombardement ferait, en réalité, suite au non-paiement d'une somme de 50 000 talaris imposée à la Communauté qui n'était pas en mesure de la payer.' The policy adopted by the French, during their short stay in Egypt was to levy taxes on a community basis and the Jewish community's share had apparently been set at thirty thousand francs, a sizeable amount for those days.

²⁰ Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, p.75

²¹ Ibid., p.76

²² Faivre d'Arcier Amaury, *Les Agents de Napoléon en Egypte (1801-1815)*, Levallois, France: Centres d'Etudes Napoléoniennes, 1990, p.169: 'Sur le plan politique, les agents de Napoléon ont eu le mérite de reconnaître en

skills of the French technocrats who had come to Egypt with the French army and others, mainly Saint-Simonists, as mentioned earlier, ‘who flocked to Egypt in search of jobs when Napoleon’s Empire collapsed and the army disbanded.’²³ For instance, in 1825, in an effort to raise the dismal standard of public health, Muhammad Ali sought the services of a French physician, Antoine Barthélemy Clot, who became known as Clot-Bey and set out to establish a military hospital in conjunction with a medical school. It was the first time that the study of a language other than Arabic - in this case French – had been introduced as part of the official curriculum of a government institution.²⁴

The Pasha’s reforms also targeted the military, in view of his obvious need for a strong army. By enrolling the services of French and British officers, he transformed his troops from an unruly and potentially dangerous amalgamation of mercenaries and foreigners, into a more professional army ‘following European discipline, formed on the European mode of organisation’.²⁵ He instituted a new order of practice called *nizam jadid* and created barracks, training camps and training schools for military cadres. From 1844 to 1849, Egyptian students from the social elite were sent to a school in Paris, set up by the Egyptian government and run by the French Ministry of War, where the motto was order and obedience.²⁶ Egypt became the first province of the Ottoman Empire to have an army trained and organised along these lines. The objective of Muhammad Ali was obviously not only to train the bodies of his subjects but also to shape their minds into a Western mould.

In the domain of public administration, Muhammad Ali again did not hesitate to send to France, at his expense, a number of handpicked young Egyptians to be trained in that field. His ultimate aim was to displace the Turks who had a monopoly on that sector of government. In addition, a number of technical schools were created locally, under French and Italian initiative and Egypt was reputed to have been ‘the first oriental country in which anything like a regular system of westernised education was established’.²⁷

Mehemet Ali – ce chef albanais sorti du rang et sans instruction – le seul homme capable de gouverner l’Egypte. Drovetti et Menguin entretiennent avec lui des rapports privilégiés, et celui-ci les reçoit toujours avec bonté.’

²³ Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, p.77.

²⁴ Jean-Jacques Luthi, *Introduction à la littérature d’expression française en Egypte*, Paris: Editions de l’Ecole, 1974, p.40. From 1882, under British rule, English displaced French in the public education system.

²⁵ Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt*, pp.222-6.

²⁶ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp.71-2.

²⁷ Dodwell, *The Founder of Modern Egypt*, pp.238-9.

The Jewish minority in nineteenth-century Egypt

How did this political, cultural and institutional upheaval affect the indigenous non-Muslim minorities? Eventually and inevitably, the wide programs of reform and westernisation instituted by Muhammad Ali impacted very significantly and very favourably on those minorities. However, as far as the Jews were concerned, their lot did not improve dramatically during the early part of Muhammad Ali's reign, although the new laws provided them with better protection than under the previous administration.²⁸ Contemporary observers such as Edward William Lane, who has written extensively on that period of Egyptian history, noted the oppression Jews were still subjected to and how both Muslims and Copts hated them and treated them with great contempt. Lane added that Jews could still be 'arbitrarily arrested and only released upon payment of a heavy fine', which explains why they were apparently very careful not to show any exterior sign of wealth.²⁹ They were still bearing the burden of the *jizya* tax – which was only abolished in 1855 – plus a community tax, in addition to the other heavy taxes imposed on the general population.

In this period, most Jews remained very devout although apparently undistinguishable from the rest of the indigenous population, apart from the colour of their turbans.³⁰ They worked either as hawkers, small traders, artisans and shopkeepers or as moneychangers - *sarrāf* - and general merchants. As with all *dhimmi* communities, the division between Jews and other ethnic groups was drawn on religious lines and they lived segregated and alienated from the Muslim majority.³¹

The Jewish community of those days consisted mainly of two religious groups: a minority of Karaites who only accepted the authority of the Written Law³², and a majority of Rabbanites, who followed the rabbinical tradition which included both the Oral and the Written Law.³³ As

²⁸ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, p.3.

²⁹ Ibid., p.150. Landau pointed out that 'Lane, the orientalist who knew Egypt so well, has left us with what seems to be the first detailed account of 19th-century Egyptian Jewry.'

³⁰ Ibid., p.148 & p.150: 'the colours of their turbans are the same as those of the Christian subjects. Their women veil themselves, and dress in every respect, in public, like the other women of Egypt...They are generally strict in the performance of their religious ordinances.'

³¹ Ibid., p.158.

³² The Karaite Jews reject the authority of the Oral Law, and accept as their guide the Hebrew Bible and human reason. The written scriptures include the *Torah* (law), the *Nevi'im* (Prophets), and the *Ketuvim* (hagiography or writings). The Oral Law includes the Mishnah, compiled by Judah ha-Nasi at the end of the second century, and the Gemara, which is a commentary on the Mishnah with both Palestinian and Babylonian versions. Together, the Mishnah and Gemara make up the Talmud (fifth century).

³³ Traditionnally, the Karaites – meaning readers of the scriptures – were believed to belong to a Jewish sect founded by Anan Ben David in eighth century Baghdad. According to Nathan Schur, *History of the Karaites*,

a testimony to the ancient origins of Karaite Jews in Egypt, the Karaite Jewish historian, Mourad El Kodsí claimed that:

The Karaite community in Egypt had in its possession, until the end of the nineteenth century, a legal document stamped by the palm of Amr Ibn al-As, the first Islamic governor of Egypt, in which he ordered the leaders of the Rabbanite community not to interfere in the way of life of the Karaites nor with the way they celebrate their holidays. This document is dated 20 AH (641 CE), more than one hundred years before Anan.³⁴

However, recent historical scholarship invalidates this claim and most scholars do not support the existence of a seventh-century document that mentioned Karaites. Similar documents such as, for example, the Geniza letter of privileges to the Jews of Kaybar, were well-known forgeries.³⁵

According to Landau, their exact number in the first half of the nineteenth century is very difficult to ascertain, as there was no censuses taken at the time.³⁶ From local accounts or those made by travellers, it is assumed to hover around six or seven thousand. The Karaites had been living in Egypt for over one thousand years and except for their religious practices, were totally assimilated into their Muslim environment as far as language and lifestyle were concerned.³⁷ Until the beginning of the twentieth century, the Karaites and the Rabbanites lived and functioned separately from one another although their differences were more on issues of religious practices and calendar rather than dogma and faith.³⁸ However, according to Laskier, European colonial penetration and the influx of Jews from Europe ‘made the Karaites even less significant than before, compelling them to cooperate ever more intensely with the Rabbanites.’³⁹ A definite rapprochement occurred between the two communities under British rule because of its policy of ‘recognising only the Sephardi Rabbanite

Frankfurt/Berlin/New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1992, p. 22, ‘modern research does not accept the traditional Karaite version, which regards Anan unreservedly as the founder of the Karaite sect. Most scholars stipulate now the existence of two separate groups *the Ananites, followers of Anan and sometimes actually members of his family * the Karaites, who were the outcome of the coalescence of various sectarian groups.’

³⁴ Mourad El-Kodsí, *The Karaite Jews of Egypt, 1882-1986*, Lyons, N.Y.: Wilprint, 1987, p.2. El-Kodsí was born in Cairo. A history graduate of the University of Cairo, with a Master’s degree from the University of Rochester, New York, he immigrated to the United States in 1959. After retiring from his teaching profession, he continues to research the history of the Karaite community.

³⁵ Information provided by Norman A. Stillman.

³⁶ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, p. 4.

³⁷ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, pp.39-44. Beinín pointed out that ‘the Karaites had lived in Egypt for 1000 years, mainly in Cairo’s *harat el-yahud al-qara’in*. They were integrated into Cairo’s ethnic division of labor, typically working as goldsmiths and jewelers... In the twentieth century, wealthier Karaites began to move to the middle-class districts of Abassiya and Heliopolis and to adopt elements of bourgeois, francophone, cosmopolitan culture.’

³⁸ Krämer, *The Jews of Modern Egypt*, p.23.

³⁹ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, pp. 6-7.

community as the sole representative of all the Jews of Egypt vis-à-vis the authorities’, a policy which more or less forced the Karaites under the umbrella of the Rabbanites.⁴⁰ As for the Sephardim, they came to Egypt in the aftermath of the Christian *Reconquista* of Muslim Spain and their subsequent expulsion from Spain and Portugal in 1492 and 1497 respectively.⁴¹ They were only marginally integrated in their Muslim context and had retained their particular language - Judeo-Spanish or Ladino – as well as a number of traditions they had brought with them from their country of origin. There was also a small group of Ashkenazim who were in Egypt since the sixteenth century and their numbers had been reinforced by the arrival of refugees from the Ukraine, escaping persecution by the Chmielnicki Cossacks in 1648.⁴²

The living conditions of the minorities gradually improved as Muhammad Ali’s successors continued to display even more partiality to the West, wishing ‘to direct the country’s economy towards the European world market’, as noted by Marsot.⁴³ Their *laissez faire* policy opened the door to an increasing number of foreign nationals who started to flock to Egypt, set up shop, form colonies and gain influence.⁴⁴ They were particularly encouraged by the special status granted to foreigners under the so-called ‘Capitulations’ regime.⁴⁵ Originally intended to protect foreign merchants residing in the Ottoman Empire, this regime had grown to allow all foreign nationals to enjoy special economic and legal privileges. Apart from guaranteeing their lives and property, freedom of religion and exemption from the *jizya*, it also exempted them from local taxation and placed them under the jurisdiction of their own local consuls and out of reach of Muslim courts.⁴⁶

Under the Mamluk regime, these privileges had not always been respected and foreign merchants were often attacked and held to ransom in spite of protests by their governments.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.7. Laskier noted two further reasons for this rapprochement: the secularisation of Egyptian Jewry, which attenuated the importance of religious differences and the rise of Arab nationalism which caused the two communities to ‘strive for greater internal unity.’

⁴¹ Krämer, *The Jews of Modern Egypt*, p.16.

⁴² Ibid., p.18.

⁴³ Marsot, *Egypt in the Reign of Muhammad Ali*, p.256.

⁴⁴ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.8. Krämer indicated that this ‘wave of massive immigration which began in the mid-nineteenth century, continued well into the 1920s, bringing the number of foreigners living in Egypt up from about 15,000 in the 1850s to 100,000 in the 1880s and over 200,000 in the years after World War I.’

⁴⁵ From the Latin word *capitula*, meaning chapter, the capitulations were initially an ancient treaty of commerce and protection, composed of a number of chapters, negotiated between the King of France, François I and the Sultan Suleiman I of Turkey in 1536, giving France extraterritorial jurisdiction over French expatriates in the Levant and later extended to cover all Europeans.

⁴⁶ Krämer, *The Jews of Modern Egypt*, pp.29-30.

As mentioned earlier, this was one of the excuses invoked by Napoleon Bonaparte for his ill-fated expedition to Egypt. However, Muhammad Ali, with a view of attracting foreign trade and investments, had decreed that all outward manifestations of xenophobia towards non-Moslems were to be suppressed. Distinctive clothing and social restrictions were abolished. Foreigners were to be protected as per the spirit of the Capitulations, which was further reinforced by the clout of the Mixed Tribunals set up from 1875.⁴⁷ This new institution completely shielded any foreign national from the local powers of law and order.⁴⁸ Not only did the Egyptian police not have the right to arrest Europeans, they could not even interfere in any altercations between them and indigenous Egyptians.⁴⁹ It is obvious that, for reasons of personal safety, economic privileges and social standing, the status of foreigner became a very desirable commodity and Jews and non-Jews alike sought it very actively.

The golden age of Egyptian Jewry

As already pointed out, with Western powers gaining more and more of a foothold in the country, Egypt had gradually become a very attractive destination for Greeks, Italians, Syrian, North Africans and Armenians. According to Landau's figures, a large proportion of the immigrants were Jewish, coming from the rest of the ailing Ottoman Empire and the Mediterranean basin, upon the outbreak of the Greek-Turkish War in 1821. In 1840, Muhammad Ali had even encouraged such Jews to settle in the country. It is important to realise that at the time, 'the Ottoman authorities did not prevent travel within their empire, and Jews from Iraq and elsewhere emigrated to Egypt to benefit from a government that ruled more leniently than those in other parts of the empire.'⁵⁰ The immigrants were coming from places such as Corfu, Salonika, the Aegean Archipelago and Italy. Krämer also mentions the Ashkenazi Jews from Russia, Rumania and Poland who came in their hundreds in the late

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.30. Krämer specified that from 1875, the 'Mixed Courts unified the legal codes and procedures by creating special codes based on the French Code Napoleon, and they were soon able to monopolize all court action involving, however remotely, the interests of foreigners and their companies.' This unique institution was in charge of civil and commercial cases between Egyptians and foreigners and between foreigners of different nationalities. Three district courts were established in Cairo, Alexandria and El Mansurah, each with one Egyptian and two foreign judges, with a court of appeals composed of six Egyptian and ten foreign judges, in Alexandria. Modifications introduced in 1889 and 1911 gave the Court of Appeals the right to approve legislation to be applied to foreigners.

⁴⁸ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, p.21. Landau pointed out that 'the authorities were forbidden to harm them, conscript them, or confiscate their property without the prior permission of their country's local representative. In some cases the foreign state granted them legal aid.'

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 21. Landau wrote: 'local authorities generally feared to harm foreign nationals or protected persons in any way, knowing that their state's local representative would protest vehemently and might even demand damages for the persons they affected and punishment for those responsible.'

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 25.

nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly after the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, 'almost all of them young and without means of support'.⁵¹

Underlying all of the above, it was the combination of three key elements that transformed Egypt into a new Eldorado and brought her into the international market economy. These elements were the building of the Suez Canal in 1869, the British occupation of the country in 1882, and the development of the cotton industry thanks to modern methods of agriculture.

The opening of the Suez Canal proved to be critical to the development of modern Egypt as it opened up the country to the world and created fresh opportunities for local and foreign entrepreneurs. In 1854, the Viceroy Muhammad Said Pasha – son of Muhammad Ali – awarded the construction of the Canal to the French Saint-Simonist engineer, Ferdinand de Lesseps. Initially, France had provided about half the capital together with the technical expertise while Egypt contributed the balance plus the necessary manpower. The construction proceeded under conditions described to have been very close to slave labour and is said to have cost the lives of between 100,000 to 125,000 Egyptian workers. The two governments had agreed that the *Compagnie Universelle du Canal maritime de Suez* was to run the Canal for 99 years, after which time its ownership would revert to Egypt. The inauguration of the Canal in 1869 by the Empress Eugenie of France, was a lavish affair, organised on a grand scale by the extravagant Khedive Ismail, and attended by numerous European heads of states as well as the elite of Egyptian society. As part of the celebrations, Ismail engaged in an extensive building program. Luxurious hotels, such as the Gezira Palace Hotel – still operating today – were raised to host the prestigious guests and their retinue.⁵² A new road between Cairo and the Pyramids was constructed especially for the visitors. Furthermore, Ismail, who saw himself as a great patron of the arts, announced plans to build a new 850-seat opera theatre in Cairo. He even commissioned Verdi to compose the opera *Aida* for its opening but, due to various delays, the opera only had its premiere in Cairo in December 1871, in front of a predominantly European audience.⁵³

⁵¹ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.18.

⁵² The Empress Eugénie of France was the guest of honour at the palace and the Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary was also a guest there.

⁵³ Mary Jane Phillip-Matz, *Verdi: A Biography*, Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993. Originally, the Khedive Ismail had asked Verdi to compose an inaugural hymn for the opening night of the new Opera Theatre, but Verdi refused and Egypt had to settle for a performance of *Rigoletto*. However, Verdi relented when he saw the libretto by Camille du Locle (1832-1903), based on a story set in ancient Egypt written by the Egyptologist Auguste Mariette (1821-1881). The work was supposed to be ready in January 1871 but was

In fact, the Khedive Ismail, a fervent francophile, steeped in Western culture, wanted his country to become part of Europe at all costs.⁵⁴ Due to his extravagant lifestyle, he squandered Egypt's reserves in the process and was forced to sell all his shares in the *Compagnie du Canal* to the British in 1875.⁵⁵ On the edge of bankruptcy, Egypt was compelled to hand over the control of its treasury to a Franco-British Commission. In 1882, on the pretext of protecting the interests and safety of foreign nationals, British troops landed in Egypt to squash a military rebellion led by Colonel Orabi Pasha. The latter was trying to impose a nationalist government on the Khedive, free from foreign interference under the slogan 'Egypt for the Egyptians'.⁵⁶ Great Britain effectively ruled Egypt until the end of World War II and its presence on Egyptian soil was maintained until the Suez War of 1956.⁵⁷ Under the British Protectorate, Egypt entered an era of political stability and economic growth. The climate of economic liberalism and legal privilege fostered by British rule, while favouring the Egyptian elite, also raised considerably the status of the non-Muslim minorities who 'welcomed with considerable enthusiasm French and British colonial penetration', as noted by Laskier.⁵⁸

The third element of the equation was the development of the cotton industry by Mohammed Ali in 1820 and the introduction towards the end of the nineteenth century of the finest variety of that commodity, the long-staple cotton.⁵⁹ Because Britain needed an adequate supply of that particular type of cotton for the textile factories of Manchester and Leeds, and since the

delayed by the advent of the Franco-Prussian war. All the costumes, designs and scenery for *Aida* were being made in France and could not be taken out of the city until the end of hostilities. The first performance took place in December 1871, nearly two years after the opening of the Suez Canal and the Cairo Opera House. The Khedivial Opera House burned down in October 1971.

⁵⁴ Solé, *L'Égypte, passion française*, pp.153-9. Solé noted that Ismail, grandson of Muhammad Ali, was granted the title of Khedive in 1867 by the Sultan of Constantinople. He was a graduate of Saint Cyr, the most prestigious military school in France. He was reputed to have uttered the famous words: '*Mon pays n'est plus en Afrique. Nous faisons partie de l'Europe.*'

⁵⁵ André Maurois, *Disraeli*, New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1928. Maurois pointed out that it was the world largest banker at the time, Baron Lionel de Rothschild who granted Disraeli a personal loan of four million British pounds to buy the Suez Canal shares for Great Britain. Once Disraeli secured the deal with the Khedive, he proceeded to convince the British government to reimburse Rothschild.

⁵⁶ Jacques Berque, *Egypt, Imperialism and Revolution*, translated by Jean Stewart, London: Faber & Faber, 1972, pp.112-24.

⁵⁷ Contemporary reports on the events of 1882 were typical examples of imperialistic discourse. Evelyn Baring Cromer, first British Viceroy of Egypt, stated in *Modern Egypt by the Earl of Cromer*, London: Macmillan, 1908, that in view of the political situation, a foreign occupation of Egypt was inevitable and an 'armed British intervention was, under the special circumstances of the case, the only possible solution of the difficulties which existed in 1882.'

⁵⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.1.

⁵⁹ Cotton is measured in staple length, which is the minimum length of one cotton fibre used in a yarn. A long staple yarn is needed to spin finer yarns and the longer the staple the better the yarn. The long staple measures 30 to 37 mm. The Egyptian variety of long staple cotton bears the name of the man who developed it, the Greek agronomist Sakellarides.

American Civil War had interrupted cotton exports from the Confederacy, high demand for that raw material brought Egypt into the world commodity markets after 1860.⁶⁰ A number of experimental farms were established and a lot of research went into cotton selection, fertilisation and irrigation. Agriculture was transformed, infrastructure was widely expanded, and demand for credit and capital soared.⁶¹ Egyptian revenue from cotton rose dramatically and by 1914, cotton exports accounted for ninety-two percent of the total export sector.⁶² According to the testimony of Maurice Mizrahi, the contribution of the Jews to the development of the cotton industry was disproportionate to their number:

*Avant la nationalisation, on trouvait à Alexandrie quelque quarante-cinq sociétés d'exportation de coton, vingt-cinq d'entre elles appartenaient à des Juifs, sans compter les compagnies dont le personnel et le directeur étaient juifs.*⁶³

At the same time, political and social upheavals occurring in different parts of the Jewish Diaspora impacted on the ethnic make-up of Egyptian Jewry. Widespread pogroms and persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe and Morocco in the second half of the nineteenth century had already brought to Egypt a significant number of refugees in need of asylum.⁶⁴ As noted by the historian Shimon Shamir, 'Egypt was for the Jews a veritable "Land of Goshen" – a safe abode for the local community and a haven for Jews from neighboring countries'.⁶⁵ Additionally, between 1914 and 1916, as indicated by Laskier, on the pretext that they were enemy subjects, 'over eleven thousand Ashkenazi Jews expelled from Palestine by Jemal Pasha, the Ottoman commander of Syria and Palestine, fled to Alexandria, Cairo

⁶⁰ For the history of the development of the cotton industry in Egypt from 1820 to 1914, see E.R.J. Owen, 'Lord Cromer and the development of Egyptian industry, 1883-1927', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 2, pp.282-301, 1966, and Alan Richards, *Egypt's Agricultural Development, 1800-1980: Technical and Social change*, Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1982.

⁶¹ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.37.

⁶² 'No other place in the world in the nineteenth century was transformed on a greater scale to serve the production of a single industry', wrote Timothy Mitchell in *Colonising Egypt*, p.16.

⁶³ Maurice Mizrahi, *L'Égypte et ses Juifs Le Temps Révolu (XIXe et XXe siècle)*, Genève: Presses de l'imprimerie Avenir S.A., 1977, p.74.

⁶⁴ H. H. Ben Sasson, (ed), *A History of the Jewish People*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976, pp.813-69. Ben Sasson pointed to the fact that, from about 1825, in countries such as Tsarist Russia, Rumania and Poland, anti-Jewish measures were intensified. Jews were subjected to forced conversions, expulsions, pogroms and residence restrictions. Consequently, they fled in their thousands to America, Western Europe and the region of Palestine. As for Morocco, Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands, op. cit.*, pp.99-107, wrote that 'Moroccan Jewry, ...lived under one of the most oppressive *dhimma* systems of the later Islamic Middle Ages', a system which 'remained in force for most of the nineteenth century', under which Jews suffered persecution and widespread abuse. In 1863, the British philanthropist and Jewish leader Sir Moses Montefiore, paid a visit to the Sultan of Morocco and with the support of the British government, tried in vain to obtain from him some measure of protection for his Jewish constituency. The emancipation of Moroccan Jewry did not happen for another fifty years.

⁶⁵ Shimon Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt – A Mediterranean Society in Modern Times*, p.xiii.

and Suez.’⁶⁶ The number of Jews in Egypt reached thirty thousand by 1882 and doubled by 1918. The last census conducted by the British in 1947 indicated a Jewish population of about seventy to seventy-five thousand, which constituted 0.4% of a global Egyptian population of nineteen million.⁶⁷ Laskier’s study specified that ‘there were approximately six thousand Ashkenazim, at least thirty-five hundred Karaites, and ten thousand indigenous Jews, the rest being Orientals and *Sephardim* who were recent emigrants, or their descendants.’⁶⁸

The newcomers’ diverse ethnic backgrounds dramatically altered the face of the indigenous Jewish community, which emerged as a multicultural and multilingual mosaic, a linguistic chaos, as stated by Krämer. The Karaites spoke Egyptian Arabic whereas immigrants from the other Arab countries spoke their own Arabic dialect. Both those groups were, therefore, comfortable with the Arab culture, and lived apart from other Jews from different ethnic origins. The rapprochement occurred gradually, as mentioned earlier, as a result of outside forces and from the internal dynamics of the Jewish community.

The *Sephardim* conversed in Ladino but were also familiar with French, Italian, Turkish, and Greek. They constituted the majority group and it is from their ranks that the social elite of Egyptian Jewry rose to occupy all the leadership positions until 1956. The Greek Jews or *Romaniots* spoke Greek, the Italian Jews spoke Italian and the *Ashkenazim* spoke Yiddish, Polish or Russian. It was only after World War I that Jews gradually dropped their daily use of their native tongue apart from the home context, in favour of adopted European languages – first Italian and then French - in all other social situations.⁶⁹ English was used by some middle and upper class families mainly in business or official situations. The Jewish community records were kept in French and the use of Arabic sank to the level of the language of the poor and uneducated Jews. A basic knowledge of colloquial Egyptian Arabic was sufficient to get by in everyday situations. This Levantine cosmopolitanism was widely practised and accepted and served the Jews well under British rule and even up to 1947.

⁶⁶ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.7.

⁶⁷ Jacques Hassoun, *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, 1990, p.3. Hassoun argued that the number of seventy thousand is not uniform in all monographs. The figure of around eighty thousand is thought to be closer to the truth.

⁶⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.7.

⁶⁹ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.27. Krämer stated that ‘in the late nineteenth century (it) was mainly Italian, which until 1876 served as the language of administration and until 1905 as the chief language of instruction in the (Jewish) community schools of Alexandria. By that time, French had become the lingua franca of the local foreign minorities and the Turko-Egyptian elite alike.’

The nationality issue

The population of Egypt was traditionally defined along religious lines. In the new ‘world order’ ushered in by Muhammad Ali’s reforms, religious minorities saw the possibility to forge a better future for themselves. After having been subjected for generations to the inferior status of *dhimmis* and the various restrictions it entailed, they suddenly found a way of ensuring their physical and financial security while promoting their social and economic advancement. Although their situation had somewhat improved by the mid-nineteenth century, they still suffered periodically from blood libel accusations or attacks from sections of the Greek or Muslim population as demonstrated by the primary sources revealed in Jacob Landau’s research.⁷⁰ On the other hand, by adopting the citizenship of countries such as Austria-Hungary, Italy, France and to some extent, Great Britain, Jews could acquire a new national identity, even though most of them had never set foot in any one of those countries. Evidently, the point of the exercise was to enjoy the privileges of the Capitulations and the protection of the Mixed Tribunals.⁷¹ In view of the fact that the distribution of the judges’ posts in the Tribunals was done on a pro-rata basis, depending on the size of the foreign colonies, the countries concerned were often more than willing to grant their protection.

Great Britain, being the dominant power in the country, ‘could afford to impose strict limits in granting any kind of British protection’ and was therefore more selective than others.⁷² Only families originally from Gibraltar, Malta or Cyprus were considered eligible. As a general rule, it seems that the British granted passports mainly to leading Jewish families, who could serve them politically by acting as intermediaries between them and the local rulers. On the other hand, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, France and Italy, keen to inflate the size of their respective colonies, acceded to the demand of protection more readily. In fact, on the basis of the Crémieux Decree of 1870, the French welcomed into their ranks any Jew who could prove

⁷⁰ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, p.182, Document XXXI. ‘1879. Blood Libel in Alexandria’. It is a copy of a report, written in Italian, by the Alexandria committee of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU), dated 29 May 1870, regarding the accusation by a Maltese against a 60-year old Jew of having kidnapped his four-year old daughter to use her blood for the making of unleavened bread. See also Document XXXVIII. ‘1873-1878 – Persecution of the Jews in Damanhur’, pp. 199-200. It is a letter, written in French, addressed to the AIU, dated 15 September 1879, relating to a charge brought against Rabbi Moise Salomon – the local *shohet* or slaughterer – for emasculating a little boy. See also Landau, ‘Ritual Murder Accusations in Nineteenth-Century Egypt’, in *Middle Eastern Themes*, London: Frank Cass, 1973, pp.99-141.

⁷¹ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, p. 26. Landau reported that, in 1855, the Jewish community of Alexandria had asked for and was granted the protection of the Austro-Hungarian consulate.

⁷² Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p. 31.

even a loose Algerian descent.⁷³ The French Prime Minister went as far as declaring in 1930 that ‘the Jewish community is one of the most important and most French groups in Egypt; a possible reduction in our influence on them could not leave the government indifferent.’⁷⁴ Italian citizenship was also relatively easy to obtain especially if one was prepared to pay for it. The fact that all the municipal records of the town of Livorno had been destroyed in a fire in at the end of the nineteenth century significantly facilitated the procedure. ‘There was hardly a prominent Jewish family in Egypt whose head was not a foreign national’ noted Landau. Leading families such as the Suarez and the Mosseri families were Italian subjects while the Cattaoui⁷⁵ and the Menasce were Austro-Hungarian.⁷⁶ Some were even granted titles of nobility for services rendered to foreign legations such as the Baron de Menasce.⁷⁷ However, the ambiguity of their official foreign status did not prevent those Jews from considering themselves as an integral part of Egypt.

This must not lead one to believe that all the Jews of Egypt held a foreign nationality. In fact, only twenty-five percent did. Over forty percent were stateless or *sujets locaux* and twenty-five to thirty percent were Egyptian subjects. In spite of the reality of these figures, the issue of nationality eventually led to the stigmatisation of the whole of Egyptian Jewry as a foreign and alien element in the rising nationalistic and pan-Arabist discourse of the 1950s.⁷⁸

⁷³ Michel Abitbol, *Le Passé d'une discorde*, Paris: Perrin, 1999, pp.161-66. The man responsible for the French naturalisation of Algerian Jews was Adolphe Crémieux (1796-1880), a prominent member of the French Consistoire, a deputy under Napoleon III and Minister for Justice under the government of Gambetta. The Crémieux decree read as follows: ‘*Les israélites indigènes des départements d’Algérie sont déclarés citoyens français; en conséquence, leur statut réel et leur statut personnel seront, à compter de la promulgation du présent décret, réglés par la loi française; tous droits acquis jusqu’à ce jour restent inviolables. Toutes disposition législative, décret, règlement ou ordonnance contraires sont abolis.*’ While this decree granted French citizenship to the indigenous Jewish population of Algeria of about 37,000, it did not grant it to the Muslim population. This seemingly preferential treatment was apparently due to the fact that the Jews had agreed to be ruled by French law, relinquishing their communal religious status. According to the French sociologist, historian and political commentator, Raymond Aron (1905-1983), the legislation known as *Senatus-consulte* dated 14 July 1865 had granted the status of French ‘subjects’ to the indigenous Muslims, with the option of becoming French citizens, if they accepted to be ruled by French civil and political laws instead of Koranic laws but the majority rejected that offer.

⁷⁴ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.32.

⁷⁵ Cattaoui is also spelt Kattawi or Qattàwī.

⁷⁶ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, p.21.

⁷⁷ Mizrahi discussed the credentials of these families in *L’Égypte et ses Juifs*, pp.62-71. See also Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp.38-46.

⁷⁸ Regarding the nationality issue, see Shamir, ‘The Evolution of the Egyptian Nationality Laws and their application to the Jews in the Monarchy Period’, in Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt – A Mediterranean Society*, pp.33-67.

Western education

With the longing for a foreign national identity came the longing for Western culture and its perceived superiority over the local culture. In the prevailing climate of westernisation, from 1840 onwards, the Egyptian authorities had encouraged the establishment of foreign language and missionary schools. Elite schools, founded by foreign nationals for their respective colonies, provided Western style education to whoever could afford it. From 1844, in Alexandria and later on in Cairo and some provincial towns, Christian religious schools for boys run by French missionaries were dispensing an excellent education both in French and Arabic.⁷⁹ In 1845, the nuns belonging to the *Mission des Sœurs de Saint-Vincent de Paul* undertook girls' education, the language of tuition being mostly French and Italian. Upper and middle-class Jews from Alexandria and Cairo began sending their children to French, British, German or American missionary schools. Landau pointed out that throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Jewish boys had traditionally been educated in the *heder*, a religious elementary school, whereas girls were not given any formal education.⁸⁰

For the Jewish community, the desire to acquire French culture did not rise solely from within. It was reinforced from without, through the action of the Jews of France, imbued with the principle of the superiority of Western civilisation. Their aim was to educate and 'regenerate' their Eastern brethren by promoting French culture, which would usher them into modernity. The Jews of the Middle East had captured the attention of French Jewry on the occasion of the so-called Damascus affair of 1840, a blood libel accusation levelled against the Jewish notables of that town. The leaders of the community had been arrested and tortured into confessing their alleged crime. Adolphe Crémieux, the French Jewish leader and statesman later responsible for granting French nationality to the Algerian Jews, together with the great British philanthropist, Sir Moses Montefiore, came on a mission to Egypt to meet with Muhammad Ali, then ruler of Syria, and plead for the release of the prisoners and their full exoneration.⁸¹

⁷⁹ One of the most prestigious and oldest schools run by the Brothers of the Christian Schools, the Collège Saint-Marc in Alexandria, is still functioning to-day.

⁸⁰ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, p.73.

⁸¹ Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984, p.1. Rodrigue stated: 'The facts of the blood libel are well known. A Capucin friar, Père Thomas, disappeared in early 1840 in Damascus. Sections of the Christian Arab population of the town accused the Jews of having murdered him to use his blood for ritual purposes...the French consul of Damascus, Ratti Menton, took the accusations seriously. The governor of the town...immediately arrested the accused Jews, some of whom happened to be the leaders of the community, and tortured them to extract a confession to the alleged crime. The

During that visit, Crémieux was appalled by the state of Jewish education, and called on Egyptian and French Jewry to help establish a school for boys and a school for girls in Cairo and later in Alexandria. Due mainly to lack of funds, those schools were closed two years later but this endeavour was not to be a total failure.⁸² It motivated local Jewish philanthropists to found community and vocational training schools in Alexandria and Cairo. From 1854 onwards, free Jewish community schools were established in Alexandria to provide a more modern education to the underprivileged, thanks to the concerted efforts of a number of prominent families such as the Aghions and the de Menasces. The syllabus of the Aghion schools – as they were popularly referred to – included the teaching of Hebrew, Arabic, French and Italian simultaneously.⁸³ Girls were also catered for in those schools.⁸⁴ Their language of instruction was at first Italian because of its popularity amongst the Jewish community and later switched to French when the latter displaced the former as the *lingua franca* of most of the religious minorities in Egypt. Crémieux's initiative also paved the way for the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU) to come to Egypt in 1868 and open up new schools in the cities and the countryside.

The AIU's *mission civilisatrice* was to bring French culture to the uneducated Jewish masses in the Middle East and North Africa. The situation in Algeria, under French rule since 1830, was somewhat different. With the Crémieux decree of 1870, the Jews of Algeria became full citizens of the secular republic of France. As a result, Stillman pointed out that:

After 1870, Jewish schools all but disappeared in Algeria, as the new Jewish citizens went to state and private French schools. Jewish education was so thoroughly neglected that by the beginning of the twentieth century the Alliance Israélite Universelle, which had not felt the need to establish any schools in Algeria previously, opened large schools in Algiers (1900) and Constantine (1902) and organised courses in religious education throughout the country.⁸⁵

terrorised Damascus Jews asked for help from the Jewish community of Istanbul, which immediately appealed for the intervention of the Jewish communities of Europe.' For the impact of the affair on European Jewry, see Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: 'Ritual Murder,' Politics and the Jews in 1840*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997 and Jacques Hassoun, 'Accusation de meurtres rituels en Egypte entre 1870 et 1910 – Symptômes - ', in *Nahar Misraïm*, No.4 & 5, Novembre 1981.'

⁸² Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, pp.73-4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.76. Landau explained: 'Hebrew was the holy tongue, Arabic, the locally spoken language, French the vehicle of commerce and culture, and Italian the language spoken by many Europeans in Egypt.'

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.74-85. Landau wrote: 'In 1862, the first [Jewish] girls school was established. Despite its small size (it had room for only seventy pupils) it symbolized the beginning of a new educational policy of schooling of girls, which was never reversed in Egypt.'

⁸⁵ Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, p.28.

In Egypt, the situation was again different and the decision to open AIU schools in Egypt was apparently taken ‘to halt the flow of Jewish children to non-Jewish and, in many cases, to Christian missionary schools...(as these) schools tried to convert their Jewish pupils.’⁸⁶ Stillman noted one particular case that scandalised the Jewish community in 1914 and ‘galvanised it into action’, when ‘twenty-two boys then enrolled or recently graduated from Catholic institutions in Cairo and Alexandria secretly converted to Christianity.’⁸⁷ Furthermore, as late as 1911, the AIU was still reporting to its central office in Paris antisemitic incidents and blood libel accusations in Egypt.⁸⁸ However, the Jewish community possessed enough clout with the local authorities to obtain justice in nearly every case. In 1919, the AIU considered its mission accomplished and transferred back to the community all its schools of Cairo and Alexandria except for one in the small town of Tantah, that continued to function until World War II. By 1947, the rate of literacy reached by the Jews of Egypt was as high as 82.2% overall, with a gap between males at 89.7% and females at 75.9%.⁸⁹

Most of the Jewish community schools only provided primary education. To the Jewish urban middle and upper class that resented the missionary activities of some Christian schools,⁹⁰ the new French schools known as *Lycées de la Mission Laïque française* offered an excellent secular education, complete from kindergarden to matriculation - *baccalauréat* - in both Alexandria and Cairo.⁹¹ Furthermore, a Jewish primary and secondary dayschool called *Lycée de l'Union Juive pour l'Enseignement* that provided a non sectarian education, along the lines of the French secular schools was established in 1925, under the stimulus of a leading member of the B'nai B'rith Lodge of Alexandria, Maître Félix Benzakein, together with the philanthropist, Baron Alfred de Menasce. They were both outraged by the latest blood libel accusation emanating from a Catholic school in Alexandria. A priest of the Collège Sainte Catherine in Alexandria, Brother Léonce, in the course of his Easter sermon,

⁸⁶ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, pp.85-91.

⁸⁷ Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*, pp.21, 245-249. According to documents from the AIU's archives, most of these boys ‘were brought back into the fold’ through ‘legal, political and family pressures’. This extraordinary event became an international cause célèbre.

⁸⁸ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, pp.182-3, pp.198-200, pp.215-7.

⁸⁹ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.10.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.159-60. See copy of the journal of a deputation sent to Egypt by the committee of the Malta Protestant College, discussing a visit to Jewish families, with the view of enrolling their children in their school and converting them.

⁹¹ The *Lycée de la Mission Laïque française* was first established in Alexandria in 1909, then in Cairo a year later. The Lycée prepared its students for the *Baccalauréat 1ère et 2ème partie*, which enabled them to be admitted into French Universities.

had accused the Jews of killing Christian children at the time of Passover, according to the libel that Jews had to mix the blood of a Christian child to unleavened bread.⁹²

On the other hand, under British rule, English had become the language of power and its teaching was promoted as the ultimate key to Western culture, both in government and private schools. Anxious to ensure an even better future for their children, some Anglophile Jewish families enrolled them in prestigious British private schools such as Victoria College, where they sat on the same benches as Egypt's elite.⁹³ This elite included members of Egypt's royal family, personalities such as the future King Hussein of Jordan, as well as members of upper crust Egyptian society.

In spite of the prestige associated with English culture, especially amongst the minorities, English never succeeded in dislodging French as the preferred language of the Westernised urban centres of Egypt and, until the late 1950s, French remained the second official language of Egypt after Arabic. A good knowledge of French was essential in the legal, professional and business sectors as well as in all social situations. It was also the nominated language at the Mixed Tribunals, which followed the Napoleon Code. This phenomenon was a true representation of the world-view of the Egyptian elite minorities. It had created a milieu, within a Middle Eastern context, where a major section of the more or less educated population communicated in a European language such as French, at different degrees of proficiency, across the barriers of ethnicity, religion and nationality.

Until 1945, all the private and communal scholastic institutions, whether French or English, Jewish or Christian, secular or religious, operated independently of local government interference and could, therefore, establish their own curriculum and pursue their own agenda.⁹⁴ The type of education they promoted was fundamental in the shaping of a new generation of Jewish and Christian Egyptian-born young men and women. As for their tertiary education, the more privileged amongst them were sent to universities in France, Britain or Italy and then returned home to practise their chosen profession.

⁹² Maître Félix Benzakein, 'Souvenirs', in Maurice Mizrahi, *L'Égypte et ses Juifs, le Temps révolu*, pp.239-248.

⁹³ Victoria College founded in 1902, was modeled on the prestigious English Public Schools to cater for the Egyptian and British elite. The school founders included three leading members of the Jewish community, Joseph Aghion, Clément Bohor, and Baron Menasche. See Samir Raafat, 'Victoria College 1902-1956: Educating the Elite', *Egyptian Mail*, 30 March, 1996; and Sahar Hamouda and Colin Clement (eds.), *Victoria College: A History Revealed*, Cairo and New York: American University Press, 2002.

⁹⁴ Jean-Jacques Luthi, *L'Égypte des Rois 1922-1953*, Paris: Harmattan, 1997, p.139.

That up-and-coming generation, proficient in many languages except maybe in Arabic, inculcated with Western culture, equipped with Western values, inevitably looked at the world through Western eyes. As a consequence, it experienced a growing sense of alienation from its Middle Eastern background. Furthermore, in the atmosphere of relative liberalism prevalent in the interwar period, young Jews were exposed to other ideologies such as socialism, communism and Zionism. Some even joined the Egyptian Communist Party, which was illegal at the time.⁹⁵ They started to distance themselves from the strict religious observance of their parents. Nevertheless, all Jewish festivals were still scrupulously observed by most of the Jewish community and this observance affected also the non-Jewish population. For instance, on Jewish festivals, the Stock Exchange was closed, in addition to the numerous Jewish owned businesses and department stores.

The Jews of Egypt and the liberal age

In 1914, the British declared Egypt a British protectorate, thereby officially ending Ottoman suzerainty over Egypt. As noted by Krämer, ‘the tensions underlying a highly uneven distribution of power, wealth and prestige...grew considerably during the war.’⁹⁶ On 13 November 1918, two days after the signing of the armistice, a group of Egyptian politicians led by the nationalist Saad Zaghloul (1860-1927), informed the British High Commissioner. Sir Reginald Wingate, that they wished to represent Egypt as a delegation (*wafd*), at the Versailles Peace Conference, with the view of claiming independence in the name of the Egyptian people.⁹⁷ Permission was refused and Saad Zaghloul and his companions were arrested and deported to Malta. Students, workers, peasants and even women took to the streets and the month-long uprising of April 1919 forced the British not only to liberate Saad Zaghloul but also to unilaterally declare the end of the protectorate and grant independence to Egypt in 1922. The Sultan Fuad became the new ruler and ascended the throne as King of Egypt (1922-1936). However, as noted by Krämer:

The British reserved for themselves four spheres of control, which were to be excluded from Egyptian sovereignty: imperial connections, that is the Suez Canal; defense; the

⁹⁵ Gilles Perrault, *Un Homme à Part*, Paris: Bernard Barrault, 1984. Perrault wrote the biography of Henri Curiel after his assassination in May 1978. Curiel was one of the early promoters of the Egyptian communist party.

⁹⁶ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.118.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.120. See also Jacques Berque, *Egypt, Imperialism & Revolution*; and Fayza Hassan, ‘Right above Might’, *El Ahrām Weekly On-line*, 1-7 April, 1999.

Sudan; and, last – but highly important in the context of the position of the Jewish minority - the protection of foreigners and local minorities.⁹⁸

The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Alliance of 1936 secured more concessions from the British but did not mean the end of their presence on Egyptian soil. Britain retained much of its influence on Egyptian politics and the national aspirations of the various Egyptian interest groups remained unfulfilled. According to Krämer, although nationalism continued to be the major preoccupation of Egypt's political scene during the whole of the interwar period and beyond, 'the rising class of Egyptian entrepreneurs was gradually forced to abandon the aim of full independence as they entered into ever closer cooperation with the foreigners and minorities dominating the local economy.'⁹⁹

Under British rule, Egyptian Jewry had reached a highly privileged social and economic rank. Symptomatic of the new socio-economic conditions arising from European penetration, a Jewish upper-mobile middle class was emerging, entering the workforce in great numbers to fill the new administrative positions as clerks and bank employees. As in other countries, Jews were prominent in the textile trade and the free professions of law, medicine and journalism.¹⁰⁰ The more fortunate ones were engaged in banking, industry, export and property development. The new national bank, Bank Misr, established in 1920 in an attempt to create an independent banking system and industry, had amongst its founders, two prominent Jews of Egyptian nationality: Joseph Aslan Cattaoui and Joseph Cicurel. Writers such as Maurice Mizrahi and Samir W. Raafat, who wrote from different perspectives, both agreed on the considerable contribution of 'Egypt's leading Jewish families in the development of the sugar and textile industries, the banking system, railway lines, public utilities, international trade and housing projects.'¹⁰¹ Jews had left their traditional

⁹⁸ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.121. The Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Alliance signed in 1936 abolished those four reservations of British control. The 1937 Convention of Montreux signified the end to the Capitulations and the Mixed Courts system to take effect in 1949.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.119 and p.122. Krämer noted that this issue was 'to dominate national politics until the new age after the revolution of the Free Officers.'

¹⁰⁰ Hassoun, in *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, p.74, elaborated: '*l'essor économique sous la domination britannique améliorera, de façon sensible, la position économique et sociale des Juifs d'Égypte...En raison des besoins croissants de personnel administratif, les Juifs fournirent un grand nombre d'employés dans les affaires de gestion et d'administration, et furent amplement représentés dans les professions libérales, telles que le journalisme, le barreau et la médecine.*' See also Maurice Fargeon, *Médecins et Avocats Juifs au service de l'Égypte*, Le Caire: Imprimerie Lencioni, 1939.

¹⁰¹ Shimon Shamir, 'Notes on Researching the Modern History of Egyptian Jewry', *Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Centre in Cairo*, No.23, June 1998, pp.4-5.

neighbourhoods for more exclusive suburbs in Cairo and Alexandria.¹⁰² Thanks to the generosity of its more affluent members, the Jewish community was able to establish its own institutions, which, apart from the various schools already mentioned, included hospitals, retirement homes, dowry funds and shelters for the underprivileged.¹⁰³

On the political front, although, according to Krämer, ‘the documentary evidence suggests that until well into the 1930s, little interest in the local political scene was shown by the vast majority of the Jews living in Egypt’¹⁰⁴, a number of Egyptian Jews were attracted to the Egyptian nationalist movement¹⁰⁵, because of its inclusive and liberal orientation and joined the political party of the *Wafd* at an early date.¹⁰⁶ The Egyptian constitution of 1923 embodied ‘the principle of national unity over and above all ethnic and religious boundaries’.¹⁰⁷ A few Jews from the elite sought and gained representations in the various parliamentary institutions and the heads of the leading Jewish families enjoyed very close relations with the royal family. In 1925, the president of the Jewish community of Cairo, Joseph Aslan Cattaoui Pacha, was named first Minister of Finance and then Minister of Communications. He was appointed to the Senate in 1927.¹⁰⁸ His wife held the prestigious post of chief lady-in-waiting to the Queen Nazli, wife of King Fuad I.¹⁰⁹

However, in the context of an emerging independent Egypt, the issue of nationality took on a new dimension. There were debates on who was and who was not an Egyptian national, essentially meaning who belonged and who did not. Initially, the decree Law number 19 of 1929 very liberally recognised as Egyptian nationals:

¹⁰² Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.10. Laskier stressed that alongside the Chief Rabbinate, a strong communal leadership was emerging ‘from the developing modernised middle class after World War I, among the activists of the pro-Zionist B’nai B’rith lodges in Cairo and Alexandria, and among the editors of the Jewish (and pro-Zionist) press...’.

¹⁰³ See in *Nahar Misraïm*, nos. 32 & 33, May 1989, a document on the statutes of a Jewish soup kitchen, ‘Oeuvre Israélite du Bouillon des Malades – Statuts’, Alexandries: Société de Publication Egyptienne, 1918. See also in Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, pp.62-70, details about the various community institutions and in pp.235-8, an 1891 report on ‘Jewish Assistance in Alexandria to Russian Refugees’.

¹⁰⁴ Krämer, ‘Political Participation of the Jews in Egypt Between World War I and the 1952 Revolution’, in Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt – A Mediterranean Society*, pp.68-9.

¹⁰⁵ As stated by Krämer in *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.124, ‘one of the first advocates of the new idea of territorial nationalism was a local Jew, James (Ya’cub) Sanùà (1839-1912), also known by his Arabic pen name. Abù Naddàra’.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p.126.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p.127.

¹⁰⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.46.

¹⁰⁹ G. Thompson-Seton, *A Woman tenderfoot in Egypt*. London: John Lane, 1923, pp. 64-7.

- all those whose families had resided in the country without interruption since 1 January 1848.
- those former subjects of the Ottoman empire who made their “habitual residence” in Egypt on 5 November 1914 (when Great Britain declared war on the Ottoman Empire and Egypt officially ceased to be a province of the Empire) and had stayed there since.¹¹⁰

Also eligible, were the children of foreigners, born and residing in Egypt, provided they gave up their foreign citizenship and anybody who had resided in the country for ten years, knew Arabic adequately and had no criminal record.

The scene seemed to have been set for Jews to be counted as equal citizens of the modern state of Egypt. Again opposing forces were at play and as always, the reality on the ground was different from theoretical and well-meaning principles. On the one hand, most of the Jews did not react immediately to the offer of Egyptian citizenship. The reason for their reticence could have been apathy or convenience. Until the Convention of Montreux of 1937, which stipulated the end of the Capitulations regime and the abolition of the Mixed Courts to take effect from 1949, most upper and middle-class Jews, like other minorities, preferred to retain the special privileges of a foreign passport. On the other hand, after 1937, the balance of power shifted; the foreign protections were being phased out while the process of Egyptianisation was intensified. Egyptian nationality became essential for employment in banking and for any business dealings with government institutions. At the same time, the Egyptian administration was gradually making it exceedingly difficult for non-Muslims and especially Jews to gain citizenship, presumably due to the rise of an Arab/Islamic type of nationalism. There were several cases of Jews who complied with the new laws and renounced their foreign nationality in view of naturalisation but were ultimately rejected.¹¹¹ This was especially true for the poorer and less educated Egyptian Jews, even though in principle, they were legally eligible. This particular group remained for the most part stateless.

Another possible reason for the apathy of Jews in officially claiming their Egyptian citizenship could have been economically based. As Laskier pointed out, for the underprivileged, ‘the fee of five Egyptian pounds that had to be paid in order to obtain a certificate

¹¹⁰ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp.33-4.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.33: ‘All evidence suggests that the majority of those who lost, or gave up their foreign nationality as well as of the indigenous Egyptian and the Oriental Jews (mostly former Ottoman subjects) in fact did not obtain Egyptian passports’.

attesting to their new nationality was an inhibiting factor' in itself.¹¹² Besides, in those days, such a certificate would not have been considered essential since Jews were still living under the control of their autonomous communal courts as far as their personal status was concerned. On this topic, the historian Joel Beinin, in his work on Egyptian Jewry, argued that the 'legal autonomy of non-Muslims was not solely a product of colonialism' and that the secular-nationalism reflected by the nationality law of 1929, was undermined by the preservation of that zone of religious legal separatism.¹¹³ The regime of religious autonomy applied to all religious communities in Egypt, including the majority Muslim population, based on the Ottoman *millet* system. The Muslims *shari'a* courts fulfilled the same functions for their coreligionists as the rabbinical tribunals, similarly free of state intervention until their closure by Gamal Abdel Nasser in 1955.¹¹⁴

The new Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 produced a watershed for Egyptian Jewry. It led to an identity crisis for them, as a minority group in a predominantly Arab-Muslim country and brought them to a crossroad. Who were they, where did they belong and how did the majority perceive them? These fundamental issues call for pause and reflection on the main features of the Jewish population at that particular point in time, before engaging the discussion further towards the main focus of this thesis, the period between 1936 and 1956.

It has been demonstrated how culturally, socially and ethnically diverse and fragmented the Jewish community was. In the nineteenth century there were several communities living away from the two main metropolises, in the Delta region and Upper Egypt. From the beginning of the twentieth century, Egyptian Jews had become more and more urbanised and concentrated in Cairo and Alexandria, the centres of economic and administrative activities. The level of their religious observance was, for the most part, inversely proportionate to their socio-economic status and access to Western style education. Although Jewish identity was strong in both cases, the poorer Jews were closer to their Jewish roots and to the Arabic culture whereas the more affluent Jews adopted a more secular European lifestyle and grew less observant in their religious practice. The perpetuated Ottoman regime of the *millet* regulated their communal lives, their lay leaders being their sole representative vis-à-vis the government and their rabbis only engaged in religious duties. Most of the time, Egyptian

¹¹² Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.9.

¹¹³ Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, pp.36-39.

¹¹⁴ According to Beinin, if that situation had been allowed to continue until that time, it was because no Egyptian leader before Gamal Abdel Nasser had had the political courage to challenge the authority of the powerful Muslim courts.

Jews used the languages of power, English, and French, and sent their children to European schools if they could afford it. The issue of foreign nationalities has also been raised to explain why one quarter of the Jewish population had managed to obtain Egyptian citizenship whereas another quarter held foreign passports and half remained stateless.

In the prevalent climate of a secular brand of territorial nationalism and under the protection of the British, Egyptian Jewry strove for and attained great heights in the socio-economic sphere as well as in the political arena. Apart from a few blood libels accusations, the relationship with the dominant Muslim and Coptic majority was generally harmonious, especially between members of the upper echelons of society.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, the acquisition and wholesale adoption of foreign culture reinforced the privileged status of the Jews, while at the same time multiplying the degrees of separation between them and the Egyptian culture and milieu. This is where the Jews in Egypt stood, before 1936, at their apex, astonishingly comfortable in their multicoloured coat, their eyes turned towards the West but their feet firmly planted in the East.

The decline and final demise of Egyptian Jewry (1937-1967)

With the benefit of hindsight, if one were to pinpoint the start of the downhill process for Egyptian Jewry, it would have to be the period from the late 1930s onwards, even if that change of gear was imperceptible to the people concerned. The chain of events that were put into motion at that time gathered their own speed, which could only signify the end of the road for the Jews of Egypt, long before the end actually happened. Notwithstanding measures such as the abrogation of the Capitulations at the Montreux Convention of 1937 and the planned closure of the Mixed Courts in 1949, new elements were being keyed into the emerging political picture. Ideologies such as pan-Arabic nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, Communism, political Zionism and Fascism were all fighting for a significant place under the Middle Eastern sun. Egyptian Jewry was fundamentally affected by the clashing agendas of those rising ideologies, as history has demonstrated. The aim of the next section is to show how the Jews of Egypt responded, when confronted with new challenges, how the evolving political climate impacted upon them and if they were actors or merely 'extras' in the chain of the events that brought about their final demise.

¹¹⁵ Gudrun Krämer, Alfred Morabia, 'Face à la modernité: les Juifs d'Égypte aux XIXe et XXe siècles', in Hassoun, *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, pp.77-8. Krämer and Morabia argued that those accusations frequently emanated from Christian communities, mainly the Greek one, not only out religious animosity but also for economic reasons, as Jews were perceived as competitors in the market place.

As already stated, the main concern of the nationalist leaders of 1919 was ‘to abolish British rule and to create a sovereign Egyptian state’, free from foreign control and influence.¹¹⁶ The emphasis being on unity irrespective of religion or ethnicity, leading members of the Jewish community such as Yusuf Cicurel Bey and Yusuf Aslan Cattaoui Pasha, like many of their Muslim and Coptic compatriots identified with and supported the Egyptian nationalist movement, as confirmed by both Krämer’s and Bein’in’s research.¹¹⁷ Reciprocally, the dominant trend among literate liberal Egyptians was to regard Egyptian Jews as ‘full members of the nation’.¹¹⁸ Some prominent Jewish figures such as the journalist Leon Castro and Maître Felix Benzakein did not see any contradiction in equally supporting both the Egyptian nationalist movement and the Zionist movement.¹¹⁹ In those early days, the national struggle overrode any involvement in foreign affairs including the Palestinian conflict and the British were perceived as the common obstacle to the fulfilment of both nationalist dreams.

By the late 1930s, the limited character of national independence achieved in 1922 was increasingly eroding the secular and strictly territorial concept of nationalism, promoted by those early liberal nationalists. This erosion was the consequence of a number of underlying factors both from within, such as the considerable power still exerted by the British in collusion with the monarchy, and from without, such as the intensifying Arab-Zionist conflict in Palestine and the rise of Fascism and Communism in Europe.

The combination of all these elements led to the rearticulation of a more militant and more xenophobic form of nationalism embracing an exclusively Arab-Islamic worldview. New players, such as paramilitary youth groups and Islamic movements appeared on Egypt’s political stage in opposition to the traditional power triangle of the monarchy, the British and the *Wafd* party. The radical Society of the Muslim Brothers, founded in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna, gradually overshadowed other Islamic groups and developed into a major political force. The Muslim Brothers believed in a fundamentalist view of Islam as the basis and guide for all aspects of life. They ‘did not see national liberation as an end in itself, but only as a

¹¹⁶ Kramer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.124.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.126 and Bein’in, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.18.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.63.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., pp.34-5. Bein’in pointed out that the lawyer and journalist Leon Castro ‘conducted propaganda for the *Wafd* party in Europe after the 1919 nationalist uprising and founded and edited a pro-*Wafd* French language newspaper, *La Liberté*, after returning to Egypt. At the same time, he was the head of the Zionist Organization of Cairo. In the 1940s, he served as the representative of the Jewish Agency for Palestine in Egypt’. As for Félix Benzakein, he ‘was a member of the *Wafd*, a deputy in parliament, a member of the Alexandria rabbinical court, and the president of the Zionist Organization of Alexandria’.

first step on the way to the restoration of the Islamic *umma* (nation) transcending all boundaries of nation, state and ethnicity.’¹²⁰ Therefore, they embraced and promoted the Palestinian cause as a Muslim and Arab cause. On the home front, they were also highly critical of what they considered a corrupt political establishment and were actively pushing for economic and social reforms. Their stand gained them widespread respect and popularity among the urban lower and middle classes. This brand of nationalism, based on the restoration of an ideal Islamic society and on a deep hatred of the British occupiers and their lackeys, was advocating a new political reality. Both the Muslim Brothers and the paramilitary movement ‘Young Egypt’ or *Misr-al-Fatat* excluded Jews from membership either because they were not Muslims or because they did not consider them ‘real Egyptians’¹²¹. By definition, the make-up of the new Egypt as they saw it, would provide fewer chances of integration and participation for non-Muslim minorities, particularly the Jewish one.

After King Fuad’s death on 28 April 1936, the advent to the throne of his sixteen-year old son, Faruk (1921-1965), was perceived as a new beginning in Egyptian politics. Firstly, the new Anglo-British Treaty of Alliance of August 1936 granted more independence to Egypt. It was followed by the Convention of Montreux of May 1937, which signified the end of the privileged regime enjoyed by foreign nationals. Consequently, local minorities lost the protection of the colonial powers and for the first time, Egypt was free to involve itself in foreign affairs. It was inevitable that the growing Palestinian conflict between the Arabs and the *Yishuv*¹²², resulting with the outbreak of the Arab revolt in 1936, would attract the Egyptian public’s attention and ultimately, dramatically affect the status of the local Jewish community.¹²³ In fact, Kramer’s research confirmed that ‘as a result of this growing involvement in the Palestine question, the second half of the 1930s witnessed the first attacks on local Jewry as the fifth column of Zionism.’¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Kramer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp.141-2.

¹²¹ Laskier, *the Jews of Egypt*, p.68. The ‘Young Egypt’ movement (*Misr al-Fatat*) was founded in 1933 by Ahmad Husayn propagating ‘a new and militant brand of Egyptian nationalism.’

¹²² Hebrew name of the Jewish community in Palestine.

¹²³ The Arab rebellion of 1936-39 against the British mandate in Palestine or the first *intifada*, as some would call it, was organised by the Haj Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, Mufti of Jerusalem and his Arab Higher Committee. The Arab High Command started by calling a general strike of Arab workers and the boycott of Jewish goods. These actions quickly escalated into terrorist attacks against the Jews and the British. The second stage of the revolt began in September 1937 after the Peel Commission recommended the partition of Palestine. The clashes with the British forces intensified, as did the attacks on Jewish settlements.

¹²⁴ Kramer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.146.

During the above-mentioned Arab revolt of 1936-39, attacks in the Egyptian Islamist and pan-Arab press, were not only anti-Zionist but also vehemently anti-Jewish. These attacks had a very distinct racial flavour, consistent with the Fascist discourse of those days. Led by the Muslim Brothers and the fascist-style group 'Young Egypt', violent student demonstrations broke out in May 1938, against Jewish residents in Cairo, Alexandria and Tantah, and the police had to intervene to protect the threatened Jewish population. Antisemitic publications such as the Arabic translations of *Mein Kampf*, and the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were distributed at various political gatherings where 'Egyptian Jews were denounced as sympathisers with Zionism, exploiters of the Egyptian masses, and elements dangerous to their host peoples.'¹²⁵

The leaders of Egyptian Jewry did not underestimate the potential gravity of the situation and reacted by using their extensive network of contacts with the Egyptian hierarchy and foreign diplomats to try and stop the wave of anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish propaganda. On the other hand, as duly pointed out by Kramer, they also pressured the 'local Jewish associations, notably the Zionist ones, to end all overt activities that might cast doubt on the loyalty of the Jewish citizens of the state of Egypt.'¹²⁶ The *mot d'ordre* from the top down was 'to remain as inconspicuous as possible, keeping a low profile in order not to draw attention to the existence of a Jewish minority in the country, let alone a national movement in its midst.'¹²⁷

Not all Egyptian Jews advocated a 'lie-low' attitude in the face of such attacks. The Jewish press and principally the leading pro-Zionist newspaper *Israël*, which appeared in three languages – French, Arabic and Hebrew - not only reported meticulously the events in Palestine but was also very vocal in its criticism of the British mandatory administration in Palestine and of Palestine's radical Arab leaders. The mere fact that *Israël's* editorials were allowed to voice their criticism and appeal for solidarity with the *Yishuv*, is proof enough of the extraordinary freedom of expression Egyptian Jews still enjoyed in the 1930s, as opposed to the strict censorship of the 1950s.

Another example of Jewish communal activism manifested itself in 1933 when, in reaction to the Nazi takeover of Germany, the Jewish leaders lobbied extensively to enlist the support of non-Jewish minorities in expressions of protest against German antisemitism. An association

¹²⁵ Ibid., p.147.

¹²⁶ Ibid., p.149.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p.149.

of all the Jewish institutions of Egypt created the *Ligue contre l'Antisémitisme Allemand* to defend itself against pro-Nazi activities on Egyptian soil. It later joined the international branch of that same organisation (LICA), with the prominent lawyer and journalist Leon Castro as its vice-president. Its goal was to put pressure on the local press against publishing Nazi propaganda material as well as to promote the boycott of German goods and films. According to Maurice Mizrahi, during the war years, LICA provided useful information to the Allies about any breaches of the maritime blockade.¹²⁸ One respondent remembered that when Fascist Italy declared itself an ally of Germany, a number of prominent Italian Jews in Egypt, who had fought for their country in World War I, returned their passports in protest and wrote outraged open letters to the newspapers. Young members of LICA even formed picket lines to prevent Jews from attending the performances of the visiting Italian Opera Company.

It is important to remember that, at the time, the sympathies of the intellectual and nationalist Egyptian circles were strongly anti-British and by *ricochet*, pro-Nazi. Furthermore, anti-Jewish propaganda was being promoted by Palestinian-Arab political exiles such as the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Mohammed Amin al Husseini, who was inciting youth groups and university students to carry out anti-Jewish demonstrations.¹²⁹

Whereas Egyptian Jewry's response to the spread of fascist ideology was unified and decisive, its response to Zionism was much more fragmented. As pointed out by Joel Beinin, such response was 'inflected by differences of class, ethnic origin, religious rite, educational formation, political outlook, and personal accident.'¹³⁰ Zionist activity in Egypt was no different from what was happening in most other Jewish communities in the Islamic world. At first, it was mainly confined to philanthropic 'fundraising on behalf of the Keren Kayemet le-Ysra'el (henceforth, the Jewish National Fund) and the Keren Hayesod (henceforth, the Palestine Foundation Fund). Laskier reported that after the Balfour Declaration of 1917, 'Zionist federations were created in Cairo and Alexandria as an initiative of Ashkenazi emigrants and several local Sephardim.'¹³¹ It has been argued that the reason why the Ashkenazis were more involved than their Sephardi counterpart in the Zionist cause was because most of them were relatively recent arrivals in Egypt from Palestine after their

¹²⁸Mizrahi, Maurice, *L'Égypte et ses Juifs. Le temps révolu*, pp.105-119.

¹²⁹Laskier, "Egyptian Jewry under the Nasser regime" in *Middle Eastern Studies*, July 1995, V. 31 No.3, p.573.

¹³⁰Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.32.

¹³¹Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.10.

expulsion on the eve of World War I. The assumption is that they had not yet formed any deep attachment to their country of residence and never intended to stay on.

During World War II, Zionist activities were stepped up with the arrival of emissaries from Palestine, promoting emigration and youth education through various pioneer youth movements. The movement *he-Halutz ha-Tsa'ir* was founded in Cairo in 1933 and in Alexandria in 1934. The Kibbutz movements *ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir* and *B'nei Akiva* were founded in 1932. As indicated by Laskier, 'the Zionist pioneer movements in Egypt enjoyed a legal or semilegal status as "scouting organisations"', until the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the outbreak of hostilities.¹³² Revisionist Zionists also operated in Egypt but were banned after November 1944 when two members of the Revisionist Stern/Lehi Gang assassinated Lord Moyne – the Minister Resident in the Middle East - in Cairo, in protest against British rule in Palestine and the implementation of the White Paper policy.¹³³

However, Zionist activism was not predominant in the community and it is true to state that in the interwar period, the Jewish establishment in Egypt displayed a lukewarm reception to Zionism as a political and national movement. Most of the influential economic elite of Egyptian Jewry remained opposed to Zionism for various reasons. Firstly, they did not think the whole issue of a homeland for the Jews concerned them since their own situation in Egypt seemed so secure. It was more of a solution for European Jews, in view of their precarious situation, Nazi persecution, and later the horrors of the Holocaust. Secondly and most importantly, the Jewish leaders did not wish to stir any anti-Jewish feelings or be accused of dual loyalty. They were still hoping for a negotiated settlement of the Palestinian conflict with the *Yishuv*. Kramer reported the existence of a dialogue between Egyptian politicians, Zionist representatives and local Jews during the interwar period and even during World War II, in an effort to mediate in the Arab-Zionist conflict. However, it seems that the British discouraged those initiatives, as they were not prepared 'to welcome an Egyptian role in the search for a comprehensive settlement of the Palestine conflict'.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid., p.304.

¹³³ Ibid., pp.110-111.

¹³⁴ Kramer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.153. Kramer reported that already in the '1920s and 1930s, Colonel Kisch from the Zionist Executive in Jerusalem had several meetings with Egyptian politicians, which were arranged by his Jewish friends in Egypt... In February 1938, Chaim Weizmann came to Egypt to meet Prince Muhammad Ali, a prominent member of the royal family, and the British ambassador, Sir Miles Lampson ... and in April 1939, Chaim Weizmann met the Egyptian prime minister, the foreign minister, and Ali Mahir.'

At the onset of World War II, from September 1939, the Egyptian government had to honour its obligations under the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Alliance of 1936, in spite of the secret sympathies of both the King and the nationalist parties for the Axis powers. It imposed strict press censorship and declared a state of siege. On the political level, the British were practically pulling all the strings, controlling the nomination of political and military leaders. Egypt was the regional base for the British army and allied troops. Nevertheless, while the Egyptian government interned or expelled all residing German citizens except German Jews and interned a great number of its Italian citizens, except Italian Jews and known anti-Fascists, it did not formally declare war on the Axis powers until February 1945.¹³⁵

On the other hand, the Jewish community openly sided with the Allies in the looming conflict. Not only did local Jews of British, French and Greek nationality fight with their armies on various fronts but also 'wealthy members of the community donated large sums of money to the British war effort and established clubs for Jewish soldiers in the British army stationed in Egypt. Some Jews collaborated in the Egyptian branch of the France Libre movement led by General de Gaulle.'¹³⁶ Therefore, they felt very threatened in 1942, when the victorious Germans were advancing in North Africa.¹³⁷ According to the Jewish Agency reports, thousands fled Alexandria for Cairo and further South. Others tried desperately to obtain entrance visas to places such as Chad, Congo or Syria. By 29 June 1942, cash withdrawal from banks in Alexandria was reported to have exceeded two million pounds. Many Jewish merchants who had invested heavily in merchandise, found themselves trapped, due to shortage of funds. The lower middle class Jews who did not have the financial means to go anywhere, felt even more vulnerable than their more privileged coreligionists.¹³⁸ Anxiety subsided only when the British defeated the Germans sixty kilometres from Alexandria, at El-Alamein, in November 1942. It is obvious that the Jewish community as a whole rejoiced in the final victory of the Allies in 1945.

Actually, not everybody in Egypt was rejoicing. The after-effects of the war on Egyptian society were manifold. The many industries and companies that employed 200,000 to

¹³⁵ Ibid., p.154.

¹³⁶ Ibid., p.157.

¹³⁷ According to the article 'Beseitigung der jüdisch-nationalen Heimstätte in Palästina', to be published in a special volume, ed. by Klaus-Michael Mallmann/Martin Cüppers, Davonstadt: WBG, May 2006, a special SS taskforce was attached to Rommel's army (Africa Korps) and assigned the task of eliminating the Jewish National Home in Palestine. There is also a mention of the deployment of a similar force 'Einsatz Ägypten' (Operation Egypt) to deal with the Jews of Egypt.

¹³⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.79-83.

245,000 employees in wartime had to dismiss them when the war ended. As a result, the gap between the privileged and the disadvantaged grew considerably, creating even more resentment against the foreign presence on Egyptian soil and against the privileged supporters of that presence.

For Egyptian Jewry, problems rose again towards the end of 1945. On 2 and 3 November 1945, date of the twenty-eight anniversary of the Balfour declaration, a number of Islamic associations called for a general strike. After being harangued by the leader of the Muslim Brothers, near the royal palace of Abdin in Cairo, the demonstrators were so fired up that they marched on the Jewish quarter and attacked bystanders, shops and synagogues. Jewish youth, who had been trained in self-defense in Zionist youth groups, managed to repel their assaults by setting up barricades. However, the rioting and the looting continued and spread to European sections of Cairo and Alexandria. According to Beinín's research, 'six people were killed, several hundred were injured, and dozens of Jewish, Coptic, and Muslim-owned stores were looted'. The only Ashkenazi synagogue of Cairo was set afire. Beinín pointed out that this was 'the first indication that there might be a popular base in Egypt for militant anti-Zionism spilling over anti-Semitism' and that the riots of 2 and 3 November exposed 'the vulnerability of the Jewish community to the consequences of the conflict over Palestine.'¹³⁹

As mentioned earlier, the privileged status of the Jewish community had already been weakened by the Montreux Convention of 1937 because of its planned phasing out of all the privileges enjoyed by foreigners and non-Muslim minorities. Furthermore, a deliberate policy of Egyptianisation, long advocated by both nationalists and Islamists, started to be implemented. It inevitably impacted on the business activities of European businessmen and their agents. For instance, from the early 1940s, in an effort to alleviate growing unemployment amongst the highly politicised educated youth, and to counteract the predominant role of foreign languages in business dealings, the use of Arabic was made compulsory. This measure forced the shop owners and businessmen who could not read and write Arabic, since they had been educated in foreign schools, to take on additional Egyptian personnel.

¹³⁹ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, pp.64-5. Following the riots, the government promised to indemnify the victims and placed guards at the entrance of the Jewish quarter.

The process of Egyptianisation also targeted the education system in foreign schools where the teaching of Arabic was made compulsory and Egyptian related subjects, such as Egyptian history and geography, were introduced into the curriculum. It is important to remember that, until the Suez War of 1956, 97,000 students were enrolled mainly in French and British elitist schools.¹⁴⁰ As pointed out earlier, until 1945, these various scholastic institutions operated independently of local government interference.¹⁴¹ After the Suez War of 1956, their importance waned considerably as all private and foreign schools were sequestered by the government and the British and French teachers expelled. By 1960, the number of students had declined by more than half.¹⁴² The subsequent nationalisation of foreign schools led to a sharp drop in the quality of education due to overcrowding and paucity of funds devoted to education by Gamal Abdel Nasser's government.

Another blow to the status of foreign nationals and stateless minorities was the enactment of the Company Law of 29 July 1947. It required all companies and subsidiaries of foreign companies to maintain a staff of Egyptian nationals comprising 75 percent of total salaries and their board of Directors to be 40 percent. The new law also 'obliged all firms concerned to submit detailed lists specifying the nationality and the salary of their employees.'¹⁴³ Evidently all these measures were meant to favour Egyptian nationals and applications for naturalisation rose dramatically, especially from a Jewish lower and lower-middle class fearing a massive loss of jobs.¹⁴⁴ However, as previously mentioned, the authorities showed a growing reluctance in dealing with these applications, especially coming from Jews and, as pointed out by Kramer, 'by 1948-49, hundreds of decisions were still pending, with many applications having already been rejected.'¹⁴⁵

Upon the birth of the State of Israel, and the start of hostilities between the new state and its Arab neighbours, the whole Jewish population of Egypt was implicitly implicated. In May 1948, martial law was declared and censorship established. No one, not even foreign

¹⁴⁰ Judith Cochran worked at the Ain Shams University, in Cairo as a Fulbright senior lecturer in education in 1980. Subsequently, she accepted the directorship of the DPS English language program at American University in Cairo. Her book, *Education in Egypt*, London: Croom Helm, 1986, outlined the popularity of foreign schools from 1840 onwards, and the attraction they exerted not only on foreigners but also on the Egyptian secular elite.

¹⁴¹ Luthi, *L'Egypte des Rois 1922-1953*, p.139.

¹⁴² Cochran, in *Education in Egypt*, p.45, pointed out that the only schools that were not sequestered and then nationalised were the American schools and those under Vatican administration.

¹⁴³ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.206.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p.207. Krämer reported that in November 1947, the Cairo community registered 1000 applications per week.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.207.

nationals, could leave the country without a special exit visa. The official reason was to prevent Jews from flocking to Israel. At the same time, Zionist youth movements were declared illegal and some went underground while the emissaries from Israel fled to avoid being caught. In May 1948, hundreds of Jews were arrested as suspected Zionists or as communists and thrown into prison, the maximum number of Jewish detainees at any one time being 700 to 800.¹⁴⁶ Although hostilities ceased in January 1949 followed by a cease fire agreement between Egypt and Israel on 24 February 1949, there were still 250 Zionist and 60 Jewish communists interned in July 1949, throughout the various detainment centres.¹⁴⁷ The interviews conducted in the course of the present work confirmed that most of the detainees ended up being expelled after a period of incarceration of six to twelve months. Their families were given a few days to settle their affairs in order to be ready to join the prisoners directly on the departing ship. The majority of those departures were bound for Israel, via Europe, with the help of the Jewish Agency and the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee (JDC). It has been estimated that about 16,000 Jews, mostly from the underprivileged class, immigrated to Israel between 1949 and 1951.¹⁴⁸

In addition, during the summer and autumn of 1948, Jews and their property were attacked repeatedly, in retaliation to the bombing of a Cairo suburb by the Israelis.¹⁴⁹ The main suspects were the Muslim Brothers. It has been suggested that although the authorities did not actually encourage such attacks, they did not wish to undermine their tenuous hold on power by defending the Jewish community against the powerful Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ A reunion of all the old members of the pioneer youth groups in Egypt was organised in Israel, on the occasion of Israel's Fiftieth Jubilee in 1998. This event coincided with the date of their arrest in 1948 and on that occasion, a booklet was issued, providing personal accounts of their individual experiences.

¹⁴⁷ Apart from the armistice with Egypt, Israel signed separate armistice agreements with Lebanon on 23 March 1949, Transjordan on 3 April and Syria on 20 July of the same year.

¹⁴⁸ Their journey to Israel was arranged via France or Italy, since there was no direct connection with Israel from Egypt. Krämer, in *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.219, pointed out that it was impossible for the Egyptian government not to notice the number of local Jews who, all of a sudden, could afford the cost of traveling to Europe. 'Yet it did nothing to prevent their departure'. Kramer suggested a number of reasons for this inaction: the fear of appearing intolerant to foreign observers, the realisation that the local Jews could not be integrated in an Arab-Islamic society and finally the pragmatic decision that 'the departure of thousands of clerks, salesmen and managers would make room for that many "real" Egyptians'.

¹⁴⁹ Beinín, in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.68, reported that 'on June 20, 1948, a bomb exploded in the Karaite quarter of Cairo, killing twenty-two Jews and wounding forty-one. Several buildings were severely damaged...Jewish witnesses on the scene testified that the response of the authorities was sluggish and negligent.' Beinín also mentioned the bombing of a number of Jewish department stores, Cicurel and Oreco, in July 1948 as well as an explosion in the Rabbanite quarter of Cairo, killing another nineteen people and wounding sixty-two victims.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.69. According to Beinín, the Muslim Brothers were considered so strong that they were suspected of preparing an armed insurrection and many were interned in May 1948. In December of the same year, the prime minister al-Nuqrashi dissolved the Society and seized their considerable assets. In retaliation, he was assassinated on 28 December 1948.

Therefore, their response was often inept and disingenuous. Thanks to the prevailing censorship, no mention of excessive violence perpetrated against Jews was allowed to appear in the press.

The enactment of emergency decrees had enabled the Egyptian government to sequester indiscriminately the property of any person or take over the assets of any enterprise deemed prejudicial to the safety and security of the State. Wholesale sequestrations of the assets of prominent Jewish individual and companies, active in vital sectors of the Egyptian economy, were carried out until the spring of 1949.

As an obvious consequence to the arbitrary detentions, sequestrations and attacks to which Egyptian Jewry was subjected, a feeling of insecurity permeated the whole community, from the humble employee to the successful businessman. The *Wafd* return to power in January 1950 and the lifting of martial law improved somewhat the community's predicament. Laskier reported that gradually, the sequestration of Jewish assets was halted, most of their possessions were returned, and many Jews were released although only on condition they left the country immediately. Some interpreted the change as a return to normalcy and were lulled into believing they could resume their comfortable and privileged lives as before. For others, emigration became for the first time a viable option.

Apart from Israel, approximately 6,000 Jews went to Europe or other destinations. Beinlin's study of the dispersion of Egyptian Jewry, chartered the various trends of this population movement. For instance, except for the minority of committed Zionists, the less privileged families tended to go to Israel while the wealthier and more educated ones chose to go elsewhere. The younger members of the community were more inclined to emigrate than the older ones. The Ashkenazim, who were more likely to have connections in Israel or in the West, emigrated more readily than the Sephardim, who had closer ties with Egypt.¹⁵¹ Some of those trends were replicated in the course of the next exodus of 1956. They were also apparent in the exodus pattern of the sample group under study in the present work.

As a general rule, the community emerged from that difficult period somewhat diminished in stature and numbers but superficially mended, contrary to the dramatic decline Egyptian Jewry experienced after the 1956 and 1967 wars with Israel. Although their public presence was

¹⁵¹ Ibid., p.71.

more subdued, the remaining 50,000 Jews continued to work in their chosen professions and conduct their social and religious activities relatively freely. Jewish community institutions, such as hospitals, schools, sports clubs, functioned normally although the communal schools were placed under close supervision of the Ministry of Public Education.

In spite of the appearance of normality, the signs of alienation were growing between the Jews and the Muslim majority. According to Laskier, after 1948 and perhaps even earlier, 'it had become quite difficult for Jews to attend local universities in significant numbers. Very few were accepted in 1949 into the universities of Fuad I and Faruq.'¹⁵² In addition, the increasing difficulty for Jews in obtaining citizenship papers highlighted the vulnerability of their legal and political status. As previously indicated, the negative attitude of the Egyptian administration became the main impediment. The historian Shimon Shamir looked into the evolution of the Egyptian nationality laws and how these laws were applied to the Jewish population:

The main problem was evidence. The law left it to the discretion of the minister of the interior to decide what proofs would be required to establish nationality (Art.21)...In particular, autochthonous Jews found it difficult to prove (for the requirements of Art. 1[2]) that their families had been living in Egypt since before 1848.... Difficulties were also encountered by families originating from Ottoman territories. In the pre-1914 realities, travel between provinces of the empire was free and hardly accompanied by traceable documentation.¹⁵³

Consequently, a great proportion of Jews were left stateless. In the emerging social and political climate of radical nationalism and fundamentalist Islam, the label 'Egyptians', 'in common or even legal parlance, came to signify in fact Muslims, or possibly Muslims and Copts, to the exclusion of all others.'¹⁵⁴ Shamir pointed out that when the 1947 Company Law was promulgated, demanding that 'Egyptians' be given a majority share in large companies, and fixing 'the minimum percentage of Egyptian administrative employees at 75 percent, and of Egyptian workers at 90 percent', a great number of stateless and even foreign Jews tried to secure their jobs by applying for Egyptian nationality. It was already too late and 'some forty thousand stateless Jews were declared foreigners.'¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.143-44.

¹⁵³ Shamir, 'The Evolution of the Egyptian Nationality Laws and their Application to the Jews in the Monarchy Period', in Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt – A Mediterranean Society in Modern Times*, pp.54-5.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.58.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p.59.

After the 1948 war with Israel, it became practically impossible for Jews to acquire Egyptian citizenship. The first amendment in September 1950 to the 1929 Nationality Law dealing with the withdrawal of Egyptian nationality ‘from any person involved in actions in favour of states that were at war with Israel’, was clearly aimed at the Jewish minority.¹⁵⁶ The new Nationality Law (No. 392) of 1956 was even more blunt, by specifically excluding Zionists. As testified by the majority of my respondents who held Egyptian nationality, an automatic denationalisation took place upon their departure from Egypt.

To the nationalists and critics of the regime, the Egyptian defeat of 1948 revealed the rampant incompetence and the extent of corruption among political and military leadership. Furthermore, the struggle against British military presence was intensifying and developed into guerrilla-like warfare in the Canal region. A mass demonstration against the British in reaction to their indiscriminate killing of 40 local policemen in the course of a bloody confrontation in a small Canal town, Ismailia, developed into full-scale rioting. On what has since been labelled ‘Black Saturday’, 26 January 1952, an enraged and unspecified mob burned and looted, unabated, large parts of modern Cairo. The riots were mainly directed against British, Jewish, Greek and Armenian establishments and also against the ruling elite. It is self-evident that, once more, the local Jews felt targeted and vulnerable as a non-Muslim minority having benefited from British rule and protection. Some of the interviewees witnessed the rioting, the burning and the brutality of the event and were quite traumatised by its sheer horror. The fire of Cairo was seen as forerunner to the overthrowing of the monarchy by the Free Officers, six months later, on 23 July 1952.

It was only natural for Jews to feel even more insecure under a regime with which they had no social or political connection and vice-versa, in spite of the show of good will towards non-Muslim minorities expressed by Muhammed Naguib, the first president and prime minister. As pointed out by Beinín, ‘several of the Free Officers had backgrounds in the society of Muslim Brothers or Young Egypt, organisations that did not view Jews as authentic Egyptians’ and were very embittered by their humiliating defeat at the hands of the new fledgeling state of Israel.¹⁵⁷ Naguib’s demise in March 1954, in favour of the hardliner nationalist, Gamal Abd-el-Nasser, marked a further downturn for the Jews, who felt more excluded and alienated. With the deterioration of the economic situation in Egypt from 1953

¹⁵⁶ Kramer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.216.

¹⁵⁷ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.85.

onwards, the Jewish community position grew even more precarious. Although it is true that most Jews faced no special restrictions, the Egyptian secret police kept a close tab on the activities of several Jews. They were arrested in increasing numbers during the second half of 1954, accused of involvement in both communist and Zionist activities and of plotting against the regime.

Another critical blow to the standing of the whole Jewish community was the ‘Lavon Affair’, which resulted in the arrest in July 1954 of an underground network of Egyptian Jews, accused of spying on behalf of Israel. Their mission was to launch acts of sabotage against British and American institutions, which would be blamed on the religious fundamentalists and/or Egyptian nationalists. The ultimate aim was to ‘discredit the new regime and impair Egypt’s relations with the USA and Britain.’¹⁵⁸ According to Beinín, the whole unfortunate affair ‘provided an excuse to treat the entire Jewish community as potential subversives.’¹⁵⁹

The situation between Egypt and Israel was becoming increasingly volatile and Egyptian Jews were again caught in the middle of the turmoil. The *coup de grâce* to their security and to their lives as they knew it, was the outbreak of the Suez War in October 1956. In view of the British-French-Israeli concerted attack on Egypt, the Jews were made to bear the brunt of the government’s anger. A series of government decrees established a state of siege and strict censorship, allowing expulsion, mass arrests, and confiscation of property, sequestration and denaturalisation.¹⁶⁰ Although these measures also affected foreign residents and other minority communities, the worse hit were obviously the Jews, whether they were citizens, stateless or foreign nationals. The exit visa issued to them upon leaving Egypt, either ‘voluntarily’ or under expulsion orders, stated prominently that they would not be permitted to return and renounced all claims against Egypt. The bleak picture painted by Beinín in his analysis of the situation, matched the testimonies of my oral historians:

¹⁵⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.205-51, outlined the whole incident including the subsequent trial and convictions, where two of the accused were hanged and the rest imprisoned for up to fourteen years. They were only released after the 1967 War, in exchange for 5,000 Egyptian prisoners. The book *Operation Susannah*, As told to Aviezer Golan by Marcelle Ninio, Victor Levy, Robert Dassa and Philip Natanson, New York: Harpers & Row, English translation, 1978, related how they were recruited in the pioneer youth groups and the details of their arrest and life in prison. The ‘Lavon Affair’ as it came to be known, caused a serious political crisis in Israel as it was later claimed that this misguided and ill-planned operation was organised by military intelligence without the knowledge or approval of the Israeli government.

¹⁵⁹ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.86.

¹⁶⁰ Laskier, in *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.253-67, outlined very precisely the application of those decrees that provides concrete evidence of the specifically anti-Jewish intent of the legislation. This bias was not surprising since the Nasser regime was always committed ‘to deprive the foreign, ethnic, and religious minorities, of the economic and social influence they had exercised for so long’ in order to achieve national homogeneity. In a way, the Suez War only precipitated the changeover.

About 1,000 Jews were detained, more than half of them Egyptian citizens. Thirteen thousand French and British citizens were expelled from Egypt in retaliation for the tripartite attack, among them many Jews. In addition, 500 Jews not holding French or British citizenship were expelled. Some 460 Jewish-owned businesses were sequestered. Many Jews lost their jobs. The government nationalised the assets of all British and French citizens, and Jews holding those nationalities were affected in that capacity. ... When the hostilities were over, Jews were subjected to unofficial pressures to leave Egypt and renounce their citizenship. According to the World Jewish Congress, between November 22, 1956 and March 15, 1957, 14,102 Jews left Egypt... Most of them abandoned the great bulk of their assets in Egypt and came to Israel as impoverished refugees.¹⁶¹

According to the respondents who were imprisoned both after the 1948 and the 1956 wars, living conditions inside their camps - which the majority called 'concentration camps' - were just bearable after overcoming the initial shock of being arrested, interrogated, and deprived of their liberty, often without any specific charges brought against them. There were few cases of systematic physical mistreatment, contrary to what happened after the Six-Day War in 1967.¹⁶²

Nevertheless, as stated by Laskier, the Egyptian government seems to have pursued a systematic policy of ridding the country of its Jewish population 'by expulsion and through "voluntary" emigration'.¹⁶³ What was left of Egyptian Jewry was subjected to the usual humiliation, intimidation and harassment techniques not always reported in history books. For instance, as revealed in my interviews, entire families were consigned to house arrest and suffered continuous surveillance, false denunciations, or arbitrary midnight visits by the Egyptian Secret Service. A typical example was the testimony of Respondent #9 who related her ordeal:

The authorities had called on the British and the French to register at the police station. Fifteen days after that notice, we were put in forced residence, my mother and myself, no radio, no telephone. After another 15 days, they came at midnight and took us to the police station, my parents, my husband and I and the baby. When they called us in, we were given 24 hours to leave the country.

¹⁶¹ Beinon, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.87.

¹⁶² See Mizrahi, *L'Égypte et ses Juifs – Le Temps révolu*, pp.126-36, where Mizrahi compared the prison conditions and the treatment of the prisoners after each war, 1948, 1956 and 1967. He wrote: '*Les internements de 1948 et de 1956 n'étaient qu'une manifestation "courtoise", si l'on peut dire, de l'antisémitisme... En 1967, les souffrances des internés furent de loin les plus dures et les plus longues. Les détenus durent subir de nombreuses brutalités de la part de leurs géôliers..*' One of my own respondents (#13F), arrested after the 1967 war, reported that he was held at the infamous prison of Abu Zaabal for only six months thanks to his Italian passport whereas his companions who were either Egyptian or stateless were kept in prison for over three years.

¹⁶³ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.256-57.

It is, therefore, easy to understand how the combination of official government policy, economic hardship due the loss of jobs and inability to regain employment caused a ‘flight hysteria’ amongst the Jews, a flight that was later referred to as ‘the Second Exodus’. Thousands of people flocked to the offices of the Rabbinate and various consulates and embassies, seeking assistance and means of escape. Laskier stated that, by 1958, twenty-three to twenty-five thousand Jews had emigrated, ‘including six thousand (until June 1957) who left on ships chartered by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)...with funds provided by the United Jewish Appeal.’¹⁶⁴ The Jewish Agency directed the immigration to Israel via European ports while the United HIAS Service handled the immigration to Brazil, Argentina, the United States, Canada, Australia, and other regions again via European centres of transit.¹⁶⁵

In the meantime, the dust had started to settle in Egypt by mid-1957, and there was evidence of a certain relaxation of the pressure exerted upon the Jewish community. Some Jews who had been expropriated at the height of the crisis, although they were not British or French, and who were still in the country, had their property returned to them.¹⁶⁶ However, it was all too late for the viability of Jewish communal life in Egypt under such an unstable political climate, deprived of its lay and religious leaders.¹⁶⁷ The emigration of the Jews continued, albeit at a slower pace. The migrants of the later wave were economically better off than the earlier ones and preferred other destinations such as Europe or the Americas rather than Israel, considered to be a harder option. The following years saw a growing degradation of a dramatically shrunken Jewish community. On the eve of the Six-Day War in June 1967, Laskier claimed 2500 Jews were left in Egypt out of the 80,000 living there before 1948.¹⁶⁸ It is important to note that by then, the other religious minorities such as the Greeks, the Armenians, the Lebanese and the Syrians had also been hit hard by various nationalisation

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p.257.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p.268. Laskier pointed out that, at least until 1959, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) recognised the status of most of the escapees from Egypt as refugees therefore eligible for United Nations protection.

¹⁶⁶ In 1958 and 1959, the French and the British governments negotiated agreements with the Egyptians providing compensation to their nationals for loss of property and/or businesses, whereas the stateless and Egyptian Jews who had been expelled or pressured to leave had no chance of redress and lost everything.

¹⁶⁷ Beinín, in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.88, noted that the chief Rabbi of Alexandria, Aharon Angel, and the President of the Cairo Jewish community, Salvator Cicurel, left the country in the post-1956 wave of departures. The Karaite rabbi had died a few months before the Suez War and Chief Rabbi Nahum was ill and died in 1960.

¹⁶⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.290. Beinín in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.87, quoted a figure of 7,000 taken from the WJC records.

decrees, as the Nasser regime seized the assets of some 820 ‘capitalist reactionaries’.¹⁶⁹ Therefore, they were also feeling excluded and undesirable and were looking for new shores to settle on.

The outbreak of the third Arab-Israeli War in June 1967 and the subsequent defeat of the Arab coalition sealed the fate of the few remaining Jews of Egypt. Most of the male Jewish population was rounded up and imprisoned. Some remained incarcerated until May or June 1970. Upon the intervention of the Spanish Embassy that issued them with Spanish passports, instigated by HIAS, the rest was gradually allowed to leave on condition that they renounce their Egyptian nationality, leave all their assets behind and pledge never to return.¹⁷⁰ Laskier estimated that by the end of July 1970, there were about 300 Jews in Cairo and 250 in Alexandria.¹⁷¹ These numbers could only have dwindled since then as there is no evidence of any Jews migrating back to Egypt, even after the signing of the peace accord between Israel and Egypt in 1979.¹⁷² One can assume that this era marked the closing chapter of the long and rich history of the Jews of Egypt.

As one can see, in twenty odd years, a vibrant, established and respected community suffered a complete reversal of fortune. The Jews of Egypt responded with a diversity of voices to the challenges that modernity and its long list of ‘isms’ brought in its wake, capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, fascism, antisemitism, nationalism, pan-Arabism, pan-Islamism, and Zionism. They embraced some and fought for them, rejected others and fought against them but they were indifferent to most. By the 1950s, whether they were Egyptian, foreign nationals or stateless, Zionists or anti-Zionists, orthodox or liberal, Francophone or Arabophone, their status was fatally compromised.¹⁷³ In an environment where they were not perceived as ‘real Egyptians’, they were seen as having actively or passively profited from colonialism. Therefore, they were implicated as agents and collaborators of the hated British and of the Zionists. They were seen as potential enemies of the state and in Joel Beinin’s words, they ‘were transformed from a national asset into a fifth column’ overnight.’ They were expelled or ‘willingly’ left their native land as they felt they had no other option. Apart

¹⁶⁹ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.266-7.

¹⁷⁰ See Tad Szulc, *The Secret Alliance*, Chapter XXXII, ‘Business with Nasser and Sadam’, pp.280-3.

¹⁷¹ Laskier, *the Jews of Egypt*, p.293.

¹⁷² During my visit to Egypt in 1999, I was given a figure of about 200 people in Cairo – most of them in nursing homes - and about 20 in Alexandria. Six years later, these figures are reported to have fallen dramatically, as was to be expected.

from a privileged few, most of them were unable to take any of their material possessions and left Egypt destitute, with the help of international Jewish charity organisations.

The usual question that has been raised by many historians is whether the creation of the State of Israel was the catalyst in the final demise of the Jewish communities of the Arab world or was this demise inevitable. I agree that Israel was a determining factor in the disintegration of all the Jewish communities of the Arab world but it remains only one of the factors. It is also true that the Jews of Egypt, by distancing themselves from their cultural and national roots, by sending their children to foreign language schools and by preferring French to Arabic, had already heavily mortgaged their future in that country. However, the 'inevitability' thesis is just as valid since one cannot deny that even if Jews had remained politically and culturally close to their Middle Eastern milieu, even if the Palestinian conflict had not erupted when it did, one element of the equation remained unchanged. Their primary condition as Jews in an Arab-Muslim world, with nationalism and fundamentalism on the rise, would have sooner or later become untenable. Whatever the answer to the initial question, this is not the main issue here. Conjectures about what would or could have happened if history had taken a different turn, are seldom conclusive or productive. The purpose of this study is to understand how the Jews of Egypt navigated in the midst of the political upheavals of the times, by trying to define what made them who they were, as a community and as individuals.

To sum up, one can say that, from the late 1930s onwards, the situation on the ground for the Jews of Egypt gradually deteriorated, for a number of internal and external reasons, until they became *persona non grata* in their own land. Transformed into refugees, they were dispersed all over the world and had to find a new home and start their lives afresh. What kind of intellectual, cultural and ethical baggage did they take with them that helped them respond to the difficult challenges of expulsion, exile, separation, immigration, rebuilding, integration, reacculturation and redefinition of self identity? Constrained by the inevitable limitations of my research, I could only study in depth the Australian experience and compare it somewhat succinctly to the French one. I have tried to assess the value of that Egyptian background assuming that in essence, it would have been similar for the whole group of Jews from Egypt, wherever they settled, even when they were confronted with different cultural contexts. All these elements, to-date, have not been extensively documented and oral history gave me as a researcher the tool to gather and evaluate these elements through testimonies and personal

interviews and compare and contrast them to official historical records, with the backing of primary and secondary sources.

CHAPTER IV:

The Australian Sample Group – Socio-economic and Cultural Configuration

The modern history of the Jews in Egypt including the wholesale expulsion or ‘self-liquidation’ of their community as Joel Beinin called it has just been outlined. For the next step in my research, the use of oral history methodology allowed me to hear the voice of ordinary members of that community, telling their version of those same events the way they remembered them and the way these events impacted upon them, from their personal perspective as opposed to the official version recorded in history books. I looked at the case histories of 92 Jews originally from Egypt who migrated to Australia. I analysed their demographic details such as gender, age, place of birth, and place of residence, using a thematic approach, and trying to identify their differences and commonalities to see if there was such as thing as a typical profile of the Egyptian Jew as a migrant. Before dealing with their actual migration experience in Australia, I raised questions about various aspects of their lives in Egypt, touching on the themes of ethnic origin, socio-economic status, education, language, identity, ideology and connection with Egypt as the ‘mother country’. I closed this section by examining the events that triggered their ‘second’ exodus to try and determine if that exodus was already foreseeable before the final break and how prepared they were for that break.

Demographics

The group of interviewees was virtually equally divided as far as gender was concerned, 47% male and 53% female. With one exception¹, they were all born in Egypt, mostly in Cairo (53) and Alexandria (31), with a few (7) in smaller rural towns such as Tantah and Mansourah, in the Nile River Delta², and even in Upper Egypt³. At the time they were interviewed, their age

¹ Case Study #14 was born in Smyrna (modern day Izmir). He came to Egypt with mother and siblings at the age of 6 in 1921.

² Tantah is an important railroad junction, situated on a major highway connecting Cairo and Alexandria. Mansourah is also situated in the Delta region, east of Alexandria. Based on Fargeon’s research, in *Les Juifs en Egypte*, pp. 287-91, it had a relatively important Jewish community at the beginning of the twentieth century of about 150 families that dwindled to about 50 in the late 1930s. A caption in a modern Egyptian travel guide, Mansourah’s lively markets called ‘*Al-Khawagat*’ specified that they were ‘in earlier times run by Greeks, Jews and Lebanese’. The term ‘*Al-Khawagat*’ or foreigners used to be derogatory, and now seems to have evolved, suggesting a certain nostalgia of the past.

varied from the mid 50 to the mid 80. Almost half the respondents (about 48%) had lived in Egypt for two generations (meaning the interviewee and parents were born there); over a third (37.5%) had been there for one generation (meaning only the interviewee was born in the country), and the rest (15%) for three or more generations. These percentages, while confirming the relatively recent migration of Egyptian Jewry in the modern period, attested nevertheless to a physical presence in the land of over two generations on average.

As noted, Egypt had attracted large numbers of migrants from the middle of the nineteenth century due to favourable economic opportunities created by the government's program of reform and modernisation, and its welcoming attitude to entrepreneurial foreigners. The migration pattern of Jewish populations from the Ottoman Empire, the Mediterranean region and Eastern Europe has been the object of studies by a number of historians, already mentioned in the previous section of this work⁴. Krämer, for instance, has looked closely at the immigration pattern of the Jews to Egypt from the nineteenth century and commented on the diversity of the various migrant groups:

The immigration of Jews from the Ottoman Empire, Greece, the Balkans, Corfu, and Italy, who were mainly of Sephardi (i.e., Spanish) origin, began in the early nineteenth century and continued until the 1920s. Sephardi and Oriental Jews from North Africa went to Egypt chiefly between 1897 and 1907, when the country experienced a stock market crash brought on by speculation. They settled mostly in Cairo and in certain trading centres in the Delta, notably Tantah. Jews from Yemen and Aden on their way to Palestine often got no further than Egypt, when their funds ran out. Most of them arrived between 1900 and 1914 and settled in the Suez Canal Zone or in Cairo. Ashkenazi Jews from, Russia, Rumania, and Poland arrived in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries, and, for the most part, went to Cairo. In 1914-15, over 11,000 Ashkenazi Jews expelled from the district of Jaffa by the local Ottoman commander, fled to Alexandria, Cairo, and Suez but returned to Palestine or Eastern Europe after the end of the war.⁵

My data revealed that the Australian sample group was not only a typical representation of the inherent diversity of Egyptian Jewry but its inner composition also reflected the size of the internal categories: a dominant Sephardi component originally from the old Ottoman Empire (Turkey, Syria, Greece, Morocco and Algeria), a smaller but still significant Ashkenazi group

³ Only one respondent (#5) was born in Assiut, a village halfway between Cairo and Aswan, because his father had established his business there.

⁴ Fargeon, *Les Juifs en Egypte, depuis les origines jusqu'à ce jour*, pp.189-90, Mizrahi, *L'Egypte et ses Juifs Le Temps*, pp. 31-2 and Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.4-8.

⁵ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.11.

from Eastern Europe (Russia, Rumania, Bulgaria, Austria and Hungary)⁶ and the rest made up of a few respondents from both Western and Eastern Europe of mixed Sephardi and Ashkenazi parentage to which was added belatedly one single Karaite Jew.⁷

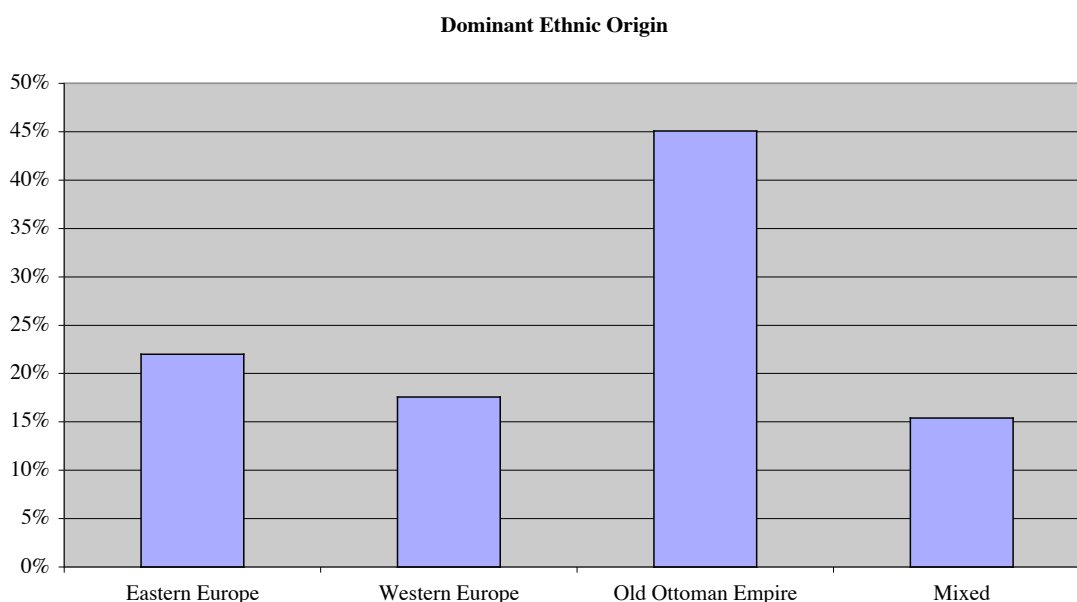


Chart 1.

The respondents' narratives confirmed the fact that economic, social and political reasons underpinned the migration of Jews to Egypt in that period. Typical of any migration story, they had been attracted to Egypt by the strong economic climate, work opportunities, political stability, family reunion and security in a welcoming and tolerant society. The mobility of prospective migrants was further facilitated by the fact, that technically speaking, Egypt was still a province of the Ottoman Empire, - and this was the case until 1914 when it became a British Protectorate - whose subjects were relatively free to move from one region to the other [see Appendix 3)

The narrative of the only respondent (#14) who was not born in Egypt, tells the story of how his widowed mother with her seven children decided to leave Turkey, a country where Jews

⁶ Ibid., pp.18-20. According to Krämer, the 5,000 to 6,000 Egyptian Ashkenazim were more concentrated in Cairo where they had their own synagogue and their own rabbi whereas in Alexandria, they were part of the general community. Krämer found that they constituted 8% at most of the overall Jewish population in the interwar period. However, within the Australian sample, they had a representation of approximately 25%. The reason for this unusually high proportion might be due to the fact that a larger component of the sample group was from Cairo.

⁷ The case of the Karaite Jew will be discussed later in this study.

had lived for hundreds of years, to settle in Egypt. ‘*Nous étions espagnols*’, stated this respondent, ‘*mais avec Isabelle la Catholique et Ferdinand d’Aragon, tous les Juifs ont été expulsés*’. His ancestors first found refuge in Leghorn and then Turkey opened her doors, ‘*les Turcs ont voulu nous prendre, ils ont été très bien pour les Juifs.*’ He was born in a small village near Smyrna, (modern day Izmir), a town that used to be a vibrant Jewish centre of the Old Ottoman Empire before it went into rapid decline after World War I. His father was a grower of sultana grapes, which he used to sell everywhere. After the father died, the family decided to leave the country in 1921 because of the ongoing conflict between Turkey and Greece. The Jews were often caught in the middle, hated by the Greeks in particular for their closeness to the Turks. In comparison, Muhammad Ali’s Egypt offered an envied political stability as well as promising opportunities for enterprising migrants. The family travelled by boat to Alexandria and settled there because this is where they found employment. Furthermore, communal help was more readily available for newcomers in an urban environment. The respondent, who was six at the time, was sent to a Jewish community school, where he received a European education free of charge.⁸

Apart from the socio-economic motivation, political unrest was another factor that pushed Jews to leave their native countries and seek a safe haven in Egypt. Three ‘Corfiot’ respondents⁹ reported that their parents had left their homes in Corfu due to discrimination by the Greek majority and blood libel accusations, and chose to migrate to Egypt because of its reputation of tolerance.¹⁰

⁸ Case Study #14: ‘*J’ai quitté la Turquie en 1921 avec ma mère pour l’Egypte. Il y avait la guerre entre les Turcs et les Grecs. Nous avons quitté pour l’avenir des enfants. Mon père étant mort, les garçons avaient grandi et ne voulaient plus rester en Turquie... Ma mère avait une soeur qui était mariée en Egypte et avait une très bonne position...L’éducation européenne, je l’ai eue en Egypte. J’ai commencé par l’école Harouch, et ensuite l’école Menasche...Nous nous sommes installés à Alexandrie...Jacques, mon frère aîné, travaillait chez un Turc. Albert et Marco travaillaient aussi.*’

⁹ Respondents #8, 71 and 59.

¹⁰ The island of Corfu or Kerkira was occupied by the Venitians for 400 years. After a short period under the French, Corfu was invaded by the English in 1814 and incorporated to Greece in 1864. According to the personal chronicle of a Corfiot family, ‘*Jessula Chronique, Corfou*’, compiled in 1991 by Jean-François Renaud, related to the well-known French writer Albert Cohen (*Mangeclous*, 1938), the Jewish community of Corfu of about 5 to 6,000 was ravaged by a blood libel accusation in 1891 and ensuing riots by the local Greek population. According to written testimonies and correspondence between the religious authorities of Corfu and Zante, the situation was considered so serious that the only solution that was envisaged was emigration: ‘*la question de l’émigration s’impose à nous d’une manière absolue*’. Over half the Jewish community did emigrate, mostly to Egypt and those who stayed were rounded up on 10 June 1944 by the Germans, their final destination being Auschwitz-Birkenau. The President of the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry reported that out of the 1795 Jews of Corfu who were deported, only 121 survived.

Other interviewees related how their families also found a safe haven in Egypt after fleeing from pogroms and persecution in Russia and Rumania. Interviewee #38 remembered hearing stories about saving the young boys of the family from being conscripted into the Russian army from the age of eight and for a minimum of 25 years, as was customary in those days:¹¹

My father was born in Bessarabia and my mother in Sofia en route to Constantinople from Odessa. The family had left Odessa because they had sons and they didn't want them to go into the Russian army. They arrived in Alexandria by ship towards the end of the nineteenth century but decided to settle in Cairo because there were more opportunities for work.¹²

Other respondents came from Salonika, Istanbul, and Smyrna (Izmir) from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. However, they still considered themselves literally 'from Spain', over 500 years after the Expulsion of 1492. One participant whose ancestors had lived all those centuries in the Ottoman Empire, still mentions his Majorcan origin:

Originally we were from Majorca. The family left Majorca at the time of the Expulsion from Spain in 1492, and went to Salonika. In Salonika, there was a congregation from Majorca. We ended up being called the children of Majorca, which is '*Ben Mayor*'. We can trace our name back to a rabbi called Solomon Ben Mayor who was buried in 1562. My father's family came from Smyrna. The family must have moved from Salonika to Smyrna sometime in the 1800s.'¹³

Interviewee #3 also pointed to the Spanish origin of his family whose original name Ha-Eleon meant 'from the province of Leon and Castille', before it was changed to a more modern form. He claimed that genealogical research confirmed that his ancestors left Spain after the Expulsion Edict of 1492 and settled in Baden-Baden where they remained for 90 years before moving to Amsterdam. He also claimed that the reason for the family's immigration to Egypt, around 1841, was rooted in a well-known historical reality: Muhammad Ali's program

¹¹ On Cantonists, see Michael, Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas I and the Jews, 1825-1855*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983. According to a report published in January 1863 in the American periodical, *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, Russian Jews were subjected to a number of repressive laws during the regime of Tsar Nikolai I, from the years 1825-1855. Amongst the harshest was the 'Cantonist' law targeting Jewish boys from the age of eight to be taken from their parents and trained to serve in the Russian army for 20 to 25 years, with the further aim of converting them to the Greek Orthodox Church.

¹² Case Study #37 also stated that his 'grandfather came to Egypt from Rumania in 1882. He was born in Galatz. He left Rumania to avoid having his son taken away to the army.'

¹³ Case Study #16.

of modernisation of Egypt needed the help of Europeans.¹⁴ This particular oral history narrative showed a direct link between the opening up of Egypt to modernity and the movement of a Jewish family from Europe to Egypt.

Italy was another prestigious origin claimed by some of the interviewees. For instance, #33 stated that her grandfather came to Egypt from Leghorn to sell trains to the Khedive Ismail, Muhammad Ali's grandson, who ruled between 1863 and 1879.¹⁵ The role played by Jewish families in the construction of several railway lines has been duly documented both by Krämer and by Samir Raafat's research on the contribution of Jewish notables to Egypt's modernisation. In fact, the Soares family, who also came to Egypt from Leghorn in the early part of the nineteenth century, established in Cairo 'the first public transport company, the horse-drawn carriages of the Omnibus Company ... which, until 1940, serviced the busy Muski Street.'¹⁶ They were popularly known as *Arabiyat Suwaris* after their founders. The Soares brothers also owned the railway line from Cairo to Helwan and several other lines in the rural areas of both Upper and Lower Egypt.¹⁷

The gathered data confirmed that the majority of my respondents were urban dwellers since over half of them (56.8%) were born in Cairo and a third (34.1%) in Alexandria. Again, these figures reflected the findings of Landau and Krämer in the Egyptian censuses of 1897 to 1947.¹⁸ According to Landau, the attraction towards urban living was already prevalent in the nineteenth century, due to the obvious factors, such as settling in the first place of arrival, usually the port of Alexandria, the need for a communal life and better work prospects as shopkeepers, brokers and clerks.

¹⁴ Case Study #3 stated: 'as far as I have been told, we could go back possibly to 1840 [in Egypt]. That was the time when somebody from the family in Amsterdam had accepted the invitation that the Vice-Roy Muhammad Ali extended to foreigners to come and develop the country, promising all sorts of benefits.'

¹⁵ Case study #33.

¹⁶ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp.39-41; See article by Samir Raafat, 'The National Bank of Egypt (NBE) 1898-1998', in *Egyptian Mail*, 11 and 25 May, 1996, section on 'The Soares Brothers of Cairo'.

¹⁷ See article by Dr. Yunan Labib Rizk, 'Battle for Helwan', in *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Issue no.492, 27 July-2 August 2000. Modern Helwan was founded in 1874 by the Khedive Ismail. Situated 24 kms south of Cairo, it was renowned for its sulphur springs and salubrious climate and was initially only frequented by the cream of Egyptian society as a holiday place. The article mentioned the construction in the 1880s of a new railway line between Cairo and Helwan by the 'Sawaris' brothers (Egyptianisation of the name 'Soares'). The new rail service transformed Helwan into a residential district.

¹⁸ See Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, pp.8-9 and Krämer, *Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.10. In 1917, from a total Jewish population of 59,581 in 1917, 49% lived in Cairo, 41% in Alexandria and 7% in the villages. In 1947, from a total Jewish population of 65,639, 63% lived in Cairo, 32% in Alexandria and only 4% in the rest of Egypt in spite of the fact that according to Landau, during World War I, some Jews disrupted the trend by settling in the Canal Zone 'where they could find better opportunities for business with the Allied troops stationed in that area'.

The traditional sibling rivalry between the inhabitants of two capital cities survived the transplantation to the 'Edge of the Diaspora' and the interviewees still saw themselves as distinctively Alexandrians or Cairenes.¹⁹ The Alexandrians expressed a special attachment to their city, claiming that the lifestyle, the people, and even the sense of humour were particular to the place.²⁰ It is true that already in the nineteenth century, Alexandria with its harbour opening onto the West was considered to be a more European city than Cairo. The number of foreigners in Alexandria exceeded one third of the total population and thus engendered a very cosmopolitan atmosphere.²¹ A French historian, Robert Ilbert, called Alexandria '*le symbole d'une Méditerranée ouverte au monde*'.²² Furthermore, the Alexandrian Jewish community was truly Mediterranean in its composition and outlook and, therefore, less exposed than its Cairene counterpart to the autochthonous Egyptian environment. Until the early 1940s, it was also considered to be better organised and more united than the Cairo community because 'all Jews living in the city regardless of rite and origin were considered part of the community', whereas in Cairo, the Sephardim, the Ashkenazim and the Karaites functioned separately.²³ However, by the late 1940s, 'Cairo finally assumed the leading role among Egyptian Jewry', thus displacing the predominance of Alexandria.²⁴

The issue of lesser or greater exposure to the indigenous atmosphere was a determining factor in the feelings of security and inclusion articulated by the respondents in the course of their interviews. Being closer to the political nerve centre of the country, Cairo-born respondents have often personally experienced some of the seminal moments of Egypt's recent history, such as the riots in 1948, the burning of Cairo in January 1952 and the Free Officers Revolution of July 1952. Therefore, they experienced a stronger attachment to the land, a better knowledge of the native language and also a more personal understanding of the events leading to the general demise of Egyptian Jewry.

¹⁹ *The Edge of the Diaspora* is the title of a book by Suzanne D. Rutland, on the history of Jewish settlement in Australia, Sydney: Williams Collins, 1988.

²⁰ Case Study #74 stated: '*J'ai l'impression que les gens du Caire menaient une vie différente que ceux d'Alexandrie. Ces derniers gardent toujours une affection particulière pour leur ville.*' Case Study #3 also concurred by saying: 'my family came to Egypt in 1841. They came to Alexandria. It was more European at the time. Cairo became more important later on. Alexandria was where all the activities were, where you had the harbour, the bankers, where all the cotton was gathered to be shipped...'

²¹ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, p.32, noted that 'Alexandria was the most cosmopolitan city in Egypt and the cultural gateway to Europe, which accounts for the fact that European influence was stronger in the Alexandria Jewish community than in any other.'

²² Robert Ilbert et Ilios Yannakakis, *Alexandrie 1860-1960*: Editions Autrement, Paris, 1992, p.16.

²³ Krämer, *The Jews of Modern Egypt*, p.82

²⁴ *Ibid*, p.86.

Did the self-perceived differences between Alexandrians and Cairenes carry any special significance for the case at hand, or were they just anecdotal? It is true that those differences have their roots in the socio-historical context that determined the posturing of the two communities. In the psyche of its European inhabitants, Alexandria, ‘the capital of memory’, as Lawrence Durrell called it, was not truly representative of Egypt, whereas Cairo was always an integral part of Egypt. As a result, the Alexandrian Jews saw themselves as more cosmopolitan and more detached from their Egyptian environment whilst the Cairene Jews, who lived in a city popularly known as ‘*Om el-Donya*’ or the Mother of the World, considered their Alexandrian brethren as provincial and pseudo-Europeans. Whatever the significance of these differences, when the end of Egyptian Jewry was spelled out, these distinctions did not affect the final outcome.

Only a small percentage (about 7 to 8%) of the respondents came from the smaller rural towns but they did not remain there beyond the school years. As the attraction of urban centres grew, most of them moved as young adults to Cairo or Alexandria for the traditional reasons: better education, more work opportunities and stronger communal institutions. One notable exception was the case of the rabbi of Port Said, who remained there until the war with Israel in 1948, when he was arrested as a Zionist sympathiser. His daughter, who now lives in Sydney, related his experience: ‘my father was kept in solitary confinement for 44 days because he was a rabbi. The other Jews that were picked up remained together, only my father was segregated.’²⁵

Another respondent claimed his birthplace as Assiut, a village situated halfway between Cairo and Aswan in Upper Egypt where there was very little record of a significant Jewish population and no organised community. He remembered ‘there were only about five Jewish families’ there. The statistical studies of 1938 published by Maurice Fargeon in his book *Les Juifs en Egypte*, showed a number of 62 Jews for Assiut and another 900 for the other villages

²⁵ Case Study #82. Landau, in *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, p.34-37, pointed out that Port Said had grown from an insignificant settlement to an economically viable town after the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869 and, as a consequence, the Jewish community had also grown in importance. The new settlers were ‘attracted to the town, in the hope of earning a living from trade and tourism.’ Landau quoted a figure of 594 in 1917 out of a total population of approximately 52,000, ‘after which the Jewish population dropped significantly’.

of Upper Egypt.²⁶ The ethnic origin of the respondent in question was Ottoman and his father immigrated to Egypt in 1889 from Istanbul because:

Business was very bad in Turkey and the situation in Egypt was good so he came. He was an electrician and opened a shop of electrical appliances and later added spare parts for cars. He named the shop *Samuel Levy* [although it was not his name] because at that time, Jewish people were very respected and trusted.²⁷

This example clearly demonstrated the high regard in which Jews were held even in a remote little village such as Assiut. In spite of this and although his father's shop was financially very successful, my respondent only dreamt of leaving his native village to study Pharmacy at university in Cairo. He eventually settled there, opening up his own pharmacy until the events of 1956 forced him to emigrate.

Krämer confirmed that 'in the interwar period, there were still several small Jewish communities in the major trading centres of the Delta and the Suez Canal Zone.'²⁸ Respondent #6, for instance, was a third generation rural dweller. She was born and raised in the small country town of Mansurah, situated on the Nile Delta, like her father and grandfather. Her father was the accountant for the local branch of Barclays Bank. The family remained there until 1948 and left for Cairo because of the father's early death. The interviewee described their lifestyle in the country town as privileged:

It was a small town. All the farmers would sell their cotton crop to the Barclays Bank and conducted all their business transactions with the same bank. We lived in an apartment. My mother had a lot of servants. She was busy supervising them, cooking and socialising. My parents would have friends coming over on Saturday and Sunday. There was even a Jewish club. Before World War II, there was a very big Jewish population and during the war, a lot more came to Mansurah when they started

²⁶ The data provided by Maurice Fargeon about the Jewish population of Upper Egypt, in *Les Juifs en Egypte*, pp.308-9, quoting a figure of 137 Jews for Assiut in 1917, dropping to 62 in 1927, was replicated in all of Upper Egypt with 1225 Jews in 1917 to 984 in 1927. This date cleared showed the trend away from rural areas. Fargeon also noted that those few Jewish families were very assimilated to the other villagers in their lifestyle but nevertheless still maintained strict Jewish traditions, although they did not have the support of Jewish institutions in those villages: '*En Haute Egypte,...les Juifs ne se comptent que par quelques rares unités insignifiantes...Aucune Communauté Juive n'existe en Haute-Egypte où les israélites mènent une vie individuelle et totalement assimilée à celle des habitants au milieu desquels ils vivent...Youssef Wahba m'assure... qu'il n'a jamais enfreint aux Lois de la Sainte Ecriture.*' pp.302-3.

²⁷ Case Study #5.

²⁸ Krämer, *Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.108.

bombarding Alexandria. After the war, most of them went back to Alexandria and even some born and raised in Mansurah also left.²⁹

The Egyptian census of 1917, as well as the records of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, confirmed there were about eighty Jewish families in Mansurah at the time, which made the Jewish community one of the largest outside Cairo and Alexandria. Fargeon claimed that there could have been around one hundred and fifty families at the beginning of the twentieth century. This number had dwindled to about five hundred individuals by 1927 and 200 on the eve of World War II. Their main activities revolved around the cotton and manufacturing industries.³⁰

The case of Respondent #27, also born in Mansurah, was not particularly significant since his parents, originally from Alexandria and Cairo respectively, were only there for professional reasons. They were offered a position as French teachers during the war years by the Mansurah Greek community school and by the Egyptian local school.³¹ The respondent was only seven years old when he left Egypt with his family. What was interesting was the fact that, in a small village town, French was included in the curriculum of both the Greek school and the local public school, a further evidence of the high status of French culture.

Of all the provincial towns of Egypt, Tantah seems to have a special resonance for a number of interviewees, either as their own or their parents' birthplace.³² Tantah, situated between Cairo and Alexandria in the centre of the Delta region, was, at the turn of the twentieth century, 'the major marketplace of a large cotton growing area and was linked to all centres of the country by a close network of railway lines' as reported by Krämer.³³ He also pointed out that, in 1909, the population of 75,000 inhabitants included a considerable number of Greeks and Jews. The Jewish migrants came mainly from Morocco, Syria, Algeria and Iraq. Before the economic crisis of 1907, the local Jewish community was very prosperous. An *AIU* school had been established in 1905, catering for boys and girls of the community as well for

²⁹ Fargeon in *Les Juifs en Egypte*, pp.287-89, documented the communal activities of all the Jewish families who lived in Mansurah.

³⁰ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, pp. 38-40 and Fargeon, *Les Juifs en Egypte*, pp.287-89 and p.307.

³¹ The whole family migrated to Australia in 1948 and settled in Hobart where the father became Head of the French Department of Hobart University and the mother continued to work as a French teacher in high schools.

³² Fargeon in *Les Juifs en Egypte*, p.279, described Tantah as having one of the oldest and richest Jewish Community in Egypt, going back to at least two centuries to the days of Muhammad Ali, when the Jews of Tantah were goldsmiths, which would attest to their social standing.

³³ Krämer, *Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp.108-111.

some Muslim pupils.³⁴ One Tantah-born respondent testified to having attended that school at the primary level, where he was exposed to French culture for the first time.³⁵

By the eve of World War II, the Tantah community had gone into decline due to a change of economic conditions and the departure of its wealthier members. However, according to a report from the *AIU*, poor Oriental and Ashkenazi immigrants, attracted by the social services and other advantages offered by the local community, such as free education for their children, filled the vacuum left by the rural exodus of the middle and upper classes.³⁶ Nevertheless, Tantah's Jewish population remained relatively well organised, with three or four synagogues, three bearing the names of their founders, Louna Botton, Chamla and Eskanderany and the fourth one reserved for the Moroccan Jews, *Kenisset el-Mogharba*.³⁷ Respondent #53 was very proud of his family's Tantah origin, as he considered himself an authentic Egyptian. He could trace his roots back to the eighteenth century, leading a modest life on the land and probably from the land: 'we were *fellaheen* (peasants)', he said without inhibition and boasted 'we had seventeen synagogues in Tantah.'³⁸

Another significant rural centre, al-Mehalla al-Kubra, considered the centre of the cotton industry, was the birthplace of the father of Interviewee #3. As previously mentioned, this Sephardi family came to Egypt around 1840 from Amsterdam, in response to Mohammed Ali's invitation to Europeans. At first they settled in Alexandria because, as the respondent explained, 'Alexandria was where all the activities were, where you had the harbour, the bankers, where all the cotton was gathered and shipped overseas and you know what cotton meant to Egypt.' Later, they moved to al-Mehalla al-Kubra:

My grandfather was a banker and a cotton merchant. He had all sorts of properties in the centre of the cotton industry in al-Mehalla al-Kubra. This is where my father was

³⁴ Landau, in *Jews in Nineteenth Century*, pp.89-90, described the circumstances of the opening in 1905 of the Alliance school in Tantah which 'unlike the *AIU* schools in Alexandria, which closed in 1919, ... continued to function until World War II'. Fargeon in *Les Juifs en Egypte*, p.281, also pointed out that the influence of the *AIU* school was such that some of its students grew up to become leading figures in the intellectual and social sphere of Alexandria and Cairo.

³⁵ Case Study #29.

³⁶ *AIU*, Egypt, XIII.E.192, Alphandary, Tantah, 14 July, 1913, quoted in Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp.109-10.

³⁷ Hassoun, Jacques, *Les Juifs du Nil*, 'Chroniques de la vie quotidienne', p.130: 'A Tantah, trois synagogues se partagent la ville...: les temples Louna, Botton, Chamla et Eskanderany. Une quatrième synagogue réservée aux originaires du Maroc – *Kenisset-el-Mogharba* – était systématiquement boudée par des notables dont l'établissement dans le Delta du Nil remontait à l'époque Byzantine.'

³⁸ Fargeon in *Les Juifs en Egypte*, p.280, mentioned only three synagogues; Landau in *Jews of Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, p.42, also mentioned three and Krämer in *Jews in Modern Egypt*, p. 111, only two. It is obvious that, in the memory of the respondent, the Jewish side of Tantah was larger than life.

born. My grandfather was the *gabbai*³⁹ of the synagogue. There was a very large community in Mehalla. It was on the way to Cairo, before Tantah... It was an important locality. A lot of Europeans, Jewish and other, lived there, the proof being the size of the synagogue. There were five hotels in the city of Mehalla and my grandfather owned four of them. The schools in Mehalla were government schools. There were no French or English schools. My father and his sister had a private tutor who was coming from Alexandria and I know they were fluent in Arabic, French and Italian.

The importance of al-Mehalla al-Kubra as a Jewish centre was particularly stressed by Fargeon who claimed that a Jewish presence in that town went back six hundred years. In the modern era, around the 1900s, the community was very prosperous, before many of its members moved either to Tantah or to the cities of Alexandria and Cairo, leaving behind the poorer members. By 1937, there were only ten Jewish families left.⁴⁰

In his chronicle of Jewish life in the villages, Jacques Hassoun evoked with nostalgia the faces of the last Jewish peasants, who looked and lived exactly like their Coptic and Muslim neighbours. He also brought to mind the Jewish commercial travellers coming from Cairo and Alexandria, rushing from one village to the other, trying to sell their wares, staying whenever possible at inns owned by fellow Jews, and sharing the latest news from the city with them.⁴¹

Gradually, as income prospects grew and city lifestyle became more attractive, the general exodus of the commercial middle class and the younger generation towards Cairo and Alexandria gained momentum and in parallel, made 'life in the provinces even less attractive and migration to the big cities even more alluring.'⁴² As confirmed by the studies of Fargeon, Landau, Krämer, Hassoun and others, most of the Jews left the rural centres, in search of better economic opportunities in the big city centres of Cairo and Alexandria.⁴³ The

³⁹ In the vernacular of the Jews of Egypt, *gabbai* specifically meant the beadle or sexton of the synagogue whereas *gabbai* is more generic and means a communal official.

⁴⁰ See Fargeon, *Les Juifs en Egypte*, pp.282-86 and Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century*, p.44. Both described the pilgrimage that used to take place in al-Mehalla al-Kubra, every year on the first of the month of Iyar, 15 days after Passover. The pilgrims used 'to congregate in the *Ustadh* ("Teacher") synagogue, named for Rabbi Hayyim al-Amshati, which, along with its Scroll of the Law, was greatly revered by all Egyptian Jewry.' On that occasion, there was a lot of drinking and merry-making.

⁴¹ Hassoun, *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, pp. 128-34: '*Le dimanche matin, ils sont plusieurs milliers à se précipiter vers les gares centrales du Caire...et d'Alexandrie...les bras chargés de valises pleines d'échantillons... Mais voici que nos Juifs se précipitent vers les petites villes et les villages du Delta. Courtiers depuis des siècles, ils assurent la circulation des marchandises et des nouvelles fraîches entre les grandes villes et les campagnes.*'

⁴² Krämer, *Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.108.

⁴³ Hassoun in *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, pp.91-3, compared the 1917 census to the 1927 census, detailing the distribution of the Jewish populations right through Egypt. The latter census showed a marked decline in the numbers of Jews from the rural districts.

participants' testimonies reflected that strong pull towards an urban lifestyle. By the time of their departure from Egypt, all the responders were living almost exclusively in Cairo or Alexandria.

The nationality issue

Since the entire sample group was of diverse ethnic origins and native of Egypt for at least two generations, one would have expected the majority to be Egyptian nationals. However, as per the following chart, the present study revealed that nearly half the participants (46.5%) held a foreign passport and less than a quarter (20.5%) had Egyptian nationality. The rest - 33% - were stateless or *sujets locaux*, which usually meant that they were considered Ottoman subjects before Egypt gained independence since 1922 and somehow had not succeeded in obtaining an Egyptian or a foreign passport. It was interesting to see how these figures compare with the overall statistics for Egyptian Jewry, an issue which is not easy to clarify.⁴⁴

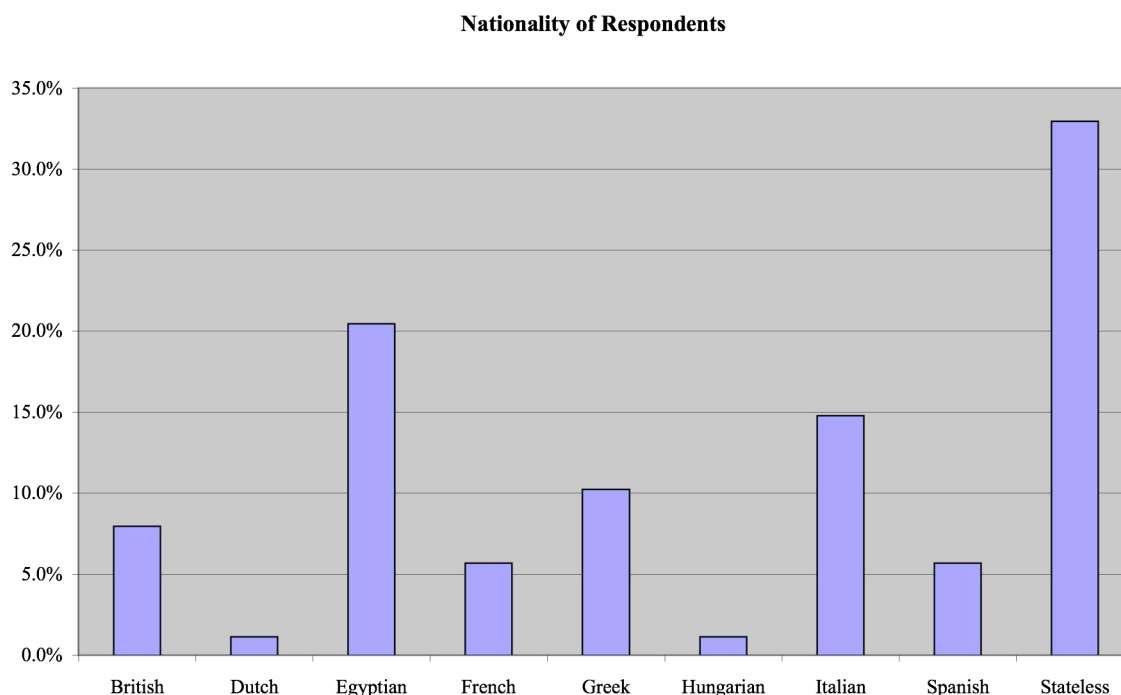


Chart 2.

Since the Nationality Law of 1947, the stateless were under the same obligations as foreign nationals and had to obtain a resident permit to be renewed every ten years. Respondent #37

⁴⁴ Shamir, 'The Evolution of the Egyptian Nationality Laws and Their Application to the Jews in the Monarchy Period' in *The Jews of Egypt – A Mediterranean Society*, pp.33-67.

declared that he bought an Italian passport for £500 when he was refused the Egyptian nationality:

I was stateless but I tried to become Egyptian. I applied to the Ministry of Interior and he said where was your father born. I replied, he was born in Egypt, I was born in Egypt and I want to be Egyptian. He said, I am sorry, we can only give you a *carte de séjour* (resident permit) which can be renewed every ten years... I bought an Italian passport in 1956, six months before leaving. This man called M... said all I had to do was to make a statutory declaration that my grandmother was Italian and was born in Sienna. There had been a big fire in Sienna and all the municipal records of Sienna had burned down. I agreed, provided I would also get passports for my wife, my three children, my sister, my niece and myself.⁴⁵

Since the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 and the British occupation of Egypt in 1882, the issue of nationality had become a major area of concern for the non-Muslim minorities. According to Krämer, the problem was compounded after the Montreux Convention of 1937:

Nationality gradually began to assume a relevance it never had before. Formal citizenship, as opposed to religious affiliation, gained further importance when, in the late 1930s, the Egyptian government started to Egyptianize the economy and the administration by reserving a growing number of positions for Egyptian citizens.⁴⁶

Historians did not always agree on the demographics of the Jews in Egypt and some discrepancies have occurred between the numbers that were quoted. For instance, whereas the 1947 Egyptian Census listed 65,639 Jews, Fargeon claimed they were 59,184 in 1937, Hassoun quoted an approximate figure of 90,000 by 1946 and Beinín's estimate was 75,000-80,000 by 1948.⁴⁷ As for their nationality, the picture is even more confused. Laskier claimed that about one quarter of the Jewish population had a foreign passport, another quarter had Egyptian nationality while the remainder 50% of stateless or *sujets locaux*.⁴⁸ Beinín argued that by 1948, only 12.5% of the Jews were Egyptians, 37.5% were foreign nationals, which also left half the population as stateless:

⁴⁵ This respondent's grandfather, originally from Rumania, had migrated to Egypt in 1882. He then left Egypt and went to Melbourne with his wife to work as an engineer. His daughter was born in Melbourne and he later died in Australia. When the time came to find a husband for the daughter, his wife wrote to Egypt and found a suitable match in a family also from Rumania. She packed her belongings and travelled back to Egypt with her daughter, who became the mother of this respondent.

⁴⁶ Krämer, *Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.29

⁴⁷ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.10; Fargeon, *Les Juifs en Egypte*, p.308; Hassoun, *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, pp.92-3 and Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.38.

⁴⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.8.

At the turn of the twentieth century, autochthonous Jews who would be entitled to Egyptian citizenship by the 1929 nationality law and its successors made up at least half of the Jewish community. But in 1948, only 5,000-10,000 of Egypt's 75,000-80,000 Jews held Egyptian citizenship. Some 40,000 were stateless, and 30,000 were foreign nationals. Many of the 10,000 poor, Arabic-speaking residents of the Rabbanite and Karaite Jewish quarters ...of Cairo or the 15,000 residents of the port district ...of Alexandria were among the stateless.⁴⁹

Krämer pointed out that the Egyptian Censuses of 1937 and 1947 did not list stateless persons separately. The last official census study of that grouping was conducted in 1927, revealing that 33% were Egyptian, 22% were European and the remaining 45% were listed as 'others', which could have meant stateless. According to the next Egyptian Census of 1937, the proportion had changed to 35% foreigners and 65% Egyptians while in 1947 it had reached 80% Egyptian as against 20% foreign nationals. Since those censuses did not treat the group of stateless as a separate category, the assumption is that they included them in the Egyptian category, which would then explain the discrepancy. In view of this conclusion, Krämer extrapolated that 'all evidence suggests that the majority of those who lost, or gave up, their foreign nationality, as well as of the indigenous Egyptian and the Oriental Jews (mostly former Ottoman subjects) in fact did not obtain Egyptian passports', which would then justify the high proportion of stateless Jews reported by Beinín.⁵⁰ Assuming that those three historians more or less agreed on the high percentage of stateless Jews, the discrepancy in their respective estimate was in the categories of Egyptian and foreign nationals. Reconciling the two estimates could not be established with any certitude in the context of this thesis. What seems more relevant here was the notable size of the 'stateless' category in both Krämer, Laskier and Beinín's research compared to the other two categories. This aspect was confirmed by the data obtained from the Australian sample group, where the stateless counted for a third. However, the higher proportion of foreign nationals – nearly half (46.6%) – compared to the 20.5% of Egyptian nationals is a reversal of the general trend. The reason for this reversal is probably due to the privileged socio-economic composition of the group, particularly when one takes into account the findings of a 1922 statistical study of the nationality of the Jewish upper class, revealing that it was 'mostly the affluent and educated middle and upper classes, which were able to obtain either foreign or Egyptian passports.'⁵¹

⁴⁹ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.38.

⁵⁰ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.33 as per Egypt, *Population Census 1937*, table 32, p.264; and *Population Census, 1947*, table 15, p.433.

⁵¹ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.35.

Those Egyptian Jews who migrated to Australia came largely from the educated and upper classes.

The circumstances in which the Jews of Egypt obtained foreign citizenship or protection have been already discussed. It is important to remember that a large percentage of them did not have a direct connection with their assumed mother country, whether it was Great Britain, France or Italy. Their connection was more with regions under the political control or protection of those countries, such as French North Africa, Malta, Gibraltar, Syria, Iraq, Lybia and Lebanon and sometimes even that connection was tenuous.⁵² Therefore, in the evaluation of this aspect of the data, it was essential to differentiate between ethnic origin and nationality as they seldom corresponded. For instance, Interviewee #34 who claimed Italian and Algerian descent was granted French nationality because of the Crémieux Law of 1870, without having ever set foot on French soil. Participant #71 explained that her parents fortuitously acquired French citizenship whereas her uncle acquired Italian nationality:

My uncle was a '*Gaulliste*'. He had paid some kind of membership during the war. Also, because we were Polish, we were '*protégés français*'. The French government needed money for the war effort during World War II and they offered us French nationality. My uncle did not go through with it ...but he bought the Italian nationality. It was much cheaper than the French.

Interviewee #31 argued that he had no problem in obtaining Egyptian citizenship in 1929 although his father came from Crete and his mother from Leghorn. #20 also stated that she had obtained the Egyptian nationality without difficulty because her maternal grandfather was born in Turkey since by law, anyone who was a descendant of a Turkish subject could automatically apply for Egyptian citizenship.⁵³ She was obviously referring to the Nationality Law of 1929, which recognised as Egyptian nationals 'those former subjects of the Ottoman Empire who made their 'habitual residence' in Egypt on 5 November 1914.'⁵⁴ Respondent #46 related that his father, who came from Turkey in the 1900s, originally from Bessarabia, had obtained Egyptian nationality. Somehow, the respondent had been registered on his birth certificate as *raeya* meaning 'local subject' in Arabic, a code word for stateless. All these examples illustrate how arbitrary and haphazard the granting of Egyptian nationality was when it came to Jews.

⁵² Ibid., p.9.

⁵³ #20 also claimed that the colour of her passport was blue, reserved for the non-Muslim citizens whereas the passport of Muslim citizens was green.

⁵⁴ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.33.

As for foreign nationality, it was not always straightforward either. A study of the data showed that 42.9% of the participants holding a British passport were originally from the old Ottoman Empire and the connection with Britain was again fortuitous. For example, Respondent #43, a British national originally from Damascus, was granted his nationality because a member of his family had given sanctuary to the British consul in Damascus during anti-Western riots and was thus recompensed by Her Majesty's government.⁵⁵ In another case, the husband was Maltese, which automatically made him a British subject. A further example was #88, a respondent whose grandfather came from Gibraltar and therefore enjoyed British protection. In only two cases, the connection with England was direct through one set of grandparents who came from Lancaster.⁵⁶

In most cases, the reasons for the various nationalities seem as diverse as the ethnic origins themselves. In fact, for the purpose of this study, the nationalities of the respondents have been grouped into three general categories, Egyptian, stateless, and foreigner. The latter category incorporated a variety of different passports: British (8%), Dutch (1.1%), French (5.7%), Greek (10.2%), Hungarian (1.1%), Italian 14.8%), and Spanish (5.7%).

The reason for the high proportion of Italian nationals was probably due to the fact that the Italian passport was the easiest one to obtain after a fire at the Leghorn municipality had destroyed all the communal records. However, not all of those participants were *Italiens de passeport*, as they used to be called. Traditionally, from the early days of Egypt's opening to European influence, Italy had developed strong trade links with Egypt and Italian Jews had forged themselves an important niche in the life of the Jewish community of Egypt. One interviewee found the proof of his family's direct link with Italy, when he leafed through the old registers of the community and found the entry related to his great grandfather:

The official records of the Alexandria Jewish Community showed that my family originated in Tuscany. My grandparents spoke Italian at home. They distanced themselves from any Egyptian traditions and customs. They sent their children to French boarding schools in Lausanne.⁵⁷

Even the records of the community in Alexandria were kept in Italian before the switch to French at the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁵⁵ Case Study #43.

⁵⁶ Case Study #4 and Case Study #77.

⁵⁷ Case Study #8.

It was also interesting to note the surprisingly high number of Greek nationals within the sample group, most of them originally from Corfu.⁵⁸ The reason for their immigration to Egypt has already been discussed. It is self evident that in view of their or their parent's past experiences in Corfu, they did not always have a strong bond with Greece and did not consider settling there after leaving Egypt in the 1950s, in spite of their Greek passport. In fact, one respondent was repatriated to Greece after being imprisoned in Egypt for Zionist activities and then expelled in 1956. The Jewish community of Athens, keen to try and rebuild the community of Rhodes that had been exterminated by the Nazis during the Second World War, promised to pay both his and his brother's fare and assured them of a livelihood if they decided to settle on the island. The respondent, then an adventurous young man, preferred the lure of the much bigger island of Australia and integrated very well in his new country. Although his accent is very Australian, he still admitted to speaking the Venitian dialect of Corfu with the older members of his family.⁵⁹

Based on the ethnic origin, the birthplace and various nationalities of the sample group, it became clear that the demographic profile of the sample group was urban based, multinational and multiethnic, regardless of its single place of birth. The study of other facets of its identity such as socio-economic status, level of education, and linguistic skills, was necessary to complement the picture of the Jew from Egypt in Australia.

Socio-economic status

In order to establish the socio economic status of the respondents, a certain number of key questions regarding housing, lifestyle, occupation and schooling, had to be assessed against their own rating of their position on the social scale. Based on the data they provided, their evaluation did not always correspond to the social reality as it was described. However, since oral history is often more about perceptions than scientific truth, the disparity was never openly challenged but reassessed as objectively as possible once it was matched with the rest of the data. Any readjustment had to take into account the comparative issues of location, lifestyle, schooling, and leisure, while keeping in mind that the category of lower middle class

⁵⁸ The island of Corfu, although always ethnically Greek, had passed from Venetian (1386-1797) to French domination (1797-1814) and then again from British protection (1814-1864) to reunification with Greece after the Greek war of Independence.

⁵⁹ Case Study #24.

in most of the cases referred to in this study referred to a *petite bourgeoisie* rather than a truly working class.⁶⁰

The main discrepancies were found in the middle and upper middle class classifications. For instance, two members of the same family had different assessments of their social standing. The brother saw himself as a member of the upper class whereas the sister maintained that the family was middle class. As noted, a ruling had to be made bearing in mind certain criteria. The occupations of the father and the mother, a schoolteacher and a secretary respectively, plus the fact that the sister, in spite of her high intellectual and academic abilities and unlike her brothers, could not pursue her tertiary education because of financial constraints, made the scale tip in favour of middle class rather than upper middle class status.⁶¹

To illustrate the three class divisions as they were represented in the sample group, I juxtaposed the stories of three women, each belonging to a different social stratum but all sharing the same family values and work ethics acquired in their formative years in Egypt. For instance, the lower middle class or *petite bourgeoisie* was represented by Respondent #1, one of the oldest participants, born in Alexandria and well into her 80s at the time of the interview. Of Syrian origin, she had very little formal education but was fluent in the Egyptian Arabic vernacular since it was the language used at home with her mother who was probably illiterate. In her youth, she lived in the popular Jewish neighbourhoods of *Moharram Bey* and *Attarine* in Alexandria. She attended the Jewish community school, *Ecole Aghion*, known to be free of charge for the under privileged who could not afford private school fees, where she learned French, Arabic and Hebrew and some rudiments of English. She learned to speak Italian and Greek from the neighbours. Although she led a very Jewish life, she lived in harmony with members of the different ethnic groups that made up Alexandrine society, including the autochthonous population. Having lost her father at a very young age, she left school at the age of 13 to join the workforce and help support her family. She even taught herself dressmaking to supplement her income. After she married,

⁶⁰ The Dictionary of the Social Sciences, ed. Julius Gould, William Kolb, Great Britain: Tavistock Publications, 1964, p.426, defines middle class as ‘that stratum, within a social structure, that is deemed “intermediate” between the “upper class” and the “working class”. The lines of demarcation, however, are not precise and are dependent upon a number of varying and ambiguous criteria. The most frequently adopted criterion relates to occupation’. For instance, while the upper class is often defined by its largely inherited wealth, the working class consists mostly of manual labourers, semiskilled and unskilled workers. The middle class includes within its ranks middle and upper level clerical workers, technicians, professionals, small shopkeepers, businesspeople and farmers.

⁶¹ Case Study #12 compared to Case Study #82.

she continued to work for the first few years, because the family needed the double income. The household could only afford one live-in servant, which was a minimum in those days. Leisure time consisted of a weekly movie, family gatherings, and outings with friends to the beach or to the municipal gardens. As per Jewish tradition, her main ambition was for her children to become professionals and together with her husband they ensured their four children had a solid French education at the *Lycée de la Mission laïque française*. Since they could not afford tertiary education for the four children, the boys were given priority over the girls. The eldest son was preparing to go to France to study medicine in Montpellier when the Suez war erupted. This interviewee told her life story in French as her level of English, adequate enough in ordinary situations, was not sufficient under more complex conditions. Her case was a typical example of how Jews from the lower middle class struggled and often succeeded to move up the social ladder, through hard work and education. It was still exceptional for a woman of her background in the Middle Eastern context of the interwar period, to display such independence and determination:

Avant tout j'ai travaillé dans une teinturerie à l'âge de 12 ans. A 13 ans, je me suis présentée à la Compagnie de Téléphone mais ils m'ont dit, nous engageons seulement à 15 ans. Moi j'avais besoin, je faisais de la couture...pour apporter de l'argent à la maison... Parfois on n'avait pas à manger... Comment j'ai appris à coudre, toute seule, depuis que j'étais petite. Une artiste du Casino Alhambra m'a apporté une robe à réparer à la teinturerie où je travaillais et elle m'a demandé si je connaissais une couturière. Je me suis proposée comme ça... C'était ma première cliente.⁶²

Her immigration experience first in Canada and then Australia illustrated the particular ability Egyptian Jews seem to have to uproot themselves, integrate their new surroundings and interact smoothly with people of different backgrounds.

The second case was a younger woman (#17) who came from a comfortable middle class family in Alexandria where she attended a private non-denominational English school. She arrived in Australia at the age of 13. Her father was Greek from Corfu and apart from French, spoke Greek, Italian, Arabic and English. He had studied law in Egypt and worked at the Mixed Tribunals before joining the family menswear business. The mother was Ashkenazi, originally from Germany, and was educated in French schools and had a very poor command

⁶² After leaving Egypt in 1957, this particular respondent (#1) migrated to Canada with her husband and two of her younger children. With the same courage and determination, she worked as a dressmaker during the day and at night baked Oriental delicacies to help supplement the family budget. Thirteen years later, she went through a second emigration when she joined another daughter in Sydney, displaying the same ability to adapt to her new environment in spite of her advanced age.

of Arabic. She was therefore totally alienated from the local population since she could barely communicate with the servants. Socialisation was mainly amongst fellow Jews and members of other ethnic groups. In spite of a strong sense of Jewish identity in the family, religious observance was not strict and the atmosphere was rather liberal. Leisure time was divided between visits to the exclusive Alexandria Sporting Club, having tea with friends while doing embroidery or '*petits points*', playing cards or going to the movies. According to my respondent, her mother led the most genteel lifestyle:

My mother was a grand lady in Alexandria and never worked. We had my grandparents in this big apartment and my aunt, her husband and two kids lived there so did my mother and father and myself. It was a really big apartment.⁶³

However, once the family arrived in Australia with very modest funds, the mother did not shy away from seeking employment as an office clerk, since she had no other experience. She worked until the age of retirement, without ever losing her 'grand lady' style, again showing a resiliency demonstrated by many of the Egyptian women I have encountered: a quiet adjustment to their change of circumstances and drop in social status, relatively quickly and with dignity.

The third case - #20 - was an educated and independent woman, whose family was part of the Sephardi aristocracy of Egypt. She believed her family history could be traced back to the times of the Inquisition. Both Ladino and French were spoken at home as well as Italian and Greek. Arabic was reserved for communication with the numerous servants that worked for the family. The grandfather was educated by the Jesuits in a private Catholic school. He had cotton plantations and his son eventually became 'one of the pillars of the textile industry.' The family also entertained close relations with the Egyptian establishment before 1948, which was probably the reason why they succeeded in acquiring Egyptian nationality. 'My father dealt with people in government on a daily basis', said my respondent. She demonstrated her independent spirit by joining the workforce as soon as she left school, although her father was against it because it was not proper for the daughter of such a prominent man to go out to work. Because of her excellent English skills, she worked at the American Embassy during the war years. The family was also very active in philanthropic work for the community. She related that her grandfather was awarded the prestigious *Légion*

⁶³ Case study #17.

d'Honneur for his role in founding a French Jewish school in the new suburb of Heliopolis, northeast of Cairo:

My grandfather S.F. wanted to create a Jewish day school and he did. He called it *l'Ecole Abraham B'tesh*. Abraham B'tesh was a very rich man who did not have any children and a very good friend of my grandfather. My grandfather had collected most of the money for the school but he needed another £5,000 so he went to Abraham B'tesh and told him: if you give me that sum, I will name the school after you and because you have no children, your name will remain known from generation to generation. The first children to go to that school were us, the grandchildren of S.F. We spent a year there to show the people that the rich and the poor can go there. I remember the caretakers were Ya'ub and Rachel. The teachers were French from France. At first the school went to the *Certificat d'études* and later up to the *Baccalauréat*. It was free for the poor and those who could afford paid the fees and the community subsidised it.⁶⁴

Both father and grandfather headed the Jewish community in turn as president and vice-president and led a very traditional Jewish life. My respondent recalled that 'the Chief Rabbi of Egypt, Rabbi Nahum effendi (1872-1960) used to come and spend the weekend' with her grandparents. Their interests were mainly intellectual and consisted of cultural '*soirées prolongées*', attended by writers, artists and musicians. All the family fortune was sequestrated after 1949 and my respondent arrived in Australia penniless, with her parents and brothers. Using her multilingual skills in Arabic, French, Italian, and Spanish, she worked for international organisations as a conference interpreter and later as a medical interpreter. As an integral part of her privileged upbringing, she had been instilled with high principles of work and moral ethics and diligently pursued her activities well into her retirement years, again without fuss or fanfare.⁶⁵

Although these three examples were representative of the different cultural, ethnic, and class divisions that made up Egyptian Jewry, these divisions were not represented in the same proportion in the Australian sample, where a strong middle class predominated overall by

⁶⁴ Respondent #20. That school was still in existence in the late 1950s. Beinun mentioned it in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.123, as the Heliopolis location of the largest and most developed branch of the Zionist youth movement, *ha-Ivri ha-Tza'ir* in Egypt. He pointed out that 'although the curriculum at the Btresh school included Hebrew and other Jewish subjects, the primary language of instruction was French' as was the case in most Jewish community schools. It was also used as a synagogue, as recalled by Moise Rahmani, editor of *Los Muestras*: '*J'ai la nostalgie des synagogues. Nous fréquentions la nommée Abraham Betesh d'Héliopolis. Je me souviens de sa cour intérieure durant les fêtes de Roch Hachana. Les discussions allaient bon train...*'

⁶⁵ The story of this particular respondent was inserted in a book by Lysbeth Cohen, *Beginning with Esther – Jewish Women in NSW from 1788*, Sydney: Ayers & James Heritage Books in association with the *Australian Jewish Times*, 1987, pp.149-51.

nearly two third.⁶⁶ As shown in the following Chart 3, one fifth of the respondents belonged to the upper middle class where the Western Europeans had the largest proportion, about 40%; the Levantines came second with 21% and the Eastern Europeans together with the ‘Mixed’ group were equal third with 15.8%. As for the lower middle class grouping, in view of its minuscule size, seven respondents in all, the statistical results could not be considered a true representation of the social reality. Those results revealed an even spread between the Eastern Europeans (15.8%) and the ‘Mixed’ (14.3%) while the Levantine grouping only had 7.3% members in that category class. The Western Europeans were not represented at all in the lower category, which was significant in itself.

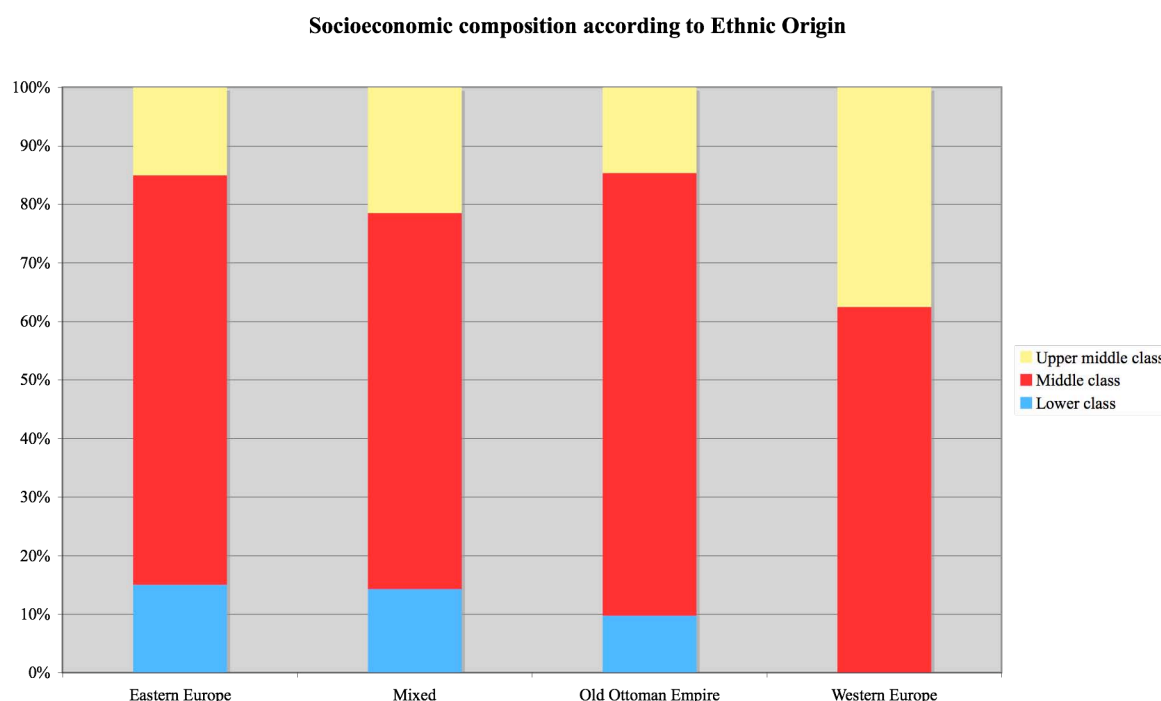


Chart 3

One possible interpretation could be that the Jews of Egypt who were of a lower socio-economic status did not usually end up in Australia but rather in Israel as claimed by both Laskier and Beinín.⁶⁷ It is quite probable that those who migrated to Australia would have been situated more towards the middle and upper echelons of society, in view of the cost of

⁶⁶ 68.4% of the Eastern Europeans, 71.3% of the ex Ottoman subjects, 60% of the Western Europeans and 68.4% of the ones of mixed ethnic background, belonged to the middle class.

⁶⁷ Laskier in *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.191, stated that in ‘most cases, the majority of the families and individuals were from the lower-middle and middle socioeconomic strata and youth who were not working’; and Beinín in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.71, wrote: ‘Except for the minority of committed Zionists, poorer families tended to go to Israel and wealthier families tended to go elsewhere.’

relocating in such a faraway country, in view of the Anglo-Celtic culture and in view of the restrictive immigration policy of Australia. These issues will be discussed in depth later in this work.

The statistics that emerged from the combination of birthplace and social status reinforced the previous findings with some variations between the urban and rural centres, as per Chart 4. The Alexandrians were divided as 10% in the lower middle class, 70% in the middle class and 20% in the upper middle class. The Cairenes had only 4% in the lower category, 72% in the middle and 22% in the upper section. The rural dwellers had the highest percentage (57%) in the lower class, 43% in the middle and, not surprisingly, were absent in the upper echelon.

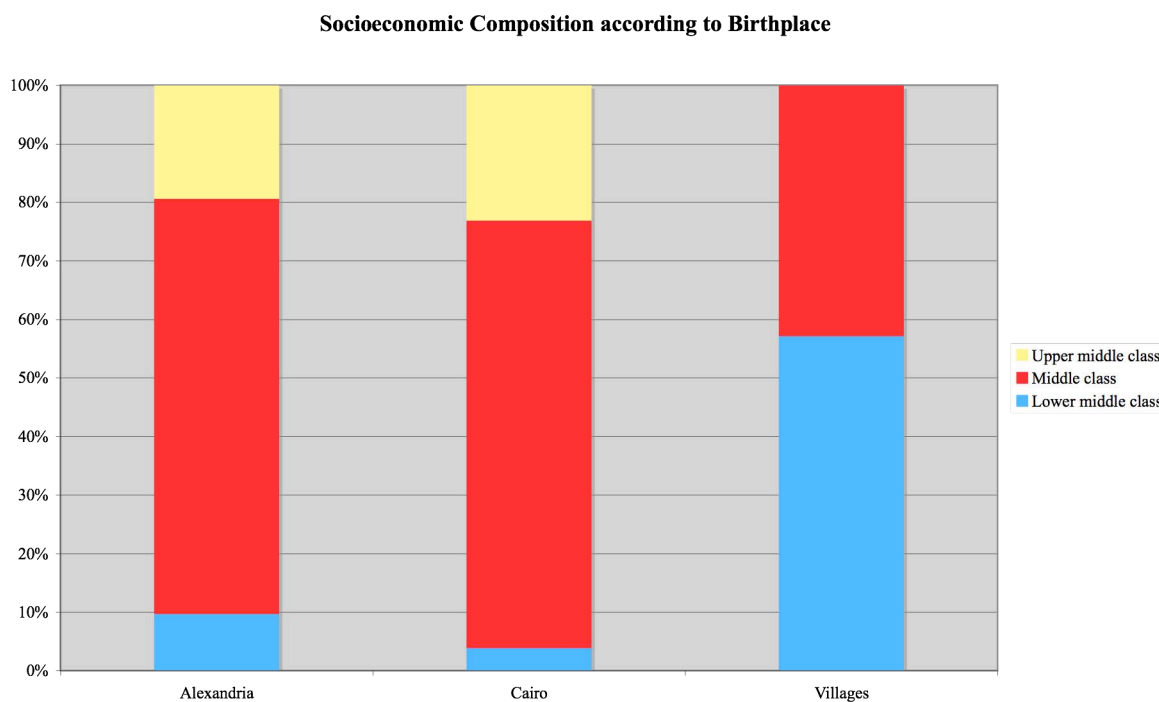


Chart 4

Again the overall picture of a large urban middle class, with a broader disparity in the upper and lower echelons between the urban and the rural dwellers, was validated.

A similar pattern emerged from the statistical analysis of the relationship between class and nationality, as demonstrated in Chart 5. The size of the middle classes in each national group remained predominant, with, nevertheless, a strong upper class. 21% of the stateless respondents placed themselves in the lower strata, 69% in the middle and 10% in the upper whereas the French, the Greeks, the Italians and the Spanish were not represented in the lower

category. The French respondents constituted 40% of the middle class and 60% of the upper middle class; the Greek and the Spanish interviewees were all middle class whereas two third of the Italians were in the middle class and one third in the upper class. The British showed 14% in the lower class, 71% in the middle and 14% in the upper. As for the Egyptians, a mere 6% declared themselves in the lower class, 61% in the middle and 33% in the upper middle class. Most of the lower middle class came from the group of stateless, which again was to be expected as they were probably not in a position to bribe any officials in high places. This shortcut would have enabled them to acquire either the Egyptian nationality or a foreign passport.

Class Structure of each Nationality

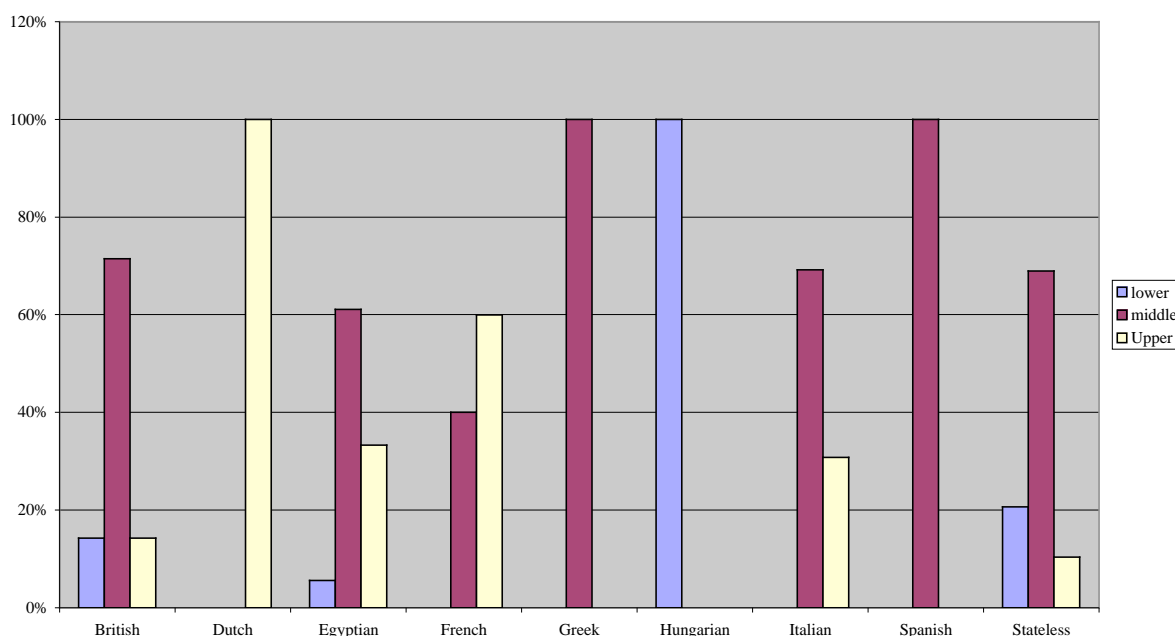


Chart 5

In view of these statistics, one can deduce that the class structure of the sample group consisted of a dominant middle class next to a significant upper middle class and a small lower middle class. These figures reflected the general trend of a rising bourgeoisie within Egyptian Jewry from the second half of the nineteenth century. Beinun attributed the success of that bourgeoisie to the following reasons:

Kinship connections throughout the Mediterranean basin, a long tradition of diasporic commercial activities, and participation in the local cultures of the Levant and overseas

French culture, enabled Jewish businessmen to function as commercial intermediaries between Europe and the Ottoman realms.⁶⁸

Indeed, with the expansion of the economy coupled with the political stability ensured by the British presence, members of the local non-Muslim minorities, including a large number of Jews, found themselves in great demand for their language skills and Western-style education. However, as noted by Krämer, ‘statistical data on occupation and social stratification are, even for the twentieth century, rare and not very reliable.’⁶⁹ Therefore, it is difficult to state with authority that the statistics established for the Australian sample group are a true reflection of Egyptian Jewry in general. As previously noted, Laskier’s research on the emigration of the Jews from Egypt to Israel from 1948 onwards, indicated that, apart from youths 16 and under, the largest group of migrants were non-professionals and of low socio-economic status. The Jewish Agency paid for their fare and transit expenses.⁷⁰ No mention was made of their nationality in the official records, which probably meant they were stateless. It is clear that, unless they were driven by a strong Zionist motivation, the Jews of Egypt who had better education, some professional, training more financial resources and a European passport, had more options than just Israel when they were forced out of Egypt. Those at the lower end of the social scale, with less work skills, less education, less opportunities and no papers would not have had those choices.⁷¹ As such, the profile of the Australian interviewees appears fairly representative of the Egyptian Jews who migrated to other diasporas communities.

Schooling/Occupation/Class

The issue of education has been discussed at length in the section on the historical background of the Jews of Egypt. It has been established that Jews, like other minorities, attended in droves the elitist foreign schools, mainly English and French, which were disseminating a highly desirable Western culture.⁷² The group under study provided the

⁶⁸ Beinun, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p. 44.

⁶⁹ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.52.

⁷⁰ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, table 6.3, p.188, table 6.4, p.189.

⁷¹ Hassoun, ‘Le deuxième exode d’Égypte,’ in Ilbert et Yannakakis, *Alexandrie 1860-1960*, pp.143-47. While evoking the successive waves of immigration from 1948 to 1973, Hassoun stated that it was the most destitute members of the community, those living in the ‘*haret-el-yahud*’, (Jewish quarter), or the ‘*fellahin*’, (peasants) together with the expelled Zionists, who first headed for Israel, via Marseille, where they were greeted by the Jewish Agency. The intellectuals, the communists and the members of the upper *bourgeoisie* chose instead to settle in Europe, the Americas or Australia.

⁷² The statistical studies on education and literacy by Hayyim J. Cohen, in *The Jews of the Middle East. 1860-1972*, New York: Wiley, 1972, p.110, revealed that by 1945-46, out of 12,107 Jewish pupils, 59.2% of them were attending foreign schools against 41% in Jewish schools.

perfect illustration of those conditions. The whole gamut of schools was represented in the various testimonies gathered in the course of this research.

In modern democratic societies, education is usually the key to upward mobility and the case of Egyptian Jewry clearly illustrated this principle. According to the census of 1907, comparing the literacy of Muslims, Copts, Jews and other ethnic groups, ‘the proportion of literacy was higher among Jews than among the rest of the population’ on a pro-rata basis.⁷³ According to Landau, the reasons for that high benchmark were both the Jewish tradition of study and the standard of education available. As discussed previously, the Jews of Egypt had a multiplicity of education institutions at their disposal. In the great majority of cases, they went through either their own communal school system or through the foreign private school system but very seldom through Egyptian government schools. Evidently, their socio-economic status, their ethnicity as well as their worldview determined their preference. The choices fluctuated between a religious or secular education administered in French, English, or Italian schools. The communal schools were the only ones teaching Jewish religion whereas the private schools were either secular, - such as the French *Lycées* and some British institutions like the prestigious Victoria College – or Christian missionary schools of various denominations.⁷⁴

The data from this study indicated a comparatively high level of secular education. 76% of the sample group, male and female, had completed varying levels of secondary education by the time they left Egypt whereas 18% had a tertiary education, leaving 6% with just primary education. The culmination of secondary studies would have been either a diploma in business studies or accountancy or the French Baccalauréat in Philosophy, Sciences or Mathematics, from the Lycées or again, in the case of the British schools, an Oxford and Cambridge Matriculation. Tertiary education in Egypt was more problematic although some of my respondents attended Egyptian Universities or foreign institutions such as the British Institute, the French Law School or the American University. The level of education of the whole group was, therefore, unusually high for that period, especially compared to the Muslim and Christian groups. The research undertaken by Ethel Carasso on the Jewish community between 1947 and 1957, has suggested a number of fundamental reasons for the

⁷³ Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, p.71.

⁷⁴ Hassoun, ‘Une Mosaïque méditerranéenne’, in Ilbert et Yannakakis, *Alexandrie 1860-1960*, p.64, pointed out that even the *Lycée de l’Union Juive pour l’Enseignement*, in spite of its name, was an essentially secular institution, founded in 1925 by the B’nai B’rith Masonic lodges. It only taught Hebrew grammar and literature.

privileged cultural position held by the Jews: their concentration in the two main cities of Egypt which gave them a more immediate access to education and the combined roles of the AIU schools and the *Lycées de la Mission Laïque Française* in spreading French culture, notwithstanding the role played by missionary French and English schools in the education of minorities in general. Extrapolating from the statistics provided in the *Statistical Handbook of Middle Eastern Countries* for 1937, showing that only 22.9% of the total Egyptian population was literate, the comparative percentage of literacy for the Jewish minority was 83.3% for men and 67.7% for women, therefore an average of 75.4% for the total Jewish population. The Muslim population's literacy was 24.9% for men and 7.9% for women, which represented an average of 16.5% whereas the Christian population was 48.6% for men and 29.8% for women, on average 39.3%.⁷⁵ This profile of high Jewish literacy and stress on education is a feature of most diaspora communities, including Australian Jewry.⁷⁶

The following chart (6) illustrates the individuality and variety of the respondents' choices of schooling. However, the resulting statistics were sometimes misleading as one given respondent could have changed schools not only within the same strand - which was not unusual - but also changed systems, for instance, from communal to private, from religious to secular or from French to English. Therefore, the figures of 55% in Christian schools against 22% in Jewish schools and 44 % in secular schools do not paint an altogether true picture. Similarly, the statistical results of 78% with French education compared to 36% with an English education and a mere 4.5% with Italian education – only at the primary level - were not mutually exclusive since the same student could have started in a French or Italian secular school and ended up in an English missionary institution.

⁷⁵ Ethel Carasso, 'La Communauté juive d'Égypte de 1948 à 1957', *Maîtrise d'Histoire contemporaine*, Université de Paris X, Octobre 1982. See also *Statistical Handbook of Middle Eastern Countries (1835 – 1944)*, Agence juive de Palestine, 1945; and Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East (1860 – 1971)*.

⁷⁶ Rutland, *The Jews in Australia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.123.

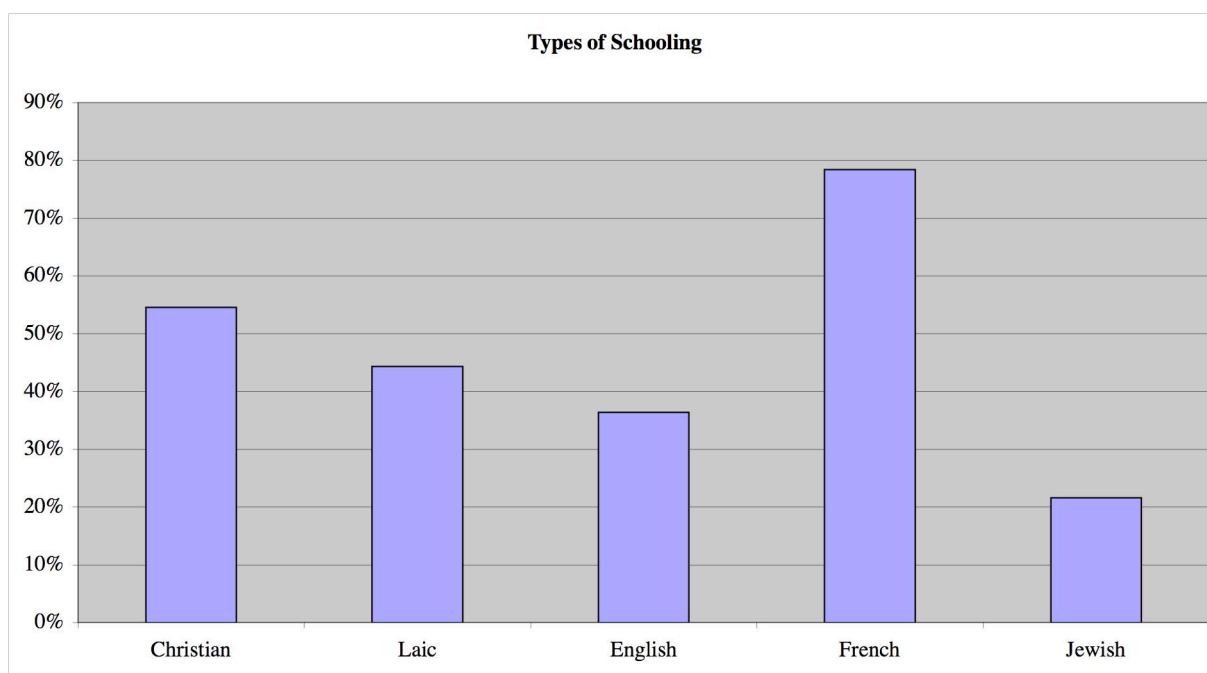


Chart 6

A perfect example of that scenario was the case of one respondent who switched from a secular communal Italian school, *Scuole della Regina Elena* to the Presbyterian Scottish School for girls and then again to Alvernia, an English convent school.⁷⁷ Another notable case was a respondent who started in a Jewish school, Abraham B'tesh then attended a French Catholic school, St. Vincent de Paul, up to the equivalent of the School Certificate (*Brevet Elémentaire*) and was finally moved to the French secular Lycée for her *Baccalauréat*. In 1946, she was offered a scholarship for a Paris university but decided to sit for the Matriculation examination, at the British Institute in Cairo.⁷⁸ Although this case was indeed exceptional, it still illustrated the remarkable diversity of education opportunities one had in a country such as Egypt in the 1940s.

A separate analysis of the middle class section of the sample group, confirmed that 73% had a secondary education, predominantly French, 23% a tertiary education and 3% only a primary education.⁷⁹ An analysis of the upper middle class standard of education within the sample showed a similar trend: 78% with secondary education, 17% with higher education and 6% with primary education only. Data on religious and secular education showed a preference for

⁷⁷ Case Study #44. The Italian school was a community institution created by the Italian government for its citizens residing in Egypt, to provide them with Italian education free of charge.

⁷⁸ Case Study #84. The respondent in question had three brothers, all high achievers. The eldest studied Medicine at the University of Cairo, the second studied Engineering and the third obtained his Degree in Engineering from the University of Adelaide.

⁷⁹ Those 3% left Egypt while they were still in primary school and pursued their schooling in Australia.

secular schools, which were attended by 56% of the sample, whereas 44% went to Christian schools and only 17% went to Jewish schools. On the other hand, only 22% of my respondents declared they attended English schools compared to 72% in French schools. A separate examination of the female respondents' level of education revealed the highest percentage of secondary education, 85%, but only 9% of higher education, which was not surprising in those days and 6% of only primary education only. There were no other significant variations between men and women in the overall analysis of the field of education.

Although the data clearly demonstrated that the majority of the group had French education, there were many instances of parents switching their children from one system of education to another, as previously noted. Apart from the common desire of most parents to give their children the best education possible, the reasons ranged from peer pressure to issues of prestige, cultural preferences or individual perceptions of better opportunities in one given system over another. For example, one respondent related that her mother removed her from an excellent Catholic school, *Ecole des Soeurs de la Miséricorde*, under pressure from a close relative who was president of the Jewish Community School.⁸⁰ On the other hand, a Christian missionary school was sometimes the only private school dispensing a Western style education if the respondent lived in a village or a small country town where there was no *Alliance* school.⁸¹ The education offered in Christian schools was usually of an excellent standard. The only problem it presented for Jewish students was the missionary zeal of some of the teachers. In one particularly salient case, the respondent recalled that the English Mission College would convert anyone who was slightly interested. In his case, the missionaries converted both his brother and himself, as they were orphans. At age 26, when he wanted to marry a Jewish girl, he had to convert back to Judaism.⁸² Respondent #38 who attended the English Mission College for Girls, also remembered the pressure that was made to bear upon Jewish pupils to convert. However, she added, 'although our class was more than 50% Jewish, only one student converted in the ten years I was there.'

⁸⁰ Case study #70 insisted that the decision to change school was not as a result of any pressure exercised upon her by the nuns to convert to Catholicism. She also added that in the Catholic school, she was only taught French whereas in the Jewish school, she had to learn French as well as Arabic and Hebrew.

⁸¹ Case Study #5 who was born in Assiut, Upper Egypt, was first sent to the American Missionary primary school and then to the Egyptian state high school because there were no other choices in that particular village. Case Study #6 who was born in the country town of Mansurah, attended a Catholic missionary school (*Ecole des Soeurs*) before being sent to Cairo to attend the French Lycée.

⁸² Case study #55.

The issue of conversion gradually became less problematic with the establishment of the secular *Lycées de la Mission Laïque française* in Cairo and Alexandria and the *Lycée de l'Union juive pour l'Enseignement* in Alexandria, as corroborated by Respondent #20:

My brothers went to the Jesuits at Khoronfish. They had the best schools at the time. They tried to convert my brother David. My parents found out when my brother David tried to sneak a book of catechism under his bed. My parents took both of them out and put the three of us in the Lycee. A lot of our friends followed suit.⁸³

In fact, all the respondents were the products of an English or French education, whether religious or secular, except for the two respondents who attended Egyptian state schools because they had no other choice.⁸⁴ This finding alone was indicative of the overall westernisation of the sample group, a westernisation that was considered the key to modernity, civilisation and success by the majority of the Jews of Egypt as well as by other minorities. It is obvious that together with their multilingualism, their relatively high level of Western education compared to other migrants of the same period proved to be an important asset in their acculturation process in Australia.

The data also showed that the questions of occupation, class and level of education were closely related. A gender-based examination of the occupations of the sample group revealed that most of the men of working age were white-collar workers, either as owners/professionals (59%) or as employees (41%) engaged in small and large trading or retail businesses, ranging from book keepers, to office administration and salespersons.⁸⁵ On the other hand, 75% of the women were in homes duties, which was not surprising with a mere 8% working in the family business and 17% employed as secretaries or receptionists. An overall analysis showed that 7% of the sample were still students at the time they left Egypt or had just finished high school; 14% were involved in the liberal professions as engineers, pharmacists, lawyers and teachers (both male and female) and a mere 3.4% - only

⁸³ Case study #20.

⁸⁴ Respondent #46 first attended the French Lycée of Alexandria. He moved to Tantah with his mother when his father died where he attended the *Alliance Israelite* school. He moved again, this time to Mansurah, during World War II, where the only high school available was the state public school.

⁸⁵ As an example of a case from a privileged socio-economic background, Respondent #8 worked in his family cotton ginning and export business, a large enterprise established by his grandfather who was a self taught 'cotton classer' (a person who can distinguish and classify the various types of the cotton fibre by touch). Similarly, the husband and son of Respondent #10 owned a large factory supplying uniforms to the Egyptian army, the police and the department of transport. In contrast, Respondent # 29, born in the village of Tantah and educated in the Jewish communal schools of Tantah and later Alexandria, left school at age 13 to work and help support his family. Before leaving Egypt, he was a salesperson in the biggest department store of Alexandria, *Les Grands Magasins Hannaux*, founded by a French Jew at the beginning of the twentieth century.

4 out of 88 – were working in a trade. In this latter category, two were women and worked respectively as a dressmaker and as a manicurist.⁸⁶ Out of the two men, one was a printer⁸⁷ and the second was an apprentice dental mechanic.⁸⁸ Two out of those four cases placed themselves in the lower middle class bracket.

Amongst the 14% of professionals who arrived in Australia with a tertiary education, not all were able to continue in their chosen profession. Two were fully-fledged lawyers who had studied Law in Egyptian and French universities. Both were highly educated and cultured gentlemen. One had practised in Egypt, working at the Mixed Tribunals until they were abolished. He never practised law in Australia because it was not the same law and it would have meant going back to university.⁸⁹ The other lawyer decided to branch out into business.⁹⁰ The wife of the only doctor in the group stated that her husband's qualifications from an Egyptian university were not recognised in Australia and he decided to go back to England to requalify.⁹¹ There was one pharmacist amongst the sample, trained in Egyptian universities who had to requalify in Australia. He ended up owning a very successful pharmacy where his clientele was mostly of migrant origin with whom he could communicate thanks to his multilingual skills.⁹² The other professionals were mostly engaged in business administration, property development, and teaching at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Most of the respondents who were students when they left Egypt proceeded to higher education once they arrived in Australia.

The analysis of the data on schooling, occupation and class confirm a definite correlation between those three elements. Furthermore, the statistics reveal that every one of the male participants was educated, participating fully in the work force, and pursuing different and respectable careers. As for the women, the fact that 28 of them were holding jobs in one capacity or another, was still remarkable in the context of the patriarchal and Oriental society they lived in.

⁸⁶ Case Study #11 used to make dresses for the British women soldiers during the war and as a consequence obtained extra rations of butter and sugar from the NAAFI, the British armed forces supply stores.

⁸⁷ Case Study #24.

⁸⁸ Case Study #77.

⁸⁹ Case Study #47 was trained in the Napoleonic Code which was the one used in the Mixed Tribunals.

⁹⁰ Case Study #43.

⁹¹ Case Study #11. Case study #25, on the other hand, had just started his pharmacy studies in Egypt when the 1956 war erupted. He completed his pharmacy studies at Sydney University.

⁹² Case Study #5.

Multilinguism

The predominant characteristic of the sample group was its language skills. Apart from the fact that all were French-speaking – since French was the *lingua franca* of minorities in Egypt, spoken at different levels of proficiency - they also spoke a variety of other languages more or less fluently. On average, they were proficient in 4.3 languages, the main ones being Arabic, French, English, Italian and Greek. According to their respective ethnic backgrounds, they could also be speaking one or more languages, such as Ladino,⁹³ Spanish, Yiddish, Turkish, Corfiote⁹⁴, Hebrew, German and even Russian.⁹⁵ A further statistical analysis looking across the variables of language skills, birthplace, ethnic origin and nationality, only confirmed those figures, showing for instance that within the sample group, the Egyptians spoke 4.3 languages, the foreigners 4.7 and the stateless 4.5 languages, as demonstrated in the following three charts:

No of languages spoken according to Nationality

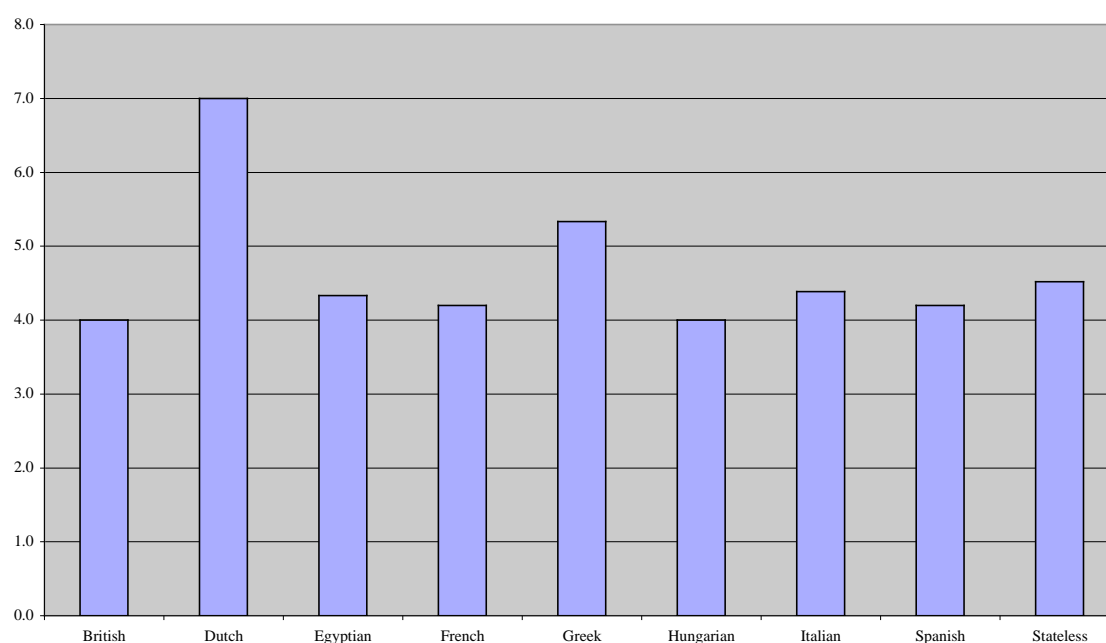
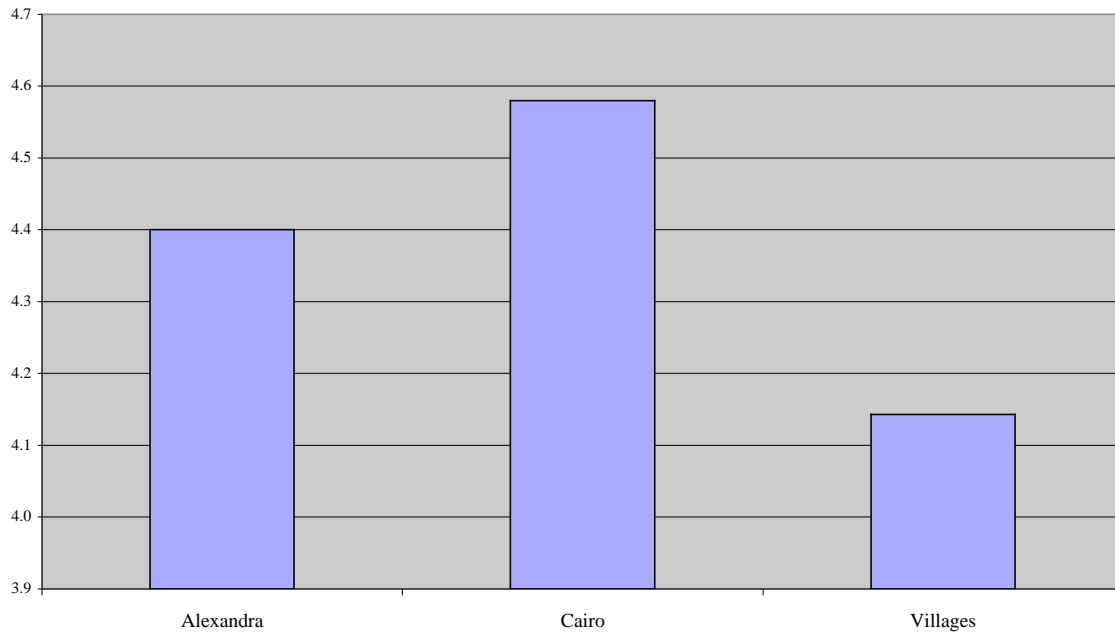
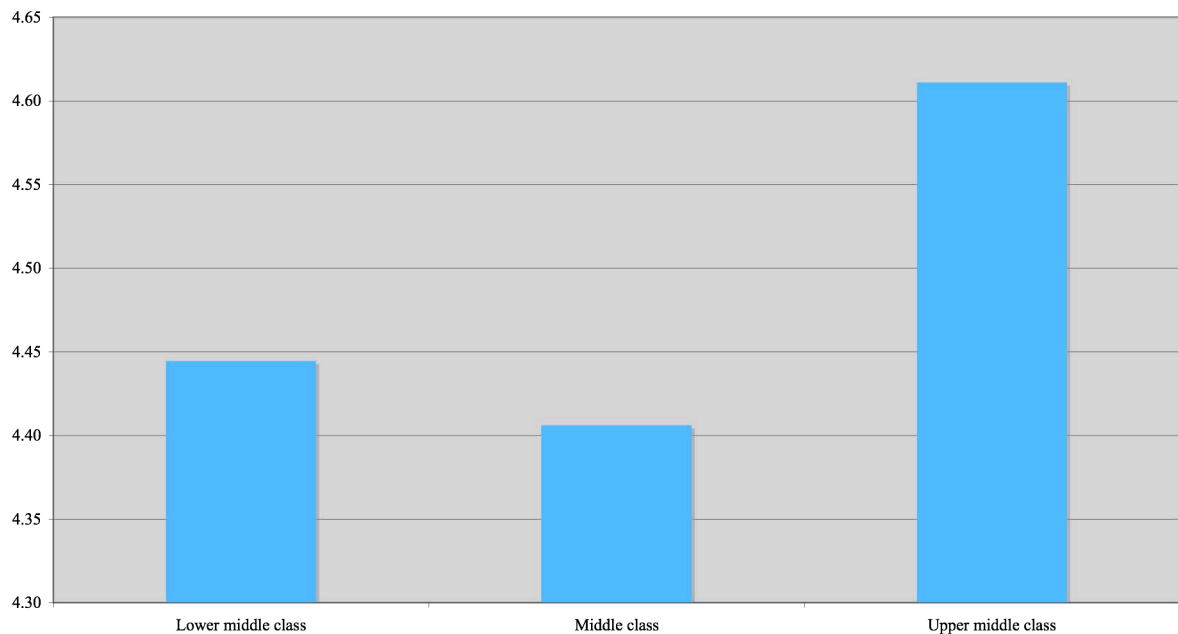


Chart 7

⁹³ Ladino, known also as *judezmo*, is a Judeo-Spanish dialect spoken by the Sephardim of Mediterranean countries and written in Hebrew script.

⁹⁴ A form of Venitian dialect spoken by the Jews in Corfu.

⁹⁵ For example, it was found that Eastern Europeans spoke 4.8 languages, Western Europeans 4.3 languages, the ex Ottoman subjects 4.5 and the ones from mixed background 3.9, which makes it an overall average of 4.3 languages.

Average No of languages spoken by POB**Chart 8****No of Languages spoken according to Class****Chart 9**

These results were not surprising, in view of the multiethnic context of Egypt until the late 1960s, where most of the Jews, like the other minorities, were exposed to a variety of languages and cultures. One must not forget that already at home, they were hearing or

speaking at least three languages depending on the ethnic origin of the family. For instance, one participant explained that her parents, originally from Smyrna, spoke either Ladino or French to the children but they also knew Turkish, Greek, and Arabic. Another classic example was a respondent whose parents, ethnically Russian and Rumanian, spoke Yiddish and German at home but were also fluent in Italian, French and English.⁹⁶ Furthermore, in the various types of schools the Jews attended, whether they were private or communal, French or English, religious or secular, a minimum of three languages were taught at all times, from a very young age. Beinín very aptly noted:

Many Jews were multicultural and multilingual, but some social status was attached to speaking Arabic, Judeo-Spanish, Italian, Yiddish, or French at home. The cosmopolitan character of the Jewish community, especially its commercial middle and upper classes, is captured by the casual remark of a son of an upper middle-class Sephardi family holding Italian citizenship that emigrated from Anatolia to Alexandria in the nineteenth century in describing the ambience of his family: ‘We spoke French and English at school, Italian at home, Arabic in the street, and cursed in Turkish.’ Alexandrines were typically more cosmopolitan than Cairenes. However there were also thousands of indigenous, poor, Arabic-speaking Jews in Alexandria whose existence has generally been ignored because the cosmopolitanism and commercial elements of the community were so prominent. Even in Cairo, ...it was rare to find monolingual Jews.⁹⁷

These linguistic skills proved to be an invaluable asset wherever the Jews from Egypt settled after they left their country of birth. A number of respondents stressed the advantage it gave them in their job search and in their contacts with other migrant groups. Thanks to their thorough knowledge of the French culture and language, some found jobs with local French institutions or created their own import-export companies in partnership with overseas French firms.⁹⁸ Some, mostly female, went into the teaching profession, specialising in French or Italian after passing their Diploma of Education in Australia.⁹⁹ In one particular case, it was thanks to my respondent’s sound knowledge of Arabic as well as French and English, which first propelled her into the field of education, teaching in a Sydney public school in the suburb of Lakemba, where there is a high Arabic-speaking student population.¹⁰⁰ Another participant stressed that it was his elderly mother’s knowledge of Italian and Greek, that helped her cope

⁹⁶ Case Study #71.

⁹⁷ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.5.

⁹⁸ His knowledge of French gave Case Study #8 the start he needed in the Pacific Islands trade. Eventually, it allowed him to create his own export company and later expand into shipping with French partners, dealing mainly with New Caledonia and the Loyalty Islands. In the case of Respondent #24, a printer by trade, he secured himself a favourable two-year contract with a printing firm in the French Pacific island of New Caledonia, thanks to his perfect command of both French and English.

⁹⁹ Case Study #18, Case Study #33, Case Study #59.

¹⁰⁰ Case Study #76.

with the initial culture shock she experienced when she first arrived in Australia because of the large number of postwar Greek and Italian migrants who settled in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁰¹

It is self-evident that a good command of the English language was a prerequisite for a smoother integration of any migrant group and the Egyptian Jews were no exception. When they first landed in Australia, their panoply of languages did not always include English, except for a rudimentary acquired knowledge from their school years or from American movies. When questioned about their English skills upon arrival in Australia, the respondents assessed them as either poor (18%), fair (30%), or advanced (48%), compared to a minuscule 3% with no skills at all. The statistical data obviously confirmed that the 38% who had attended English schools in Egypt, accounted for the lion share of the advanced speakers, that is 85%. Conversely, out of the 62% who did not have English schooling, 42% described their English skills upon arrival in Australia as fair, 27% as poor, 25% as advanced and 5% as having no skills at all. However, these differences did not translate as dramatically in their professional life as one would have expected. The figures showed that 50% of the fluent English speakers immediately went into white-collar jobs compared to 41% of those rated with fair to low English skills, which is a negligible difference. On the other hand, no respondent with an English education stayed home whereas 9% of the second group did. It is obvious that good English skills would have facilitated employment. The advanced English speakers dominated both in the professional and the business/white-collar fields but it was by a rather small margin. Thanks to their gift for languages, the non-English speakers caught up relatively quickly. These statistics indicate that an English education was not the ultimate key to successful integration. The French educational system had laid enough groundwork to enable them to apply their capabilities without too many problems.

A number of important questions were raised in connection with the continued use of French by Egyptian Jews. Who, amongst the sample group, maintained the use of the mother tongue and why? Was it transmitted down to the children as part of their cultural heritage and what the children's reaction? How did the dominant Anglo-Saxon population react to the use of a foreign language?

¹⁰¹ Case Study #63.

In 1984, Dr. Suzanne Rutland interviewed some Egyptian and German Jews in Adelaide. She pointedly raised the issue of language, quoting the remarks of Rabbi Jeffrey A. Kahn, then minister of the Temple Shalom, in Hackney, South Australia:

[The Egyptian Jews]... continued to speak French among family and friends in Australia and at communal functions. Their love of the French language had not been diminished by events in Egypt. For most of the German Jews, on the other hand, the German language had unpleasant associations and so they chose to use English rather than their mother tongue. Their children who grew up in Australia usually could not communicate in German. The fact that the Egyptian Jews continued to speak French disturbed many European Jews who had sacrificed the use of their native language.¹⁰²

In fact, at the time the interviews for the present study were conducted, only thirteen respondents - 14.6% - elected to proceed in French, because they considered it their mother tongue and not necessarily because of a low level of fluency in English. Only two cases out of the thirteen respondents who chose French, admitted this to be their main reason.¹⁰³ The majority had no problem expressing themselves in English since they were all holding responsible white-collar jobs or ran their own business successfully. For instance, Respondent #54 spoke Arabic, French, Italian, Ladino and English fluently. However, her bond with the French language was so strong that she would seize every opportunity to speak it. As argued by the French researcher Alain Lévy who based his doctoral thesis on the history of a Jewish Egyptian family from 1899 to 1980, the fact of choosing to speak French in that context was the expression of a deliberate choice of civilisation:

*De fait, aujourd'hui, quarante ou quarante-cinq ans après avoir vu leurs itinéraires diverger et les conduire à des situations, modes de vie et lieux notablement différents des uns des autres, ils [les Juifs d'Égypte] communiquent spontanément et systématiquement en français lorsqu'ils se retrouvent. Ce n'est pas une simple commodité, puisque l'anglais, l'italien ou l'arabe conviendraient tout autant. C'est l'expression d'un choix de civilisation.*¹⁰⁴

I also found that French was freely spoken by Egyptian Jews amongst themselves in family and social situations. It seems to be a conscious effort not to lose the connection with the French language and culture but not necessarily with France as a national entity. The result

¹⁰² Rutland, 'Egyptian Jews in Adelaide: A Case Study in Oral History', p. 22.

¹⁰³ Case Study #71 had no English skills on arrival, although she was fluent in Italian, Greek, French and Arabic. She had quite a large family and still communicated with her children in French but managed to speak some English with her grandchildren. As is usually the case with migrants who do not join to the workforce and remain more or less isolated in the context of the family home, her English skills remained poor in spite of her being fluent in four other languages.

¹⁰⁴ Alain Lévy, 'Itinéraire d'une famille juive d'Alexandrie de 1899 à 1980; de la tradition ottomane à la modernité', *l'Ethnographie*, Vol. 116, p.77, 1994.

was often a constant switch from one language to the other, with some borrowing from Italian and Arabic in the process. Depending on their age when they first arrived, the older participants would speak French to their children and grandchildren who would answer them in a more or less hesitant French or more often than not, in English. In the case of the younger respondents, the use of French with their children would depend on whether their partner was also from Egypt. The attitude of the children towards the use of French by their parents has changed over the years. Whereas in the 50s and 60s, they resented it because it made them feel different from their playmates in the school grounds, the advent of multiculturalism and the promotion of foreign cultures and languages in the broader community through the introduction of ethnic radio in 1975, with its foreign language broadcasting, and the creation of SBS, a multiethnic television station, rendered the knowledge and the use of a foreign language not only more acceptable but even desirable.¹⁰⁵ In the context of my research, when both the parents were French-speaking, their children not only spoke French but they also demonstrated a propensity for at least another foreign language acquisition. In the case of even one French-speaking parent, most of those children still claimed a certain level of communication in that language, particularly with grandparents whose fluency in English was below average.

From all the information gathered throughout the interviews, it follows that the multicultural environment of Egypt in the colonial period, where a plethora of ethnic and religious traditions, languages, customs and mentalities cohabited more or less in harmony, bred a cosmopolitan, multilingual and multinational group of Jews who was forcibly dispersed throughout the Western world. Their ability to connect with different cultures simultaneously, their linguistic abilities and their standard of education stood out as a fundamental trait of their identity and was common to all across the boundaries of class, education and ethnic origin. It served them well in their migration experience as shown by this section of my study of the Egyptian Jewish sample in Australia.

¹⁰⁵ See Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, pp.369-77, on 'the transformation of Australian society since the late 1960s, with its increased emphasis on multiculturalism'.

CHAPTER V:

Jewish Ethnicity, Religiosity and Politics of the Sample Group

It has already been established that Egyptian Jewry and by extension, the sample group under study, embodied a very diverse community, divided into subgroups along the lines of ethnicity, culture, education, and socio-economic status. This diversity was also reflected in the religious domain where significant and jealously guarded differences in rituals, language and customs existed between the Sephardim, the Ashkenazim, and the Karaites.

Ethnic background -- Sephardim, Ashkenazim and Karaites

It is important to remember that, according to modern tradition, the wide umbrella of *Sephardim*, includes all the Jews originating from Spain via the old Ottoman Empire, that is Turkey, North Africa and Greece as well as the Oriental Jews, indigenous of Egypt and other Arab countries such as Syria, Lebanon and Yemen. Obviously, they did not all share the same traditions and rituals. Oriental Jews used to live in separate Jewish quarters called *haret-el-Yahud* or *hara* and were, as far as language, dress and eating habits, unrecognisable from their Muslim or Coptic neighbours. Traditionally, they were more religious than their westernised and cosmopolitan brethren of the middle and upper classes. By the mid-twentieth century, the majority of Oriental Jews had gradually moved out of the *hara*, leaving behind their poorer coreligionists. The fact that none of the participants in the present research admitted to having ever lived in the *hara*, whether in Cairo or Alexandria or even in the provincial towns, was a clear indication of their standing in the socio-economic ladder.

Italian Jews are also catalogued as *Sephardim* since a sizeable number of Spanish Jews settled in the various principalities of Italy after their expulsion from Spain in 1492. However, their Spanish origin is sometimes debatable. Such is the case of the ancient Jewish community of Rome that claims a presence in the city from the time Judea was a province of the Roman Empire. Jews first came to Rome as free settlers and, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 70 CE, were brought in as slaves and prisoners.¹ In the case at hand, Respondent #8, who claimed an old Italian origin, resented being ‘lumped in with the *Sephardim*’, arguing

¹ Roman Jews follow an ancient and unique Italian rite, called *nusach italki*, which is different from both the Ashkenazi and Sephardi rites and is still followed in many Italian synagogues.

that, since there was no trace of a Judeo-Spanish tradition in his background, neither through language, food or rites, his family could not be of true Sephardic origin. The ongoing use of Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) at any level of competence by the descendants of the expelled Spanish Jews, five hundred years after the fact, is seen as ‘an identity marker’ in the debate about who is and who is not a true Sephardic Jew.²

As previously indicated, the first Sephardic migration to Egypt dated back to the fifteenth century, at the time of the Christian *Reconquista* of Muslim Spain and after the Expulsion in 1492. Nevertheless, the majority of Sephardim came to Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, via different provinces of the Old Ottoman Empire, in search of a better and more secure future, as testified by several respondents. The official records clearly showed that they were at the helm of the Egyptian Jewish community, which was also confirmed by the various testimonies of my informants. One of them proudly recalled the origin of her family:

My father’s family came from Spanish Morocco in the late 1870s by ship, landed in Alexandria and settled in Mehalla-el-Kobra, which is a township halfway between Cairo and Alexandria. I remember my father telling me that our family history went back to the times of the Inquisition. They spoke Ladino. My grandfather was president of the Jewish Community and my father was vice president.³

By the twentieth century, the leaders of Egyptian Jewry were all Sephardim. The whole community was headed by the Sephardi chief rabbi of Egypt, regardless of origin or affiliation and except for the Ashkenazim and the Karaites, everybody followed the Sephardi rite with some local variations.⁴ Jacques Hassoun, in *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, poetically evoked the ancient Egyptian ritual as ‘*des bribes du très vieux rituel égyptien*’.⁵

The statistics emerging out of the current study, showing a majority of Sephardim in the Australian sample group adequately reflected the Sephardic predominance amongst Egyptian

² Judeo-Spanish, known also as Ladino, is an ancient form of Castillian mixed with Hebrew and Turkish words and often written in Hebrew script, similarly to Yiddish. See Mary Altabev, *Judeo-Spanish in the Turkish Social Context, Language Death, Swan Song, Revival or New Arrival*, Chapter 3, ‘The people and the language’, pp.37-66, Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2003. This book was the result of her PhD dissertation presented at the University of Sussex, September 1996.

³ Case study #20.

⁴ See Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.17.

⁵ Jacques Hassoun, in *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, pp.124-137, also mentioned the traditional pilgrimage to the ancient synagogue of El-Ustadh (Teacher), founded in 1044 in Mehallah el-Kobra, and dedicated to the holy man R. Hayyim al-Amshāti. The pilgrimage used to attract *en masse* the Oriental Jews from all over Egypt and was even attended by an official representative of the Egyptian government.

Jewry. Nevertheless, the group included 22% of Ashkenazim, 9% of mixed affiliation with only 1% Karaite. The percentage of Ashkenazim was uncommonly high, as they never represented more than 8% of the total Jewish population of Egypt, even after the wave of immigration of 11,000 Polish and Russian Jews expelled from Palestine by the Ottomans in December 1914.⁶ According to Fargeon, there were only 5,000 Ashkenazim living in Cairo in 1939.⁷ Krämer added that they remained a minority of 5,000 or 6,000 individuals in the interwar period and most of them were based in Cairo, in the Ashkenazi quarter of *Darb-el-Barabra*.⁸ The predominance of Cairo as a place of residence for Ashkenazim could very well be the reason why, out of a total number of twenty-six Ashkenazim in the Australian group, twenty were from Cairo and only six from Alexandria. It is also possible that a higher number of Ashkenazim were attracted to Australia because of its Ashkenazi European heritage.

According to the comments from the majority of interviewees, the relations between the two communities seem to have been mostly harmonious, notwithstanding a certain feeling of superiority from the Sephardim who considered themselves the aristocracy of Egyptian Jewry. A mixed marriage between an Ashkenazi and a Sephardi couple was sometimes considered as a *mésalliance* as related by Respondent #43 who was jokingly chastised when he announced his engagement to an Ashkenazi girl: ‘why do you marry a *schlecht*?’ Don’t we have enough girls in our community?’ However, he claimed he did not take these remarks to heart. For him they were the expression of a superficial sibling rivalry and were not rooted in deeply founded prejudice. My data showed that intermarriage between the two groups was not totally boycotted, as noted by one of my Sephardi respondents:

Two of my uncles married Ashkenazi girls and jokingly, probably not knowingly, we used to call them ‘*schlecht*’. It is much later that I found out what it meant and I felt awful about it.¹⁰

⁶ According to Krämer, *The Jews of Modern Egypt*, p.18, the majority of these exiles returned either to Palestine or Eastern Europe after the war ended.

⁷ Fargeon, *Les Juifs en Egypte*, p.231.

⁸ See Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.20: The Ashkenazim ‘tried to establish a separate community organisation. The Ashkenazi Community, founded in 1865, was, however, denied official recognition - partly because the Sephardi community resisted all attempts at institutionalised separatism. But for all practical purposes, the Ashkenazim formed an independent community in Cairo, with their own rabbi, president, and council... In Alexandria and the provincial towns, where the Ashkenazim formed a small minority, they remained within the larger community.’

⁹ Derogatory Yiddish term for an Ashkenazi, meaning bad or evil.

¹⁰ Case study #66.

As for the respondents of mixed affiliation, they also did not recollect any bad feelings between the two communities, as confirmed by the next interviewee:

I am Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Was I aware of any tension between the two groups? No, but I was aware I was different; I spoke Yiddish at home.¹¹

This particular respondent recalled that she regularly attended the Ashkenazi Synagogue of Cairo with her father and other Cairene respondents, whereas the Ashkenazim of Alexandria usually attended the same synagogues as the Sephardim.¹² As was mentioned earlier, the fact that the Alexandrian Jewish community gathered the three ethnic groups under one single umbrella, fostered a climate of greater unity. Supporting evidence of this aspect of communal interrelations came from a representative of the Zionist Executive in 1925:

In Alexandria, conditions are different from Cairo... There too, you have the separation between Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews ... but relations are much better there and the differences have been significantly reduced under the influence of the seaport... Social intercourse, too, is more highly developed; even intermarriage is more frequent and does not have the diffamatory [sic] character attached to it in Cairo.¹³

The third constituent of Egyptian Jewry was the Karaite population whose estimated size varied from 3,500 to 9,000, depending on the sources.¹⁴ According to the Karaite Jews I have interviewed formally or informally, it seems that most of them left Egypt between 1952 and 1957, the same as the bulk of Egyptian Jewry. Beinon, whose research of that group was more extensive, claimed that few Karaite Jews departed before the Suez War, because of their close identification with Arabo-Egyptian culture and stronger attachment to the land:

...a significant proportion of the Karaites remained in Egypt until the 1960s. Because most Karaites were thoroughly Arabized and defined themselves in terms rooted in their experience as an Ottoman millet, they tended to remain in Egypt longer than Rabbanites.¹⁵

¹¹ Case study #22.

¹² The Cairo Ashkenazim had their own rabbi and their own separate *Beth Din*.

¹³ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.76.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.24. Krämer pointed to different sources quoting varying figures: the 1947 Egyptian census quoted 3,486 Karaites; Maurice Fargeon, 7,000 in 1939; unofficial Karaite sources, 8,000. Krämer in *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.86, quoted a problematic figure of 6 to 7,000 Karaites in the interwar period. Laskier in *The Jews of Egypt*, p.7, only mentioned the Egyptian census figure of 3,500 whereas Beinon, in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.3, noted that there were some 5,000 Karaites in Egypt in 1948. Jacques Hassoun, in *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, p.103, claimed that the Karaite population numbered 7 to 9,000, thus representing nearly 8% of the total Jewish population.

¹⁵ Beinon, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.44.

Whereas Beinín found a well-established Karaite community in the San Francisco Bay area of about 400 people, Karaite Jews were hard to trace in Australia.¹⁶ Through the network of Egyptian and Turkish Jews in Sydney, I located only one Karaite couple and obtained a very informative interview from the husband. He was married to his second cousin, and knew of only another five or six Karaite families also in Sydney, all related either directly or by marriage.¹⁷ Although this respondent articulated most of the issues relating to Karaite Jews, it is obvious that I could not draw significant conclusions based on only one interview. Therefore, I decided to group his testimony with the testimonies of the other two Karaites I formally interviewed in Paris and San Francisco. These interviews complemented by Beinín's findings helped to construct a more informed picture of the way Egyptian Karaites maintained their sense of identity while acculturating within Western societies, whether it was the United States, France or Australia. They also provided some degree of comparison with the findings relating to the experience of Sephardim and Ashkenazim. Furthermore, I decided to use the singularity of the Australian case study to evaluate what happens when the reference group of a minority has already a minority status within the broader reference group. Thus, similar to Russian dolls, Karaite Jews are enclosed within four concentric social circles: the Rabbanite Jews from Egypt, the Sephardic community, the Ashkenazi Australian community, and finally the broader Australian society.

In fact, the first concern raised by my respondent, related specifically to the 'minority' aspect, obviously a very sensitive issue. As was the case with the other Karaites I met overseas, he saw himself first as a Jew of the Karaite tradition. He resented a categorisation because it suggested separation and alienation between the Karaite minority and the Rabbanite majority. He claimed that in Israel, the ancient conflict between the two groups had been put aside and that the Jewishness of the Karaites was not questioned any more. Actually, in spite of some reluctance expressed by the Orthodox rabbinate of Israel, the official stand of the State of Israel is to include and accept the Karaite Jews as part of the broader Jewish family.¹⁸

On the other hand, the Australian Karaite emphasised the fundamental difference between the Karaites of the Middle East like himself and the Karaites of Crimea and Lithuania who do not

¹⁶ Ibid., p.185.

¹⁷ I was discouraged from approaching them because of their advanced age and state of health. Some had already passed away. Although I knew of a few Karaite families who were originally from Istanbul and now living in Sydney, I made a considered judgment not to formally include them in the present study since they were not from Egypt.

¹⁸ Beinín, in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, has succinctly covered the Israeli experience of the Egyptian Karaites, pp.181-4.

consider themselves Jews.¹⁹ From the early nineteenth century, the latter claimed they were not ethnically Jews and their claim was accepted by Tsarist Russia. They made the same claim to the Nazi authorities in January 1939 and after confirmation from the Rabbinic authorities that they did not consider Karaites as Jews, the Nazis also ruled that:

The Karaite sect should not be considered part of the Jewish religious community...and that the racial classification of the Karaites should be decided not according to their attachment to a specific people, but according to their personal genealogy.²⁰

This decision saved most of them from death, although more than two hundred Karaites were massacred at Babi Yar by the *Einsatzgruppen* by mistake.²¹

As for the relationship between Karaites and Rabbanites in Egypt, my Australian interviewee claimed that it was mostly harmonious²², in spite of their differences on matters of rite and practice, such as the calendar, some aspects of dietary law and the exclusion of certain festivals like Hanukkah.²³ Apparently, it was not customary for Karaites to have a *bar mitzvah* ceremony and even more so a *bat mitzvah*.²⁴ The American Karaite respondent had a vague recollection of having some kind of coming-of-age celebration at the Karaite

¹⁹ The researcher, Tapani Harviainen, in a paper called '*Ethnic encounter and culture change*', given at the third Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies, Joensuu, Finland, 19-22 June 1995, argued that 'the question of the Jewishness of Karaites divides the originally Arabic-speaking Karaites in Israel and San Francisco into another camp: these designate themselves as Karaite Jews, while the Karaims in Eastern Europe stress the independent national character of their community... Besides being a national minority, the Karaims represent an independent religion; they prefer to designate their faith as "a religion based on Judaism in the same way as Christianity is an independent religion with a Jewish background"' p.2.

²⁰ See Shmuel Spector, 'Karaites' in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, Vol.2, New York: Mac Millan, 1990, pp.785-787.

²¹ My respondent claimed that the Rabbanite rabbis' intention were to save the Karaites from Nazi persecution. The fact that 'groups of Jewish scholars in the Vilna, Warsaw and Lvov ghettos, ... were prepared to claim, contrary to their real convictions, that they [the Karaites] were not Jews, in order to save their lives' was discussed by Nathan Schur, *History of the Karaites*, 'The Karaites in Nazi-occupied Europe during WWII', pp.123-25.

²² Krämer in *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p. 26, concurred that the Karaites 'tried to keep relations with the Rabbanites friendly, but decidedly distant'.

²³ The Karaites base their calendar on the observance of the new moon and the ripening of the barley crops in Israel. They do not accept the Rabbanite interpretation of the prohibition to mix meat and milk products based on the commandment: *Thou shall not boil a kid in his mother's milk* (Deut. 14:21). They do not celebrate the festival of Hanukkah or festival of Lights, and the Fast of Esther, both considered to be post-biblical holidays. The French interviewee elaborated that 'Hanukkah is a celebration of the Second Temple and for Karaites, only the First Temple counts since the second one is but a reproduction of the first'.

²⁴ According to the French interviewee, a *bar mitzvah* ceremony symbolises the authority of the rabbis over the Jewish community. The Karaite Jews do not recognise that authority since a Karaite boy is Karaite – literally meaning a reader - from the time he starts to learn to read and not at an arbitrary age set by the Rabbis. However, the Sydney respondent informed me that Karaites in Israel today have adopted the practice of *bar mitzvah*, probably under pressure to conform to the majority.

synagogue of Cairo, together with other boys of the same age, at the time of the festival of *Simhat Torah*.²⁵

On the other hand, the Parisian Karaite interviewee, who has maintained a very strong sense of Karaite/Jewish identity, did not always agree with the assessment of her Sydney counterpart. Although she had left Egypt at the age of sixteen after the Suez war, and later married an Ashkenazi Jew, she was very much aware of the tension and even the antagonism between the two communities. Even today, she still feels rejected by Rabbanite Jews:

Vous me demandez mon sentiment d'identité, d'appartenance. Je serai toujours la petite fille de mon grand père, juive karaïte en premier lieu, sauf pour les Juifs qui nous rejettent, les rabbanites.

Nonetheless, the Sydney respondent did not feel estranged by or excluded from the Rabbanite community both in Egypt and Australia, although he admitted not being observant enough in his religious practice to be significantly affected one way or the other. In his view, Egyptian Karaites felt more alienated from the last Karaite Rabbi of Egypt, Tobia Bobovitch (1879-1956), who came from Crimea, and hardly spoke Arabic whereas the whole Karaite community was very fluent in that language.²⁶ In the Egyptian Jewish context of religious communalism of the 1940s and 1950s, the Karaites Jews were recognised as 'a Jewish minority and lived as other minorities in the Middle East, endogamously and self-governing'.²⁷ In spite of this *modus vivendi*, marrying Rabbanite Jews was often discouraged and even frowned upon. It was customary for Karaite Jews to marry within their community and often within the extended family, in order to maintain continuity of their particular traditions and cohesion in their midst.²⁸ Thus, most of the Karaite Jews I came in contact with, whether in Australia or overseas, were somehow related.

²⁵ *Simhat Torah*, literally meaning 'rejoicing in the Torah', is a joyous celebration, which concludes the annual cycle of the reading of the Torah. Towards the end of the service, all the scrolls of the Torah are removed from the Ark for seven processions around the synagogue, followed by singing children with banners and candles. This is probably the celebration this respondent remembered.

²⁶ Tobia Simha Levi Babovitch served as the last Chief Hakham (Rabbi) in Cairo of the Karaite community from 1934 till he died in 1956. According to the information compiled by Nathan Schur in *the Karaite Encyclopedia*, Frankfurt, 1995, 'as he [the rabbi] was used to the different customs and Halakha of Russia and Turkey, he often opposed the local customs, but was not very successful therein. It is obvious that the nationalistic ideology of the European Karaites, who claimed not to be Jews at all, could not be applied successfully in Egypt.'

²⁷ Beinon, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.183.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.193. Beinon reported that in the Karaite family tree compiled by David Elichaa of Imperial Beach, California, all the Karaite families of Cairo were related.

One point that all the three Karaite interviewees agreed upon were their close ties to the land of Egypt. ‘We were the oldest existing indigenous group in the Middle East...and long pre-date the Arab conquest of the region in the seventh century’, proudly stated the American Karaite, whose relative, Mourad Farag Bey, helped draft the Egyptian constitution in the 1930s.²⁹ It is well known that Karaite Jews in Egypt were totally acculturated to the Arab-Egyptian culture unlike the majority of Rabbanite Jews.³⁰ While remaining fully Jewish on their own terms, their religious practices were strongly influenced by the Muslim tradition. For instance, Karaite Jews removed their shoes before entering a synagogue, similar to the Muslims before entering the mosque. Instead of a *kippah* as a head covering, Karaites wore the fez or *tarboush*, a traditional Turkish headdress adopted by Arabs. In addition, although the synagogue service was conducted in Hebrew, any additional blessing or special announcement was expressed in Arabic, the mother tongue of the Karaites. In the Sephardi or even Ashkenazi synagogues, a European language – in most cases French - was used to address the congregation.

Contrary to the Rabbanites, Karaite Jews often adopted Arabic patronymics. For instance, the Australian Karaite respondent explained that, back in 1840, his ancestors had ‘arabised’ the family name – which used to be typically Jewish - in order to blend in better with the Egyptian environment. When asked the date of his family’s arrival in the country, he hesitated, ‘maybe around 1000, from Iraq or Persia’ but he was adamant that they had been in Egypt for several generations. Both his grandparents used to wear the traditional Arab garb, while his father, who was a teacher in a government school, had adopted European attire, but still had to wear the fez, which was compulsory in government schools. Contrary to the growing trend amongst Jews in Egypt to educate their children in private French or British schools and to distance themselves from Arabic culture, he was sent to a *madrassa* or Koranic school, for two years, and then to an Egyptian public school in order to acquire a perfect knowledge of Arabic, since they considered it their national language.³¹ It was also the language used within the family, as was the case for most Oriental Jews, although few would

²⁹ See Jacques Hassoun, *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, p.104, where he mentioned Mourad Farag Bey, ‘*poète et juriste, co-rédacteur de la première constitution de l’Égypte indépendante.*’

³⁰ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.39. Beinín also confirmed that ‘in all respects except religious practice, the daily lives of the Karaites of *harat-al-yahud al-qara’in* [the Karaite quarters] were undistinguishable from their Muslim neighbors’.

³¹ He then enrolled at Fuad University where he graduated as a Bachelor of Commerce.

admit it today.³² Consequently and again contrary to the majority of respondents (65%), the Australian Karaite was and still is fluent in both the colloquial and literary strands of Arabic.³³

The Karaite respondents all expressed a strong attachment and feelings of belonging to Egypt. Unlike half of their Sephardi and Ashkenazi compatriots within the sample group, they regarded themselves as Egyptians. The Australian respondent evoked his university days at the Fuad University of Cairo:

There were demonstrations all the time against the King and the British. I felt very nationalistic, very anti-British. I felt Egypt should be independent. I was politically active. I used to join the demonstrators, shouting the slogan ‘down with the British’, until the day they started to shout ‘no Jews after today’, while passing near the Jewish *hara*. So I slipped out, disgusted.³⁴

Despite their strong allegiance to Egypt and Arab culture, they still experienced problems being accepted as legitimate Egyptians. As explained by Beinín, they had not quite assimilated the ‘notions of citizenship and nationality recently introduced to Egypt’.³⁵ When asked by the Egyptian state to prove their citizenship, they tried to comply but met with a lot of bureaucratic resistance, nearly as much as the Rabbanite Jews. As a perfect illustration of this covert discrimination, the Australian Karaite respondent stated that his family had to take the Egyptian government to court on that issue. They had to prove their eligibility, which they did thanks to a record found in the Cairo Citadel’s archives relating to the ‘arabisation’ of their name back in 1840 and, therefore, attesting to their presence in the land. The judgment was in their favour and the state was ordered to grant citizenship to all the family

³² For instance, the French Karaite respondent remembered that her grandfather, a lawyer at the Islamic courts where all the proceedings were conducted in Arabic, possessed such a high level of proficiency in the Arabic language that he used to read the Koran fluently. Since their language at home was nearly exclusively Arabic, she considered it an aberration that her parents succumbed to outside pressure and sent her to a French school to learn French while her brother was sent to a British school to learn English. As a general rule, the Oriental Jews repressed the fact that they still spoke Arabic at home, as it would mean they were not educated in the European tradition and, therefore, could be labelled as backward and unsophisticated.

³³ Because of his perfect knowledge of the Arabic language, he is often called upon to translate sensitive material appearing in the Arabic media, referring to the Jewish community.

³⁴ He was confronted once more at graduation time with the dichotomy of being an Egyptian Jew when he was not awarded the traditional signed photo of the King, together with his diploma, as was customary for all Egyptian graduates.

³⁵ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.40.

members, a judgment which, paradoxically, pointed to the independence of the judiciary within a system where the arbitrary often ruled.³⁶

With the establishment of the state of Israel in May 1948, a rude awakening was in store for the Karaites in spite of their closeness to Egypt and its culture, when a bomb exploded in June 1948, in the Karaite section of the Jewish quarter of Cairo, ‘killing twenty-two Jews and wounding forty-one’.³⁷ The younger generation of Karaite Jews gradually came to realise that there was no future for them in Egypt, as the Australian informant pointedly said: ‘I felt I would never be accepted as a “real Egyptian”, although in my heart I felt Egyptian.’ This realisation pushed him into joining the underground socialist Zionist youth movement, *Shomer ha’Tsa’ir* with the view of eventually migrating to Israel. In fact, when he decided to leave Egypt after the Suez War, he was stripped of his citizenship and was issued with a *laissez-passer*, a travelling permit, stamped with the dreaded Arabic words *rihla bi-dun raj’a*, literally meaning ‘journey without return’, just like most of Egyptian Jewry.³⁸

Religious observance

When asked about their degree of religious observance, most of the interviewees - 68% - considered themselves as traditional, which usually meant that their families attended synagogue services intermittently and kept the traditional rites of passage. They did not necessarily keep a *kosher* home except during the festivals, as stated by Respondent #66:

My mother was traditional. We kept kosher only at festivals but very strictly. A lot of Jews from Egypt only kept kosher at festivals.

Informant #81 confirmed this practice:

My father was not a religious man but my mother was traditional. When came the High Holy Days, she would do what she had to do and got the kosher meat.

On the other hand, a quarter of the interviewees stated that they practised a minimal religious observance by celebrating only the three main Jewish festivals, *Pessah*, *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*. Only two out of the 92 people interviewed stated their family were strictly

³⁶ Ironically, while the family was in court trying to prove their national identity, my respondent was called for military service, even though he was not considered an Egyptian national. After spending three months in the army, he was permanently dismissed without any official reason but he suspected it was because he was a Jew.

³⁷ See Krämer, *The Jews of Modern Egypt*, p.26 and Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.68.

³⁸ After 12 years in Israel after Egypt, he subsequently immigrated to Australia in 1969. He only went back to Egypt once, in 2000, after 43 years of absence.

Orthodox, that is, they kept a *kosher* home, observed the Sabbath and attended synagogue every week. In view of the minute size of that subgroup, the only significant conclusion that could be drawn from these findings was that the Orthodox Egyptian Jews did not immigrate to Australia. This could be attributed to any number of reasons: their socio-economic status, the geographical distance from *Eretz Israel*, their lack of English skills, the absence of a family contact, or simply the ‘unknown’ character of the place. Furthermore, given that the majority of those who came to Australia belonged to the more affluent and more cosmopolitan middle and upper middle classes, it was to be expected that they would be less religiously observant than their counterparts in the lower strata since religious laxity in Egypt often went hand in hand with Westernisation.

My respondents were also asked about their *bar and bat mitzvah*. All the male respondents in the two groups answered in the affirmative to the question of *bar mitzvah*, which again was not surprising in the context of a traditional Jewish community.³⁹ What was unexpected was that seven of the female respondents remembered having a *bat mitzvah* ceremony while the majority insisted that it was never practised in Egypt, even unheard of. Actually, one can find in the memorial book *Juifs d’Egypte – Images et Textes*, a picture of such a ceremony, dating back to 1927, labelling it ‘a religious initiation’.⁴⁰ One respondent confirmed that not only did she have a *bat mitzvah* but so did her mother who used to attend the Jewish communal school where this practice was apparently encouraged from the early 1920s.⁴¹ It seems to be an Italian influence innovation introduced by the Chief Rabbi of Alexandria at the time, R. Raphael della Pergola (1910-1923).⁴² My interviewee remembered it was a collective

³⁹ The term *Bar mitzvah* signifies a boy’s coming of age on his thirteenth birthday and the accompanying ritual and ceremony. The custom to celebrate a boy’s first public observance of the *mitzvot* – commandments – goes back to the Middle Ages whereas the equivalent ceremony for girls, the *bat mitzvah*, only developed in the US as a ritual alternative in the Conservative and Reform movements from 1922. The historian Paula E. Hyman reported that the first American *bat mitzvah* was that of Judith Kaplan, the daughter of Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, founder of Reconstructionist Judaism. However, Arthur Ocean Waskow and Phyllis Ocean Berman pointed out in *A Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven*, New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2002 that there is evidence of earlier *bat mitzvah* celebrations in Lwow in 1902 as well as in Italy and France. Within Orthodoxy, the custom has now been adopted and the actual ceremony is usually not held on a Shabbat contrary to the Reform movement, although this is also changing. For instance, at the Sydney Great Synagogue, at the end of the Friday night service, the *bat mitzvah* girl is invited to give an address or *drasha* to the congregation, on a topic set by the rabbi.

⁴⁰ *Juifs d’Egypte Images et Textes*, Paris: Editions du Scribe, 1984, p.65, ‘Initiation religieuse des Jeunes Filles en 1927 à Alexandrie’. It is interesting to note the French translation of the word *bat mitzvah*, which could either indicate the need to explain the concept to the uninformed or a further sign of Westernisation of the community as a whole.

⁴¹ Case study #52.

⁴² Rabbi R. Della Pergola published a 53-page manual *Recueil pour l’initiation des jeunes filles israélites*, Alexandrie: Communauté Israélite, 5682/1922 (French and Hebrew). According to the information provided by Norman Stillman in May 2006, there were ‘similar rites among Grana [Livornese Jews] of Tunisia at the time of

ceremony held at the main synagogue of Alexandria, when the girls recited the Ten Commandments, the Thirteen Articles of Faith and the *Shema*.⁴³ Another informant recalled having her *bat mitzvah* in the early 1950s:

We were 18 girls. We sang all together and it was the most magnificent experience. We were all dressed in a long white gown in *piqué*, with a short veil, walking into the synagogue Eliahu Hanavi. After the ceremony, a lunch was served at the back of the synagogue for the poorer members of the community, which we shared with them.⁴⁴

The ceremony did not obviously have the pageantry and glamour of modern day's *bat mitzvah* ceremonies. The focus was more on sharing that special day with others girls less fortunate. All the girls had to wear exactly the same style of dress, modest and simple, in order not to embarrass those who could not afford a more expensive outfit.

The percentage of girls who responded in the affirmative to that particular question stood at 14.5% out of a total of 48 girls, which is not negligible for those days. Actually, the fact that this relatively new custom was practised as early as 1927, so soon after the first American *bat mitzvah*, is a further indication that the Egyptian Jewish community, although fundamentally traditional and patriarchal, was not closed to progressive trends within Judaism.

In order to further assess the level of Jewish affiliation of the Egyptian community, it was essential to examine the crucial issue of intermarriage. A third of my informants stated there was intermarriage in their immediate or extended family. At the personal level, only six were actually married to non-Jewish partners, which in turn represents a mere 6.5% of the total group. They were all women, whose family religious observance ranged from orthodox to minimal. Only three remained in a Jewish framework in Australia, due to the proximity of parents and siblings. All except one had intermarried a number of years before emigration but the span of the marriage did not fit into any obvious pattern since the age group varied greatly from case to case. Therefore, no significant conclusion could be drawn on the issue of intermarriage being more prevalent in one particular age group within my sample. Only in one single case was there strong opposition and subsequent ostracism by the father, who was

first communion for which we have pictures, again with the girls dressed in a pseudo-bridal gown similar to that used for first communion in the Catholic Church.' See also article in the Egyptian Jewish newspaper *Israël*, 6 June, 1935, p.4: 'Grand Temple Neve-Chalom – Cérémonie de Bar Mitzva de 55 garçons et initiations de 30 jeunes filles.'

⁴³ Opening word of a central prayer of the Jewish liturgy, meaning 'Hear', incorporating a confession of faith.

⁴⁴ Case Study #66.

strictly Orthodox.⁴⁵ In the remainder of the cases, no major family conflict was reported over the choice of a non-Jewish spouse, apart from the initial outcry. On the contrary, three of those cases declared that their respective spouses were greatly respected by the rest of the family.⁴⁶

Based on the findings for the sample group, one may conclude that before immigration, marriage within the faith was usually the norm, while intermarriage remained a rare occurrence. When it did take place, it was seriously frowned upon but seldom considered a major tragedy. In fact, Krämer quoted the Egyptian censuses as showing that mixed marriages constituted only five to 6 percent of all marriages contracted by Jews annually, which means that the sample group was a true representation of the general trend.⁴⁷

This more or less tolerant attitude towards intermarriage was consistent with the rather low level of ultra-orthodox religious observance within the sample group. As one would expect, this had not always been the case as most respondents indicated that their parents or grandparents were more observant than themselves. One informant, who lived as a child in a remote village of Upper Egypt in the 1920s and 30s, with no Jewish population, stated that his father, in spite of the distance and logistic difficulties, made sure that all the Jews of the area celebrated the Jewish festivals according to tradition:

At *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur*, my father used to go to Cairo to get all the kosher products. He used to hire a rabbi and convert one of his properties into a synagogue. The rabbi would bring a *Sefer Torah* and we would have services. The Jewish families would come from all around, from Minieh [a neighbouring village] so that we would have a *minyan*.⁴⁸

Furthermore, the age factor was a determining element in the level of religiosity of the respondents, since out of the 68% who declared themselves as traditional Jews, 74% were born before 1923, whereas 62% of those with minimal to nil observance, were born after 1923. The older they were, the more likely they were to be more observant and vice versa.

⁴⁵ Case Study #28 was eventually accepted back into the fold after a few years but the father never really reconciled himself to the idea of a non-Jewish son-in-law.

⁴⁶ Case Study #51 who married an office colleague said: 'my mother used to tell me, he [the husband] is an angel. There is no one like him.' Case Study #60 married her Greek neighbour who, having fought with the Allied Forces in the Greek Brigade during WWII, was able to immigrate to Australia in 1949 and sponsored all his wife's family.

⁴⁷ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p. 229.

⁴⁸ Case Study #5.

Clearly, modernity, Westernisation through education and upper class mobility brought in their stride a growing laxity in religious practices.

The picture that emerged from those statistics was one of a community very much aware of its Jewish identity, still close to its traditions but not as strictly as its elders, and surprisingly open to the outside world, both in the Jewish and non-Jewish domain. Although these findings cannot be assumed to reflect the religious character of Egyptian Jewry as a whole, especially in view of its innate diversity, they still reflected the trend demonstrated by broader studies. Krämer, for instance, commented on the lack of deep religiosity of Jews in Egypt, pointing out however that ‘they were traditional enough to reject the secular’.⁴⁹ Jacques Hassoun confirmed that ultra-orthodoxy was mostly found in the Jewish *hara*, amongst the economically disadvantaged members of the community while he described the privileged group as, at the same time, ‘*dévots, vibrants et frivoles*’⁵⁰.

Zionism, Communism and Egyptian nationalism

How did the participants of this study respond to the three modern ‘isms’ that were so fiercely debated in their political context: Zionism, nationalism, and communism? Did their response reflect the traditional detachment of Egyptian Jews from politics or did it reveal a definite level of involvement in one of those ideologies?⁵¹

Involvement in Zionism was always a sensitive issue for the Jews in Egypt as discussed in the preceding chapter. The questionnaire presented to my respondents listed three classifications that ranged from ‘high’ for people who played a significant role in Zionist youth movements before and after 1948, ‘marginal’ for those who were sympathetic to the Zionist cause but whose activism was limited to attending a few meetings and fundraising, to ‘nil’ for those who had no involvement whatsoever.

The historical records showed that the Egyptian Jewish establishment’s response to Zionism was not altogether positive. Apart from the B’nai B’rith leaders who ardently supported it,

⁴⁹ Krämer in *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp.190-1, wrote: ‘What Jewish visitors from Europe and Palestine, most of them Ashkenazim, deplored most was the apparent lack of Jewish life – as they knew it...In the late 1920s, a teacher from the Alliance Israélite school in Tantah reported ...: it is true that the Egyptian Jew always says his prayers, and observes all the rites, but he lacks the Jewish soul’.

⁵⁰ Hassoun, *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, p.135.

⁵¹ See Krämer, ‘Political Participation of the Jews of Egypt Between World War I and the 1952 Revolution’, Chapter V, pp.68-82, in Shamir, *The Jews of Egypt – A Mediterranean Society in Modern Times*.

most of the influential leadership of Egyptian Jewry remained opposed to any open manifestation of Zionist aspirations by the community in order not to stir up anti-Jewish feelings or be accused of dual loyalty. Egypt's delegate at the nineteenth Zionist congress in Lucerne in 1935, had already articulated this particular concern:

The Sephardim of the Mediterranean basin and elsewhere did not dare to advertise their attachment to the Yishuv openly. They had to conceal their enthusiasm in order not to create an atmosphere of doubt and suspicion before the Muslims about their loyalties and patriotic sentiments.⁵²

The leader of Sephardi Jewry in Palestine, Avraham Elmaleh, who visited Cairo frequently on fact-finding missions, reported in 1939 that 'even when the affluent Jews made contributions to these funds [Jewish National Fund and Palestine Foundation Fund], they refused to accept receipts so that no record of donations to Zionist causes would be entered into their accounting books'⁵³.

This ambivalent attitude towards political Zionism was discernible in the testimonies of most Australian respondents, as illustrated by the following statement:

You're asking about my feelings towards Israel back in Egypt around the time of the creation of the state in 1948. We were not very involved although we were very happy about it. We could not show our true feelings because of our environment.⁵⁴

In some cases, the response was totally negative. Participant #8 recalled that his father believed so strongly in the future of Egyptian Jewry, that he strictly forbade his son to be associated with any Zionist entity.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, as previously discussed, Zionist youth movements established by emissaries from Palestine attracted middle class Jewish youth, particularly from the Jewish schools in Alexandria, where, according to Beinín, 'socialist Zionism was hegemonic':

⁵² Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.40.

⁵³ See Laskier, *ibid.*, pp.44-5, 50. Laskier also pointed to the report of Moshe Ben-Asher, 'Egypt's most formidable Zionist', after the Arab revolt of 1936-39, who estimated that this was a wake-up call for Egyptian Jews. Their feeling of security and stability was shaken by the growing support of Egyptian politicians for the Arabs of Palestine. As a result, the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine began to sound more attractive.

⁵⁴ Case Study #55.

⁵⁵ Case Study #8 was still loosely involved in Zionist youth movements and remained a close friend of some Zionist activists that were subsequently arrested and convicted as spies in the so-called Lavon Affair in 1954. For details on the Lavon Affair, see, Beinín, in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, pp. 94-117, Laskier, in *The Jews of Egypt*, pp. 205-251 and Aviezer Golan, *Operation Suzannah*, New York: Harper & Row, 1978.

The largest and most active of these movements was 'ha-'Ivri ha-Tza'ir (The young Hebrew), the Egyptian branch of ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir (The young guard) that sought, usually unsuccessfully, to blend Zionism and internationalism...A second Marxist Zionist youth movement formed in 1949-50: Dror – he-Halutz ha-Tza'ir (Freedom - the young pioneer)...established a strong base at the Lycée de l'Union Juive pour l'Enseignement of Alexandria, where, according to one graduate, the dominant ideology was Marxism-Leninism. Students learned dialectical and historical materialism in geography class from Alexandre Roche...⁵⁶

These observations were confirmed by a number of informants, both in Australia and France, who attended that same Jewish school. One Sydney-based respondent remembered quite vividly that particular young and charismatic teacher, 'who constantly digressed from his geography lesson to preach the merits of communism.'⁵⁷ Although the collected data confirmed that indeed half of the Zionist activists were a product of Jewish schools, that data also showed that out of the 38% of respondents who attended English schools at some stage, 58% called themselves Zionists. For instance, one respondent, who went to a prestigious British school in Alexandria, had joined a Zionist youth group as early as 1945. He recalled how the Zionist emissaries prepared his group for life on a kibbutz and how he was smuggled into British mandated Palestine in 1946, at the age of 19, with another 56 youngsters⁵⁸:

It was a few days before Pesach. We were given the uniforms of Jewish soldiers who were stationed in Alexandria. They were British soldiers. We took their paybooks, we had to memorise their numbers and once we arrived in Israel [Palestine], we already had identity cards waiting for us and the uniforms and papers were sent back to Egypt. We crossed the desert by train. The whole operation was arranged by the Hagana. We arrived at the kibbutz Deganya Bet the first night of the Seder. There were 350 people around the table. I will never forget that night.⁵⁹

In fact his experience was part of a well-documented operation called 'Operation Passover' of April 1946, organised by the Hagana with the help of local Zionist emissaries, as a series of initiatives to smuggle youth out of Egypt, wearing British army uniforms.

⁵⁶ Beinun, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.51.

⁵⁷ Case Study #8 also stated that the teacher in question had even organised a number of secret meetings outside school hours with a number of eager students. When discovered, the teacher was severely reprimanded by members of the school board who were also parents. They were horrified at the thought that their children were being indoctrinated in Marxism and Zionism.

⁵⁸ Laskier in *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.113-5, reported that the actual number of youth smuggled out during that particular operation is disputed but the consensus seems to be around 70 to 100 individuals. In spite of these relatively small numbers, 'Operation Passover' was important because it was 'the *'aliya* of a progressive elite of Zionists, among them people who played an integral role during the late 1940s and early 1950s as Mossad Le'Aliya and Jewish Agency emissaries in Egypt and North Africa.'

⁵⁹ Case Study #62.

Nonetheless, the Australian sample included the whole range of Zionist involvement. Out of 92 participants, only 15% acknowledged being Zionists and having an active involvement in the Zionist movement; less than a third (31%) registered a limited involvement; more than half (55%) never participated in any Zionist activities and one participant declared to be anti-Zionist. In view of the official stand of the Egyptian/Jewish establishment towards Zionism, it is not surprising that the participants aged between 18 and 28 were the most represented in the active Zionist category as opposed to those over the age of 28 who were the least represented.

As for Egyptian nationalism, it has already been stated that the vast majority of Jews in Egypt showed little interest in the local political scene. Under King Fuad I (1917-1936)⁶⁰, a small number of prominent Egyptian Jews who had direct entry into the Royal court, were active participants in the nation building process either as members of government such as Senator Cattaoui (1861-1942)⁶¹ or as strong advocates of Egyptian nationalism such as the so-called Abu-Naddara (1839-1912).⁶² By the late 1940s, this was no longer the case and there was no Jewish representation in government circles. Jewish political activism on behalf of an independent Egyptian state was rare in the context of a rising Islamic and pan-Arab nationalism. In fact, this trend was one of the dominant features of the Australian participants, who all claimed they had no involvement in Egyptian political life, with two interesting exceptions.

⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that, similar to some of the privileged non-Muslim minorities, King Fuad, born in 1868, son of Khedive Isma'il, a fervent francophile, had an entirely European education. At the age of ten, he went to school in Geneva and in 1885 joined the Military Academy of Turin. He later became military attaché in Vienna. Consequently he spoke Italian, French and German fluently but 'practically no English ...and hardly any Arabic' as pointed out by Jacques Berque, in *Egypt, Imperialism & Revolution*, p.278.

⁶¹ See Krämer in *The Jews of Modern Egypt*, pp.94-6, who described Joseph Aslan de Cattaoui Pasha (1861-1942) as a man 'with far reaching connections in Egyptian business and political circles' who was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1914 and was sent to London as legal adviser to the Egyptian delegation (the *Wafd*) in 1920-21. Krämer added that 'Joseph Aslan Cattaoui entered Parliament in 1922 as deputy of Kom Ombo... The same year he was appointed to the constitutional Commission preparing the new constitution of April 1923...in November 1924, he became minister of Finance...In recognition for his service, King Fuad made him a member of the Egyptian Senate in 1927.'

⁶² Jacob M. Landau, in *Middle Eastern Themes*, pp.172-87, related the life achievements of one of the most ardent Jewish supporters of Egyptian nationalism, James (Ya'qub) Sanua (1839-1912), also known by his nickname Abu Naddara, meaning the man with glasses. He made major contributions as a journalist, playwright, political cartoonist and satirist, exposing the excesses of the ruling class and fighting against the British occupation of Egypt. According to Landau, he was in frequent contact with Colonel Orabi Pasha and his group, who led the 1882 rebellion against the British under the slogan 'Egypt for the Egyptians'. See also his biography by Irene L. Gendzier, *The Practical Visions of Ya'Qub Sanu'*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, M.S. Monograph XV, 1966.

The first one was the Australian Karaite respondent. He stated that he strongly identified with a left-oriented Egyptian nationalism, during his days at university. Together with fellow students, he participated in several anti-British and anti-government demonstrations, where patriotic slogans such as 'Egypt for the Egyptians' were being shouted. As noted, he withdrew only when these demonstrations turned anti-Jewish.⁶³

The second exception was a woman who was involved with communism from a young age. According to Beinín, the ideology that attracted Egyptian Jewish youth even more than Zionism was communism:

1,000 or more Jews participated in the Egyptian communist movement from the 1930s to the 1950s. Thousands more were sympathetic to Marxist ideas in one form or another...Excluded by definition from both Islamic currents like the Muslim Brothers or the quasi-fascist Young Egypt, Jewish youth searching for political expression in the 1930s and 1940s (a minority of the community, to be sure), turned towards Marxism or Zionism or, as in the case of ha-Shomer ha-Tza'ir, a combination of the two.⁶⁴

That particular respondent went totally against the trend of the rest of the Australian sample, as far as her gender and involvement in politics. She perceived her activism was part of her Jewish essential condition: '*j'étais activiste de par ma condition d'être juive d'abord.*' At the age of fifteen, in Egypt, she joined the underground communist party, in her brother's footsteps. She rejected political Zionism as a solution for all Jews.⁶⁵ She professed the notion that was popular amongst a certain section of Egyptian Jewry before 1948, that the state of Israel was a much-needed and deserved safe haven for the Jews of Europe who had endured unspeakable racist persecution throughout the centuries. It did not apply to the Jews living in the safe and tolerant Egyptian environment, where she personally never felt threatened until the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Egypt was her home; she did not feel a foreigner and she pointedly said: '*je ne me sentais pas étrangère.*' She felt a deep attachment

⁶³ See Chapter 6, p.13.

⁶⁴ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.142. See also Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp.172-82, about the high involvement of Jewish middle class youth in the communist movement in Egypt already in the 1920s and 30s.

⁶⁵ Case Study #54 related that her brother, along with a number of other Egyptian Jews, was recruited by Henri Curiel (1914-1978), the legendary and charismatic Jewish Egyptian communist militant, who was responsible for the foundation in 1943, of MELN, *Le Mouvement égyptien de libération nationale*, the precursor of today's communist party. He was imprisoned for two years after the 1948 War with Israel. He was then expelled, settling eventually in France, where he remained politically active in unpopular and controversial causes. He was described by the French media as the patron of terrorist organisations '*le patron des réseaux d'aide au terrorisme.*' He was assassinated in Paris, in May 1978 by unidentified killers. See Gilles Perrault, *Un Homme à part*, Paris: Bernard Barrault, 1984. This book was translated into English, *A Man Apart: The Life of Henri Curiel*, London: Zed Books, 1987.

to the people and empathised with the plight of the ordinary downtrodden Egyptians, especially the women. Particularly gifted in languages, apart from French and English, she spoke Ladino with her parents who were originally from Smyrna (Izmir). She was also fluent in Arabic both written and oral, which was rare for a woman of her generation. In the French Lycée where she studied, Arabic was taught as a third language for a few meagre hours a week. Her political activism was not confined to the Egyptian scene as she relentlessly continued her fight against social inequality when she migrated to Australia, always on the left side of the political spectrum, organising migrant women support groups, informing them of their rights and working with the Ethnic Communities Council.⁶⁶

Notwithstanding these two exceptional cases, the bulk of the Australian respondents declared they were apolitical in Egypt, in terms of Zionism, Egyptian nationalism and communism. The same applied to their new country, at least on the federal level of politics. In Egypt, their focus was directed more towards economic concerns, Jewish communal and family life. In Australia, they seem to have been more concerned about rebuilding their lives economically, professionally and socially as well as quietly consolidating their integration and acculturation within both the Jewish and broader communities, without disturbing the status quo.

Feelings of belonging

Before assessing the level of their integration into Australian society, it was important to analyse the depth of their feelings of belonging in the 'old country'. Since the issue was more about perception than about objective evidence, I raised the following questions with the participants: did they feel Egypt was their home, did they feel included in the national project and how did they react when confronted with the adverse political reality of Egypt in the late 1940s?

The statistical analysis of their responses showed that about half the sample (53%) voiced strong feelings of belonging in Egypt, at least until the seminal events of 1948. Egypt was their home and for most of them, as one respondent so aptly put it, it was the only one they knew. The rest of the group was equally divided between those who qualified their sense of belonging as moderate (23%) and those denying it outright (24%). Why did the last two subgroups feel such an alienation from a land where they had been living for at least two generations in apparent comfort and freedom?

⁶⁶ Case Study #54.

According to my findings, the controversial issues of foreign citizenship and Zionist activism did not impact significantly on those feelings one way or the other. For instance, although 57% of the respondents⁶⁷ across the board expressed a strong attachment to their country of birth before 1948. Whether they were foreign nationals, Egyptians or stateless, did not make a significant difference.⁶⁸ The statistics seem to validate the claim that, for the Jews of Egypt, the adoption of a foreign nationality was more often one of convenience than of conviction. As for the Zionist activists or sympathisers, my research surprisingly revealed that they were just as likely to have strong feelings of belonging in Egypt as those with a minimal Zionist involvement (59% against 51%). These results tend to validate the contention put forward by Krämer that ‘at least until the late 1930s, even local Zionists supported the national aspirations of the Egyptian people. It was by no means rare to find Egyptian Jews who, like Léon Castro, sympathised and collaborated with both the Egyptian and the Jewish nationalist movements.’⁶⁹

Since the criterion of citizenship or political activism did not appear to determine the degree of closeness to Egypt, I looked at the issue of age to check if there was a direct correlation between those two factors. For that purpose, the group was subdivided into three subgroups: over 28, under 18 and those in between the two. The resulting statistics confirmed that a majority (63%) of the older constituents admitted to a strong sense of belonging when they lived in Egypt, whilst the younger subgroups were equally divided between those who declared themselves to be moderately attached and those totally unconnected to their birthplace. It was to be expected that the respondents who left the country before the age of 28 would be more estranged from their Egyptian roots than their parents and older compatriots. One of those respondents admitted that while he grew up considering himself as part of a tolerated minority, his father, an Italian national whose family had settled in Egypt nearly three generations ago, believed until 1955 that Egypt was his home.⁷⁰ It is self-evident that these contrasting attitudes were the result of a growing perception that Jews had no place

⁶⁷ Case Study #54, who was a very proud Egyptian national, recalled her anguish when she was stripped of her passport on her departure in 1957 and given instead stateless travelling papers, stamped ‘no return allowed’: *Au moment où je devais quitter, on m’avait enlevé le passeport égyptien et on m’a donné une feuille de route ‘aller sans retour’. C’est une chose qui m’a déchiré terriblement le coeur parce que je me considérais très égyptienne. J’étais très fière de l’être.*

⁶⁸ Case Study #29, stateless, born in the village of Tantah, never questioned his feeling of belonging before 1948. Egypt was his home where he led a very Jewish life, although he was not a Zionist. Contrary to the majority of the sample group, he spoke and wrote Arabic perfectly. He was forced out of his job of twenty-seven years because of the 1947 Company Law, which required 75% of employees to be of Egyptian nationality.

⁶⁹ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.169.

⁷⁰ Case Study #8.

in the new political scene. They were also the manifestation of a new world vision implanted in the minds of the young by the ideas promoted in Western schools. Their appropriation of a Western cultural identity was at the expense of the Egyptian cultural identity.

Competence in the national language

This trend was again apparent when I compared the respondents' level of fluency in the Arabic language with the respondents' respective age group. The figures showed that out of the 92 participants, more than half (65%) rated their fluency as poor to fair whereas only one third (approximately 34%) rated it as good to excellent. Except in two cases, the speakers with excellent skills were all over the age of 28 at the time of their departure from Egypt whilst three quarters of the speakers with poor skills were under the age of 28. Conversely, the figures showed that those with the higher level of fluency in the Arabic language were more likely to feel a strong attachment to Egypt than those at the lower end of the scale (67% against 33%). Generally speaking, within any migrant group, all things being equal, the older members of the group start their new lives with a poor command of the national language of the adopted country whereas the younger generation will quickly become more and more fluent in that language and gradually becomes unidentifiable from the dominant national group. In the case of Egyptian Jewry, particularly with the Oriental Jews, the opposite became the norm. The parents were better Arabic speakers than their children, who were again better speakers than their own children.⁷¹ When the latter openly abandoned Arabic, their original home language, for the more prestigious foreign languages, they also shed or tried to shed their Oriental/Middle Eastern identity and mentality, often equated with a lack of sophistication. Amongst the Australian sample group - except for the Australian Karaite who was under the age of 28 when he left Egypt - only one other respondent - now over 80 years of age - admitted to speaking exclusively Arabic at home with her parents.⁷² Another 14 respondents (15.5%) said that an adequate level of Arabic was spoken at home as well as one or two European languages. The rest of the group stated that they only spoke a 'kitchen' Arabic with servants and shopkeepers.

⁷¹ The family of Case study #53, who lived in the village of Tantah and whose roots go back to the beginning of the eighteenth century, spoke nearly exclusively Arabic at home but he was sent to Cairo, to British schools, to get what was considered the best education. Although he was also fluent in Arabic, it was relegated to second place. By the time his children were born, Arabic had been totally suppressed and supplanted by English and French.

⁷² The parents of this particular respondent (case study #1) came from Aleppo, Syria, and spoke exclusively Arabic. However, as was often the case, French gradually displaced Arabic and the respondent spoke only French to her children.

Another interesting result of the statistical study showed that out of the 35% of respondents who admitted possessing good to excellent Arabic skills, 55% were of lower middle class. On the other hand, from the 32% with fair skills, only 11% situated themselves in the lower echelon. It is obvious that at least for the younger generation of respondents, the declining status of Arabic was directly linked to the flagging competence in the language, which was in turn related to age and position on the social ladder. Conversely, competence in European languages was identified with high culture and social standing and was a determining factor in the perception of self. Krämer confirmed that already in the interwar period:

Arabic, by contrast [to French], was increasingly losing ground, and ... was relegated to a low rank as the language spoken by the poor inhabitants of the Cairo *hara*, the provincial towns and the Karaites...Most local Jews knew just enough colloquial Egyptian Arabic to be able to deal with shopkeepers, waiters, domestic servants and the man in the street; a minority had a sufficient command of Modern Standard Arabic to be able to read and write it.⁷³

A fair question to be asked is whether the Jews of Egypt gradually excluded themselves or whether they were excluded from the national process. Were they actors or victims, or maybe both? Could the Egyptian leaders of the time have done more to embrace their non-Muslim minorities through education as Turkey's Atatürk did for his minorities?⁷⁴ In fact the language issue was initially very similar in both Egypt and Turkey, during the lifetime of the Ottoman Empire. The same multicultural ambience prevailed, which meant that minorities such as the Greeks, Italians, Armenians and Jews, continued to use their own language in the public and private domain. As was the case for Arabic in Egypt, 'knowledge of Turkish was not considered to be a necessary condition for interaction in everyday life' and 'in the case of the Jews, the educated elite spoke French as well as Judeo-Spanish because of the French influence the Alliance [*AIU*] had on the community', stated Mary Altabev, who has extensively researched the status of Judeo-Spanish in the Turkish social context.⁷⁵ It was the mirror image of the situation in Egypt, where French was 'the lingua franca of the local foreign minorities and the Turko-Egyptian elite'.⁷⁶ Only after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the new Turkish Republic in 1923 by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), did extensive socio-political reforms overturn the status quo. The

⁷³ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.28.

⁷⁴ Mary Altabev, in *Judeo-Spanish in the Turkish Social Context*, pp.95-7, argued that these measures constituted the *coup de grâce* for the status of Judeo-Spanish but I would add that they also meant the end of the predominance of foreign schools by displacing the privileged position previously occupied by European languages and culture.

⁷⁵ Altabev, *Judeo-Spanish in the Turkish Social Context*, p.63.

⁷⁶ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p. 27.

historians Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue who have written comprehensively on the Sephardi diaspora in the Levant, studied the process of Turkicisation of Turkish Jewry.⁷⁷ With the view of constructing a new secular national identity, Atatürk embarked on a modernisation and secularisation program of the education system. In November 1928, he mandated that Turkish be written using the Roman script instead of the traditional Arabic script and, at the same time, he instituted compulsory Turkish primary education for all Turkish citizens, regardless of religion or ethnicity. Benbassa and Rodrigue confirmed that ‘the use of Judeo-Spanish was also viewed unfavorably and a number of organizations were founded to encourage Jews to speak Turkish.’⁷⁸ The proclaimed message of these sweeping reforms was one of inclusiveness of all ethnic groups in the new nation’s building, through the medium of a unifying national language. From what I have observed in my informal meetings with Turkish Jews now living in Australia, the process of Turkicisation was a success as far as fluency in the national language and sense of self are concerned, although some reservations were expressed by Altabev, as a result of her research:

I argue that the Turkish Jewish identity is marginal because they [Turkish Jews] feel that they are not considered as part of the national majority mainly because of their different religion (cf. Lewis, 1961; Akçam, 1995; Bora, 1995).⁷⁹

In Egypt, a similar program of Egyptianisation was started after the Montreux Convention of 1937 with the abolition of the Mixed Tribunals and the phasing out of special privileges for foreign nationals. In an effort to raise the status of knowledge and use of Arabic, at the same time as alleviating the growing problem of unemployment of ‘highly politicised high school and university graduates’, the Egyptian government targeted the workplace by making ‘Arabic obligatory in all business dealings’, thus forcing ‘shop owners and businessmen unable to read and write Arabic...to take on additional Egyptian personnel.’⁸⁰ The government also targeted education, although not as ambitiously as the Turkish example, by introducing compulsory Arabic tuition in the curriculum of prestigious private schools, which were patronised by the Egyptian elite and the middle and upper class non-Muslim

⁷⁷ Esther Benbassa and Aron Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry – A History of Judeo-Spanish Community, 14th-20th Centuries*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, Paperback Edition, 2000, pp.101-3. According to Mary Altabev in *Judeo-Spanish in the Turkish social context*, p. 61, these measures constituted the *coup de grâce* for the status of Judeo-Spanish but I would add that they also meant the end of the predominance of foreign schools by displacing the privileged position previously occupied by European languages and culture.

⁷⁸ Benbassa and Rodrigue, *Sephardi Jewry*, pp.102-3.

⁷⁹ Altabev, *Judeo-Spanish in the Turkish Social Context*, p.142.

⁸⁰ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p. 206.

minorities.⁸¹ It is true that the implementation of these reforms was not felt in earnest in those schools before the early 1950s when government regulations demanded that students who failed their Arabic examinations, not be allowed to proceed to the next class, regardless of their achievements in other subjects. For the majority of my younger respondents, who saw themselves rightly or wrongly as Europeans, these changes were not met with great enthusiasm although Arabic tuition was still limited to a few hours a week and effectively relegated to second or third rank behind French and English studies. On the other hand, the Egyptian education system was under scrutiny by leading Egyptian intellectuals and scholars such as Taha Husain (1889-1973), who was very critical of the didactic method used to teach Arabic which ‘exaggerates its difficulties even further, making it into an esoteric language that repels the students.’⁸² Therefore, it is not surprising that such a small percentage of respondents stated they possessed excellent Arabic skills. Had the teaching methods undergone fundamental reforms, could they have reversed the trend as far as non-Muslim minorities were concerned? The question remains in the domain of the hypothetical.

At the end of the day, the reasons for the failure of the Arabisation or re-Arabisation of the Jewish community of Egypt compared to the Turkish Jewish community were too deeply rooted in the cultural, social and political context. The combination of Egyptian Jewry’s adoption of Western culture and worldview, its growing uncertainty of ever being accepted as ‘real Egyptian’ coupled with the looming Palestinian conflict, made it a ‘mission impossible’. The government efforts towards Egyptianisation were not truly embracing of all ethnic and religious groups. The Jews, for one, did not embrace them, in spite of the initial support of Egyptianisation by prominent leaders of the Jewish community such as the Chief Rabbi Haim Nahum and Joseph Aslan Cattaoui.⁸³ According to Krämer – and I tend to agree with her - the integration of all non-Muslim minorities, except for the Copts to some degree, was already doomed in the 1940s⁸⁴:

⁸¹ Ibid., p.105. According to Krämer, in the early 1930s, the Jewish community schools, attended by children of lower and lower middle class families, ‘were placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and adopted the Egyptian curriculum. Arabic was henceforth the main language of instruction, particularly in the senior classes.’ Clearly, this new measure did not affect the middle and upper middle class students who continued to flock to European private schools.

⁸² This was the opinion of Taha Husain (1889-1973), the celebrated Egyptian intellectual and scholar, who thought that ‘the teaching of Arabic, should follow the same rules as that of any other language’ reported Berque in *Egypt Imperialism & Revolution*, p.639.

⁸³ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp.168-72.

⁸⁴ B.L. Carter, *The Copts in Egyptian Politics, 1918-1952*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1985. The Copts constitute the largest Christian minority in the Middle East. The latest estimates of around five million put

Even if the Jews had all become Egyptian patriots, learned Arabic, and applied for Egyptian nationality, it would still not have changed the basic fact that they overwhelmingly were not of Egyptian origin, not ‘real Egyptians’, and not Muslim.⁸⁵

After the events of 1948, any question about inclusion or exclusion, nationalism or Zionism, activism or apathy proved to be irrelevant. All the participants in this study, whether they felt they belonged in Egypt or whether they felt unwelcome, whether they remained close to the Egyptian culture or whether they distanced themselves from it, agreed that everything had changed for the worse after the outbreak of hostilities with Israel in 1948, and particularly after the Suez War in 1956, when they were all implicated as fifth columnists. Participant #20, one of the earliest ones to have acquired Egyptian nationality, expressed her growing feelings of alienation:

After 1948, the climate started to change in Egypt... We found ourselves stateless from one day to the next. I started to feel I did not belong and we were not welcome. Around 1949, the government sequestrated everything we owned and that is when we discovered we were blacklisted because my father had properties and money. We were kicked out of our apartment. We then became determined to get out of Egypt.

It is clear that, even though over half of the participants initially considered themselves to be an integral part of Egypt, this study has demonstrated the fragility of that bond when confronted with adverse political and economical conditions. The demise of the ‘liberal’ and inclusive style of Egyptian nationalism and the rise of an exclusive, pan-Arab and anti-foreigner nationalism, further fuelled by the creation of the new State of Israel and the plight of the Palestinians, shattered what proved to be an illusion of inclusiveness and caused the Jews to flee or be forced out of their country of birth, which, since it started to enter the modern world, had been so welcoming and tolerant towards its minorities.

them at six to eight percent of the Egyptian population. Since the Free Officers’ coup in 1952 and the advent of Gamal abdel Nasser, the Copts have suffered from growing discrimination and marginalisation by the State.

⁸⁵ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.205.

CHAPTER VI:

Forced Emigration - The Three 'Trigger Events'

As a general rule, the Jews left Egypt in three successive waves, after each of the three Arab-Israeli Wars in 1948, 1956 and 1967. I have labelled these wars 'the trigger events'. The 1948 War triggered their first exodus, forced or otherwise. In fact, the Jewish Agency records showed that 20,000 Jews, a sizeable 25% of the total Jewish population of about 75000 to 85,000¹, left between 1949-1950 of whom 14,299 settled in Israel.² The second and major wave left in the wake of the second trigger event, the 1956 Suez War, when, in the space of just four months, between November 1956 and March 1957, another 14,102 Jews departed (23%). Jewish emigration of another 17,000 to 19,000 continued steadily until the outbreak of the 1967 Six-Day War, leaving only between 2,500 to 7,000 Jews in Egypt.³ The third Arab-Israeli War brought about the nearly total depletion of Egyptian Jewry.

The measures taken by the Egyptian government against its Jewish minority after each of those three decisive dates included arbitrary detention, expulsion, denaturalisation, and economic strangulation through sequestration of assets or workplace discrimination. Since all the respondents of my sample stated they were affected by at least one of these measures, I tried to determine who was forced to leave, who left 'voluntarily' and under what circumstances. While a third (34%) stated they were given no choice but to leave the country, an equal percentage declared they feared the hostile environment and about a quarter (28%) stated they left because they could see no future for Jews in Egypt. From these findings, one could deduce that although the last two subgroups did not experience the same degree of persecution suffered by the first, they still left Egypt under some form of duress that was permeating from the prevailing climate of anti-Jewishness, fear and uncertainty.⁴

¹ Estimates taken from the WJC records, 1971:25.

² Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.187.

³ Those figures are quoted by Beinun, in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jews*, p.87, taken from the records of the WJC. Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.290, quoted only 2,500.

⁴ Only two respondents who left Egypt before the first 'trigger' event of 1948 stated they did it for personal reasons, one out of Zionist idealism (case study #62) and the other one because, he said, 'he wanted to see the world' (case study #41).

The 1948 Arab-Israeli War

The relation between the so-called ‘trigger’ events and their time of departure was clearly reflected in the testimonies of my respondents. In fact, the overall data collected through the interviews indicated that out of 92 respondents in Australia, 24 left between 1946 and 1951, 11 between 1952 and 1956 and 57 after 1956, with only one respondent who left after 1967. These numbers roughly reflected the trend for the overall Jewish population and undoubtedly demonstrated that the Suez War was the catalyst for the departure of the bulk of the respondents. Nonetheless, those who left earlier, both after the 1948 War and the Cairo fire of 1952 represented a far from negligible percentage of 38%, a further proof that the Jews of Egypt were already experiencing destabilisation and discrimination before the tripartite attack of 1956.⁵

There were some variations in the emigration pattern of the two ethnic groups within that timetable. For instance, my findings seemed to echo those of Beinín about Sephardim emigrating later than Ashkenazim.⁶ The reason suggested by Beinín was that Ashkenazim had shallower Egyptian roots than the Sephardim because of a more recent migration to Egypt and difference in culture and mentality. In fact, the analysis of my data did show a vast gap between the two subgroups in relation to their attachment to their country of birth and also revealed that a larger proportion of Ashkenazi participants emigrated even before 1952, whereas the opposite was true for the Sephardi participants.⁷

In the wake of the first Arab-Israeli war the authorities officially targeted all Zionists activists and sympathisers, even though Zionist youth groups were tolerated up to 1948 and operated semi-legally in Egypt. They also targeted anybody suspected of being a communist or associated with a communist. Since the authorities had imposed martial law throughout the country, the criteria for these arrests were elastic. Anyone deemed ‘prejudicial to the safety and security of the state’, was a potential target.⁸ There were three such cases amongst my sample group. The experience related by Respondent #46 was particularly significant as it demonstrated the arbitrary nature of those arrests. He was a student at the Faruk University,

⁵ Case Study #57 was able to remain in Egypt because she was married to a Christian Egyptian. However, she admitted having a lot of difficulty finding work in the last years because she had to reveal her maiden ‘Jewish’ surname to her prospective employers and employers were not allowed by law to employ her.

⁶ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.71.

⁷ 11 out of the 20 Ashkenazim in the sample group emigrated before 1956 compared to only 20 out of a total of 63 Sephardim.

⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.126.

in his last year of Engineering and was never involved in Zionist or communist activities. In April 1948, members of the Muslim Brothers Society tried to stop him from entering the grounds of the university on the pretext that ‘they did not want Egypt to help the enemies of Islam’. When he tried to force his way in, they physically assaulted him. The dean of the faculty, who did not want any problem with the powerful Muslim Brotherhood, worked out a compromise where the Jewish student collected his lecture notes from friends without attending classes personally. This arrangement was short-lived as, on 15 May 1948, the day Egypt and the other Arab states declared war on Israel, the authorities formally arrested him. He recalled the precise circumstances:

The guy from the secret police was there and he said: ‘the Egyptians on one side and the foreigners on the other side.’ I went towards the Egyptian side because that is what I thought I was. He said: ‘you are not an Egyptian, you are a foreigner, you are a Jew’. Until then, I had never been impressed by the arguments of the Zionists. This is when I realised that it was not going to help to try and integrate in Egypt because they were never going to accept us. That was the turning point for me. I started to study Zionism and Hebrew while I was in prison.⁹

He was subsequently interned for fifteen months with other Jewish students in the Abukir camp, 20 kilometres from Alexandria.¹⁰ Although their treatment in the hands of Egyptian authorities was fair, it was still a very traumatic experience for these young people who were never officially accused of any wrongdoings or put on trial.¹¹ The only way to be released was to agree to leave Egypt immediately and forever.¹² Paradoxically, during his time in prison, this particular respondent together with other students in the same predicament, appealed to the Prime Minister of Egypt, al-Nuqrashi Pasha - the same one who had declared repeatedly to the British Ambassador in Egypt that ‘all Jews were potential Zionists but that anyhow all Zionists were Communists’- to allow them to sit for their final examinations. Strangely enough, they were granted permission to do so, albeit separately from the rest of the

⁹ One of my contacts in Israel was also interned in the Abukir camp at the same period as Respondent #46. He recalled that, while in prison, this particular respondent, from a totally anti-Zionist stand, turned into a fervent Zionist and migrated to Israel when he was released. Six years later, due to family pressure, he left for Australia, and settled at first in Hobart before moving to Melbourne.

¹⁰ It was an old British air force military camp with hangars where the internees were lodged during the summer and then transferred to wooden shacks in winter.

¹¹ My respondent described the Abukir prison more ‘like a holiday camp’. By bribing the camp officials, the detainees were allowed to cook their own food, and received regular visits from family and friends as well as food parcels.

¹² Krämer in *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.211, stated that ‘on the night of 15 May, “for reasons of public security related to the present situation,” hundreds of Zionists and communists, mainly Jews, were arrested...Between July 1949 and February 1950, the Zionists and most of the communists who had been interned over the preceding months were released ...The foreign nationals and stateless persons among them were expelled from Egypt’.

student body. The respondent recalled that his diploma was delivered to him in the internment camp together with a signed picture from the King, in recognition for his outstanding performance in the examination. ‘This was Egypt, it couldn’t have happened anywhere else’, remarked this respondent. Eventually, the covert efforts of the Jewish Agency and Mossad Le’Aliya helped secure his release from prison together with other detainees and organised immediate travel arrangements to Israel through Naples.¹³

To further illustrate the random nature of these arrests, the next example was a case of mistaken identity. Interviewee #35 was put under house arrest and given one month to leave the country, because he was mistaken for a Zionist activist bearing the same name. The third case was the Rabbi of the Port Said community, arrested as a suspected Zionist sympathiser, held in solitary confinement for forty-four days then shipped out with his family.¹⁴ One could be arrested just for a perceived empathy with the enemy.

Other respondents reported they felt threatened by the anti-British street demonstrations because as one said, ‘invariably, at the end, they turned anti-Jewish’.¹⁵ Often it was the sudden and unjustified arrest of a brother or an uncle that galvanised them into leaving as testified by this interviewee:

We could see our stay in Egypt was coming to an end. My cousin M. [who used to do land valuations] had been arrested because the police had found maps of the farms he was supposed to value and thought they had a Zionist spy on their hands.¹⁶

Apart from the fear of being arrested, the Jews also had to contend with daily harassment in the street. One respondent claimed he was beaten up twice by a group of young Egyptians and treated to a variety of insults both as a Jew and as a foreigner. In 1951, he decided that ‘enough was enough’. He obtained some information about Australia from the Australian

¹³ The work of these two organisations was amply documented by Laskier in *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.164-83.

¹⁴ Case Study #80, who was only ten years old when her father was arrested, has never forgotten how the whole family was waiting on the boat for his liberation. They proceeded to Singapore where the Jewish community needed a rabbi.

¹⁵ Case Study #43 said he remembered the anti-Jewish riots of 1929 when he saw his father take a pistol and put it in his pocket. Laskier, in *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.18-9, wrote about the anti-Zionist riots of April and May 1938, when ‘Muslim youth paraded through Cairo’s and Alexandria’s centres, shouting, “Down with the Jews” and “Throw the Jews out of Egypt and Palestine”’.

¹⁶ Case Study #43, as a British subject, had served in the British Army in Cairo during the war. He chose Australia because he wanted to be as far as possible from the Middle East.

Ambassador at the time, Sir Roden Cutler, bought his ticket and landed in Sydney in September 1951.¹⁷

The growing climate of distrust towards the Jewish population was another disquieting feature. The Jewish families, who lived too close to so-called sensitive areas, were ‘advised’ to move. Needless to say, they could not disregard the so-called advice. Such was the case of one informant who reported that after 1948, the family were forced out of their apartment because it was considered too close to the royal Palace of Abdin in Cairo, where King Faruk resided.¹⁸

Another debilitating measure imposed on a number of Jews after the 1948 War was the government sequestration of their assets, as explained by Laskier:

On 30 May [1948] Proclamation N26 subjected to sequestration the property of any person who was interned in Egypt and of anyone residing outside Egypt whose activities were deemed “prejudicial to the safety and security of the state as well as of those who had merely been placed under surveillance”. Since there was no legal barrier to placing people “under surveillance”, the proclamation could be, and was, applied indiscriminately.¹⁹

Considering the fact that the government targeted the business assets and properties of ‘the most celebrated figures of Egyptian society and of Jewish communal life’, it is difficult to believe that the motivation for this proclamation was purely a question of security.²⁰ In fact, Respondent #20 whose father, an Egyptian national, was ‘one of the pillars of the textile industry in Egypt’ as well as the Vice-President of the Cairo Jewish community, attested that, around 1949, the government unilaterally sequestered everything the family owned and their apartment was seized. At the same time, her brother, who had a key position with a foreign company, found himself barred from his office. There was no other avenue left for them than to leave the country for good.²¹ Another interviewee whose family owned a very successful bullion business related that, in 1952, while his parents were travelling overseas for business, their work premises, properties and bank accounts were seized, without prior warning. A

¹⁷ Case Study #79 was British and did not need a landing permit for Australia in those days. Earlier on, his brother had been arrested in 1948 as a Zionist, although he was more of a Communist, and, since the family had British nationality, had been deported to England. The whole issue of identity in relation to the Jews of Egypt seems to be encapsulated in that one case: Jewish, second generation Egyptian-born, in possession of a British passport, arrested being a Zionist when he was really a Communist.

¹⁸ Case Study #83.

¹⁹ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p. 126.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²¹ Case Study # 20.

warrant was issued for his father's arrest, charging him with tax evasion while other members of the family were imprisoned.²² His father never returned to Egypt and lost everything he owned.

Before examining the aftermath of the Suez War in 1956, I also looked at the impact caused by the Cairo fire on 'Black Saturday', 26 January 1952, a seminal event in modern Egyptian history.²³ Contrary to the other three 'trigger' events, the Arab-Israeli wars, this was an internal matter, a so-called 'spontaneous' uprising against the hated British and their indiscriminate killing of 40 policemen, and the corruption and mendacity of King Faruk's rule. Although it was not directly aimed at the Jews, the excesses and the violence displayed on that day seem to have shaken the community to its core, and according to the testimonies of my Cairene informants, played a significant role in their decision to leave the country more or less urgently. This is how one respondent recalled that day:

I witnessed many demonstrations and riots because we lived in the centre of Cairo. The one that is the most vivid in my mind is when they burned Cairo down in 1952. They were burning people alive. We could see the Shell building from the back of our flat and we could see the people being torched alive as they were trying to get out of the building. I was terrified.²⁴

A second respondent was so traumatised to see the frenzied mob, totally out of control, burning and looting systematically every symbol of Western presence, in particular British and Jewish, that he decided there and then to leave Egypt immediately. One week later, he was in Italy with his son.²⁵ Another informant who worked for the British Institute in Cairo was luckily away from his office on that day, as the whole building was torched and a lot of people were hurt.²⁶ Although he had already been considering leaving Egypt since 1947, this particular event caused him to hasten his preparations and he left the country within a few months.

Even for the respondents who did not witness those nightmarish scenes of January 1952, their significance was compounded when they were followed in July of the same year by the Free Officers coup that overthrew the ailing monarchy of King Faruk. A climate of uncertainty and fear generated first by the violence in Cairo and by the change of regime permeated the

²² Testimony of a Karaite Jew in San Francisco (#22 USA).

²³ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, pp. 219-20. Beinun, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.48.

²⁴ Case Study #22.

²⁵ Case Study #47.

²⁶ Case Study #63.

Jewish community. The rise of Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser as the new leader in 1954 consolidated those fears even deeper, which, according to Beinín, was understandable:

There were good reasons for Jews to be alarmed when a group of unknown army officers overthrew the monarchy and seized power on July 23, 1952. The army had no social or political links to the Jewish community.²⁷

The Suez War of 1956

Nevertheless, as already stated, it was the tripartite attack of Britain, France and Israel on 29 October 1956 that sealed the fate of the Jews in Egypt. Harsh measures taken by the military government in retaliation to this attack ‘directly and radically affected the rights, status, and very existence of many Jews in Egypt’.²⁸ They were subjected to arbitrary police detention, sequestration of their businesses and assets, expulsion from the country and denaturalisation. The oral history testimonies of my interviewees reflected very closely the reality on the ground. Fifty-seven of my respondents - 63% - left the country from 1956 onwards. I estimated that 23 (42%) were forced out amongst whom 12 were actually expelled after being interned or kept under house arrest.²⁹ The rest emigrated so-called ‘voluntarily’, although the distinction between the two categories was often blurred. Their motivation was either the fear of repercussions from the political situation or the realisation that Jews had no place in the new Egypt. One can safely assume that in fact the Jews of Egypt faced forced emigration.

As enemies of the state, the British and the French were immediately expelled. Amongst the Jews, those who were French or British nationals were doubly targeted for expulsion and sequestration by the authorities. They accounted for 14% of the sample group. The story as related by British Respondent #4, expressed the fear and disarray felt at the time:

The expulsion of the French and the British started. As a British subject, my mother was expelled, her shop seized and she had to leave within three days with only E£10. I was also expelled and was supposed to leave without my family but was saved by the Dutch Consulate who gave me a false passport declaring I was Dutch since my

²⁷ Beinín, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.85.

²⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.253.

²⁹ Only the men in the sample group actually spent time in prison. I have not personally encountered either in Australia or overseas any instance of a Jewish woman being imprisoned as a result of the state of emergency during the Suez War. However, according to a report from the American Jewish Committee, and picked up by Laskier, in *The Jews of Egypt*, p. 254, out of about 900 Jews who had been arrested in November 7, 1956, and kept in different locations, ‘another forty-two Jews were detained, most of them women, many of them aged’ at the Abraham B’tesh Jewish school in Heliopolis.

marriage. It was a very difficult time. We were living in fear of our servants who were brainwashed every day, during their prayers at the mosque or by loudspeakers in the streets. They were coming back to work with hate in their eyes. I remember walking along the streets and hearing some Arabs yelling ‘we will cut your throat’.

The general procedure was for the authorities to detain one member of each British or French Jewish family and then issue an order of immediate expulsion for all the family. The prisoner would be released on the condition he would leave the country immediately and was brought directly to the ship to join his family. Such was the case of the fiancé of Respondent #51 who was arrested for being British and Jewish and imprisoned for a month before being deported to Britain. At the same time, the family business was sequestrated and all the rest of his family left with nothing except for their clothing and the allowed sum of E£10 per person.³⁰

The six French nationals in the group reported they were immediately served with expulsion orders after being kept under house arrest. House arrest meant no communication with the outside, therefore they were not allowed to have a radio or use the telephone.³¹ Deliberate intimidation and bullying was also used to further demoralise them. ‘The doors had to remain wide open. We had no right to close them and anyone could come in and take anything they wanted’, recalled one respondent who, together with her parents, husband and one week-old child, was given notice to leave the country within three days.³² On the other hand, it seems that the strict enforcement of the expulsion orders varied from case to case. Interviewee #9, who had been under house arrest for over two weeks, was given 24 hours to leave the country after being woken up at midnight and taken to the police station with her husband and baby. Her husband pleaded and managed to obtain an extension on health grounds, but the rest of the family was not granted any such reprieve.³³ As with the British nationals, the business and personal assets of all the expelled French nationals were sequestrated under Military Proclamation No.5, and they left the country with little else than their clothes.³⁴ It is important to note that these measures particularly affected the British and French Jews since

³⁰ The Egyptian pound (E£) was equivalent to one pound sterling (£Stg)

³¹ Laskier, in *The Jews of Egypt*, p. 254, confirmed that Jewish families were held in confinement at their homes, ‘under surveillance by building concierges invested with police authority to control Jewish tenants under confinements’.

³² Case Study #69.

³³ In spite of that reprieve, the whole episode was very distressful for this interviewee. When the hostilities had first erupted, the whole family had left their apartment, to avoid a repetition of what happened to them during the 1952 Cairo fire, when the insurgents torched the building and her parents had to flee from the roof top. This time, they had taken refuge at the home of relatives when they heard ‘a radio announcement that anybody harbouring French or British citizens would be considered an enemy of the state.’ Not wishing to endanger the relatives, they decided to go back home, where they were put under house arrest.

³⁴ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.254.

they were not true expatriates whose permanent home and assets would have been in their mother country. Their home was Egypt and in most cases, those Jews had never set foot on French or British soil except maybe on holiday. Everything they owned or built, whether on a large or modest scale, physically and metaphorically, was rooted in that country. When they were forced out of their familiar surroundings, they experienced not only the material loss of their possessions but also the emotional loss of the only home they knew.

It is self-evident that, in the context of the Suez crisis, the Zionists, real or imagined, would bear the brunt of the emergency laws. Although the percentage of active Zionists within the Australian group was very low (13%) – which reflected more or less the situation in Egypt – one of them, (#24), a Greek national, was arrested by the *mukhabarat* – the Egyptian secret police - on charges of espionage for Israel because of his past activities in Zionist youth organisations. His brother was also arrested for good measure and they were both kept at the infamous Tura prison in Cairo together with common criminals.³⁵ As the authorities did not have enough evidence to convict them, and upon intervention from the Greek Consulate, the two brothers were taken from prison straight onto a ship bound for Greece and had to remain handcuffed until the ship was out of Egyptian territorial waters. Furthermore, any connection with known Zionist activists, however tenuous, was considered suspect and acted upon. Such was the case of a doctor who was arrested and interned for months at the Huckstep prison near Cairo, just because he used to work in the same hospital as Moshe (Mussa) Marzuk, the Karaite Jew, hung in 1954 for his part in a conspiracy to commit acts of sabotage on behalf of Israel.³⁶ Again, no charges were laid but the doctor and his wife and child were issued with an immediate expulsion order. The Suez War was also a wake-up call for the Karaites of Egypt. Beinon claimed that 40 percent of them departed between October 1956 and March 1957, although there were still one thousand Karaites in October 1966, out of an overall Jewish population of about seven thousand on the eve of the 6-Day War.³⁷

³⁵ The common procedure was for the secret police to arrest any male member of the family, when they could not find the particular one they were looking for.

³⁶ Case Study #11. Dr. Marzuk was one of the thirteen conspirators involved in *Operation Susannah* or ‘*The Mishap*’. Eleven were arrested. Dr. Moshe Marzuk and Shmuel (Sammy) Azar were the only ones condemned to death. See Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, pp.205-48.

³⁷ Beinon, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, pp.181-203. His estimate of 7,000 Jews seems to be based on the work of Mourad El-Kodsi, *The Karaite Jews of Egypt, 1882-1986*, Lyons, N.Y.: Wilprint, 1987. Laskier, in *The Jews of Egypt*, p.290, quoted a much smaller number: ‘Egypt’s defeat in 1967 created problems for the remaining twenty-five hundred Egyptian Jews.’ See also Tad Szulc, *The Secret Alliance - The Extraordinary Story of the Rescue of the Jews Since World War II*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1991, pp.280-3, where it was stated that: ‘In 1967, at the start of the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War, the Egyptian government imprisoned

The French, the British and the Zionists were not the only besieged groups. Egyptian and stateless Jews as well as Jews of other nationalities were also targeted and saw their properties and businesses seized under Military Proclamation No.4.³⁸ It was very clear that the largest and most important Jewish-owned ventures were the prime objectives of the sequestration policy. I have identified seven such cases out of the 57 respondents who left after 1956. For example, Respondent #8, an Italian national, whose well-respected and prominent family owned a large enterprise dealing with cotton ginning and export, reported that the offices were occupied by a military appointed sequester, the ginning mills seized and the bank accounts frozen unilaterally. The owners were barred access to their premises and finally expelled from the country within a few days with nothing except a few suitcases of clothing. The husband of Respondent #10, an Egyptian national who was very well connected to people in government, was manufacturing and supplying uniforms for the Egyptian army. His privileged connections did not prevent him from being eventually arrested, his business sequestrated and subsequently nationalised. The couple was forced to leave the country with only a few of their personal belongings, having lost everything:

*La fabrique a été nationalisée, la maison séquestrée. Tous les meubles ont été notés. Nous n'avons rien pu vendre. Nous avons quitté la maison avec juste quelques valises avec nos habits.*³⁹

Respondent #19, of Spanish nationality, reported that he was working in the family business, an important enterprise manufacturing concrete pipes when it was nationalised after two of the co-directors were arrested on trumped up charges of espionage. He consequently lost his job and had to leave the country, as by that time nobody would employ a Jew.

It is clear from these examples, that neither being a foreign national nor an Egyptian national, guaranteed Jews immunity from harassment, sequestration or expulsion. The situation was even more precarious for stateless Jews, as noted by Laskier:

It is estimated that as early as the end of November 1956, at least five hundred Egyptian and stateless Jews had been expelled from Egypt...Because in most cases the individual

approximately 500 Egyptian Jewish males between the ages of eighteen and fifty-three. They belonged to a Jewish enclave of some 2,500 people...?.

³⁸ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.255.

³⁹ His surviving wife recalled that they were forced to renounce their Egyptian nationality and left the country as stateless.

served with a deportation order was responsible for supporting his family, all members of the family had to leave the country.⁴⁰

Within this study, the stateless refugees represented about a third of the total group. They equally attributed their departure to expulsion, loss of livelihood and a hostile environment. They also experienced the erratic enforcement of the emergency laws. For instance, the son of Interviewee #1, whose application to the University of Montpellier in France had been intercepted by the government censor, was expelled within a week for corresponding with an enemy of the state. Another informant, who thought he had nothing to worry about, was suddenly ordered to leave the country, maybe because his brother had gone to Israel a few months before. On the other hand, his father whose extensive property and assets were seized was not officially expelled.⁴¹ It is obvious that, in this case like in many others, to be expelled or to leave 'voluntarily' was a question of semantics since the individual or the family, who was left destitute, had no choice but to leave. According to Laskier, this was the result of a deliberate policy by the Egyptian authorities to get rid of its Jewish population, using 'more subtle, potent techniques of intimidation and psychological warfare against the Jewish population as a whole', as well as a 'simultaneous economic harassment of Jews'.⁴²

It stands to reason that the closure of major Jewish, French and British owned businesses meant the loss of jobs for a large section of the Jewish community even if they did not suffer directly from expropriation or expulsion. For instance, Respondent #1 recalled that her husband, as the accountant of a large French company whose Jewish managing director had been expelled, was ordered to stay at his post until he had shown all the financial records to the military administrator. As soon as his work was completed, his employment was terminated. Without a job or a possibility to find another one, he applied for a landing permit to Canada, sponsored by his sister, who had emigrated straight after World War II. Other respondents recalled they were just asked not to come to work anymore, without any explanation given, although they guessed the true reason: 'We were stateless. We had to leave Egypt because my husband was fired from his job like all the Jews'.⁴³

Furthermore, many Jews in private enterprise were prevented from conducting their business efficiently because of continual obstructions created by arbitrary government regulations. As

⁴⁰ Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p.256.

⁴¹ Case Study #7.

⁴² Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, p. 256.

⁴³ Case Study # 40.

a result, they had to close down or relinquish their share of the business to Muslim Egyptians for next to nothing. This state of affairs was again corroborated by my oral history testimonies. For instance, one respondent, who had been running a prosperous customs agency for years without any restriction, suddenly found himself barred from entering the Egyptian customs area because it had been declared out of bounds for Jews. Since he could not continue working under those conditions, he had to close down and found himself deprived of his livelihood. Until that time, he had never considered leaving Egypt.⁴⁴

While it is true that not all Jews were expelled or stripped of their property or even made jobless, all my informants testified to the atmosphere of panic that overtook Egyptian Jewry in the days and months following the Suez War:

The people in Cairo were in such a panic. Every time I went to my shop, I noticed that all my [Jewish] neighbours who had shops were leaving one by one, going all over the world. We used to meet in my house with friends, we would look at the map and one would say, 'I am going to the Belgian Congo', another one, 'I am going to Argentina'. They all had different destinations. I decided to come to Australia.⁴⁵

The scenes at the offices of the Jewish community, both in Cairo and Alexandria, at various consulates, embassies and travel agencies, were, in a way, reminiscent of the pictures of the Jews of Germany trying desperately to flee after the events of Kristallnacht in November 1938, although there was no comparison whatsoever with the extent of violence experienced by the German Jewish community during the Nazi pogrom.

The fact that the government was engaged more or less overtly in a policy of 'encouraging' Jewish emigration did not mean that the Jews were free to pack their bags and go. They first had to obtain exit visas which were equally compulsory for foreigners, Egyptian and stateless Jews. Those who were Egyptian nationals were stripped of their nationality once they applied for an exit visa.⁴⁶ They had to leave the country as stateless with a *laissez passer* marked as valid for only one one-way trip, '*valable pour un seul voyage sans retour*'.⁴⁷ The procedure to obtain those visas was often capricious, time-consuming, and onerous as public servants

⁴⁴ Case Study #90.

⁴⁵ Case Study #7.

⁴⁶ Case Study #10: *Nous sommes partis en tant qu'apatrides bien que mon mari était Egyptien. Il a du renoncer à sa nationalité.*

⁴⁷ Respondent #72 had still in his possession a copy of that document, with the inscription in French and Arabic.

were notorious for their venality.⁴⁸ The experience of the next informant encapsulated the general feelings of exasperation, frustration and panic:

I was stateless. I had to go to the authorities to obtain an exit visa. They gave me a visa but said that my son, a newly born baby, had to stay back because he was born in Egypt, therefore he was Egyptian. I took my son and went to the offices of the Red Cross and told them I wouldn't move until they got me an exit visa. There were thousands of other women in the same predicament. The Red Cross eventually obtained permission for us to leave. It was the worst time in my life. I left in a great hurry and I didn't take anything with me.⁴⁹

As a matter of fact, most of the respondents who left at that time said that, according to regulation, they were only allowed to take their personal belongings such as clothes and household linen plus E£10 or E£20 and E£50 worth of gold per person.⁵⁰ They had to dispose of all their bigger possessions such as furniture, cars, and household goods, at prices well below their true value. Profiteering was rife in those desperate circumstances. Often, the Jews just closed their doors and departed, leaving everything behind.⁵¹ One particular informant said 'I didn't get one penny for my house. I had to give everything away. I left without telling anybody.' When he tried to sell his car, he had to reveal his religion to the prospective buyer, who then proceeded to pay him a quarter of what he was asking.⁵²

Once they reached the point of departure, which was usually the port of Alexandria or the airport in Cairo, the customs inspectors were ruthless in their searches and confiscated arbitrarily any items considered to be too valuable and my respondents recalled the humiliating body searches they had to endure, particularly in the period immediately following the outbreak of the Suez War.⁵³ Here is what Respondent #65 remembered:

We had to pack in six days. We were putting boxes after boxes in the basement for my uncle to take care of. The porter saw what was happening and although we had given him money to appease him, he denounced my mother to the authorities, saying that she was putting diamonds in the suitcases. The day that we left, we just closed the house as

⁴⁸ Beinun, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.73.

⁴⁹ Case Study #40.

⁵⁰ Some stated they were allowed to take £20 per person.

⁵¹ Respondent #21 who was thirteen at the time, came from a very affluent family. The family owned a jewellery shop and she remembered vividly the day of her departure: 'we closed the door of the apartment and left it as is. The shop was also left. I didn't even know we were going on that day. My mother didn't trust me.'

⁵² Case Study #37.

⁵³ There were several such cases, #1, #65, #90, including myself.

if we were coming back. Our ship was delayed because we were all bodily searched. They didn't find anything and finally they let us aboard.⁵⁴

A handful of interviewees reluctantly revealed, that they were so desperate at the idea of leaving the country empty-handed that they took the huge risk of smuggling out some money, either personally or through the black market by conceding a hefty percentage.⁵⁵ 'I converted all my money in gold ingots', said one informant, 'my brother made some wooden boxes with a double cavity big enough to fit the gold. I bribed a guy £50 to look after our luggage.' If caught, they would have faced years in prison. In some cases, they entrusted small amounts to Egyptian friends who arranged somehow for the money to reach them once they were on board, without exacting a share of that money. Respondent #8 recalled a particularly colourful and touching episode. His father, who, together with his brothers, was at the head of a very large cotton trading company, had been expropriated and expelled with his whole family although they were Italian nationals. Since his bank account was frozen, he had managed to gather about E£800 from the sale of personal items. He entrusted that amount to one of his most loyal Egyptian employees, who promised to pass it on to him just before the ship boarded. However, nothing happened and my respondent's father thought all was lost. The ship's gangway was being removed when that man ran up to the ship, sobbing and screaming, to hug his boss one last time. In the ensuing confusion, he managed to slip into his boss's pocket the money that had been entrusted to him.⁵⁶ Another interviewee reported that all his mother's jewels were passed through customs clandestinely by an Egyptian friend and mysteriously delivered directly to his cabin on the ship.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, these cases were more the exception than the rule and taking into account all the testimonies, it is fair to say that most of the respondents were more or less forced 'Out of Egypt' – as per the title of André Aciman's colourful memoir - with little more than a few suitcases full of clothes.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ This was just one case #65 but there were many others.

⁵⁵ Respondent #14 said he transferred his money to Switzerland through the black market, at the rate of 87 piastres per US\$ when the official rate was 24.

⁵⁶ Case Study #8.

⁵⁷ Case Study #81.

⁵⁸ André Aciman, *Out of Egypt*, Canada: HarperCollins, 1994. Aciman was born in Alexandria. He is currently Professor of French literature at Princeton.

The last trigger event: the 1967 War

In the interim years between 1956 and 1967, Jews were increasingly pushed out of the workforce and the private sector was eliminated through a campaign of widespread nationalisation. The Jewish community gradually lost all of its prominent members who had previously held positions of leadership in the various Jewish institutions. The few respondents who stayed on after 1956 till the early 1960s did so mainly for economic reasons. They claimed they were still making a good living from their on-going businesses and were reluctant to leave the country empty-handed. For instance, the family of Participant #14, owned an upmarket lingerie shop that used to supply the Queen Narriman, King Faruk's second wife. Their business had somehow escaped the various waves of sequestrations and nationalisation, but my respondent feared for his children:

I wanted to leave since 1948. One had to think of the children and their future but my brothers were very comfortable, they had the shop, they owned buildings and they didn't want to budge. So we left without them in 1962.⁵⁹

The consequences of the Six-Day War in 1967 for the remaining Jews in Egypt proved to be catastrophic. As previously mentioned, at least 425 Jewish males between the age of 18 and 53 were rounded up as soon as the war started. The seventy-five who were foreign nationals were taken from prison directly on board a ship to be deported. However, the Egyptian and stateless Jews remained in prison, some for over three years and were only released upon intervention from foreign governments and international agencies. As already mentioned, it was mainly thanks to HIAS' 'secret diplomacy', the unpublicised cooperation of the Spanish government and the vital role played by Spain's ambassador in Cairo, Angel Sagaz, that all the Jewish prisoners were eventually freed and allowed to leave Egypt.⁶⁰

None of my Australian interviewees experienced these events personally as they had already left Egypt by 1963, with the exception of Interviewee #57 who was married to a Syrian Christian and thus remained in Egypt until 1970. Although she was not particularly targeted during the Six-Day War, she confirmed that the living conditions for all non-Muslim Egyptians gravely deteriorated after 1967. For instance, she was often threatened with dismissal in her work place because of her typically Jewish maiden name, which, by law, had to appear on all her identity papers.

⁵⁹ Case study #14.

⁶⁰ Szulc, *The Secret Alliance*, pp.280-3.

The only first hand testimony of someone who remained in Egypt until 1967 was obtained from an informant in England, an Italian national, who stayed behind for economic reasons. He was arrested in June 1967 and spent six traumatic months in prison before being expelled. He witnessed some horrific incidents but he claimed they were caused by the sadistic and brutal initiatives of the prison guards rather than by official directives from the Egyptian government regarding the treatment of its prisoners.

The scarcity of testimonies post 1967 is proof enough of the fact that the Jewish presence in Egypt had already declined dramatically by 1967 and continued its downward trend until today, when it has been reduced to about 100 old people, mostly women.⁶¹ After twenty-five centuries of continuous history, Jewish life in Egypt has shrunk to such an extent that the few remaining Jews cannot even form a *minyan* or quorum of ten male Jews, which is the minimal number required to conduct the traditional service in the two remaining synagogues of Cairo and Alexandria.

Through the testimonies of my respondents, I have tried to establish that they were truly representative of their community before their forced emigration and dispersion. Like the bulk of Egyptian Jewry, they had led a tranquil and privileged life under the protection of the foreign powers. Until 1948, Egypt was considered home by most of them, although some were already feeling a mounting tension since 1937 with the abolition of the foreign nationals' privileges status, the rise of a new brand of exclusive pan-Arab and Islamic nationalism and the escalating conflict in Palestine. In the space of less than twenty years, triggered by each war between Israel and Egypt, Egypt was emptied of its Jews, a population mostly middle class, whose dominant characteristics were its ethnic, religious, cultural and national pluralism, its Western-style education and its multiple language skills. How did they fare 'Out of Egypt'? How prepared were they for their new lives? Apart from Israel, who took them in and why? Why Australia? The next section of my work will examine the transit period when my interviewees suddenly became refugees looking for a new home, and the many challenges they had to face before they settled down at 'the Edge of the Diaspora'.

⁶¹ The gender component of the remaining Jewish community contributed to the surprise election of Esther Weinstein, the first woman president of the Jewish Community of Cairo (JCC) at an impromptu meeting of the board of the Adly Street synagogue in 1996, when a unanimous motion was passed 'allowing women on the board of directors for the first time in the history of the 1,000 year-old community'. This event was reported both in *The Egyptian Gazette* by Samir Raafat, August 23, 1996 and in the JCC Newsletter, *Bassatine News*, Volume 1, Issue 3, September 1996.

CHAPTER VII:

A Journey to the 'Edge of the Diaspora'

The composition and socio-economic characteristics of the Australian participants in this study has just been profiled. By examining their immigration experience, I have sought to present a picture of the 'Jews from Egypt' as a migrant group and demonstrate how my informants' cosmopolitan and multicultural background contributed to their successful integration into Australia, both at a personal and communal level.

It has been established that the three successive wars between Egypt and Israel, and the repercussions upon Egyptian Jewry ranging from imprisonment, sequestration, house arrest, expulsion, freezing of assets, denaturalisation and various other intimidation measures, triggered an authentic, panic stricken second 'Exodus' type emigration which permeated the whole community and brought about its self-liquidation. According to established statistics, out of a population of about 80,000 Jews before 1948, nearly half – 47.5 % - migrated to Israel.¹ The rest chose other destinations such as Brazil, France, the United States, Argentina, England, Canada and even Australia.²

Egyptian Jews migrated to Australia mainly in the wake of the first two trigger events, the 1948 War and the 1956 Suez War. They were not numerous and their small number could be attributed to a number of basic elements about Australia such as the fear of the unknown, the geographical distance and the ensuing higher cost of transportation compared to other more accessible destinations, the culture and, most importantly, the restrictions inherent to the Australian immigration policy. Immigration to Brazil, for instance, was not restricted by a quota system, particularly under the presidency of Juscelino Kubitschek (1956-1961), as was

¹ Israel Ministry of Immigration, *National Statistics*, 2002, indicated a total figure of 37,597 migrants of Egyptian extraction, between 1948 and 2001, which represented 47.5 % of the total Jewish population of Egypt of 80,000. Israel received 16,024 migrants between 1948 and 1951 and 20,484 between 1952 and 1971 and the last trickle from 1971 onwards.

² According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1971, the figures relating to the distribution of that emigration, were, apart from Israel, 15,000 in Brazil, 10,000 in France, 9,000 in the United States, 9,000 in Argentina and 4,000 in Great Britain.

the case for the United States and Australia.³ According to the research of Ruth Leftel on the Egyptian/Sephardi community of Sao Paulo, the Brazilian Embassy in Cairo received instructions not to limit the number of visas issued to Egyptian Jews.⁴ Since Brazil was not involved in the confrontation between Egypt and her enemies, the immigration formalities were conducted in Egypt. The Embassy was instructed to process visa applications gradually, at a rate that would allow the establishment of the necessary infrastructure to accommodate the refugees.⁵ The approval rate for migrants' applications was further facilitated in cases where the head of the family had a profession and for applicants with family already settled in Brazil.⁶ In cases of hardship, HIAS or the Brazilian Jewish community compiled lists of people who wished to immigrate and forwarded those lists, already bearing a permanent visa authorisation, to the Brazilian officials in Egypt. This *modus operandi* was particularly helpful for stateless applicants. A local doctor, recommended by the Brazilian consulate, conducted the medical screening in Egypt. The only exclusions concerned applicants suffering from certain conditions like trachoma, an eye disease that is endemic to Egypt.⁷ As one would expect, a clean police record was also obligatory and applicants had to prove they were never engaged in unlawful, meaning communist, political activities.

On the other hand, Australia's immigration policy in the late 1940s and 1950s was not particularly welcoming of migrants from the Middle East. In fact, as a general rule, during the first 150 years of Australian colonisation, the only immigration that was encouraged was from English-speaking countries such as the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Canada and the United States. Migrants of Nordic and Germanic origins were considered exceptions to the rule as they were considered part of the Anglo-Celtic race. As a renowned scholar on Australian migration, James Jupp, stated, 'the ideal type of an Australian was of English culture and Nordic racial origin.'⁸ My research in government archives of the late 1940s unabashedly revealed, through the exchange of correspondence between immigration officers in Europe and ministers in Canberra, the ugly face of the so-called 'White Australia Policy'.

³ The exceptional open immigration policy of Brazil was noted at a meeting of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society (AJWS) in Sydney in 5 May 1957 where it was said: 'Egyptians .. were not allowed to enter any country except Brazil, who accepted these Jews without question.'

⁴ Ruth Leftel, 'A comunidade sefaradita egipcia de São Paulo', PhD Thesis, History, University of São Paulo, May 1997.

⁵ See also Joëlle Rouchou, 'Nuits d'été au parfum de jasmin: Souvenirs des Juifs d'Égypte à Rio de Janeiro – 1956/7', PhD thesis, University of São Paulo, 2003, pp.83-6.

⁶ Oral testimony from respondents who migrated to Brazil in 1957.

⁷ Egypt suffers from hyperendemic trachoma, which is the leading cause of preventable blindness. It is one of the oldest infectious diseases known to mankind and was first documented as early as the Pharaonic era in Egypt.

⁸ James Jupp, *Immigration*, Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1991, p.69.

The White Australia Policy was the backbone of the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901, the first year of Australia's federation. It was central to the government's aim of building a white British Australia from which all other racial groups would be excluded, although it was never spelled out in so many words. As stated in *Old Worlds and New Australia*, by Janis Wilton and Richard Bosworth, 'any sense of special identity that Australians possessed had largely sprung from a belief – and fear – that they were the “white guard” keeping the pass against a hostile world.'⁹

With the use of practices such as the infamous 'dictation test', this policy was 'almost completely effective between the 1890s and the 1960s as a form of immigrant exclusion'.¹⁰ It granted immigration officers all the necessary powers to admit or to exclude anybody because of their physical appearance or on any other basis.

It was a post-Second World War Labour government that introduced for the first time a radical program of non-British immigration based on the idea that, in order to resist invasion from Asia, Australia must 'populate or perish'. The landing permit system, interrupted during the war, was resumed and immigration officers went looking for suitable migrants in the DPs camps of Europe. For Jewish survivors in those camps, there was an initial period of optimism.¹¹ However, due to Australian isolationist attitudes, fear of economic competition, shortage of housing, and surfacing of antisemitic feelings, a negative reaction to Jewish refugees manifested itself in the media and amongst some elements of the general population. As a consequence, in 1946, Arthur A. Calwell, the first Minister for Immigration, imposed a quota system 'which limited the number of Jews permitted to travel on any boat to 25 per cent'.¹² Calwell also introduced other policies to limit the number of European Jews to travel

⁹ Janis Wilton and Richard Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia*, p.2.

¹⁰ Jupp, *Immigration*, p.48, explained how the dictation test was used to exclude any undesirable while avoiding the mention of race: 'the dictation test, which was incorporated in the Commonwealth Act of 1901, was discretionary and could thus be used for anyone. [It] required any intending immigrant to pass a written test, originally in “any European language”. However, the language did not need to be one understood by the immigrant. For instance, the dictation test was used in 1934 to prevent the Czech-Jewish socialist writer, Egon Kisch, from landing in Australia because of his political views. As he was fluent in several European languages, he was given a test in Sydney in Scottish Gaelic and failed. He appealed and the High Court ruled that Scottish Gaelic was not a European language and he was able to tour Australia. His story was featured at the Centenary of Federation Exhibition, “Belonging: a Century Celebrated” at the State Library of NSW in Sydney, January 2001. Kisch came to Australia for an anti-war conference and because of his agenda was prohibited from landing in Melbourne. It is clear that the dictation test was used to justify exclusion rather than to ascertain whether immigrants were literate. The dictation test continued to be implemented whenever it was deemed necessary until its abolition by the *Migration Act* of 1958.

¹¹ Rutland, *The Edge of the Diaspora*, pp.225-256.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.233.

to Australia in the post-war era and immigration records of the post-war period continued to show evidence of an exclusionist policy on the basis of race.¹³

To ensure that no undesirables would slip through the net, the official instructions were to refuse permanent residency to British subjects as well as aliens who were not of 'pure European descent', an obvious euphemism for 'white'.¹⁴ This ruling targeted specifically the applications of British subjects whose ethnic origin was India or Singapore. Following a 1948 report that large numbers of Indian Jews who wished to immigrate were non-European in appearance¹⁵, the Calwell ministry decided to prohibit entry to Australia to all Jews of Middle Eastern origin except under special circumstances.¹⁶ Applicants had to declare on their immigration application Form 40, whether or not they were Jewish.¹⁷ No other religion was indicated on that form. Although the question was deleted in 1954 after the leaders of Australian Jewry registered their protest, the immigration officers were still under instructions to try and determine during the interview if the applicant was of the Jewish faith. Calwell's immigration policies continued to be implemented by Robert Menzies' Liberal government, with Harold Holt as Minister for Immigration from 1949 to 1956. Aaron Aaron, one of the founding members of the New South Wales Association of Sephardim, who migrated to Sydney from Calcutta in 1950, related to me, during an interview, how he fought the Australian government for two years to get his wife and children to join him from Calcutta.¹⁸

¹³ In 1948, Calwell extended that quota to the Jewish refugees arriving by plane; he limited the intake of Jews from Shanghai in 1947 and introduced the 'Iron Curtain Embargo in December 1949, 'which effectively excluded Jews who originated from countries under Soviet rule'. See Rutland, 'Subtle Exclusions: Postwar Jewish Emigration to Australia and the Impact of the IRO', *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, Issue 10, no.1, Summer 2001, p. 53 and 'Australian responses to Jewish refugees migration before and after World War II, *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 5, no.2, 2003.

¹⁴ National Archives of Australia A 446, Item 72/077857/72, letter from T.H.E. Heyes, Head of the Immigration Department, 20 January 1949, 236/19/2.

¹⁵ National Archives of Australia A 446, Item 72/077857/72, Minute No. 339, 15 October 1951 and letter from H.T.E. Heyes, 51/243, 22 February 1952. See also Series D4878 and D4881, the Alien Registration documentation had to indicate the race of the applicant and even more precisely whether the applicant was European or coloured.

¹⁶ Rutland, *The Edge of the Diaspora*, p. 242. See also National Archives of Australia A446, Item 72/077857/72, Consular Circular No. 51, 26 July 1954: 'In regard to Jews of Middle East origin, it has been found that a proportion of them show distinct traces of non-European origin and their admission is generally restricted to the wives and minor children of residents of Australia. Applications for the admission of this class of person, whether of British or alien nationality, should be referred, accompanied by evidence that they are at least of 75% European origin, as in the case of Eurasians who are not Jews. Signed F.H. Stuart.'

¹⁷ One of my respondents, Case study #56, obtained from the National Archives a copy of that particular document related to the application for admission to Australia of her husband's family, dated September 1954. The question 'Are you Jewish' was still included.

¹⁸ The *Sydney Jewish News* of 27 April 1956 reported on the Department of Immigration's response, regarding the rejection of applications from Sephardi Jews for admission to Australia, stating that 'if an applicant for admission is of "mixed race", it is necessary for him to be 75% European by descent, European by education, mode of living, etc., predominantly European in appearance.'

Another respondent, who landed in Australia in 1958, reported that his family had been trying to obtain a landing permit since 1951. He suggested that their application was rejected consistently until 1957 because they were Egyptian nationals and therefore considered non-Europeans although their ethnic origin was Italian and Spanish.¹⁹

Three issues needed to be addressed. Firstly, how did such an immigration policy impact on the Jewish refugees from Egypt wishing to immigrate, since in principle, they were labelled undesirable? Why did they pick faraway Australia of all places as their new home and where did they choose to settle?

Australia was no stranger to Egypt, despite the great geographical distance. Australia had been involved with the Middle East since 1914 and Australian soldiers played a key role in the British conquest of Palestine. They were also heavily involved in the defence of Egypt during World War II.²⁰ The Australian politician and diplomat, Richard G. Casey was in Cairo in 1942 as Minister Resident in the Middle East, appointed by Sir Winston Churchill.²¹ Again, in 1956, the Australian Prime Minister, Sir Robert Menzies, was personally drawn into the Suez Canal crisis. Chanan Reich, an Australian academic and political writer who has studied the relationship between Australia and Israel, noted Australia's reaction to Nasser's unilateral nationalisation of the Suez Canal in July 1956:

The Australian government felt strongly that Nasser had acted contrary to international law, and that the Canal, being vital to the security of countries including Australia, should be returned to international control with guaranteed freedom of navigation.²²

In fact, in September 1956, Menzies headed the Committee of eighteen countries sent to Egypt to negotiate with Nasser the regaining of international control of the Canal.²³ However,

¹⁹ Case Study #25.

²⁰ Some of my respondents formed personal friendships with Australian soldiers during that time.

²¹ Thomas Bruce, Millar, (ed.), *Australian Foreign Minister: the diaries of R.G. Casey, 1951-60*, London: Collins, 1972. While in Cairo, Casey (1890-1976) played a key role in the negotiations between the British and Allied governments, local leaders and the Allied commanders in the field. He was knighted in 1960 and was appointed by Menzies in 1965 as the second Australian born Governor-General after Sir Isaac Isaacs.

²² Chanan Reich, *Australia and Israel. An Ambiguous Relationship*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002, p.93. See also William James Hudson, *Blind Loyalty: Australia and the Suez Crisis, 1956*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1989, pp.29-30 where Hudson pointed out that 'From Menzies to the bloke in the corner pub', Australians' reaction to the nationalisation was deeply rooted in racial prejudice with 'a special category of contempt ... reserved for the Egyptians' based on their experience in the Middle East during World War I.

²³ National Archives of Australia ACT A1209/23 Item 57/5736 PT1: copy of official message from the Right Honourable R.G. Menzies, Prime Minister of Australia to his Excellency Gamal Abdel Nasser, president of the Republic of Egypt.

Menzies was not exactly an objective observer. On the contrary, he was a staunch supporter of the United Kingdom and 'had publicly and trenchantly damned Nasser and defended the United Kingdom's militant response to nationalization'.²⁴ Furthermore, Australia, 'as a power dependent on maritime communications', had important interests in the region, which included 'the Suez Canal as a "life line" of the Empire and of trade with Britain and Western Europe; oil; the creation and maintenance of Israel'.²⁵ Thus, an untempered use of the Canal seemed vital to Australia, since 60% of all Australian trade went through the Canal and any diversion from that route to the 1900 kilometres longer Cape of Good Hope route would have increased annual freight charges significantly.²⁶

The meeting between Menzies and Nasser was a total failure in diplomatic terms. According to Menzies' own reports to London and Canberra, he was angered with Nasser's reaction to the proposal handed to him and had even 'entered into a personal argument with Nasser, and ... Nasser had taken great offence'.²⁷ On 7 November 1956, as a consequence of the tripartite attack by Britain, France and Israel, Egypt severed diplomatic and all other relations with Australia, in retaliation for its support of Britain. The Australian Legation in Cairo was closed and the Canadian Embassy agreed to act as protecting power for Australian interests.²⁸ The Australian government was kept well informed of the situation in Egypt, post Suez, through the various reports tabled at the United Nations on this very issue. From early November, straight after the outbreak of hostilities, reports on the alarming situation of Jewish residents in Egypt started appearing regularly in the Jewish press.²⁹ Under pressure from the leaders of Australian Jewry, the government voiced a strong protest at the UN

²⁴ Hudson, *Blind Loyalty and the Suez Crisis, 1956*, p.75.

²⁵ Reich, *Australia and Israel. An Ambiguous Relationship*, p.86 & p.60.

²⁶ National Archives of Australia Series A1838/283 Item 780/6/3 PT1, file 780/6, Subject - United Kingdom and Australian interests in the Suez Canal, p.2: 'Any weakening of the United Kingdom economy as a result of the closure of the Suez Canal is a matter of serious concern for Australia, for the United Kingdom is by far Australia's best customer for her exports.'

²⁷ Hudson, *Blind Loyalty*, p. 82.

²⁸ National Archives of Australia A1838/396, Item 1500/2/15/5, Memo External Affairs Dept. 7/11/56.

²⁹ Upon arrival of some 200 Egyptian Jews in Sydney, the *Jewish News* edition of 30 November 1956, Vol. XVIII, No.13, p.1, displayed on its front page a large title 'Egypt throws out Jews' where they denounced vigorously the arrests, sequestrations and various types of harassment the Jews had been subjected to after the 1956 Suez War; on 7 December 1956, more headlines appeared in the same paper: 'Help needed for Egyptian Jews' p.2, 'Egyptian Jewry: PM asked to get UN help', Vol. XVIII, No.14, p.3; on 1 March 1957, 'Egypt's Jew Baiting', No.26, p.9; on 15 March 1957, 'Egypt destroyed Jewish Community', No. 28, p.3; on 18 October 1957, 'Quiet despoliation of Egyptian Jewry', Vol. XIX, No.4, p.1.. The arrival of one of my respondents with his wife and three daughters was reported in the *Sun-Herald*, 31 March 1957: 'A broken-hearted family, victims of Colonel Nasser, arrived in Sydney last night by air.'²⁹

General Assembly about the ill treatment that Jews as well as British and French residents were reported to endure in the hands of Egyptian authorities.³⁰

Was there a direct correlation between Menzies' personal interaction with Nasser and the granting of visas to Jewish refugees from Egypt as claimed by some of my interviewees? I found no hard evidence supporting such a claim. However, I found clear evidence in archival records that, by March 1957, a special immigration policy was promulgated in favour of Jewish and non-Jewish refugees from Egypt, in recognition of the hardship they had endured as a result of the Suez War.³¹ Was this policy a spontaneous and humanitarian gesture by the Australian Government to the victims of the Suez crisis, or was it more a response to the strong representation and numerous appeals made by the leaders of Australian Jewry in this respect, particularly in Sydney and Adelaide?

From the evidence I have uncovered both in government and community archives, it is fair to say that, notwithstanding the goodwill of the Australian government, the implementation of that particular immigration policy was mostly due to the tireless efforts of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society of New South Wales (AJWS) and its President, Sydney D. Einfeld³², as well as considerable political lobbying from the South Australia Jewish Board of Deputies with the help of Patrick Galvin, the Labor Federal Member for Kingston, South Australia.³³

Einfeld, who was also President of the Executive Council of Australia Jewry, reacted immediately to the outbreak of hostilities on 29 October 1956 by sending a telegram to the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies in Canberra, urgently requesting Australia's 'intervention against ill treatment of Jews in Egypt' and pointing out the establishment of concentration camps for Jews together with the 'seizing of one so-called hostage from every Jewish family

³⁰ National Archives of Australia A1838/278 Item 175/11/20/15 PT2. Cablegram from Australian Embassy in Washington to Department of External Affairs, 7 December, I.17255, expressing the United States concern that 'intimidation of various kinds may be being exercised against Jews generally to induce them to leave Egypt and leave property behind.'

³¹ National Archives of Australia A1838/2, Item 1531/115 PT1; Foreign Circular No.118 (local); Foreign Circular No. 57 (overseas). This circular instructed immigration officers to grant special consideration to applications by residents or former residents of Egypt 'who have been or [were] about to be forced to leave Egypt as a direct or indirect result of the crisis there which began at the end of October 1956.'

³² Sydney David Einfeld, born in Sydney in 1909, was a leading figure in both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. He became president of the AJWS in 1952 and remained in that position for 25 years. He also alternated as president of the ECAJ with Maurice Ashkenasy from Melbourne from 1952-1968. He was a long time leader of the New South Wales Jewish Board of Deputies. In addition, he was very active in the Australian Labor Party (ALP) representing the electorate of Bondi in the NSW State Parliament (1965-1971). See Suzanne Rutland, 'The Hon. Sydney David Einfeld, AO: Builder of Australian Jewry, *AJHS Journal*, Vol IX, July 1991, pp.312-331.

³³ Patrick Galvin (1911-1980) represented this seat in Federal Parliament from 1951 to 1966.

seeking escape'.³⁴ Subsequent letters were sent by Einfeld to the Prime Minister, and to the Minister for External Affairs, Casey, dated respectively 11 and 12 December 1956, urging the government to instruct the Australian Delegation at the United Nations 'to support protests made against this harsh and brutal treatment of the people of [his] faith who are still in Egypt'.³⁵ In fact, the AJWS records showed that from November 1956 and as late as September 1962, Einfeld was in constant contact with the Department of Immigration at the highest echelons, pleading the case of Egyptian Jews, because of the fundamental reluctance at official government level to allow into Australia Oriental Jews on the assumption they were not 'white'.³⁶ During a personal interview with Suzanne Rutland in 1984, Einfeld reported that he became aware of this attitude in the course of his negotiations with Canberra and 'asked to be accompanied by Aaron Aaron, (then the leader of Sydney Sephardi Jewry) so that T.H.E. Heyes (later Sir Tasman), Secretary of the Department of Immigration, could see for himself that Sephardi Jews were not 'black'.³⁷ Heyes' initial response pointed to the difficulties caused by the closure of the Legation and the fact that it could no longer secure checks on health and character of applicants in Egypt. Therefore, although the government sympathised with the predicament of the Jews of Egypt, the answer was that 'there is nothing more that can be done by the Department at this juncture'. Only the applications that were received and sent back to Cairo before the closure of the Australian Legation in Cairo, could be considered at that stage, provided they fell under the following criteria:

- a) holders of recently expired visas may be given renewals.
- b) where screening was completed by the Australian legation and visas were about to be issued, visas may be issued.

³⁴ National Archives of Australia A1209/23 Item 57/5736 PT1, PM's file 56/1095, A161 Sydney Sub 166 4-37P: copy of a telegram sent by the President of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, Sydney D. Einfeld to the Prime Minister, Canberra. See also in same file, A15 Preston Vic 107 9-40A, copy of a telegram sent at the same time by Joseph Morello, President of the Maltese community in Australia, to the Prime Minister, asking for help in saving 'the lives of our unfortunate relatives now in Egypt'.

³⁵ National Archives of Australia A1209/23 Item 57/5736 PT1, Prime Minister's Department, 56/1095.

³⁶ Minutes of AJWS Council Meetings, 19 November 1956, 16 January 1957, 3 March 1957, 5 May 1957, 30 June 1958, 10 October 1958, 1 December 1958, 1 May 1959, 30 July 1959, 11 November 1960, 2 February 1962, 13 September 1962.

³⁷ As noted by Rutland in 'Egyptian Jews in Adelaide: a Case Study in Oral History', pp.19-24, this type of information, highly confidential at the time as well as potentially very embarrassing, cannot be found in government archives. It is only revealed 'through oral history'. Aaron confirmed this occurrence when he granted me an interview in 1999. He stated that he even met with Harold Holt, Minister for Immigration from 1949 to 1956, 'really a good man' and asked him point blank 'am I black?'

- c) where screening had not been completed but the applicants are the dependent relatives of residents of Australia, [the Immigration Department] will be prepared to consider waiving normal screening on compassionate grounds.
- d) In regard to persons whose admission's has been applied for since the Legation was closed, the Department will consider the grant of visas, without screening to the wives and minor children of residents of Australia.³⁸

In fact, a grateful respondent, a French national, who had been expelled from Egypt in 1956 and was living in France in a refugees' hostel while waiting for a landing permit for Australia, testified to the crucial role played by Einfeld in the admission of Egyptian Jews into Australia:

At first, we were refused permission to come to Australia...Life in France had not been very easy. I felt a foreigner, I felt a refugee...It is only when Syd Einfeld got special permission for refugees from Egypt that we were accepted under that category.³⁹

Rutland's research also revealed that there was also considerable political lobbying by the Adelaide Jewish community between December 1956 and March 1957, to facilitate the admission of relatives from Egypt into Australia. The South Australia Jewish Board of Deputies called a public meeting on 20 December 1956 to discuss the problem of the Jews in Egypt with Patrick Galvin, the ALP MHR for Kingston, as the guest speaker. A sub-committee was formed and 'it was decided that a list of names of families seeking permits to enter Australia should be drawn up and that this list be submitted to both Canberra and the Australian Jewish Welfare Society.'⁴⁰ Further recommendations were made such as sending cables to President Dwight D. Eisenhower, to the Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, to the UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjold, with copies to Prime Minister, Robert G. Menzies. Furthermore, every effort was to be made to meet Menzies, during his visit to Adelaide in January 1957 although this request was subsequently denied. Nevertheless, following the public meeting, Galvin sent a telegram to the Prime Minister, that read as follows:

Urge you to give special consideration to allow into Australia persons in Egypt and those expelled from Egypt who have relatives in Australia prepared to give guarantee of

³⁸ Letter from T.H.E. Heyes, Secretary, Dept. of Immigration to Syd Einfeld, 14 December 1956, re plight of Egyptian Jews.

³⁹ Case study #9.

⁴⁰ Minutes, SA Jewish Board of Deputies, 20 December 1956.

accommodation and maintenance. In addition as it seems impossible in Egypt at present for screening and medical checks to be completed for people who have already been given permission from Australia is it possible for visas to be issued subject to such checks being completed at Australian legations in Paris or elsewhere...Suggest on humanitarian basis these people receive same consideration as Hungarians as they are suffering because of their sympathy with Britain and their Jewish faith.⁴¹

However, in spite of Einfeld and Galvin's combined representations, the initial response from the new Minister of Immigration, Athol G. Townley, to Galvin in January 1957 once again disappointed the Jewish community, reiterating that only the Egyptian Jews 'who had been nominated already and had their applications accepted and sent to the Australian Legation in Cairo before its closure could have their screening and medical checks in another country if they could manage to leave Egypt.'⁴² Townley further elaborated that it had become necessary since April 1956 'to reduce the number of applications being accepted for nationals of the South European and Mediterranean countries in order to avoid the number of migrants exceeding the program approved by the government.' Entry permits were only granted to nationals of Southern European and Mediterranean countries if the applicants 'had dependent relatives of residents of Australia or were single women under 35 years of age.'⁴³ Actually, Interviewee #90 reported that her father's application for admission of his sister with her husband and child into Australia was rejected on the basis of that particular policy as shown by the letter he received from the Department of Immigration, which read as follows:

The very considerable increase in the number of applications for the admission to Australia of nominated Southern European and Middle Eastern migrants paying their own fares, has made it necessary to place some temporary limitation upon the number which can be approved.⁴⁴

It is clear from the above that the Federal Government had decided there would be no mass migration from Egypt and refused to broaden the categories of Egyptian refugees, pointing out, not unreasonably, that these were not people without a country since 'Italians and Greeks

⁴¹ Letter from Patrick Galvin MHR, ALP, Kingston, South Australia, to Dr. E.A. Matison, President of the Board, 16 January 1957, in the South Australian Jewish Board of Deputies, Correspondence File, with copy of his telegram to the Prime Minister, R. G. Menzies, 21 December 1956. Later in Sydney, Leonard Bosman, Liberal MP for St George District, NSW, between 1963 and 1969, helped some of his Jewish/Egyptian constituents in their efforts to obtain permission for their relatives still in Egypt or in transit in Europe, to be admitted into Australia. Through chain migration and family reunion, some 30-40 Jewish families from Egypt had settled from the early 1950s in the St George area of Hurstville, Peakhurst, Beverly Hills, and Penshurst, NSW.

⁴² Rutland, 'Egyptian Jews in Adelaide: a Case Study in Oral History', p.21.

⁴³ Letter from A. Townley to P. Galvin, 29 January 1957. Galvin subsequently forwarded a copy of this letter to Dr. Matison, Head of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies Sub-committee, constituted to deal with the plight of Egyptian Jews at the public meeting of 20 December 1956.

⁴⁴ Case Study #90. Letter dated 16 April 1958, from the Department of Immigration, Ref. 1158/11844.

could return to their homelands and Israel was prepared to accept all Jews expelled from Egypt.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, Galvin⁴⁶ and Einfeld persisted in their representations and by March 1957, Townley agreed to broaden somewhat the categories of such persons eligible to come to Australia:

On humanitarian grounds I have now decided that up to 30th June next applications may be accepted from residents of Australia for the admission of any relatives, dependent or not, other than cousins provided that the nominees:

- 1) Are residents in Egypt, or were residents there on 1 November 1956.
- 2) Can reach a country outside Egypt where they can be seen by an Australian overseas post.
- 3) Are found to comply with normal immigration standards as to health, character etc.

In cases where such applications are accepted before 30th June, but the nominees are found to be still living in Egypt as at 30 September next, it will be necessary to consider then whether the application should be regarded as having lapsed.⁴⁷

This development was welcomed by Australian Jewry and led to the second most important wave of Egyptian Jewish migration. Although the relative relaxation of immigration requirements explains why a few thousand Jews of Egypt ended up in Australia, it still meant that only those with close relatives in Australia, who could act as sponsors, were considered suitable. It is not surprising therefore that the majority of my respondents - 68% - invoked the presence of family in Australia as the main reason for their immigration, which clearly reflects the impact of that particular aspect of government immigration policy.

Even for those who were considered eligible, the procedure was not straightforward since the Australian Legation in Cairo had been closed down from the early days of the Suez War.

⁴⁵ Letter from Mr. Tasman (later Sir) H.E. Heyes, Secretary of the Department of Immigration to Mr. S.D. Einfeld, President of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society, 14 December 1956, SA Jewish B. of Deputies, Correspondence file.

⁴⁶ Letter from P. Galvin to Dr. Matison, SA Jewish Board of Deputies, Correspondence file, 31 January 1957: 'I am continuing to press for a more liberal intake from Egypt and should I receive further information in this matter it will be forwarded to you.'

⁴⁷ Letter from Athol Townley to P. Galvin, 27 March 1957, SA Jewish Board of Deputies, Correspondence File re "plight of persons in Egypt". I have already pointed out that, as a general rule, nationals from Southern Europe and other Mediterranean countries could only come to Australia if they were the dependent relatives, fiances/fiancees of residents, or single women aged 18-35.

Therefore, the first hurdle for would-be applicants was to leave Egypt and present themselves personally at the offices of the Australian Embassy in Rome, Paris, and Athens for their initial interview and medical screening. The circumstances, in which the Jews were departing, especially in the wake of the Suez War, have already been discussed at length. The harsh political and socio-economical measures implemented by the Egyptian authorities vis-à-vis their Jewish population, were obviously aimed at provoking their hasty departure. The travel documents given to stateless and Egyptian Jews were only valid for a one-way trip even when they were leaving Egypt ‘voluntarily’, and forced to relinquish any claim for compensation from the Egyptian government.⁴⁸ It was inevitable that, in this context, a great number of people would have required considerable help for their relocation, as far as tickets, visas, transit accommodation and other essential needs were concerned. The Jewish Community of Alexandria and Cairo and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) worked hand in hand with secret funds supplied by international Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency and United HIAS Service to provide that help. ICRC records showed that its delegates in Egypt were:

actively concerned themselves with stateless Jews and those stripped of their Egyptian nationality who wished to emigrate, and the ICRC organised a shipping schedule from Alexandria to Greece and Italy...Upon arrival, they were assisted by the Greek and Italian Red Cross Societies and by the local branches of international Jewish organizations, which sought to find a country of permanent asylum for them.⁴⁹

Around the same time, from about early 1957 and at least until 1959, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) ‘declared that many of the escapees from Egypt came under the mandate of his Office’ and, as refugees, were entitled to United Nations assistance and funding.

Once the Egyptian refugees landed in European ports, the Jewish Agency directed the emigration to Israel and HIAS took care of emigration to other countries such as Latin America, the United States, Canada and Australia. The refugees, particularly those who were stateless and without means of support, were met upon arrival, and offered assistance for

⁴⁸ The Australian government was well aware of the ill-treatment of Egyptian and stateless Jews as well as British and French nationals by Egyptian authorities as per Australian National Archives A1838/278, Item 175/11/20/15 PT 2, Inward Savingram I.17781, from the Australian Embassy in Washington to the Dept. of External Affairs in Canberra, dated 12/12/56, A1838/283, Item 854/10/13/4/4, Savingram I. 1188 dated 17/01/57 and text of Commonwealth Relations Office Telegram No.760, dated 22/12/56.

⁴⁹ Françoise Perret, ‘ICRC operations in Hungary and the Middle East in 1956’, *International Review of the Red Cross*, 31/08/1996, No.313, p.412-437. The Red Cross chartered 14 vessels from January to September 1957, which transported 7,910 stateless Jews to Piraeus and Naples.

food, accommodation, or any other basic need during that interim period.⁵⁰ As far as Australia was concerned, the immigration process took approximately two to twelve months and sometimes even longer, depending on each case. About 26 % of my respondents stated that they were assisted by Jewish relief organisations at some stage of their 'exodus', particularly while waiting for their visa application to be approved. The refugees were accommodated in HIAS nominated hotels in Paris or *pensione* in Rome or Genoa. If needed, they were given meal tickets or medical help. Respondent #18a kept a diary of that period. He was 20 years old at the time and had left Alexandria in December 1956 for Genoa, with his brother, on an Egyptian ship, the ss *Nefertiti*. As they were approaching the coast of Italy, he noted:

All day long passengers reorganise, lock up suitcases and make themselves ready for disembarkation. We are close to Corsica. At 7 p.m. we arrive at the port of Genoa. It is no great fun to arrive at night in winter in a foreign land not knowing where we will spend the night with 'umpteen' suitcases. The consuls of France and UK are on the dock, greeting their nationals. Jews on board huddle around representatives of a Jewish organization. At 10 pm, we are driven to *l'Albergho Torinese*. Completely lost!

At a later stage, he added this explanatory note for his children:

Our accommodation and board was provided by the HIAS and I seem to remember that the hotel used to billet Jews from Egypt and from Hungary who had escaped the USSR invasion. They considered us as the rich refugees as we had full suitcases and £10. Many of them had nothing!

Nevertheless, only 12 % of the respondents acknowledged having their passage to Australia paid for by HIAS. The majority declared they paid their own fare, which was consistent with their middle to upper middle class background. They circumvented the prohibition to take any funds out of Egypt except for £20 or even £10, by purchasing open-dated tickets to Australia before leaving Egypt, often without knowing if their applications would be successful. Some even spent all the money they possessed on first-class cabin tickets because they had received adverse reports on the living conditions in the tourist class cabins, as per the following testimony:

⁵⁰ Laskier in 'Egyptian Jewry under the Nasser Regime 1956-70', *Middle Eastern Studies*, confirmed that 'France, more than other countries of transit, supported stateless refugees. Holders of foreign passports, however, received assistance from AJDC-financed French-Jewish agencies which in January 1958 provided cash relief to 1,400 persons.'

At the time, we could take some of our furniture and household possessions (but no money or jewellery) because we already had our migration papers. We were allowed only £20 each. As we could take no money out, we bought ourselves first class tickets for our trip. We tried to smuggle some money out through a custom agent in Alexandria who was supposed to bring the money on the ship for a 10 % commission. We got to Alexandria - we could not leave via the Suez Canal as it was blocked due to the war -, gave him the package but on that night he came on the boat and said that the customs had found the money. We were so scared at the time because they were putting lots of Jews in prison. We had lost everything. We went to Genoa where we stayed 30 days waiting for the boat to Australia. HIAS accommodated us into a *pensione*.⁵¹

Even the foreign nationals, particularly those who had been expelled, needed assistance with accommodation and living expenses while waiting for their visas in Paris, Rome, or Athens, and government or local Jewish organisations provided that assistance. One such case, a French national, landed in Paris after being expelled from Egypt as enemy alien after the outbreak of the Suez War, with her husband, a week-old baby, and her parents. She described that period as ‘the best and worst year of her life’:

We ended up living all together in one room in the attic of a hotel for one year. We had help from the French government. Every Thursday, we had to queue up at the Palais Chaillot and we would get tickets for milk, restaurant and rent.⁵²

Another French national who was also expelled in November 1956 with her baby and parents, had a similar experience:

We had already bought our first class tickets to Australia back in Egypt. We stayed in France for nine months [waiting for our landing permit] and were helped by the French government as refugees. We were staying at *l’Hotel Brebant*, which was requisitioned by the government for the accommodation of Egyptian, Algerian, and Hungarian refugees. These were financed by the HIAS.⁵³

Respondent #51, a British national who had been imprisoned then expelled in November 1956, straight after the Suez War, was accommodated in a Jewish refugee hostel in London with his fiancée and their wedding ceremony at the Spanish Portuguese synagogue was organised and paid for by the local Jewish community.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Case Study #55. Laskier in ‘Egyptian Jewry under the Nasser Regime’, p. 589, noted that from November 1956 to the end of 1957, ‘between 23,000 and 25,000 Jews are estimated to have left Egypt...These included at least 6,000 stateless persons’ and while ‘the Jewish Agency directed the emigration to Israel...the United HIAS Service ... took care of immigration to Latin America, the United States, Canada, Australia and other regions’

⁵² Case Study # 71

⁵³ Case Study # 9.

⁵⁴ Case Study # 51.

In accordance with published data, 591 Jewish refugees from Egypt were assisted by HIAS in their emigration to Australia from 1956 to 1963, although the extent of that assistance was not specified.⁵⁵ In fact, it was the combined efforts of relief organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in cooperation with HIAS, American Jewish Joint Distribution (AJDC), the French *Comité juif d'action sociale et de reconstruction* (COJASOR) and the Italian, Greek, and British Jewish communities, that facilitated the transfer of the Jewish population from Egypt, through Europe and to their final destinations.⁵⁶

Since, as a general rule, the Jews of Egypt who were leaving the country ‘of their own accord’ were not allowed to take anything more than their personal clothing and only E£20 – sometimes E£10 – per person, they packed enough clothes to last them for the first two to three years of emigration, in anticipation of difficult times ahead.⁵⁷ The end result was an ‘umpteenth number of suitcases’, as noted by Respondent #18a in his diary.⁵⁸ It is not surprising therefore that the majority of respondents preferred to travel to Australia by ship, in order to have all these suitcases carried at no extra cost. The *Lloyd Triestino* or *Flotta Lauro* shipping lines seem to have been the most popular choices.⁵⁹ The voyage usually took about 32 days from Genoa to Sydney, with stopovers in Naples, Messina, Port Said, Aden, Colombo (modern day Sri Lanka), Fremantle, and Melbourne.⁶⁰ While the refugees from Egypt were moving from one hemisphere to the other, the Hungarian refugees escaping the Soviet reprisals after the 1956 Hungarian revolution, were also heading for the same destinations, using the same travel routes. In addition, those ships were carrying large numbers of assisted Italian migrants from Sicily and Calabria, in search of a better life in Australia. Therefore, the ships were fully booked and the conditions were below par, particularly in third class cabins,

⁵⁵ Sources quoted by Laskier, *The Jews of Egypt*, AJDC. Arch., 308B-309A/80, p. 593.

⁵⁶ COJASOR was partly funded by AJDC. It was started in 1945 and helped in the settlement of Jewish refugees in France.

⁵⁷ Some of the French and British nationals who were expelled and given 24 hours in which to leave the country claimed they were only allowed one suitcase per person.

⁵⁸ Leaving their homes with only what they could carry, was a common pattern in the long history of forced displacement experienced by Jews throughout the ages. In the 1930s, in the early stages of Hitler’s persecution of German Jews, when they were still allowed to leave the country, they were restricted to taking only their clothes and very few personal valuables. The 1956 Hungarian refugees escaped with very little of their personal belongings. Even the South African Jewish émigrés of the 1980s and 1990s, who did not leave South Africa under such duress, were faced with restrictions regarding the transfer of their financial assets.

⁵⁹ The *Lloyd Triestino* ships were *ss Australia*, *ss Oceania*, and *ss Neptunia*; the *Flotta Lauro*’s ships were *ss Roma* and *ss Sydney*.

⁶⁰ The French passenger line *Messageries Maritimes* offered more or less the same service from Marseilles.

as mentioned previously. Those amongst my respondents who were privileged enough to travel in first class cabins retained beautiful memories of a leisurely month at sea and reminisced about the excellent food, accommodation and entertainment. On the other hand, those who travelled below deck or in more modest cabins, complained of crowded conditions, poor choice of food, and even at times, segregated quarters, which meant that married couples were separated for the whole duration of the voyage which, as noted, lasted over a month.⁶¹

The reasons invoked for choosing to migrate to Australia, were characteristic of all displaced individuals looking for a sanctuary, showing that family reunion was the predominant attraction (68%); the perception that Australia was a land of opportunity came second with 23% followed by the search for political security with 8%:

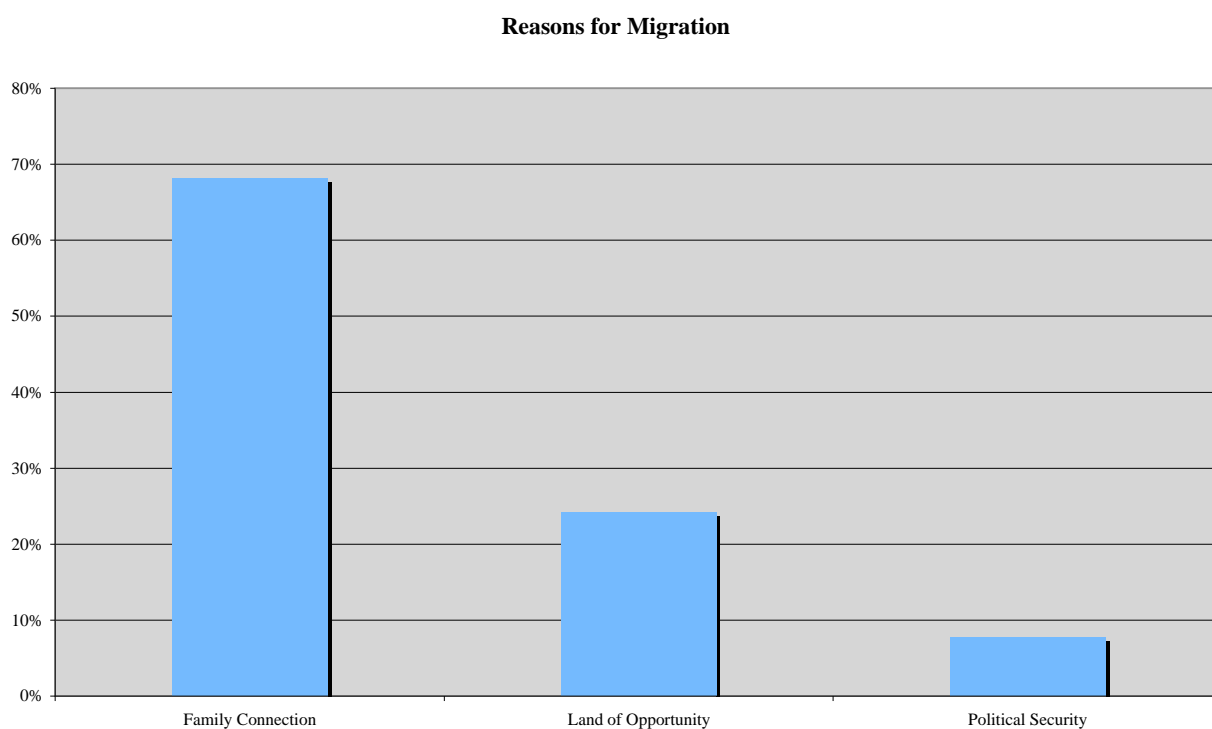


Chart 10

The picture was slightly different when a comparison was made between the migrants pre-1956 and post 1956. About 42% of the ‘pioneers’, who migrated to Australia pre-1956, were searching for a better future in a safe country far away from the Middle East. In fact, political security and better economic opportunities rated about the same. Additionally, cultural

⁶¹ Case Study #25 related that he travelled with his family on the *ss Oceania* in what he called ‘the bottom class’ made up of segregated cabins of six or eight and the ship was full of Italian migrants. Their voyage took six and a half weeks because they had to go through the Cape as the Suez Canal was still blocked.

affinities and proficiency in English must have contributed to the final decision of where to settle, considering that nearly half of the group possessed an advanced level of English and one third had an adequate knowledge of the language. Nevertheless, the dominant reason for migrating to Australia remained the presence of a family member or a friend who could act as a sponsor. Family reunion, which led to a chain migration phenomenon, accounted for two thirds of the sample. One of the first Egyptian Jews, who landed in Australia in 1948 at age 26, stated that he alone was responsible for the arrival of over forty migrants who all settled in Adelaide because he was there.⁶² Family reunion was a particular feature of the post-1956 migration from Egypt as demonstrated by the next chart:

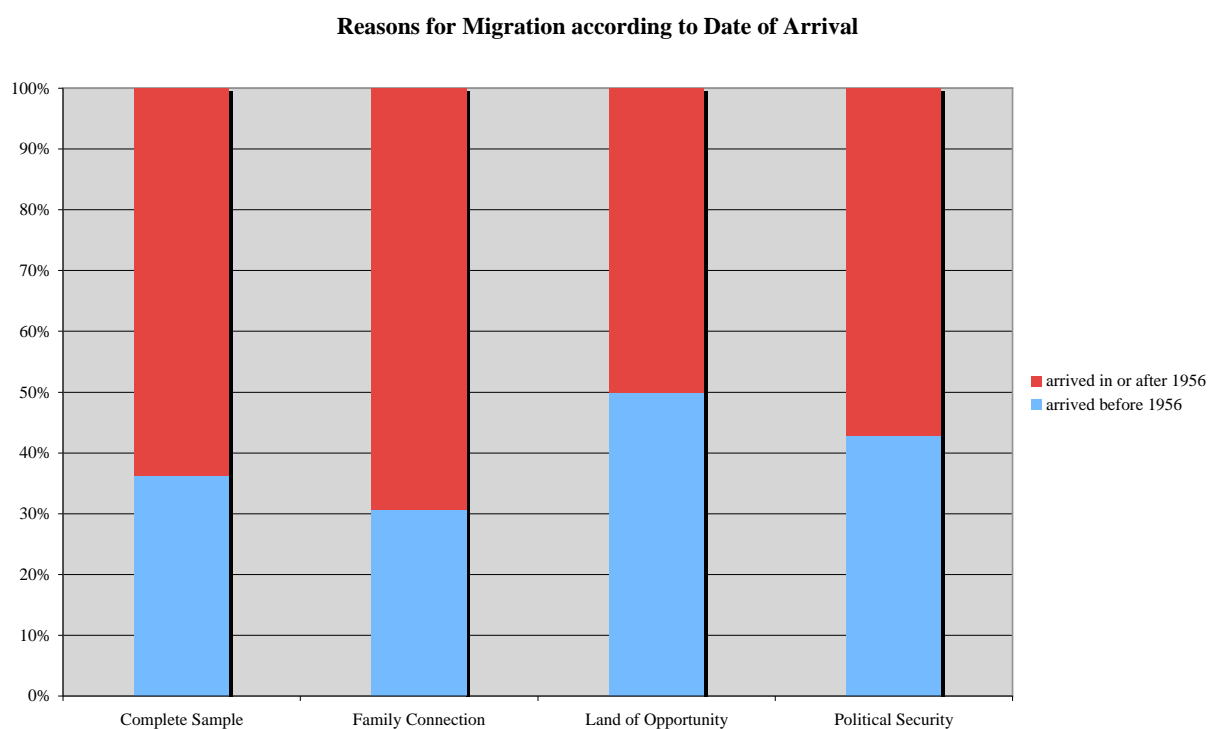


Chart 11

The eulogy of Elie Ovadia, an Egyptian Jew who landed in Australia on Australia Day, 1957, praised him for sponsoring 44 members of his extended family:

My father went on to sponsor the immigration of the entire extended family, both on his side and my mother's. Three generations and several families followed in the next 18-

⁶² Case Study #91 related he was in constant correspondence with his friends who were still in Egypt, trying to convince them to follow him. A number of my Adelaide interviewees confirmed that his enthusiastic letters about Australia and Australians were read aloud by all his friends in Cairo.

24 months, all of these using our home as a halfway house until they themselves were established.⁶³

According to one of the beneficiaries of Ovadia's hospitality, at any given time, there could have been up to thirteen people living under the same roof. There were several other cases of chain migration and extended families pooling their resources until they could cope on their own, as illustrated by the following example:

[My first wife's cousin] bought a house in Homebush and we moved in with them, renting one of their rooms. As soon as we arrived, I started the formalities for my sister and her family and for my younger brother. They had to leave Egypt and go to Italy for these formalities as the Australian Embassy in Egypt had closed down. They were there for six months. They sent us a little bit of money, which we used as a deposit for a house at Bondi Beach, where the Swiss Grand Hotel is now, a big semi with four rooms. They arrived nine months after us and moved in with us. Then my first wife's uncle and family of four arrived and also moved in with us. We were three families plus my younger brother. At one stage we were 13 living together in the house.⁶⁴

On the other hand, having a British passport in those days virtually ensured entry into any Commonwealth country and therefore the British members of the sample group were privileged applicants, provided they complied with the usual conditions applicable to all British subjects.⁶⁵ For instance, Interviewee #41, who had been drafted in the British navy between 1942 and 1945, 'wanted to see the world' and dreamt of coming to Australia. He seized the opportunity to emigrate very soon after the end of the war, although he still had to wait 18 months for passage on a boat to Australia as troop repatriation had priority over any other kind of travel.⁶⁶

⁶³ Copy of Elie Ovadia's eulogy delivered on 22 February 1999, was provided by his son Charles. Elie Ovadia's name has been engraved on the Welcome Wall, a monument built next to the National Maritime Museum at Darling Harbour, Sydney, to honour the achievements of more than 6,000,000 migrants who have chosen to make Australia their home.

⁶⁴ As indicated in the first chapter, this particular respondent, Mayer Harari, published his autobiography, *Second Exodus*, Caulfield South, Victoria: Makor Jewish Community Library, 1999, as part of the 'Write Your Story' Jewish communal project.

⁶⁵ Those respondents did not indicate if they benefited from the UK Assisted Passage Scheme instituted since 1947, offering passages to Australia for £10 per adult and £5 for children aged 14-18. As per Reginald Thomas Appleyard in *The ten pounds immigrants*, London: Boxtree, 1988, p.43, this scheme was followed in 1957 by the 'Bring out a Briton' campaign with the result that between 1961/2 and 1971/2, only ten % of British migrants were unassisted.

⁶⁶ Case Study #41 landed in Perth in 1947. He lived there for four years in 1947 before moving to Melbourne. Another group of British subjects residing in Egypt who were allowed to enter Australia with the minimum of formalities, again provided they complied with the usual conditions applicable to all British subjects, were the Maltese. 8,000 Egyptian-born Maltese arrived in Melbourne in 1956 after being expelled from Egypt in the wake of the Suez War.

Another British respondent who had also served in the British Army for the whole duration of the war, could foresee that life in Egypt, as he knew it, was coming to an end, particularly after witnessing numerous anti-British riots post 1945 and the voting on the partition of Palestine. When in May 1948, two of his relatives were arbitrarily arrested on charges of Zionist espionage and imprisoned in the infamous Huckstep camp⁶⁷, he decided it was time to get as far as possible from the Middle East.⁶⁸ His British passport gave him the choice of any Commonwealth country. He dismissed Canada because of the climate and South Africa because 'it was another country with problem'. He decided therefore 'to go as far South as possible', and originally had made plans to migrate to New Zealand where an ex-colleague and his wife had emigrated. However, as experienced by the previous respondent, there was a two-year waiting list on ships going in that direction.⁶⁹ The hardship of travelling such a long way in the immediate post-war years has been well documented by social historians and writers who studied that crucial period of migration to the southern hemisphere and the conditions on the so-called 'hell ships'.⁷⁰ Mayer Harari recalled the old 1500 tons Greek ship *ss Rena* on which he travelled to Australia from Port Said. He called it 'a ferry' as it was claimed that it was originally used for a shuttle service between Cyprus and Haifa. My respondent claimed they were 400 passengers instead of 80, travelling under 'terrible conditions', with stringent water restrictions, and with some passengers sleeping on deck. The voyage took forty-seven days and my respondent, who was travelling with his spouse and a fourteen-month old baby, thought they would never make it to their destination. He even claimed that after disembarking its last passengers, the ship eventually sank outside Sydney Harbour.

⁶⁷ The Huckstep Camp, situated about 14 kilometres from Cairo, was an old American military camp with buildings and hangars. For living conditions in the various prisons where Jews were incarcerated in the wake of 1948 War, see the testimony of Professor Arie Schlosberg, 'The internment camps in Egypt' given at the 1998 Conference of Hagana members, Prisoners of Zion, Youth Movements & Aliya Activists in Egypt, as part of the celebration of Israel's 50th Jubilee.

⁶⁸ This respondent related the circumstances in which both an uncle and a cousin were arrested because of the fortuitous nature of their respective occupation. The uncle, who worked in the department of archives of a private company, was accused of burning secret documents. The cousin, who was employed by the *Crédit Foncier Egyptien* and was responsible for the valuations of mortgaged properties, was suspected of spying because of the maps found in his possession.

⁶⁹ In her doctoral thesis, 'The History of Australian Jewry 1945-1960', Vol. I, pp.63-4, Rutland commented on the 'severe shipping shortage which existed after the war' as well as the restrictive official policy of reserving space on British ships 'for returning Australians, wives, families and fiancés of ex-servicemen and for British migrants'.

⁷⁰ See Rutland's comments on the 'hell ships' in 'Postwar Jewish "Boat People" and Parallels with the Tampa Incident', *Australian Journal of Jewish Studies* XVI, 2002, pp. 159-176; Catherine Panich, in *Sanctuary? Remembering the Postwar Migrants*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin Australia, 1988, pp. 22-32, also evoked the experiences of postwar refugees seeking a new life in Australia; the journalist and writer, Diane Armstrong, in *The Voyage of their Life*, Sydney: Flamingo, 2001, has researched the individual stories of Jewish and other refugees who travelled to Australia on the *ss Derna* in 1948.

What most of the respondents knew about their faraway destination was often very schematic and idealised and did not match the reality of life in Australia, particularly in the late 1940s. This was true of all migrants, particularly the desperate postwar European refugees who relied on the promotional material provided by Australian Consular officials, as noted by Catherine Panich, daughter of migrants who came from Europe at the end of World War II:

The active advertising in Europe to recruit migrants included posters depicting a beautiful girl plucking oranges from a tree. People in white shoes were walking through Sydney with the bridge in the background. These, apparently, were the conditions in Australia.⁷¹

Equally, my respondents had read about Australia in library books, and often based their decision to emigrate on that scant information.⁷² Those who did not wish to migrate to Israel and could not stay in Europe, either because they were stateless or because of limited economic opportunities, had to pick a country where they had the best chance to be accepted and to make a decent living. It was often a process of elimination, as explained by one interviewee:

We realised that the situation in Egypt was not good. We took the world map and looked at Canada, too cold, South Africa, looming problems with the majority black population, Rhodesia, bound to be trouble, so Australia was the best place with the best climate, a country for the future.⁷³

For others, it was a waiting game, just a matter of accepting the first visa that came through, after applying to three or four countries such as the United States, Brazil, Canada, and as a last resort, Australia. Respondent #91 admitted that after witnessing some of the rioting in the

⁷¹ Panich, *Sanctuary*, p.15; Nojna Peters in *Milk and Honey but no Gold: Post war Migration to Western Australia, 1945-1964*, Nedlands W.A.: University of Western Australia, 2001, pp.5-6, pointed to 'the propaganda posters depicting Australia as a bountiful country of booming industry, full employment...' and 'the films, pamphlets and information evenings at Australian immigrations offices around Europe' where 'Australia was portrayed as a plentiful land – a land of milk and honey – with trees laden with succulent fruits and gold nuggets on the streets just waiting to be picked up.'; see also Glenda Sluga, *Bonegilla - 'A Place of No Hope'*, Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 1988, p. 6, referring to a pamphlet entitled *Glück in der Neuen Heimat*, (Happy in Your New Homeland), published and distributed by the Australian Department of Immigration in 1948 amongst prospective migrants, romanticising 'much like the newspapers stories of the time...this "new life" with pictures of lovers wandering through sunset-lit landscapes.'

⁷² Respondent #35 arrived in Adelaide in 1948 with her husband, a British national who had been wrongly arrested in 1948 and expelled because he bore the same name as a Zionist suspect. The family in Egypt had consulted a book on Australia and had picked Adelaide as a suitable place of settlement, based on what they read. The young couple was sent ahead to pave the way for the rest of the family and were very disappointed and unhappy with the living conditions in Adelaide in the early years. My respondent stated that she is now happy to be living in Australia but in hindsight, she would never have picked to settle in Adelaide because it was too isolated.

⁷³ Case Study #67 landed in 1952.

streets of Cairo after World War II, he just wanted to leave the place. ‘*L’Egypte, ce n’est pas pour moi*’, he told his wife. Waiting for his American landing permit to be approved would have taken at least six to eight months. He had been told that Australia was a fantastic country, ‘*un pays formidable*’ and in 1947, he decided to come on a tourist visa to see for himself. He liked what he saw and settled in Adelaide. Why Adelaide? At first, it was just a fortuitous decision because of an acquaintance he made on the ship on his way to Australia. He was searching for investment opportunities and found Adelaide friendlier and people in authority more accessible and more helpful than in Sydney or Melbourne.⁷⁴

My research also noted two interesting trends concerning the immigration pattern of the Ashkenazim compared to the Sephardim. As per chart 12, the first group represented nearly a quarter of the sample group, when in Egypt, Ashkenazim constituted only 8% of the total Jewish population and secondly, contrary to the migration trend of the Sephardim, relatively more Ashkenazim migrated to Australia before the Suez crisis (39%) than after (15%).

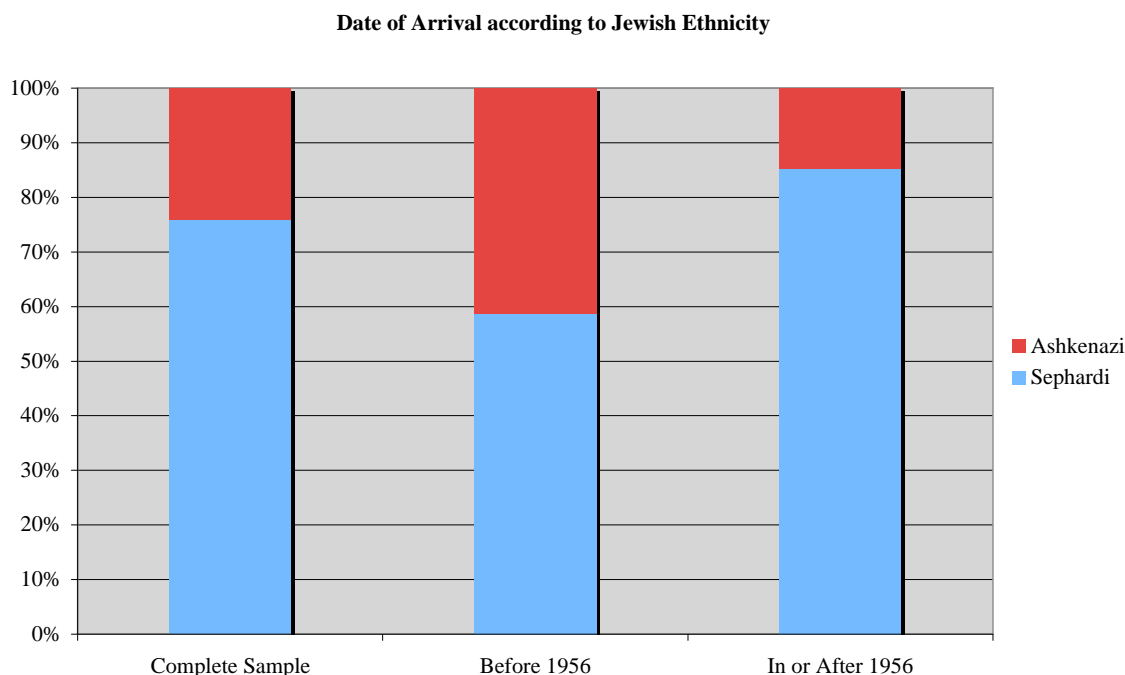


Chart 12

⁷⁴ He recalled his first meeting with the person in charge of the Industrial Development Department. The latter arranged for him to meet almost immediately with the Premier of South Australia who helped him set up a textile manufacturing industry. At the time, the Liberal premier was Sir Thomas Playford, who was in office for a record 27 years from 1938 to 1965. He was known for his achievements in developing South Australia’s manufacturing industry. In the 2002 Sir Thomas Playford Memorial Lecture, the Liberal politician Tony Abbott, recalled that ‘when he [Playford] assumed office, South Australia’s population was barely half a million and its economy was almost exclusively agricultural. By the time he retired, the population had more than doubled and Adelaide rivalled Melbourne, as the great manufacturing city of Australia.’

Why did such a relatively high percentage of Ashkenazim choose to settle to Australia? The search for political security seems to have been the highest motivating factor for the Ashkenazim since on a pro rata basis it applied to over half of them as demonstrated in the next chart:⁷⁵ For instance, Respondent #22, whose grandparents escaped from Russia to avoid being drafted in the army, arrived in Australia as a teenager. She recalled how her father made his choice:

The reason we came to Australia was because my father said he did not want to live again in a country that could be involved in another war. So he did it by process of elimination. France was rejected because of the Algeria issue; Israel was rejected because of the war with the Arabs ... whereas Australia was far enough for him to know that he was going to lead a peaceful existence.

The second motivating factor for Ashkenazim was the belief that Australia offered more opportunities and the third must lie in the fact that more Ashkenazim than Sephardim had attended English schools in Egypt and therefore, on a pro rata basis, more of them possessed advanced English skills. In fact, 55% of those who were good English speakers were Ashkenazi, compared to 43% of Sephardim. Nevertheless, the fact that 46% of the whole group fitted in the top category with only 3% with no previous knowledge of English, amply demonstrated the overall level of proficiency of my sample.

I suggest three other reasons for the earlier emigration of the Ashkenazi participants as shown below on Chart 13. On one hand, the Ashkenazim, because of their shallower roots in Egypt, were more likely to have family already overseas - in this case, Australia - who would encourage an earlier migration and provide assistance. On the other hand, an instinctive understanding and experience of persecution might have made them more sensitive to the ominous signs of danger looming ahead. Or again, maybe they just realised sooner than their Sephardim compatriots that 'the good old days' in Egypt were coming to an end, since their predominant reason for leaving Egypt pre 1956 was the lack of opportunities for the future.

⁷⁵ My statistical data indicated that 67 % of the overall sample came because of a family connection, about 25 % considered Australia a land of opportunity and the rest believed Australia would provide political security.

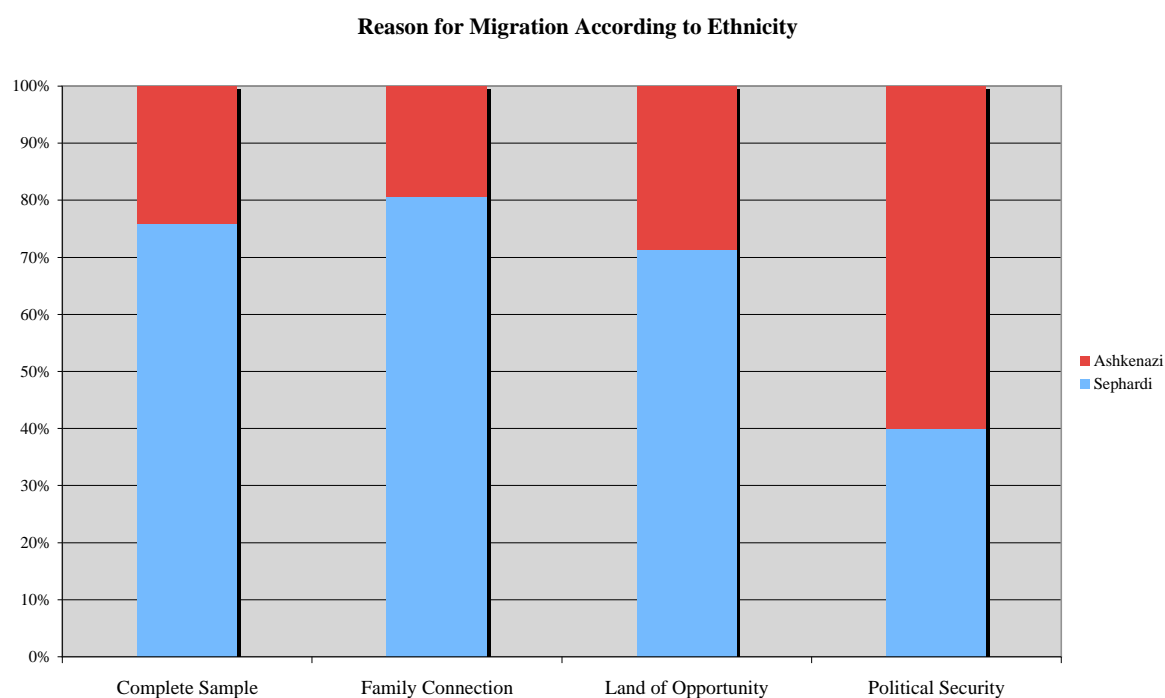


Chart 13

I have just listed the reasons why my sample group of Egyptian Jews chose Australia as their destination. It has been established that the majority came to be reunited with family or close friends, trying to alleviate the trauma of dispersion and displacement that they all experienced at different levels of intensity. However, it is clear that the road to Australia was not without its problems, due to the political situation in Egypt, the restrictions imposed by the Australian immigration policy and the complicated logistics of obtaining a landing permit. It is also clear that often Australia represented the second or third choice and its distance from Egypt and from Europe was daunting for some and attractive for others.

My research did not attempt to determine the exact number of Egyptian Jews who migrated to Australia because of the inconsistencies between the numbers recorded in official government censuses, estimates by various researchers, the educated or uneducated guess of members of the group, and my own assessment based on the number of people I came into contact with, about forty years later, taking into consideration the inevitable depletion of the original group due to natural attrition.⁷⁶ Equally, demographers and Jewish historians have also debated upon the size of the somewhat larger group of Hungarian Jews who found refuge in Australia

⁷⁶ Malcom J. Turnbull, in *Safe Haven, Records of the Jewish Experience in Australia*, Canberra: National Archives of Australia, 1999, spoke of 'several thousand Sephardi Jews, most of them Egyptians expelled in the aftermath of the Arab-Israeli conflict, [who] managed to migrate to Australia in the 1950s', p. 34. However I have not been able to verify this number in official censuses.

at about the same time, in the wake of the 1956 Hungarian revolution.⁷⁷ Whatever the total number of Egyptian Jews in Australia, it is undeniably much smaller than the broad postwar Jewish migration from Eastern Europe. This could be one of the reasons why they have not attracted too much attention on themselves and so little official data on the specifics of the group is available.

The Australian census of 1971 listed as 944 the number of Jews born in Egypt who migrated to Australia out of an overall Jewish population of 62,208.⁷⁸ This figure related only to people who chose to register their religion as well as their place of birth, which obviously was not always the case.⁷⁹ Furthermore, it did not take into account those who were not Egyptian-born. The issue of under-numeration of Jews is an ongoing problem for demographers of Australian Jewry and most argue that the level of under-numeration is at least 20 %. In view of these uncertainties about the size of the group, I elected rather to study the profile of who came to Australia, when, why and where. While it was difficult to draw a definitive picture because of the diversity and pluralism inherent to all Egyptian Jews, a certain number of characteristics have emerged from the analysis of my data.

The majority of my respondents (about 60%) arrived in Australia after the 1956 Suez crisis, which was consistent with the general pattern of emigration of Egyptian Jews, while the rest had already emigrated just prior or after the first war between Egypt and the fledgling State of Israel in 1948.⁸⁰ As has already been established, the reasons for leaving Egypt were closely linked to the political situation on the ground: nearly two thirds of the sample group were either expelled for political reasons or forced to leave because of loss of livelihood and one third saw no future for Jews in Egypt.

⁷⁷ William D. Rubinstein, *The Jews in Australia*. Vol. II, Melbourne: William Heineman Australia, 1991, p. 80, claimed that 'the Hungarian Jews accounted for the bulk of the nearly 3800 Jewish migrants known to the Welfare society who came in 1957-58, with 1619 arriving from Hungary in 1957. Most settled in Sydney rather than Melbourne...In 1961, there were 2055 Hungarian-born Jews in New South Wales, but only 1029 in Victoria, according to the (optional) religious statistics of the Census. Even in 1981 these state figures were, respectively, 1638 and 823.' On the other hand, Rutland in *the Edge of the Diaspora*, quoted Syd Einfeld who had assisted in the selection of Hungarian Jews, estimating that by December 1957, '1000 of the 5000 Hungarian escapees admitted to Australia were Jewish.' p.243.

⁷⁸ Rabbi Israel Porush, 'The 1971 Census – Interesting Data concerning Jews', *AJHS Journal*, Vol. VIII, 1975, Part 1, pp. 1-5.

⁷⁹ Charles Price in *Jewish Settlers in Australia*, Canberra: Australian National University, 1964, pp.6-8, discussed the very issue of why some Jews would choose not to answer the census question on religious affiliation, as posited by Rabbi Dr. Israel Porush in his article 'Some Statistical Data on Australian Jewry', *AJHS Journal*, Vol. IV, 1953. 'He argued that a number of Jewish refugees from Nazi Europe had been so persecuted because of their origin, that, even, when safe in Australia, some would be reluctant to write the word "Jew" or "Hebrew" on any official document.' The same could be said of Egyptian refugees.

⁸⁰ See Graph 3 'Reasons for migration against date of arrival'.

Looking at the profile of the respondents compared to the landing permit criteria, it was obvious that after race, the emphasis was on health as well as youth. The health requirements for would-be migrants were strictly monitored by immigration officials. The applicants had to submit to a thorough medical examination by an Australian doctor at the various screening centres in Europe. Preference was clearly given to young and healthy single men and women and young families whereas older - over fifty - and/or ailing applicants were discouraged and often rejected outright.⁸¹ Interviewee #65 recalled that his family's application was consistently rejected because of the advanced age and declining health of his grandmother and her sister - 80 and 75 respectively -. It was only when those ladies passed away after three years of waiting in Rome that the rest of the family was allowed into Australia.⁸² Furthermore, the fact that about 90% of my sample group were under the age of 45 upon arrival on Australian soil is a clear indication that the age factor played an essential role in the migrant selection process as shown by the following chart 14:

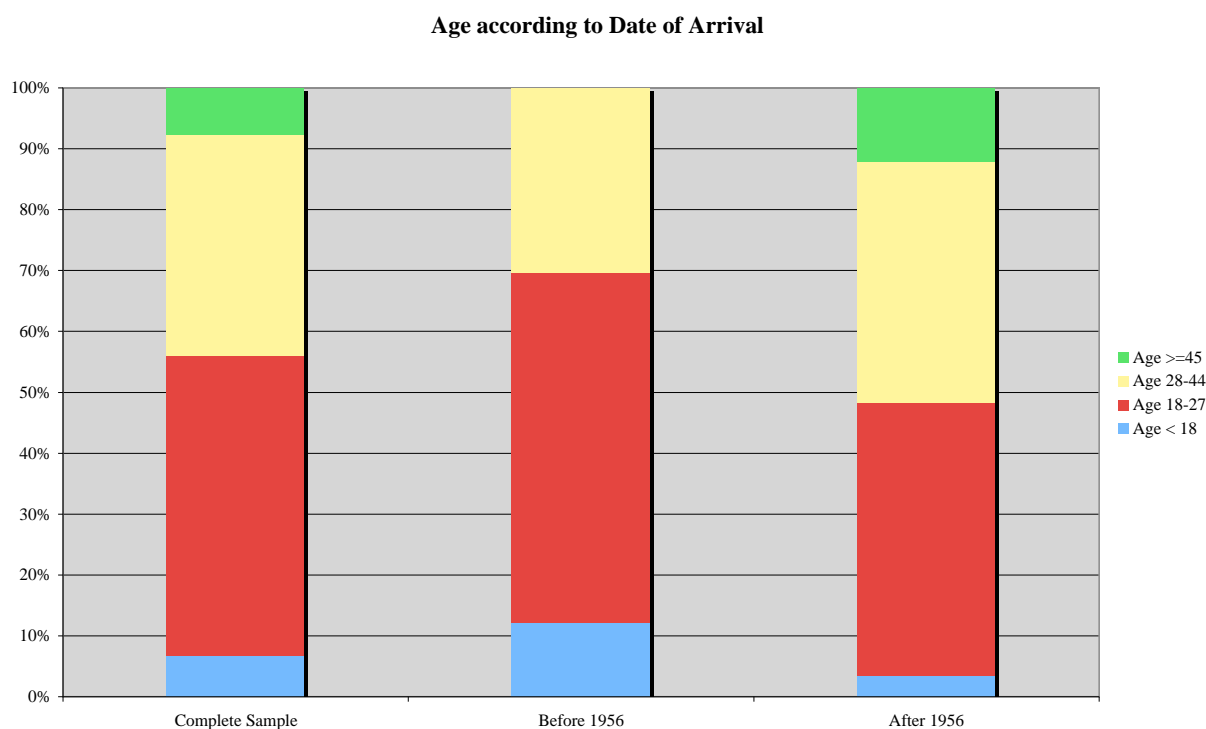


Chart 14

⁸¹ Annual Report of the Australian Jewish Welfare Society for the year ended 30 April, 1957, p. 4: 'Although quite a number [of Jews from Egypt] have already arrived in Australia there are serious delays in the issuing of Permits to many who are at present residing in Italy or other countries.'

⁸² See letter from AJWS to NSW Association of Sephardim, 8 July 1957.

Overall, 49% were aged between 18 and 27, 37% were aged between 28 and 44 and only 8% were 45 and over. Actually, about 57 % of the respondents who had immigrated before 1956 were even younger, their age ranging from 18 to 27.⁸³ This particular phenomenon was not surprising since, apart from the occasional contact with Australian soldiers stationed in Egypt during World War II, the image of Australia in the minds of would-be migrants was very similar to that of the Far West in nineteenth century America. As already indicated, very little of substance was known about the actual living conditions and the overall impression left by the Australian soldiers on leave in the streets of Cairo and Alexandria during the war years was not for the faint-hearted. It was, therefore, natural that anyone who dared to venture so far from a comfortable and familiar environment to the other side of the world, would be young and adventurous, looking for new horizons in what was perceived to be an uncharted and distant land. In fact, nearly a third of the pre-1956 subgroup - twelve out of thirty-seven - considered Australia to be a land of opportunity, apart from being far away from the troubles of the Middle East. They saw themselves as pioneers and their youth was an asset that facilitated the immigration formalities.

The post-1955 respondents were mostly young adults, although slightly older than the first group.⁸⁴ However, the most significant difference was found in the 'over 44' group, where my chart showed a leap from 0% pre-1956 to 12% post-1955. This phenomenon was obviously linked to the further degradation of the status of the Jews in the context of the Egyptian political climate from 1956 onwards, when most of the Jewish population had no option but to leave the country. As already mentioned, their choice of destination was often determined by the presence of family or friends, and the majority of my interviewees were sponsored by a family member. On the other hand, it was not surprising that the majority of my respondents were young since it was a physical impossibility for me to access most of the older cases. The odds were that migrants arriving in Australia in the 1950s, aged over fifty, were not likely to be alive or well enough mentally in the late 1990s to be able to contribute to this study.

Where did the Egyptian Jews settle once they landed in Australia? In view of their predominantly urban background, it was obvious they would be attracted to the three capital cities, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Big cities usually offer better work opportunities as

⁸³ The oldest respondent amongst those who migrated prior to 1955 was 44 when he landed in Australia.

⁸⁴ 46% were aged between 18 and 27 while 39% were between 28 and 44, compared to 57% and 31% respectively for the earlier arrivals.

well as a stronger community network. Strangely enough, the city that attracted them most, at least initially was the smallest of the three, that is Adelaide, which was the preferred place of settlement for nearly half of the pre-1955 arrivals. It was certainly the place where they became the most visible and where they formed the largest single ethnic group within the broader Jewish community. Out of a population of 985 Jews in Adelaide recorded by the 1961 census, they numbered about 400, although the people I interviewed quoted much higher numbers.⁸⁵ Whatever the case may be, they had a much more significant impact on the Adelaide community than their compatriots in Melbourne and Sydney.

A number of factors could have contributed to that phenomenon. Three key individuals were responsible for facilitating the immigration and settlement in Adelaide of Egyptian Jews. The role played by the Labour MP, Patrick Galvin, in securing a relaxation of the quotas for Egyptian Jews after the 1956 Suez War, has already been outlined. Another was the late Reverend Abraham Berman (1891-1982), who served the Adelaide Jewish congregation for many years, from the late 1940s to 1977. His role has not been recorded in official archives but was revealed by his wife in the course of a series of interviews conducted by Rutland in 1984 as part of her research on oral history.⁸⁶ Franziska Berman related that the Chief Rabbi of Egypt, Haim Nahum Effendi (1872-1960), wrote to Reverend Berman, appealing for his help in obtaining a landing permit for one of his congregants and his family who had been rejected twice by Australian Immigration because of the advanced age – 50 – of the parents-in-law.⁸⁷ Apparently, thanks to Berman's intervention, they were finally accepted in principle in 1955 and arrived in Adelaide in September 1956, just before the outbreak of the Suez War. Franziska Berman also claimed that her husband facilitated the entry into Australia of another hundred people from Egypt, because of his close contacts at the Immigration Department in Adelaide.⁸⁸ Some of those individuals became the most prominent members of the Adelaide Jewish/Egyptian community.

⁸⁵ Rutland also reported the contradiction between official figures and the perception of her interviewees in her article 'Egyptian Jews in Adelaide...', p.24. See also Bernard Hyams, whose research of the history of Adelaide's Jewish community, confirmed the obvious gaps in the census figures, in *Surviving, a History of the Institutions and Organisations of the Adelaide Jewish Community*, Adelaide: Hyde Park Press, 1998, p.102.

⁸⁶ In May 1984, Rutland interviewed Mrs. Franziska Berman, wife of Reverend Abram Berman (1891-1982) who served as second minister and *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation from 1944 until his retirement in 1977.

⁸⁷ An Egyptian Jew, resident of Adelaide, confirmed Franziska Berman's claim to Rutland. Unfortunately, he passed away before I could personally interview him in Adelaide.

⁸⁸ All my Adelaide interviewees confirmed the hospitality and the warmth of the Bermans towards the refugees from Egypt, as discussed later in this chapter. However, the claim that Reverend Berman had helped with such a

The third individual who spearheaded the establishment of Egyptian Jews in Adelaide was Max Liberman, who came to Australia from Egypt with his young wife, in late 1947, on a tourist visa, while waiting for his immigration papers for the United States to come through and subsequently decided to settle in Adelaide. Having brought with him some capital, he very quickly made contact with the South Australia Department of Industrial Development and the Premier of South Australia to discuss the investment possibilities in that state. Against all odds, he succeeded in obtaining the necessary permits to start a textile factory in Adelaide, in partnership with a friend who was a textile manufacturer in Egypt. He remained in constant touch with his friends in Egypt and some of them, now living in Adelaide, concurred in saying that it was his enthusiastic letters about conditions in Australia, that undoubtedly induced a number of them to join him. The friend who was in textile had apparently already received a landing permit for Brazil when he read Liberman's glowing reports on the South Australia government policy of encouragement for the establishment of new industries, which caused him to change his previous plans. His brother also remembered those circumstances:

Nous avons lu la lettre de Max qui disait que tout manquait à Adélaïde et qu'on pouvait s'installer très facilement. Le gouvernement de Playford en Australie du Sud encourageait les grandes industries à s'établir à Adélaïde. Nous avions déjà le permis pour aller au Brésil mais mon frère a voulu d'abord passer par l'Australie. Quand il est arrivé ici, naturellement il a voulu rester et il n'était plus question d'aller au Brésil.⁸⁹

Through his contacts in local government, Liberman was able to secure landing permits for over forty of his relatives and friends within the first three years of his own arrival. He commented on how easy the whole procedure was in those early days:

C'était tellement facile d'avoir des visas à ce moment-là. J'allais à l'Immigration Dept et je disais que j'avais une famille de douze personnes en Egypte qui voulait venir ici.

large number of landing permits, seem to have been largely unknown. For instance, the brother of one of the individuals named by Mrs. Berman, even denied outright that Reverend Berman had been instrumental in procuring landing permits for his family. This is the nature of oral history, when individual memories are often contradictory. It is possible that Reverend Berman's influence may have been more general than specific or that the brother may not have been aware of the Reverend's background work in this respect.

⁸⁹ Apart from this particular testimony, another two respondents, #35 and #36, had the same recollection of all the friends getting together in Cairo when those letters arrived to find out as much as possible about life in Australia.

*Le type me disait, je suis très 'busy'. Il me faisait remplir les formulaires, mettre la photo dessus, mettre le 'stamp' et ensuite il signait et j'envoyais les 'landing permits'.*⁹⁰

From thereon, through chain migration, more Egyptian Jews started to land in Adelaide, where they found a growing network of their compatriots as well as a welcoming Jewish community.⁹¹

Was the presence of family and friends the only reason why so many Egyptian Jews chose to settle in Adelaide? Some respondents spoke of a special bond between members of the same Masonic Lodge in Cairo as the root of their decision. Although my research did reveal that a higher proportion of Adelaide respondents or their parents were Freemasons in Egypt, this claim was not otherwise substantiated. Others stated that Adelaide's climate was an important factor. For instance, one respondent confided that she and her husband chose Adelaide because she was asthmatic and wanted a place where the climatic conditions were similar to Egypt's.⁹² They believed that Adelaide, with its Mediterranean climate of winter rainfall and sunny summers, and the desert never far away, fitted their requirements perfectly.

Adelaide's compact size - the 20-minute city - was probably another attraction, compared to the sprawling character of Sydney and Melbourne, which could be quite alienating for a newcomer, even if one is familiar with urban living.⁹³ In a smaller environment, human contacts are generally easier to establish and most of my Adelaide interviewees spoke with gratitude about the warmth of the welcome and support provided by people like Reverend and Mrs. Berman. Their home became a haven for the newcomers who had nowhere to go. The Bermans helped the new migrants to adjust to Australian conditions by holding an open house every Sunday evening, bringing together thirty or forty Egyptian refugees, who met and interacted around a 'Lazy Susan', filled with nuts and snacks. Many of my Adelaide

⁹⁰ Liberman eventually became a giant of the building industry in South Australia. He built satellite towns in Adelaide, Perth, and Sydney and was Chairman of the South Australia Housing Trust from 1975 to 1980. He was awarded the medal of Officer of the Order of Australia for services to the building industry (AO) in 1986. In 1992, the SA State government convinced him to come out of retirement to head a large inner-city development in Adelaide, called Garden East, which turned out to be very successful.

⁹¹ The phenomenon of chain migration was very aptly defined by Price, in *Jewish Settlers in Australia*, p.21, as 'the process whereby one member of a family, village, or township successfully establishes himself abroad and then writes to one or two friends and relatives at home encouraging them to come and join him, frequently helping with housing, jobs, and passage expenses. The few who join him then write home in their turn, so setting off a "chain" system of migration that may send hundreds of persons from one small district of origin to one relatively confined area in the country of settlement.' This was indeed the scenario of the migration of several Egyptian Jews to Adelaide.

⁹² Case Study #35.

⁹³ The reasons for that reputation are that one will never be stuck in traffic for more than 20 minutes; most trips do not take more than 20 minutes and one can walk from one side of the city centre to the other in 20 minutes.

respondents personally experienced their hospitality, as demonstrated by the following statement: *'nous allions chez lui chaque dimanche jouer aux cartes et il nous donnait à manger. Il était formidable. N'importe qui venait et tapait à la porte, il lui ouvrait la maison.'*⁹⁴

Indeed, the role played by the Bermans was an important factor both in the process of chain migration from Egypt to Adelaide and in smoothing out the initial feelings of alienation experienced by the newcomers. They provided a focal point, a point of social contact for people who otherwise might have felt totally lost. In addition, the small Adelaide Jewish community, only too happy to boost their membership with the newcomers, welcomed them with open arms.

Another possibility is that Egyptian Jews did not really choose Adelaide but Adelaide chose them. Since the arrival of displaced persons after World War II, the Australian government has been trying to influence immigrants to settle in regional areas. Today, a growing number of initiatives such as the 'State Specific and Regional Migration (SSRM) Schemes' have been developed to direct migrants away from the bigger centres of Sydney and Melbourne, with the aim of encouraging the development and industrialisation of the smaller capital cities.⁹⁵ Actually, Max Liberman, who was responsible for attracting so many of his friends and relatives to Adelaide, claimed that it was easier to obtain landing permits for people willing to go to smaller centres such as Adelaide. Based on his personal experience, he also felt that the setting up of new businesses and industries in Adelaide was greatly facilitated by local government bodies. His contacts there have served him well over the years and today, well past the age of retirement, he is still vigorously involved in various development projects in South Australia:

'I am more active in my work than I was when I was younger. I just finished eight buildings twelve months ago and I am looking for another big development in the centre [of Adelaide].'⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Case study #91.

⁹⁵ Graeme Hugo, 'Regional migration: a new paradigm of international migration', *Research Paper*, no. 10, *Research note* no. 56, p. 2, Parliamentary Library 2003-04.

⁹⁶ In the late 1970s and 1980s, Liberman stated that his building company worked in partnership with Immigration authorities on the basis of regional sponsored migration schemes, offering a housing package to prospective British migrants to Adelaide. They would commit to sell the prospective migrants' house in England and provide them with a newly built one in Adelaide. This project was also replicated in Melbourne, Sydney and Perth. My respondent spoke of about 12,000 families who migrated to Australia thanks to this plan.

As verified by other testimonies from the Adelaide respondents, settling in a more contained environment and sharing their experience with their compatriots, proved to be, at least for some, more congenial to a successful socio-economic integration, while maintaining a sense of identity.

I suggest another underlying reason for Egyptian Jews' preference for Adelaide, the smallest of the capital cities, a reason probably rooted in the trauma of the migration experience as a whole. Maybe they were trying to recapture and recreate what had been lost in their particular 'exodus', such as a solidary, close knit-community with a family atmosphere. The Maccabi Club, which was one institution they built themselves and patronised assiduously for at least the first ten to fifteen years, was not only a congenial meeting place, similar to the sporting clubs of Egypt. It was also an attempt to replicate a family ambience and strengthen their bond and their identity as Jews from Egypt living in Australia. In fact, this was exactly how Rabbi Jeffrey Kahn, who served as first Rabbi of the Beith Shalom Progressive Synagogue in Adelaide from 1981 to 1986, described the group of Egyptian Jews to Rutland in the course of an interview in 1984, 'a very tight-knit group, with very close relationships between them'.

Nevertheless, in spite of Adelaide's dominance as far as the earlier settlers within my sample were concerned, Sydney was a particularly popular destination particularly for those who arrived post 1956. My survey revealed that they were latecomers even compared to those from Melbourne, in view of the initial attraction exerted by Adelaide and its familiar social network, as per Chart 15.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Only 9.8% of the Sydney group came before 1956 whereas the Melbourne group had a percentage of 46% pre 1956. However, in view of the small number of Melburnians in the whole sample – 23% – it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion on that issue. On the other hand, as already stated, the higher percentage of Sydney settlers - 45% - can safely be attributed to the fact that, logistically, being myself based in Sydney, I had an easier access to the Sydney component of my sample.

Date of Arrival according to City of Settlement

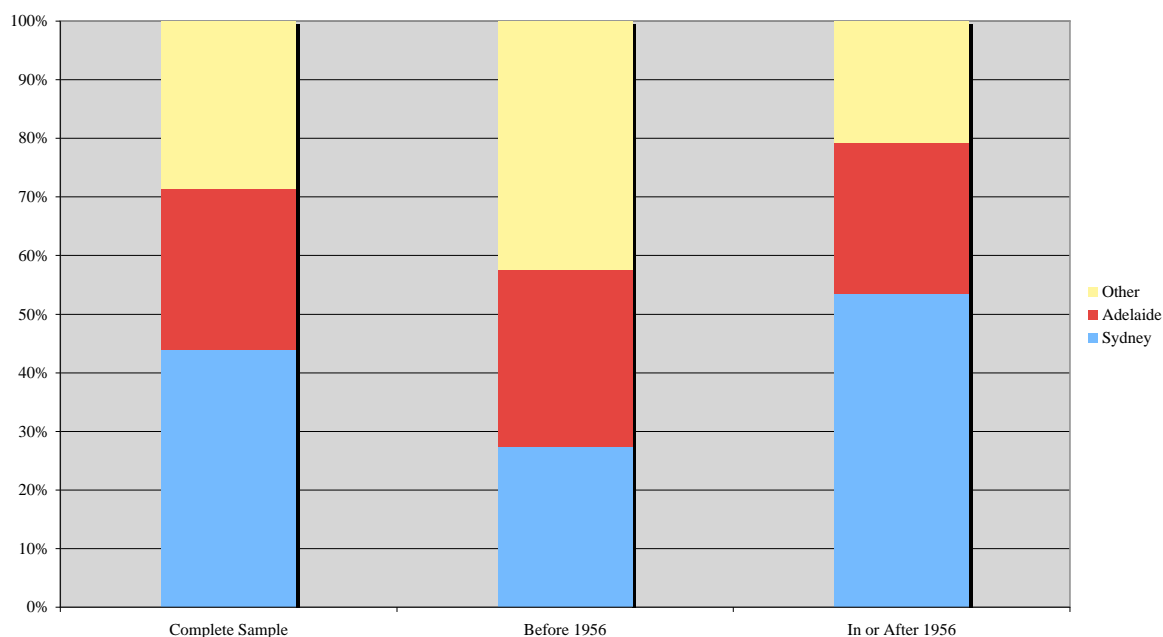


Chart 15

Nevertheless, the majority of the Sydney-bound migrants (68%) settled there for the same reason as the Adelaide group, because of the presence of family and friends. Furthermore, the attraction of a big city like Sydney, the hope of better socio-economic opportunities, the geography of the place with its pristine beaches and temperate climate, were undoubtedly important components of the equation.

While recognising that all these factors played a part when it came to choosing a place to settle within Australia, it is also important to remember that often the newcomers had no choice but to stay, at least initially, in the place of residence of their sponsor – relative or friend –, whether it was Adelaide, Sydney or Melbourne and this was found to be true across the board. The class privileges they enjoyed in the old country were long gone although not forgotten when they landed in Australia, unknown and disoriented, with very little money or no money at all. Social services for migrants were minimal in that period, the distances were daunting, and the topography of the place was totally unfamiliar. Consequently, the newcomers tried to settle within close proximity of each other to try and create their own network. Therefore, Egyptian Jews did not always settle in traditional Jewish areas such as for instance the Eastern suburbs of Sydney or Elwood and St Kilda in Melbourne nor did they

seek accommodation in government or Jewish migrants' hostels.⁹⁸ Actually, most of the postwar Jewish refugees were not accommodated in government migrant camps, such as Bonegilla in Northern Victoria, or Bathurst in NSW, as pointed out by Rutland:

The Australian government, both Labor and Liberal, insisted that the reception and integration of the refugees was the responsibility of the Jewish community. No government funds were to be expended on Jews because of the fear of political repercussions. The task of accommodating the newcomers and helping those in need to find their feet in a new land was assumed by the sponsors of the refugees. Australian Jewish Welfare Societies (AJWS, Sydney and the AJS&RS, Melbourne) directly sponsored some of the refugees and acted as a backup service for those who were sponsored privately but required assistance.⁹⁹

Among my group of interviewees, there was only one case that went through the Bonegilla Migrant Centre, when he first arrived in 1968 via Israel.¹⁰⁰ As for the Jewish hostels, I also encountered only one case of a couple with two children who needed a place to stay while their house was being built, and lived in one room at the Greenwich Jewish hostel in Sydney for eleven months in 1961. This did not mean Egyptian Jews had no trouble finding a place to live. Coming from Egypt where most people lived all their lives in rented apartments, they were confronted with a totally different situation in Australia where people usually bought their own home and where rental accommodation was scarce. For instance, all the pre-1956 arrivals who had no family connection in Australia complained about the scarcity of housing in Australia after the war. Children were not welcome in rented accommodation and guesthouses. Conditions in Adelaide were particularly difficult in the early days of Egyptian migration and most respondents concurred in saying that life was hard in this respect. They also remembered that the food coupons were still in operation and building material for new houses was in short supply. One interviewee confirmed that in the late 1940s, 'returned soldiers were given priority. Migrants had to obtain a building permit and wait two years

⁹⁸ As noted, about forty to fifty families, who, through chain migration, had migrated to Australia from about 1952 onwards, settled within a few kilometres from one another in the Southern suburbs of Sydney, such as Beverly Hills, Bexley, Hurstville, Penshurst, Peakhurst, where Jewish presence was minimal. The nearest established Jewish community was the Strathfield community.

⁹⁹ Rutland's PhD. Thesis, *The History of Australian Jewry 1945-1960*, p.104. Re government hostels, see Panich, *Sanctuary*, and Sluga, *Bonegilla, a Place of no Hope*. The first migrants arrived at the Bonegilla Migrant Reception centre in the Wodonga district in 1947. They were displaced persons (DPs) and they had come to Australia under the Commonwealth's Post War Migration Scheme. In return for free or assisted passage to Australia, the new migrants were contracted for two years of labour wherever the Australian government chose to send them. Bonegilla was the largest migrant camp in Australia and was closed in December 1971 after 320,000 people passed through its gates.

¹⁰⁰ Case Study #7 was 21 when he was expelled from Egypt in 1958 and spent ten years in Israel. In Australia, he first worked as a cleaner before going into the wool business where he succeeded very well.

before they could build their own home and new houses could not exceed ten squares in size.¹⁰¹

Respondents with babies experienced the greatest difficulties. One Adelaide respondent reported that when she finally found a room to rent, she was not allowed 'to stay in the house during the day with the baby because the lady of the house did not want to be disturbed.'¹⁰² Respondent #35 recalled that she had to move when her baby was born because babies were not allowed in that particular guesthouse.¹⁰³ Another couple lived in a rented caravan for over 18 months before moving into their house.¹⁰⁴ A Melbourne respondent said he lived two years with his wife and child in a rented room at £12 per week until he had saved £500 for a deposit on a house worth £3000.

Apart from a few privileged cases amongst those who arrived before 1956, it was clear that accommodation was the main source of anguish for most respondents in the early days of their immigration. Despite those initial difficulties, my survey showed that within two years of arrival, 68% of the sample had bought their own home and the rest within an average of four years. This was largely due the buoyancy of the work market. Looking at the whole group across gender differences, all of the respondents who were of working age stated they joined the workforce almost immediately upon arrival without any major difficulty. One must not forget that those were the days of full employment in Australia. The level of occupation of the newcomers usually matched their qualifications but obviously not their former status. In fact, 42% were in white-collar jobs while 19% started their own professional or business enterprises. A very small proportion - 9% - worked as technicians, 7% were still students, while only 11% – particularly those with low English skills - were initially engaged in factory or menial work.

When comparing the differences in the level of occupation between men and women in the group, it became apparent that displacement and hardship due to migration disrupted the structure of the traditional family in Egypt with the man at the helm, sole provider for his wife and children. Suddenly the man was not the only breadwinner and the woman had to assume a collaborative role in providing for the financial needs of the family. Her status changed

¹⁰¹ Case Study #91

¹⁰² Case Study #67.

¹⁰³ Case Study #35.

¹⁰⁴ Case Study #44.

significantly from what it had been in Egypt where middle class married women rarely worked for a living. Once in Australia, Egyptian/Jewish women were often willingly or unwillingly 'liberated' from the ancient structures prevalent in their country of birth and from their single role as homemakers. Although the latter category of occupation remained exclusively the domain of women within the sample, the change was particularly noteworthy in the white-collar category. Whereas in the old country, only 9% of wives or mothers were employed, in Australia they constituted nearly half of the overall group of white-collar workers. One respondent claimed that she developed as a person in Australia because she was able to do what she wanted. She opened her own women's wear factory, designed and cut the patterns and her husband organised the machinists and the orders distribution.¹⁰⁵ Amongst the women who arrived in their early teens and finished school in Australia, the majority went on to become primary and high school teachers.¹⁰⁶ The adult women took office jobs as clerks or secretaries depending on their training. As expected, my data also showed that women 'at home' with low or no English skills fared worse than working women, particularly the older ones. Some expressed feelings of isolation and alienation as they faced a social structure and cultural traditions that were totally foreign to them. On an obviously less tragic scale, they were confronted with the same predicaments experienced by Holocaust survivors who, as noted by the sociologist Naomi Rosh White,

having left behind all that was familiar to them, deprived of family, former friends, social networks and material goods, [they] had to try and find a place in a new community, to start their lives again.¹⁰⁷

Those interviewees only found solace within their own ethnic and linguistic group. For example, the mother of Respondent #8 was left in charge of the household while the rest of the family went out to work to pay off the three mortgages on the home they had just bought. They were living away from the traditional Jewish areas. After leading a life of luxury in Egypt surrounded by servants, this respondent found herself trying to make ends meet on a very tight budget, alone all day, having to clean, shop and cook for five adults and an eleven-year old child. Since her English skills were poor, communicating with her Australian

¹⁰⁵ Case Study #15 had her own factory for many years until her daughter joined her and expanded the business further into maternity wear.

¹⁰⁶ Respondents #22 and 69.

¹⁰⁷ Naomi Rosh White, *From Darkness to Light – Surviving the Holocaust*, Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1988, p.171. Dr. Naomi Rosh White is an Australian sociologist who was written on migrants and women. She is herself the daughter of Holocaust survivors. *From Darkness to Light* explores the lives of eleven Holocaust survivors, five women and six men, through their own recollections of their experiences interspersed with historical records.

neighbours was made even more difficult by the difficult to comprehend 'Australian accent'. Her only support group was her extended family. It is obvious that in such cases, integration was a longer and more arduous process.

Overall, my study consistently showed working women within the sample group were engaged in lower status occupations than the men. They represented only 15% of the owner/professional section where tertiary-educated men dominated.¹⁰⁸ This trend was an obvious reflection of the patriarchal nature of Jewish society in Egypt where higher education was considered more essential for men than for women, since the latter were destined for marriage and home. This mentality sometimes persisted even after immigration into Australia. It was not unusual in Egyptian Jewish families to make all the necessary sacrifices for the son to pursue university studies while they pushed the daughter into an office job without much prospect.

It is also true that the women – particularly the older ones - did not remain in the work force in the same proportion after the initial period of settlement. Obviously, as the socio-economic situation of the family improved, the financial contribution of the women became less essential. It is important to remember that the Australian working conditions of the 1950s were not particularly friendly to mothers, especially those from migrant communities, due to a severe shortage and even lack of public child-care facilities, combined with inflexible working hours. One respondent remembered that at her place of work, Prudential Insurance Company, the policy still prevalent in the late 1960s was not to employ young married women.

Taking into consideration all of the information up to this point, a clearer profile of the Egyptian Jewish migrant is starting to emerge. It has been demonstrated that the selective nature of the Australian immigration policy ensured that potential migrants were young and healthy individuals and families, as per the majority of my respondents. It has also been established that although they came mostly from a privileged middle and upper middle class, all those privileges had been stripped away and they landed in Australia, with very little money or no money at all, particularly after 1956. In spite of the initial and inevitable culture

¹⁰⁸ The working conditions of women in general and particularly of migrant women of non-English speaking background (NESB) in postwar Australia, have been the subjects of numerous studies. See B.A. Mitsztal, 'Migrant women in Australia', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, Vol.12, no.2, 1991pp.15-34; M.D. Evans, 'Immigrant women in Australia: resources, family and work', *International Migration Review*, Vol. 18 (4 Special Issue), Winter 1984, pp.1063-90.

shock, their integration and acculturation were reasonably smooth thanks to a Western education, multiple language skills, a cosmopolitan culture and sound business training. Although most Egyptian Jews have generally maintained their use of the French language within the family circle and with their compatriots in social situations, two-third of the sample was proficient enough in English to function relatively well in the workplace. In fact, all the respondents who were of age stated they joined the workforce almost immediately after their arrival without major difficulty. It is true that those were the days of full employment in Australia and the type of occupation usually matched their qualifications. The fact that a very small percentage was engaged in factory or menial work is a further sign of the overall level of education and sophistication of the sample. As demonstrated in the previous section, the sample group also reflected a traditional community with robust family structures, a strong sense of Jewish identity, a traditional, but somewhat low level of religious observance, and no significant involvement in politics.

By tracing back every step of the long journey of my respondents to the ‘Edge of the Diaspora’, I have tried to project a comprehensive picture of the conditions under which they immigrated to Australia, at the time of the ‘White Australia’ policy, when Jews from the Middle East were considered undesirable migrant material. I have examined the historical and political connection between Egypt and Australia, focusing on the period of the nationalisation of the Suez Canal and the role played by the Prime Minister of Australia, Sir Robert Menzies, in the negotiations with the President of Egypt, Gamal-Abdel-Nasser. I have looked into the reasons why my respondents elected to migrate to Australia, a country they knew nothing about, and I have examined the long and tedious process my participants had to go through to obtain the precious landing permit. I have assessed the support provided by Jewish and international organisations during their transit period in Europe and the extent of the lobbying by communal bodies in Australia and a few exceptional individuals who fought for their admittance into the country. I tried to evaluate the profile of each respondent, who was allowed in and who was refused and why. I found that those who were accepted represented an excellent prototype of a ‘model’ migrant, since they fitted the strict criteria set by the Australian immigration policy of those days.¹⁰⁹ Their assets were not necessarily

¹⁰⁹ The Egyptian-born Brazilian researcher, Joëlle Rouchou, stated in her doctoral thesis on the migration of Egyptian Jews to Brazil, that, according to the vice-president of the HIAS Committee in charge of Egyptian refugees in Brazil, their integration was one of the smoothest integration: ‘Pernidji prit une part active dans plusieurs cas d’immigration, et raconta que celle-ci avait été “l’assimilation la plus facile et qu’ils trouvèrent du travail très rapidement” p.115.

money but youth, health, education and an existing network of family and friends, which made them self-sufficient although their beginnings were difficult. As a general rule, they never went through the government sponsored migrant centres or the Jewish migrants' hostels. However, I found that the traditional family structure of the respondents was significantly eroded by the hardship of forced emigration. As the women were forced to take on new roles, men were displaced from their respected position of sole breadwinner. I looked into the ethnic distribution of the group between Sephardim and Ashkenazim to try and find a migration pattern related to that distribution. I examined the reasons why such a relatively high proportion of the sample group chose to settle in Adelaide and the role played by a few key individuals in that respect. My research has shown that, in spite of the White Australia policy, in spite of the different culture and traditions, the Jews of Egypt quickly entered the work force, and blended in Australian society, thanks to the multicultural skills and cross-cultural strategies they had acquired and practised in Egypt. Due to their small number and the diversity of their identities, they did so without too much fanfare and as a result never raised their profile as a distinctive group within the broader Jewish community, especially in the larger cities of Sydney and Melbourne whereas the Jewish community of Adelaide was small enough for Egyptian Jews to make a difference. Today, the ranks of the original community of Egyptian Jews of Adelaide are very much depleted through the process of natural attrition and displacement towards the bigger cities of Sydney and Melbourne, mainly to follow their children. Will those children retain some traces of the distinctive identity of the Jew from Egypt or have they totally acculturated to the host? Will they at least know the chequered history of their parents and grandparents? These are some of the questions that I will attempt to answer in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII:

A Multi-layered Identity

For any group of migrants, the question of identity and identification is fraught with problems and contradictions. In a multicultural society such as Australia's, it is determined by a composite of national, ethnic, social and religious elements that often coexist in a state of lesser or greater tension. It is inevitably shaped by the strength of the migrants' connection to their former homeland, its traditions, culture, and language, by their acceptance of the value system and mentality of the adoptive country and by the ability to balance the merits of both, aided by government initiatives towards a smooth social integration. Their identification with their new home will greatly depend on the context of their migration - whether it was political or economic, voluntary or forced – and on the strength of the respective parochial institutions, ethnic or religious. It will depend on their age, their education, their proficiency in the national language, the level of support granted to them by public or private welfare bodies, the success of their social and professional integration and their own strategies of acculturation.

In view of the above, I chose to raise the question of identity with my respondents towards the end of the interview, on the assumption that after recounting their lives in Egypt, the reasons for their departure and their migration experience in Australia, my respondents would be more attuned to the nuances this particular issue encompasses and their answer would reflect these nuances. I tried to induce them into sorting out their various layers of identity and define their core identity by evaluating their level of self-identification with Australian society in general and the local Jewish community in particular, their religious observance, and finally the place Egypt and/or Israel occupy in their hearts and minds. They all agreed that their core identity was their Jewishness, which they qualified in different ways, Egyptian, Sephardi, Australian or European (mainly French and Italian). None of them could identify themselves with a single definition. Their answers were, therefore, as multifaceted as my questions and I promptly realised that trying to define the specific identity of Egyptian Jews through their perception of self, as well as through the way they were perceived by others, was not going to be straightforward. The fact that they came from a Middle Eastern country, without being necessarily ethnically Oriental, being francophone without necessarily being French nationals, possessing a string of other unrelated languages, being Jewish without being strictly

observant, being of the Sephardi tradition when the majority of Jews in Australia were Ashkenazi, rendered the task of labelling them concisely even more intricate. Therefore, my plan was to consider their self-identification while bearing in mind the other features of their profile that either reinforced or contradicted their own perception. My ultimate aim was to uncover if the clash between the various layers of their identity helped or hindered their integration into Australian society.

The issue of identity in general, and Jewish identity in particular, has been studied by eminent contemporary sociologists such as Steven M. Cohen, Samuel C. Heilman, Zvi Gitelman, Stephen J. Whitfield and numerous others who have defined what constitutes the essential components and characteristics of modern Jewish identity or identities. Most of them agree that Jewish identity in Western societies today is more a matter of choice than a matter of fate.¹ Stuart Z. Charme, for instance, argues that:

In modern culture, where identity is open, affirmations of the given and traditional are as much dependent on choice as more dramatic creations of new identifications and commitments....Identity, formerly objective and imposed, has become constructed and chosen – Jewish identity, like all others.²

It is undeniable that Jews, by essence, have multifaceted identities, as a consequence of their history of peregrinations. This characteristic is a major feature of Egyptian Jews' distinctiveness, which has remained constant wherever they have settled. The 'sociological ambivalence' discussed by Samuel Heilman, in his study of the Orthodox Jews in the United States, generated by a possible contradiction and therefore conflict between an inner and an outer Jewish identity, is a very significant feature of my sample group.³ This was already true for them in Egypt where, on the national and/or cultural level, they were torn between their western outer identity, and their Egyptian roots, their inner identity. On the other hand, living in a country where one was defined by one's religion, they were always perceived as 'others' by the Muslim majority but they also perceived themselves as 'others'. Even when they felt a

¹ Zvi Gitelman, in his article 'The Decline of the Diaspora Jewish Nation: Boundaries, Content, and Jewish Identity', *Jewish Social Studies*, Bloomington: Jan 31, 1998, Vol.4, no.2, pp.112-22, noted that 'observers of American Jewry are fond of saying that, today, all Jews are "Jews by choice" '; Stephen J. Whitfield, 'Enigmas of Modern Jewish Identity', *Jewish Social Studies*, Bloomington: Vol.8, no.2/3, pp.164-71, who stated that 'in the twentieth century in particular, the history of the Jews can be recounted in terms of the erosion of a stable identity, so that eventually all of them would be described as Jews by choice...'. See also Samuel C. Heilman, *Cosmopolitans and Parochials*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989.

² Stuart Z. Charme, 'Varieties of Authenticity in Contemporary Jewish Identity', *Jewish Social Studies*, Bloomington: Jan 31, 2000, Vol.6, no.2, p.136.

³ Samuel C. Heilman, 'Inner and Outer Identities: Sociological ambivalence among Orthodox Jews', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 39, 1977, no.3, pp.227-41.

strong sense of belonging in Egypt, even when they were Egyptian nationals, they knew that they would never be considered ‘true Egyptians’ and consequently they did not really consider themselves Egyptian. Technically speaking, one can argue that the Jews in Egypt were still ‘Galuth Jews’ although they lived in privilege and comfort under the protection of the colonial powers. They remained the perennial outsiders and eventually the time came when they were forced to flee their country of birth. One could say that, with this expulsion, the conflict between their inner and outer identities was unequivocally resolved for them as far as Egypt was concerned.

What happened once my respondents landed on Australian shores? Did they again feel conflicted between the Egyptian/French culture, their inner identity and the contextual Anglo-Saxon culture, their wished-for outer identity, and how did they resolve that conflict? What model of acculturation did they choose to resolve that conflict, assimilation or integration? Which strategies did they use to fit into Australian society? The present study first examined their perception of self-identification, both in Egypt and in Australia, and checked for any variation resulting from their displacement. It evaluated the content of their Australian identity since a good proportion of the participants claimed it had now become not only part of the way they saw themselves, but also part of the way they wanted to be seen. As stated by Chanan Reich in his comparative research on the ethnic identity of the Jewish and Greek communities in Melbourne, the ‘formation of identity is an ongoing process of interaction between external identification and self-identification.’⁴

It is important to remember that most of the Jews of Egypt came to Australia as impoverished refugees. As demonstrated, they came mostly from a middle class (70%) and upper middle class (20%) background. They had all left their homeland under duress but had no possibility of going back to that homeland. In fact, they could not even visit the country before 1977, when the Egyptian President, Anwar el-Sadat, started peace negotiations with Israel. Catherine Panich, who studied the Australian postwar immigration experience, explained that such a migration process could be compared to:

a metaphoric... “death” of the former self, the permanent loss of close relationships, the recognition that a chapter of one’s life is closing with great finality. The action of

⁴ Chanan Reich, ‘Ethnic Identity and Political Participation: the Jewish and Greek Communities in Melbourne’, Thesis (PhD), Dept. of Politics, Monash University, Melbourne, 1983, p.88.

emigrating thrust one irrevocably into a new frontier...Slowly and subtly the newcomer would be absorbed and moulded by this new environment.⁵

Furthermore, Egyptian Jews arrived in Australia before the term 'multiculturalism' was coined, at a time when the country still 'dealt with cultural diversity fundamentally through exclusion' via the 'White Australia' policy and migrant groups were defined in racial rather than ethnic terms, as pointed out by Geoffrey Levey in his discussion of the challenges presented by Australian multiculturalism on Jewish identity.⁶ Assimilation was the currency of the day and it demanded that 'all previous allegiances be relinquished, along with traditions and languages.'⁷ How did they fit into that single mould, in view of the multiple nature of their identity?

The answer to that question is that, like most other migrants, they obviously did not fit neatly into any single category. The majority of my respondents identified with being primarily Jewish, in spite of a below average level of religious observance, which, according to Levey, is the case for most Australian Jews.⁸ Their Jewishness was more a sense of belonging to the Jewish people by sharing a number of rituals and traditions. Therefore, it was not 'the sole emblem of their being' as it usually is for ultra-Orthodox Jews.⁹ One must not forget that this was how they were identified and how they identified themselves during their time in Egypt, regardless of their religious laxity or orthodoxy. They continued to perceive their Jewishness as the essential component of their identity, although it had now become more of an ethnic marker rather than a strictly religious one. For instance, one of my respondents insisted that being Jewish was very important to her even though she had just stated she was totally secular: 'it is something that I cannot reject or deny. I am the product of a traditional Jewish family.'¹⁰ Another informant, who qualified his Jewish identity as a question of culture not of

⁵ Panich, *Sanctuary*, p.172.

⁶ Geoffrey Brahm Levey, 'Jews and Australian Multiculturalism', in Geoffrey Brahm Levey and Philip Mendes (eds), *Jews and Australian Politics*, Brighton, Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2004, pp.182-4. Levey is Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, and Coordinator of the Program of Jewish Studies, at the University of New South Wales, Sydney.

⁷ Panich, *Sanctuary*, p.171.

⁸ In that respect, Levey, in 'Jews and Australian Multiculturalism', p.182, pointed out that 'even the most secular Jews strongly self-identify as Jews and with Jewish peoplehood.'

⁹ Heilman, 'Inner and Outer Identities: Sociological Ambivalence Among Orthodox Jews', *Jewish Social Studies*, p.227.

¹⁰ Case study #54: '*le fait d'être juive est très important pour moi. C'est une chose que je ne peux pas jeter, je ne peux pas nier. Je suis ce que je suis, le produit d'une famille juive qui était traditionnelle mais pas religieuse.*'

religion, admitted nevertheless that he was affiliated to a synagogue and attended services on the High Holy Days.¹¹

In addition, all my respondents listed a range of other identities, which might not be as fundamental as their ethno-religious identity, but nevertheless remained an important part of who they were. For instance, Respondent #89, an Italian national, who declared at first: ‘my heart is Jewish. Now I am Australian’, must have realised that the issue was not as simple as his statement implied and qualified it by adding:

I see myself as a person with more than one identity, Italian to some extent but more Egyptian. I think like them. I was brought up with them [the Egyptians]... I lived with them all my life; we spoke the same language.¹²

It is obvious that, in his case, all his different inner and outer identities were cohabiting quite happily and there was no question of relinquishing any one of them in order to adopt a single national identity, however desirable.

Having lived in a country like Egypt where the outer identity was often negotiable, Egyptian Jews had acquired the necessary strategies to juggle national and ethnic identities according to the time and place. I encountered many such examples in the course of my research. The case of the Karaite informant was particularly relevant. As stated previously, the Karaites of Egypt were not as westernised as their Sephardi compatriots. Up to the middle of the twentieth century, except for their religious practices, they were very acculturated to the local population as far as language, clothing, and food were concerned. This respondent first language was Arabic both at home and at school. Apart from his Jewish middle name, his first name and surname were typically Egyptian. Through the omission of one of his names, he used to switch from one identity to the other according to the context. On university campus, he emphasised his Arabic persona in order to be accepted by his Egyptian/Muslim fellow students whereas in the workplace, when he dealt with Jewish, British or French firms in view of employment, he emphasized his Jewish persona by revealing only his Jewish name. Once his position was secured, he would reveal his Egyptian identity, presenting it as an added asset since it allowed him to enter a domain that was not always accessible to his

¹¹ Case study #21 stated: ‘I am a cultural Jew but nationally I am an Australian. I owe Australia everything I have’.

¹² Case study #89 was considering emigration since 1953 and finally made it to Australia one month before the eruption of the Suez War in 1956.

Westernised bosses. He was able to operate in both worlds and move with ease from one to the other thanks to this duality.¹³ His inner and outer identities were interchangeable. As argued by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, ‘when the individual presents himself before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behaviour as a whole.’¹⁴ When he left Egypt, my respondent spent thirteen years in Israel before immigrating to Australia in 1969, which added another layer to his identity. Today, depending on the circumstances, he sees himself either as an Australian Jew or as an Israeli Jew but he is also a Karaite Jew from Egypt. The question is: which aspect of his identity is predominant? There is no simple answer. Levey commented upon the complexity of Australian Jewish identity:

The twin worlds that Jews occupy are reflected in how they choose to call themselves...Jewish institutions and individuals in this country typically refer to themselves as “Australian Jews”...The noun “Jews” signifies the presumed primary identity; the adjective “Australian” is the qualifier.¹⁵

That particular issue is still hotly debated within the various diasporas of Egyptian Jews. Are they to refer to themselves as ‘Egyptian’ Jews, as Jews of Egypt or as Jews from Egypt?¹⁶

The informants of the present study have used different strategies to deal with the content of their Egyptian identity. Some respondents claimed they had no conflict of identity by denying the Egyptian content altogether. For example, Informant #63, who had always mixed in British circles in Egypt, both at school and at work, stated he never felt part of the country and saw it purely as an accident of birth. Since arriving in his adopted country, he has defined himself first and foremost as an Australian, and this was his presentation of self to others. As for his religion, it belonged in the private domain of his inner identity, and he revealed it only

¹³ This stratagem did not always work in his favour. He recalled the time of his graduation when all the students received their diploma accompanied by a signed picture of King Faruk, except for him. When he queried what he thought was an oversight, he was reminded in a very subtle way that he was not really an Egyptian since his middle name was Jewish.

¹⁴ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 1956, Monograph No.2, p.23.

¹⁵ Levey, ‘Jews and Australian Multiculturalism’, pp.187-8.

¹⁶ A typical example of that debate can be found in the preamble of the *Historical Society of Jews from Egypt*, based in New York, where it is stated that this organisation shall be known as such, ‘and not of Egypt or of Egyptian Jews, but FROM EGYPT for the purpose will be to include all our co-religionists whose lineage have sojourned in the Jewish Communities of Egypt...’. In the course of this thesis, for the sake of simplicity, I have often designated them as ‘Egyptian’ Jews, knowing full well that, literally speaking, this label only applied to a small proportion of my respondents.

when it was appropriate.¹⁷ This was exactly the way Jews had traditionally negotiated life in liberal democracies before the advent of multiculturalism, ‘by downplaying their Jewish distinctiveness’ and stressing their national loyalty, noted Levey.¹⁸ The next informant (#31) also considered herself much more Australian than anything else. While she acknowledged that Egypt had given her precious multicultural skills, she never felt she belonged there. As for her Jewishness, it constituted a part of her ethnic background but did not play a significant role in her present life since she was neither a practising Jew – she married a non-Jewish person - nor did she socialise with Jews, even those from Egypt.¹⁹

I also found that the exposure to a multiplicity of cultures of the type experienced in Egypt made it difficult for the Jews of Egypt to identify with a single and dominant national or cultural distinctiveness. For example, Respondent #10, born of an Austrian father and a Russian mother who migrated to Egypt towards the latter part of the nineteenth century, spoke Yiddish at home with her parents and had a French education dispensed by the Catholic nuns while her brother went to a Jesuit school. She did not identify with either her Russian or Austrian origins, but felt she belonged in Egypt, although she did not speak Arabic. That sense of belonging had probably more to do with the comfort of her privileged lifestyle. Typically, she never called herself Egyptian although she had Egyptian nationality. On the contrary, she maintained that she had no distinct sense of identity, and therefore could adapt herself to any environment: *‘je ne sens pas que j’ai une identité distincte. Je m’adapte à tout le monde. Je me décris comme quelqu’un qui vient d’Egypte, de culture française.* ‘I am a citizen of the world’, declared another informant, ‘I am comfortable anywhere.’²⁰

In fact, the collected data indicated that, in spite of having been rejected by what was for most of them their mother country, the majority of the Jews of Egypt have kept a positive memory of their birthplace and maintained certain elements of the culture they left behind, such as the

¹⁷ In spite of his definition of self as Australian, this respondent recognised that multiple identities were part of the makeup of Egyptian Jews, himself included. He remembered how baffled the Australian Immigration Officer was, in 1953, when he landed in Australia and presented his *laisser-passer*, stating in Arabic and French that he was stateless (his father was an Ottoman subject from Salonika); then his wife presented her British passport (her family was originally from Gibraltar) and his mother, her French passport (from Syria). The officer, puzzled, asked how they were all related and even when the respondent tried to explain these anomalies, he still could not comprehend the whole picture.

¹⁸ Levey, ‘Jews and Australian Multiculturalism’, p.181.

¹⁹ Case study #31 described her immediate reaction to Australia as one of ‘love at first sight’. It was interesting to note that in spite of her declaration of being totally alienated from her Jewishness, she must have felt it still had some relevance to her since she was the one who initiated the contact with me, thus participating through her testimony in a project on the Jews of Egypt.

²⁰ Case Study #87 had an Ashkenazi father who had been raised by an Italian Jewish family and a Greek Orthodox mother who converted to Judaism. At home, they spoke about seven languages.

languages, the food, even the sense of humour. For instance, within my sample group, the majority – 68%- still reminisced with pleasure about their lives in Egypt and did not harbour any resentment towards Egypt. Some of them even spoke Arabic - albeit a broken one - whenever they had the opportunity. As noted, the use of the French language within the family circle and in selected social situations has been maintained, particularly in households where both spouses were from Egypt, and nearly half the sample group – 44% - expressed a deep and continuous affinity with the French culture.²¹ The same proportion declared that they socialised mostly with ex-Egyptian Jews, mainly in the ‘over 28’ category, sharing some of the traditional Egyptian dishes, while 40% noted that at least some of their friends were originally from Egypt. The older they were, the more they identified with the past, which is usually the case for everybody and more so for migrants for whom the past represents a familiar anchor to which they are attached while they try and charter their way in unfamiliar waters.

Nevertheless, Egypt symbolizes the past and could not be resurrected, as specified by Informant #19: ‘Egypt has very little relevance except in memories’. Nearly half of the group of Sephardim within the sample refined their definition of self as primarily ‘Sephardi Jews from Egypt’, a definition that consciously or unconsciously excluded the national connotation of the label ‘Egyptian Jews’ and retained the ethnic and religious aspects. One third of the sample – 33% - claimed they now saw themselves as Australians, as succinctly articulated by the next respondent: ‘I feel Jewish because I was born Jewish and then I feel Australian, as if I was born here. I feel nothing for Egypt.’²² Participant #55, who was stateless when he arrived, declared that since his first citizenship was Australian, this is his only national identity.²³ As a general rule, my data showed that those who had a strong sense of belonging in Egypt were more likely to define themselves as Jewish/Egyptian whereas those who did not, tended to prioritise their Australian identity, as per the following graph:

²¹ One is unwittingly reminded of the Sephardi Jews who lived in Turkey for 500 years after their expulsion from Spain and still maintained the daily use of Ladino.

²² Case study #91: ‘*Je me sens juif parce que je suis né juif et ensuite je suis australien, comme si j’étais né ici.*’

²³ It is not surprising that this informant, who was educated in British schools in Egypt and spoke English fluently, felt immediately at home in Australia.

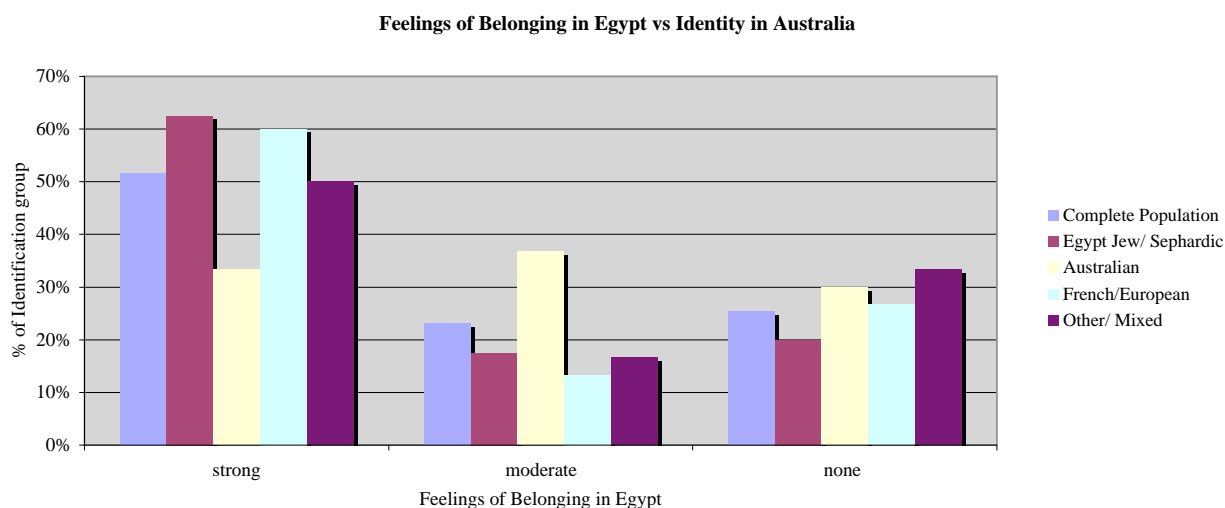


Chart 16

The complexity and ambivalence of Egyptian Jews' multiple and conflicting identities were not really understood in any of their countries of immigration, and the old dilemma lingered. Whereas in Egypt, they were never considered Egyptians, in their new country they were labelled as Egyptians or even Arabs both by the general population and by the Jewish community. The confusion made by the general population was somewhat tolerated and humoured whereas it was resented coming from the Jewish community who, in the eyes of my respondents, should have known better. This attitude was part and parcel of the bigger issue of internal cultural divide between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews that will be discussed further in this chapter.

On the other hand, in the late 1950s, when the main wave of Jewish Egyptian migrants arrived in Australia, the general population, staunchly monolingual and still quite insular, was just starting to get accustomed to the ways of the 'new Australians': their broken English, their funny accents, their strange food and their peculiar customs. On the whole, my respondents did not complain about the way they were greeted by Australians. They considered them mostly helpful and pleasant in spite of their innate Anglo-Saxon reserve. There was at times some venting of anti-immigrant feelings, especially when migrants communicated in their own language in front of the locals. One respondent stated that 'they felt that somebody talking in a different language was strange'. 'You have to speak English', they said.'²⁴ In the same vein, Participant #8 remembered an unpleasant episode in 1959, when he was having a

²⁴ Case study #77, as one of the earliest arrivals – in 1949 – still maintained that in spite of their insularity, 'the Australians were very nice, kind and hospitable.'

private conversation in French with his wife in the train on their way to work, and a commuter intervened loudly by poking her umbrella at his wife, saying: speak English, you wogs!²⁵ This was obviously a reflection of a policy of assimilation where migrants were encouraged to shed their old culture and adopt unilaterally the Anglo-Celtic culture. A number of parents within the sample group reported that the issue of language deeply affected their children who begged them consistently not to speak French in front of their school friends.²⁶ Even in the late 1960s, when the Department of Immigration had already dropped from official usage the term ‘assimilation’ and replaced it with ‘integration’, a respondent remembered being admonished by a primary school headmistress for speaking French to her children. Nevertheless, nobody in the sample group could recall a significant anti-Semitic incident originating from non-Jewish Australians.

The multiple identities of the Jews of Egypt always seem to baffle Australians and it was not uncommon for the former to be submitted to a lengthy interrogation by the latter trying to work out who those newcomers were, why did they speak French when they said they were born in Egypt, why were they not French, why were they not Egyptian, what did it mean to be Jewish in Egypt and a string of other related questions. According to the numerous testimonies of the majority of Egyptian Jews who settled all over the map, they were subjected to the same type of questioning and always had to explain themselves to others.²⁷ Even in France where they shared the same culture, they were often asked: ‘*mais d’où venez-vous?*’ because their accent was not recognised as an authentic French accent and therefore they could not be ‘true French’. It seems that their multi-layered identity was also confusing for the host society.

If one were to assess which type of migrants would acculturate better than others in those days, it would obviously be the young, European-looking, educated, English-speaking and

²⁵ Case study #8 had initially settled in the southern suburbs of Sydney, a very Australian area, which included a number of Italian migrants from Sicily and Calabria.

²⁶ The ingrained bias against foreign languages transcended the fact that French was the most preferred second language taught in high schools at the time.

²⁷ Maurice Mizrahi, a Cairo-born Jew who migrated to the United States as a refugee in 1967, recently gave a talk at his local synagogue entitled ‘Growing up under Pharaoh’ where he spoke about the baffling nature of Egyptian Jews’ identity or rather identities. He described his family as a ‘linguistic and cultural zoo’: his native language was French; he was educated in French, then Italian, then Arabic, and then English; his father was a true Sephardi whose native language was Ladino and was educated in Italian; his mother was a true Mizrahi or Eastern Jew (the ones who never left the Middle East) whose native language was Arabic and educated in French; his grandparents were from Rhodes and Salonica where both Ladino and Greek were spoken; his great grandfather, a rabbi, was from Smyrna (Izmir) in Turkey where he built a synagogue and spoke Turkish and everybody prayed in Hebrew. Although this is an obvious case of hyperbole, multilingual skills were definitely a dominant feature of the case studies that form the core of the present research.

middle class. It is undeniable that these factors played a major role in the degree of identification and communal involvement of the participants. For instance, within my sample, those who were under the age of 28 upon arrival in the country, felt much more connected to Australia than those over the age of 28. One can safely assume that this is true across the board for all migrants. Early integration difficulties are usually more easily overcome by the younger members of any migrant group and the structure of my sample group confirmed that the majority – about 60 % - of those between the age of 18 and 45, had an easier integration experience than those over 45. More specifically, the respondents in the upper middle class category, aged between 18 and 28, with a tertiary education and advanced English skills were more likely to be involved in communal affairs than the older respondents. Furthermore, any respondent under the age of 18 upon arrival would have attended primary and/or high school in Australia, which would significantly accelerate not only the identification process but also the degree of professional achievement. The younger migrants were more likely to become professionals or self-employed than those who arrived over the age of 45, as demonstrated by the next chart 17:

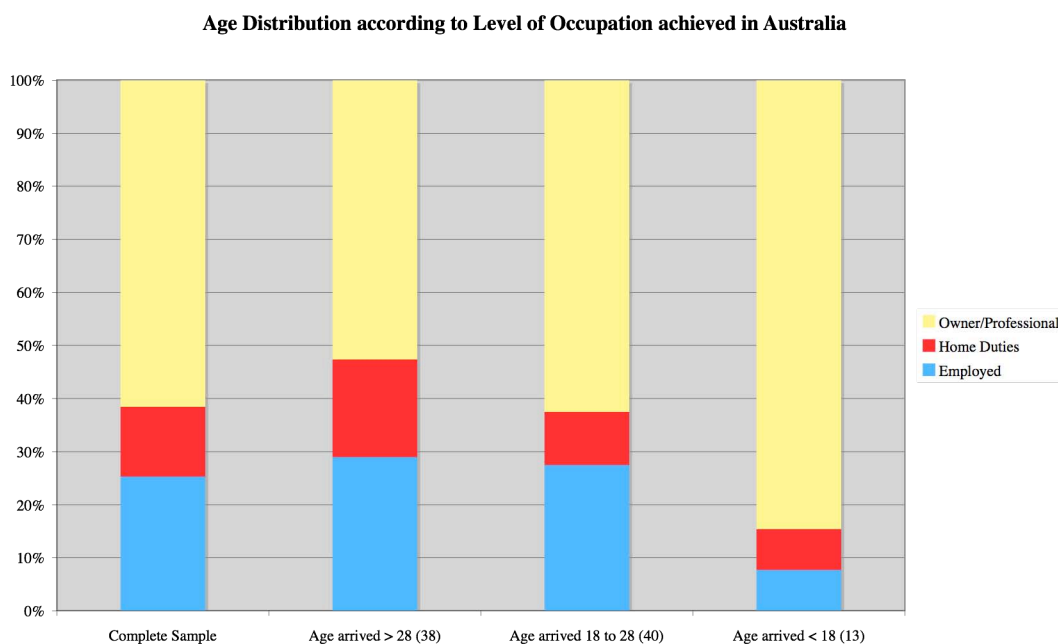


Chart 17

In fact, by the time the present research was initiated, the overall percentage of those who achieved the highest status professionally was a remarkable 62%, which means they had re-integrated their place in the middle and upper middle class. In addition, virtually all the participants had become more or less fluent in English, either through formal education or

self-tuition. It is true that their English remained accented, even after more than 40 years, and identified them immediately as non-Australians or at least non-Australian born. However, in view of the multicultural nature of modern Australian society, they were not alone in this respect. Some even declared that through the years, their accent was often considered 'interesting', particularly when they revealed that they came from Egypt. If they did not look too 'ethnic', the response would often be: 'you don't look Egyptian' as if in consolation.

My next concern was to address the issue of the dynamics between the sample group and the broader Jewish Australian community. Both the size of the existing Jewish community and the support system organised by the local Jewish institutions, were crucial to the newcomers' self-identification with that community. As noted, the profile of Egyptian Jews was higher in the smaller Adelaide context where they were accepted 'on face value' by the established community who, claimed Respondent #35, 'was more interested in us than we in them'. Their profile was definitely much lower amongst the much larger Sydney and Melbourne Jewish communities where some of my respondents complained they were made to feel like outsiders by their fellow Jews. One notable example was the case of Interviewee #63, a highly educated graduate of the elite Victoria College in Alexandria and the British Institute, who was fluent in four languages. He reported that some of his Ashkenazi colleagues used to call him an 'Arab' because he did not speak Yiddish. This feeling of being patronised by the Jewish establishment was often shared by both Sephardi and Ashkenazi interviewees. For instance, an Ashkenazi respondent confided that, to this day, the only people who accept her as an equal and with whom she feels most comfortable, are the more recently arrived South African Jews. The latter have also been considered 'outsiders' at times by some of the local Jews. According to that respondent, her complex identity as an Ashkenazi, francophone, Egyptian-born Jew as well as an Australian, is regarded as a fascinating and distinctive feature.²⁸ This phenomenon was probably due to the fact that the Egyptians' migration preceded the South Africans' and therefore the former were perceived as more seasoned 'new Australians'? How did South African Jews weather their own immigration experience and is there any parallel between the two cases? It is true that their migration to Australia was greatly facilitated by the fact they were not refugees when they first arrived. In addition, they

²⁸ Case study #26 arrived in Australia in 1951 as an eight-year old, born of Ashkenazi parents. The family first settled in Melbourne but very quickly moved to Sydney where they met and subsequently socialised with a large group of Jews from Egypt. My respondent married an Egyptian-born Sephardi Jew, and has been consistently active in the Jewish community since she became involved with the Jewish National Fund (JNF) at the age of sixteen.

found in Australia a familiar culture, education system, lifestyle and communal structure. In view of the size of the Jewish South African population in Australia – estimated around 15,000 - they were able to rely on their own support group and most of them very quickly re-established themselves within the ranks of the Jewish and wider community.²⁹ Nevertheless, no uprooting is easy and they must have also experienced difficulties re-adjusting to their new life. A comparative study of their ‘exodus’ would be an interesting topic for future research.

Gitelman has argued that ‘identification with Jews is generally expressed in the diaspora...in two ways: affiliation and philanthropy.’³⁰ To what extent were Egyptian Jews affiliated to Jewish institutions such as synagogues, communal bodies, and welfare organisations? How did they generally interact with the local Jews and particularly with the Iraqi/Indian Sephardim? Was there a sustained effort on their behalf to build separate institutions in order to preserve the specificity of their Sephardic religious traditions and cultural identity or identities? In other words, how strong and distinctive was their Sephardi identity and how did it fit in with the dominant Ashkenazi identity and with the ‘other’ Sephardim of Australia?

Firstly, it is important to state that synagogue affiliation was quasi axiomatic for the Jews in Egypt. As noted by Krämer, ‘all Jews residing in town for a certain period of time, usually one year, were regarded as members of the community, regardless of rite and personal observance.’³¹ However, the system of synagogue membership where congregants have ‘to pay to pray’ was quite foreign to Sephardim as it was customary in Egypt for the rich families of the community to maintain and subsidise the various religious institutions. Everybody attended the synagogue of their choice ‘without having to pay any fee’ whereas in Australia, many resisted the notion of ‘membership payment’ that was common practice in all the diasporas of the Western world.³² The present research also revealed that as a consequence of uprooting and dispersal, the practice of regular synagogue attendance, apart from the High Holy Days, was often neglected by most Egyptian Jews in Australia. Nevertheless, the fact that the majority of the sample group – close to 80% - remained affiliated to Sephardi, Ashkenazi or Reform synagogues, however loosely, proved a persisting self-identification as Jews in spite of the laxity in their religious observance. The distribution between the three

²⁹ See Rutland, *The Jews in Australia*, p.134, where she stated: ‘According to the 2001 Census, 10 473 Jews had been born in South Africa but, allowing for under-counting of 20 per cent, the number is likely to be closer to 14,000 to 15,000.’

³⁰ Gitelman, ‘The Decline of the Diaspora Jewish Nation...’, p.114.

³¹ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.69.

³² Naomi Gale, ‘Sephardim and Sephardi Identity in Sydney’, *AJHS*, Vol. XI. Part 2, 1991, p.338.

types of institutions was not necessarily based on ethnicity and has fluctuated over the years. For example, about 20% of my Sydney and Melbourne Sephardi respondents who had the choice between the two rites, chose to be affiliated to Ashkenazi synagogues whereas the opposite was almost never true.³³

As for their Sephardi identification, the early records of the Sydney Sephardi Synagogue showed that a significant number of Egyptian Jews had joined up with the predominant Iraqi and Indian Jews as foundation members of this synagogue and some of them served on the Executive and/or in the Ladies Auxiliary for many years.³⁴ Scholars such as Myer Samra and Naomi Gale have both compared and contrasted the issue of identity between the Iraqi and the Egyptian groups and studied their interaction as well as their relations with the wider Jewish community.³⁵ Samra has pointed out that the Iraqi and Indian Jews came to adopt the label of Sephardim by the mid-1950s, partly out of a need to differentiate themselves from the predominant Ashkenazim and partly because they considered the Sephardi/Spanish/European background to be more prestigious. They were not aware of the Egyptian Sephardim:

For many of my informants, ‘Sephardi’ had become synonymous with Iraqi culture, so to learn about Sephardi Jews from Egypt with different customs has been quite a surprise.³⁶

The encounter between the two different Sephardi traditions encouraged a degree of acceptance of certain aspects of these traditions, such as ‘the liturgy and culinary endeavours’. For example, Samra noted that the ‘tunes identified with the Yerushalmi tradition [practised by Egyptian Jews], occasionally used in the Sephardi Synagogue’ were favourably accepted by Iraqi Jews who use the Babylonian Talmud. Furthermore, the dishes prepared by the Egyptians, although different from Iraqi cuisine were more appreciated than Ashkenazi cuisine. This was an instance of a sharing of cultures. However, added Samra,

³³ Gale, *ibid.*, p.334, has stated that in 1987, out of an approximately Sephardi population of 3000, 740 are affiliated to the two Sephardi congregations and the rest are either members of Ashkenazi congregations or do not belong to any synagogue.

³⁴ See Aaron, *The Sephardim of Australia & New Zealand*, p.79: list of foundation members; pp.100-1: list of Executive members of the Board; p.230: profile of Albert Hassid, who joined the NSW Association of Sephardim upon arrival in Australia from Cairo in 1952 and was closely involved in the negotiations related to the building of the Sephardi Synagogue. He represented the Association on the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies. He was also invited to serve on the Executive Council of Australian Jewry in the matter of Jews in Arab countries.

³⁵ See Myer Samra, ‘Yisrael rhammana: constructions of identity among Iraqi Jews in Sydney, Australia’, Thesis (Ph.D.), University of Sydney, 1987. Naomi Gale, ‘From the Homeland to Sydney – The Sephardi Jews’. Thesis (PhD), University of Sydney, 1988. This thesis has since been published under the title: *The Sephardim of Sydney – Coping with Political Processes and Social Pressures*, Sussex: Sussex Academic Press, May 2005.

³⁶ Samra, ‘Yisrael rhammana...’, p.87.

notwithstanding the positive aspects of their identification with each other, the dissimilarities between the two communities led to episodes of friction and even estrangement, arising ‘from differences in cultural taste and education’ as well as differences in self-identification.³⁷

According to some of my informants, the Iraqi establishment considered the Egyptians not knowledgeable enough of their own ‘religious’ traditions³⁸, whereas the Egyptians found the Iraqis too rigid in their approach to ritual differences and often unwilling to compromise.³⁹ Once more, the issue of the Egyptians’ continued use of French as their *lingua franca*, caused a controversy. Samra argued that the fact that they spoke French between themselves and had ‘developed friendship networks which included other Jews from around the Mediterranean who have also adopted the French language’, further alienated the Iraqi/Indian group. As for the Egyptian Jews, whilst accepting the general notion of a ‘common Sephardiness’, they still claimed they were ‘real’ Sephardis, with a true Spanish origin, without much in common with the so-called Sephardi Jews from Asia.⁴⁰ Naomi Gale also found that ‘members of the Egyptian group invariably regarded themselves as superior to the Iraqi and Indian-born members...more modern and more advanced’.⁴¹ Gradually, due to natural attrition as well as disaffection and/or general apathy, the original Egyptian membership of the Sephardi Synagogue dwindled considerably. Some joined other Egyptian families who were already affiliated to Ashkenazi synagogues as a result of their children attending Jewish day schools and therefore being acculturated to the Ashkenazi tradition. Others were already settled far from the traditional Jewish neighbourhoods where there was only one Ashkenazi synagogue and a small Jewish community. For instance, for the Egyptians who lived in the St George district, the travelling distance to Bondi Junction constituted a significant obstacle to their joining the Sephardi Synagogue, particularly for the older members who often were not driving. It was much more convenient for them to join the local Ashkenazi synagogue, based

³⁷ Samra, ‘Yisrael rhammana...’, p.180.

³⁸ Gale, in ‘Sephardim and Sephardi Identity in Sydney’, p.338, also pointed out the more relaxed religious observance of the Egyptians compared to the Iraqis: ‘In contrast to the Egyptian Jews, Iraqi Jews adhered strictly to their religion’.

³⁹ Two Sydney informants (#25 and #26), who worked tirelessly for many years in every capacity for the Sephardi Synagogue and had served on the board of Management of the Association, became disillusioned when they encountered opposition from the Sephardi Rabbi in regards to the Bat-mitzvah of their daughter. They also found that the Indian group was becoming more and more ‘vociferous and wanted everything their way’. When the congregation was left without a rabbi for a certain period of time, my respondents decided to join the membership of the Great Synagogue.

⁴⁰ Samra, ‘Yisrael rhammana...’, p.180.

⁴¹ Gale, ‘Sephardim and Sephardi Identity in Sydney’, p.338.

in Allawah.⁴² Furthermore, some of the disaffected ‘Eastern Suburbs’ members, who considered themselves ‘true Orthodox Sephardim’, pooled their efforts with other Sephardim from Israel, North Africa and Iraq and formed their own Sephardi *minyán*, now based at Beit Yosef (the Caro Synagogue) in Bondi.⁴³

In the case of Melbourne, it was a group of dedicated Egyptian Jews, wishing to emulate the example of the NSW Sephardim and also seeking to define themselves vis-à-vis the dominant Ashkenazi community, who enlisted the help of the Melbourne Baghdadi community to establish the Sephardi Association of Victoria in November 1965. The first president was Maurice Tueta, an Egyptian Jew.⁴⁴ A Sephardi synagogue was subsequently built and inaugurated in March 1977 by Malcom Fraser, then Prime Minister of Australia, which was a momentous occasion. Unfortunately, Gad Ben-Meir, who also served as president of the Association, claimed that the new leadership which took office in 1987, had sown ‘seeds of division and dissension’ which ‘brought about the alienation of almost the entirety of the Iraqi constituency and of the intelligentsia.’⁴⁵ It is interesting to note that some of my respondents, who were part of the original committee and were still very involved in the running of the synagogue, did not mention any significant internal conflict, either because they considered it irrelevant by the time of the interview or because they simply occulted the memory of that conflict, which is often the case in oral history. On the contrary, they showed great pride in the self-sufficiency and strength of their small congregation. Only when specifically asked about any friction between themselves and the Baghdadi members, did they acknowledge it existed but that they still managed to maintain a reasonably harmonious working climate between the two ethnic subgroups. One of the founding members, 95 years old Maurice Gamil, proudly showed me the Commonwealth recognition award presented to him in February 2002, in recognition for his unique dedication to the Sephardi Synagogue and to the Sephardi tradition.⁴⁶

⁴² Due to the dwindling Jewish population in that area of Sydney, this synagogue is now part of the Southern Sydney Synagogue, which also incorporates Bankstown Synagogue and South Coast Hebrew Congregation.

⁴³ This information was relayed to me by an Egyptian Jew who was a member of the Sephardi synagogue for twenty years before deciding to leave the congregation.

⁴⁴ Aaron, *The Sephardim of Australia and New Zealand*, pp.33-5.

⁴⁵ Gad, Ben-Meir, ‘The Sephardim of Australia’, *AJHS Journal*, Vol. XI, Part 1, 1990, p.29. See also, Fiona Kaufman, ‘The Sephardi Voice: the Sephardi Community of Victoria 1800-1984, a Study’, Honours Thesis, 1984, University of Melbourne, Department of Middle Eastern Studies.

⁴⁶ The vice-president of the Sephardi Association of Victoria testified that Mr. Gamil, without formal religious training ‘spent many long hours at home, reciting the prayers with the very unique Sephardi tunes that he had

Overall, the identification of the Egyptian Sephardim with the Sephardim of Asia encountered a number of difficulties, particularly in Sydney, due to differences of culture, religious practice and mentality. The issue of the younger generation of Egyptian Jews in Adelaide, Sydney and Melbourne is even more problematic. It is obviously difficult to motivate them to retain their Sephardi identity when their parents' congregations are ageing and shrinking. The allure of the bigger and better organised Ashkenazi synagogues, the influence of the Jewish day school system, where Ashkenazi history and traditions are predominantly taught, with, at best, a token Sephardi content, and the prestige of the upwardly mobile young Ashkenazi adults, often prove too much of an attraction for the young to develop a distinctive Sephardi identity and do not augur well for the growth of the Sephardi community of Australia.

How did Egyptian Jews interact with the broader Jewish community, a community that was predominantly Ashkenazi? It was interesting to note that while the Sephardim and Ashkenazim within the sample group were very much aware of their own history and traditions, they did not see themselves as fundamentally different and they dealt with one another as equals. Together in Egypt, they had already undergone the process of westernisation through education and socialisation and now in Australia they were experiencing the same trauma of displacement and alienation. However, according to the testimonies of various respondents, the attitude of the dominant Ashkenazi community in Australia towards the minority Sephardi community was often unsympathetic. One respondent who was herself Ashkenazi, stated:

There was no warmth from the Anglo-Jewish community. They looked down upon us. They did not like us to speak French.⁴⁷

Others recalled the patronising behaviour of the dominant group and the subtle discrimination they experienced in the early days of their arrival. This negative perception was confirmed by Gale's research on the Sephardi Jews of Sydney. It seems that when Sephardim started to arrive, 'neither AJWS nor the ECAJ displayed much enthusiasm in helping them', whereas the 1956 Hungarian refugees who arrived at the same time as the Egyptian refugees, were

grown up with and wanted to pass on to the next generation.' This was part of an article 'Reward for work' published in the district newspaper, *The Moorabbin Leader*, on 12 February 2002, p.25.

⁴⁷ Case study #56 was expelled from Egypt in 1956 as a French national and arrived in Australia in 1958 after spending two years in France, waiting for a landing permit. As one of the few truly observant respondents, she became affiliated to the Great Synagogue of Sydney where she had her first contacts with the Anglo-Jewish community. She worked for 21 years in Jewish education and was the Headmistress of the Great Synagogue Sunday School.

welcomed with open arms.⁴⁸ Apparently, many Jews from Egypt were particularly bitter at the way they were treated. According to Gale, the attitude of the Ashkenazi establishment stemmed partly out of ignorance of the existence of Sephardi Jews, and partly out of fear of a new wave of antisemitism sparked by the arrival of presumed undesirable ‘black’ Jews who would undermine their status as ‘White Australians’.⁴⁹ Maybe it was no coincidence that the only three instances reported to me where Egyptian Jews complained of discrimination by local Jews in positions of authority, concerned respondents who were ‘visibly ethnic’, in other words of ‘Middle Eastern appearance’. The three cases, two in Sydney and one in Melbourne, had gone to the Jewish Welfare offices upon arrival in Australia, asking for help and in all three cases, they were told to address themselves to ‘their own people’, code word for the Sephardi community.⁵⁰ The impact caused by such an expression of exclusion at a particularly vulnerable time in their life, when they had already suffered dispossession and dislocation, seems to have had a deep lasting effect since they still remember those incidents over forty years after the fact. Gale very aptly recalled Max Weber’s differentiation between self-identification and identification by others:

While self-identification refers to common descent and cultural traditions, identification by others is based mostly on physical and behavioural characteristics which are different from those of the identifier.⁵¹

It is understandable that the Egyptian Sephardim, who were considered the aristocracy of their community in Egypt, did not appreciate being snubbed by the dominant Ashkenazim. Nevertheless, apart from those few cases and unlike the Baghdadi and Indian Jews, the majority of my interviewees did not claim they were consistently discriminated against by the dominant Ashkenazim, probably because of their ethnic heterogeneity, Western acculturation and generally more ‘European’ appearance.

The experience of Egyptian Jews in Adelaide constitutes a case in point. Contrary to the situation in Sydney, the Adelaide respondents reported that their relationship with the established Ashkenazi community was mostly harmonious, borne out of respect and genuine

⁴⁸ Gale, ‘From the Homeland to Sydney’, p.162. She acknowledged that two prominent community leaders, A. Landa and S. Einfeld, did help Sephardim referred to them through friends.

⁴⁹ Gale also mentioned the case of one Egyptian Jew who, upon arrival in Australia, was met by a Jewish representative on board the ship and asked to prove her Jewish identity by speaking Yiddish. This is very reminiscent of the negative reactions of the Anglo/Jewish establishment to the European refugees who arrived in Australia immediately before World War II. See Rutland, *The Edge of the Diaspora*, pp.184-8.

⁵⁰ One of those respondents reported that this incident caused her to distance herself completely from the Jewish community.

⁵¹ Gale, ‘Sephardim and Sephardi Identity in Sydney’, p. 344.

interest for the cultural and religious differences between the two traditions. On the other hand, Adelaide Jewry was so small, that all newcomers to the community were welcomed regardless of their ethnic background. Some locals reproached the Egyptian newcomers for their low level of involvement in communal activities. They even reproached them for their continued use of the French language whereas they had abandoned their native German for English.⁵² Nevertheless, the consensus was that they contributed significantly to the community by more than doubling its size and therefore reinvigorating it. Adelaide Egyptian Jews never wanted to establish a separate Sephardi synagogue in spite of various promptings from the Sydney and Melbourne Sephardi Associations. In view of the overall small size of the community, they did not wish to isolate themselves and thus divide the community. They preferred the strategy of acculturation, which was integrating the existing structure while retaining certain features of their identity.

Again it was in Adelaide that the communal involvement of the Jews of Egypt was most prominent. After the initial struggle to settle and earn a living in a foreign land, a number of Egyptian Jews came to hold leadership positions in the established Adelaide communal institutions. The leader of the New South Wales Association of Sephardim (NAS) Aaron Aaron praised them in his book:

they helped to regenerate Jewish life into what was becoming a fast-fading assimilated Jewish community. Their presence has been felt in the synagogue where they introduced parts of their Sephardic *Minhag*, blending this with the Ashkenazi *Minhag* so that the result reflected aspects of the background of every Jew.⁵³

This was reiterated to me by one of my Adelaide respondents who served many terms on the board of the synagogue, eventually becoming president. He was responsible for the introduction of some of those Sephardi *minhagim* and melodies in the predominantly Ashkenazi ritual. Furthermore, he headed the Jewish Welfare Society of Adelaide, and ran it single-handed for many years.⁵⁴ A number of other prominent Adelaide Egyptian Jews were mentioned by Aaron Aaron, such as Victor Ades who was president of the South Australia Jewish Board of Deputies from 1963 to 1970. The Jewish kindergarten of Adelaide still bears his name. Dr. Albert Hassan, was treasurer and president of the Adelaide Hebrew

⁵² Rabbi J. Kahn confirmed that resentment was expressed by the European Jews towards their fellow Jews from Egypt in respect to their use of French.

⁵³ Aaron, *The Sephardim of Australia & New Zealand*, p. 20.

⁵⁴ By the time of the interview, Albert Ninio, had been living in Melbourne for a number of years. He died a few months later. A very warm tribute was paid to him by the former Chief Minister of the Adelaide Hebrew Congregation, Rabbi Philip Heilbrunn, praising his involvement in all aspects of Jewish life in Adelaide.

Congregation, the only synagogue in Adelaide at the time. Joseph Bolaffi was Treasurer of the South Australia Zionist Federation from 1962 and then became President in 1974 for six years.⁵⁵ Albert Ninio was past and acting president of the B'nai B'rith Lodge (1969-1970).⁵⁶ Victor Baroukh was president of the Nat Solomon's House for the Aged. Furthermore, Henri Ninio, who later became the Lord Mayor of Adelaide, was the president of the Beit Shalom Progressive synagogue, established in 1963. Today, his daughter is one of the rabbis of Temple Emanuel in Woollahra, Sydney. As stated previously, Egyptian Jews were also very active in the establishment of the Maccabi Sports Club, in 1960, supporting it for many years, probably because of their familiarity with the social club scene in Egypt. The high level of communal activism of the Adelaide respondents appears to be unquestionable.

Only in South Australia, were Egyptian Jews visible in state and local politics, however modestly. As already mentioned, the Lord Mayor of Adelaide between 1993 and 1997 was Henri Ninio, and his brother was Commissioner for Multicultural Affairs. Max Liberman, the pioneer amongst Egyptian Jews in Adelaide, was Chairman of the Housing Commission from 1975 to 1980. Others achieved great success in the business realm, such as the Hassan family and the Barouch family.

From these observations, it seems that the strategies of identification and acculturation of Egyptian Jews with the wider Jewish community worked relatively well in spite of some early difficulties again due to cultural differences and the racist attitudes of a few within the ranks of the predominantly Ashkenazi institutions. Once they were more established and more financially secure, they often joined Ashkenazi synagogues, sent their children to Sunday school and when they could afford it, to Jewish day schools, Jewish sports clubs and Zionist youth groups. Through their children, they gradually entered Jewish society and because of their innate ability to adapt and fit in, they were accepted and integrated within the fold relatively quickly. However, in the case of the Sydney respondents, for financial reasons, they did not always conform to the traditional Jewish pattern of settling in the more affluent Eastern Suburbs and moved to more popular 'Australian' suburbs where they relied on their own network for support and socialisation. In the case of Adelaide, because of their numbers, my respondents made a more significant impact on the existing Jewish community and the acculturation was more a two-way process.

⁵⁵ Case study #89 was also a supporter of a number of Jewish organizations such as of JNF, WIZO, B'nai B'rith, and the Maccabi Sports Club.

⁵⁶ Case study #66.

Another important component of the overall Jewish identity is the level of identification with the State of Israel. As noted by Samra, 'Israel is central to the identity of all Jews, even if the elements from which that identity is built may not necessarily be identical.'⁵⁷ Attachment to and identification with Israel function at several levels, ideologically, religiously, nationally and personally. How close did my respondents feel to the Jewish state and what did it represent for them today compared to what it represented in Egypt?

Firstly, virtually all the sample group stated they had family, close or extended, living in Israel, and hence, were connected on a personal and emotional level. In addition, they felt implicated on a national level with the Jewish state, at varying degrees of intensity, although few would elect to settle there at this stage of their lives. Nearly 10% of my respondents lived in Israel for a number of years after leaving Egypt. They migrated to Australia to be reunited with family and for economic reasons. On the other hand, close to 17% of the interviewees never visited Israel. Nevertheless, the majority openly expressed feelings of pride and solidarity with the Jewish state and close to 44% claimed they actively supported Zionist organisations by promoting or attending functions and contributing financially to Zionist causes. For instance, Respondent #56 always encouraged her sons to attend Zionist youth movements. Like for many other Jews, the Six Day War was a watershed event for her, intensifying her identification with the Jewish State. In this respect, Rutland noted:

Unlike the 1956 Suez crisis, the 1967 war had a significant impact on Australian Jewry because it brought together all members of the community, including the unaffiliated. More importantly, the community expressed this sense of unity and solidarity in a public manner, either through attending rallies or donating to the emergency appeal.⁵⁸

This last respondent revealed to her granddaughter that 'it was through this war that she developed a sense of identity with Israel and Judaism and has never felt so proud of being Jewish'.⁵⁹ One must remember that in Egypt, except for the idealistic young men and women who joined the Zionist youth movements, most only sympathised in secret with the Jewish state. Not only were Zionist activities banned after the establishment of the Jewish state but also any outward sign of support for Israel was construed as an act of treason and severely punished. 'We could not show our true feelings [towards Israel] because of our environment.

⁵⁷ Samra, 'Yisrael rhammana..', p.247.

⁵⁸ Rutland, *Edge of the Diaspora*, pp.358-9.

⁵⁹ Talia Clara Seidman, 'In every generation, it is one's duty to regard himself as though he personally had gone out of Egypt (Haggadah)', Dr. Hans Kimmel Memorial Prize for Jewish History – Year 10, September 2003, p.52 and p.54.

You had to be very careful and very restrained’, remembered one respondent.⁶⁰ Those who did not tow the official line paid the heavy price of imprisonment and expulsion as was the case for a number of my informants both in Australia and overseas.⁶¹ In fact, the establishment of the State of Israel was the last straw in a chain of events that forced the Jews of Egypt to undertake their ‘second exodus’.

In Australia as in other Western democracies, Jews felt free to express their solidarity with Israel or criticise its policies and they often exercise that freedom. Some of my informants stated that the existence of Israel was essential to their security and to their status as Diaspora Jews: ‘*Les juifs du monde sont en sécurité de par l’existence de l’Etat d’Israël.*’⁶² Another respondent went even further by saying that for him and his wife ‘the existence of Israel made the area and the world in general a safer place’⁶³, while another disagreed, stating that for her, Israel could not be considered a safe haven in the current political context.⁶⁴ A respondent who lived in Israel for eight years prior to coming to Australia declared he could not separate his identity as a Jew from his identification with Israel: ‘outside Israel, you have to identify yourself as Jewish whereas in Israel you just are.’⁶⁵ Interviewee #61 admitted to a lingering sense of culpability for not having settled in ‘the Promised Land’, and having opted for the relative comfort of Australia.⁶⁶ Even for those who were not always in agreement with the current Israeli government’s policies, being loyal to the state of Israel remained a constant.⁶⁷ Some chose to qualify their feelings of solidarity by insisting that, as Australian citizens, their first loyalty was to Australia and then to Israel, except in the unlikely event of Australia

⁶⁰ Case study #55 was orphaned at an early age and raised by a non-Jewish family. In Egypt, he was only aware of the danger that any sign of support for Israel represented.

⁶¹ Case study #24 was imprisoned and later expelled for being a member of a Zionist youth movement and the same for Case study #46 who was accused of being a Communist.

⁶² Case Study #7 was never involved in Zionist activities in Egypt but was nevertheless expelled in the wake of the Suez War in 1956. He suspected that it was an excuse for sequestering his father’s business. AJDC arranged for his resettlement in Israel where he remained for ten years before immigrating to Australia. He is now very involved with the Sephardi Synagogue in Melbourne.

⁶³ It is only when this informant (#55) left Egypt and migrated to Australia, that he felt free to express his support of Israel. Two of his children, who are now married to Jewish partners, were staunch supporters of Betar, the right-wing Zionist youth movement.

⁶⁴ Respondent #9.

⁶⁵ Case study #62 lived in Israel for a few years before coming to Australia to join his mother and sister. He had originally made *aliyah* from Egypt as part of Operation Passover straight after World War II.

⁶⁶ Case study #61 arrived in Adelaide in 1949 to join her future husband who had migrated earlier. Their beginnings were hard due to the difficult post war conditions.

⁶⁷ Case study #72 conceded that Israel represented an element of security for Diaspora Jews although personally, he would not choose to live there because of cultural differences.

turning against its Jewish population.⁶⁸ Respondent #54, on the other hand, was totally against the idea of Israel's centrality to the identity of all Jews. She identified more with Egypt and the Egyptians: '*je me considérais très égyptienne. J'étais très fière de l'être.*' She also violently disagreed with the policy of occupation of the Israeli government vis-à-vis the Palestinian population. Once again, the whole range of identification with Israel, as expressed by my respondents, has been outlined, demonstrating once more the diversity of the group that included staunch Zionists, Zionists sympathisers and even anti-Zionists.

Up to this point, it has been established that my interviewees strongly related to their Jewishness as a combination of a distinctive ethnic and religious identity specific to the Jews of Egypt. Some tried to assert their collective identity through the establishment of and affiliation to Sephardi institutions, without a resounding success due to their small numbers and internal division. Others, drawing on their multicultural skills, successfully blended into the ranks of the broader Australian/Jewish community, even though they rarely held leadership positions, with the exception of Adelaide Jewry where Egyptian Jews were more numerous and therefore more prominent. There are also individual cases of communal achievements such as the immediate past president of the Great Synagogue of Sydney, Herman Eisenberg⁶⁹, the immediate past president of the New South Wales Council of Jewish Women, Dinah Danon and others who worked for communal organisations in different capacities. The majority has maintained some fundamental aspects of their previous or 'inner' identity, their affinity with the French culture and their Egyptian and Mediterranean roots, a 'salad bowl' of multiculturalism to quote Levey.⁷⁰ Most of my respondents seemed well integrated and have accommodated both their Jewish identity and their newly forged national identity as Australians.

It is important to point out that, apart from a feeling of nostalgia of their past life in Egypt as well as a lingering feeling of anger and resentment about the way this period of their lives was abruptly terminated, none of my respondents uttered any regrets about choosing to live in Australia. On the contrary, many of them even admitted that 'being kicked out of Egypt was

⁶⁸ Respondent #9 was also of the opinion that if Jews were threatened in a country like Australia, they would be doubly threatened in a country like Israel because of its strategic and geographical location in a troubled and unstable part of the world.

⁶⁹ In January 2006, Herman Eisenberg was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) for his service to the community through at the Great Synagogue of Sydney, as well as the Wesley Mission and Rotary International. See *Australian Jewish News*, 'From nothing to something', 27 January 2006, p.6. (Appendix #4).

⁷⁰ Levey, 'Jews and Australian Multiculturalism', p.193.

the best thing that could have happened to us'. What Chanan Reich wrote about the broader Jewish community of Melbourne seems particularly relevant to my sample group:

The 1967 survey of the Melbourne Jewish community revealed a marked satisfaction with life in Australia and positive emotional feelings about being Australians...This pattern of positive feelings towards Australia prevailed side by side with a high degree of Jewish identification... [These feelings] stem from economic success, or upward social mobility and a relatively high degree of tolerance which they enjoy in Australia.⁷¹

Nevertheless, their memories of the past are part of a precious cultural heritage that could easily be forgotten. When asked the question whether their children were interested in their past history in Egypt, the majority of my respondents (76%) answered in the affirmative. How can that heritage be transmitted to the next generation? Oral history is certainly one tool that has been used by a number of Australian-born grandchildren of Egyptian Jews who entered the Hans Kimmel Memorial Essay Competition in Contemporary Jewish History at Moriah College, Sydney's largest Jewish day school. The requirements of that competition are to research the life story of one member of one's family. This exercise proved to be an enriching experience at every level, as it gave them firstly the opportunity to learn about their parents' or grandparents' origins and early beginnings in Australia directly from the subjects themselves, and secondly it motivated them to delve into the contextual history of the twentieth century. One such student was faced with the dilemma of a family with roots in a number of countries such as Austria, Russia, Greece, Italy, Algeria and France before even getting to Egypt. She wrote:

This 'dilemma' however, soon translated itself into an opportunity as I decided to focus my research on the different Jewish communities and lifestyles, that my family had been part of over the last 120 years.⁷²

Another student realised the importance of her grandmother's testimony and the rich legacy she has entrusted onto her:

My grandmother lived through a period of great changes in the world, which had a significant influence on her life...The languages, customs and traditions that she has

⁷¹ Reich, 'Ethnic Identity and Political Participation: the Jewish and Greek Communities in Melbourne', p. 277.

⁷² This student, who did not wish to be named, was awarded the first prize at the Hans Kimmel Essay Competition for her entry in 2001.

kept and brought from her youth enrich my life as well as my family's life in Australia.⁷³

The direct transmission method of one's cultural heritage to the younger generation, particularly when it reflects the life of a community that is no more, complements and enriches any academic research of that particular period of history and of the people that lived through it. The past inevitably shapes the construction or reconstruction of one's identity.

It is clear that from the two possible models of acculturation to the Australian way of life, assimilation or integration, my respondents did not choose the former, at least at the level of the first generation. As defined in the introductory part of this study, assimilation means foregoing one's cultural and religious traditions and fusing into the host society by either changing name, intermarrying, converting, or just leaving one's ethnic community. Apart from a few exceptions, my informants' preferred model of acculturation was integration into Australian society while maintaining their ties with their ethnic background and their religious community. What strategies did they use in their efforts to 'become Australians and remain Jewish'? They tried as much as possible to reside close to centres of Jewish life.⁷⁴ They provided Jewish education for their children either through Sunday schools or Jewish dayschools. They contributed to the general welfare of the Australian Jewish community by being active in Jewish organisations such as B'nai Brith (#5), the National Council of Jewish Women (#26), and the Sydney Jewish Museum (#15).⁷⁵ They also made a contribution to the wider Australian community by donating their time to organisations such as Meals on Wheels, to Rotary International, the Wesley Mission, and to both major political parties.⁷⁶

It has also been established that most of the interviewees did not abandon their language and culture in spite of some adverse reactions from both the Jewish and the wider Australian community. They did not reject their religious tradition even if their level of observance had

⁷³ Talia Seidman's essay also won the first prize in 2003.

⁷⁴ For instance, three families of respondents moved after more than 15 years in the St George area of Sydney to the Eastern suburbs, a traditional Jewish area so that their children would socialise with other Jewish children.

⁷⁵ Respondent #37 entertained the residents of the Montefiore Home for many years, playing their favourite tunes on the piano. Respondent #72 is the editor of the quarterly magazine of Jewish Care, called *Keeping in Touch*. Another interviewee (#1K) acted as Arabic translator for the NSW Jewish Boards of Deputies on numerous occasions.

⁷⁶ One particular respondent (#6) worked for over ten years as a volunteer for Meals on Wheels, delivering meals to the old and the underprivileged. Respondent #56 was a volunteer at the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. She worked in the International broadcast Centre because of her multi-lingual skills.

generally waned compared to Egypt.⁷⁷ They did not turn their back on their own community, whether they stayed within the inner circle of Egyptian/Sephardi Jews or the wider context of Australian Jewry. Actually, 45% of the participants admitted that most of their friends were Jews from Egypt, while 40% stated they mixed both with Egyptian and Australian Jews.⁷⁸ These statistics also indicated that there was only a basic socialisation with non-Jewish Australians. In fact, amongst the 92 respondents, there were only four cases of name anglicisation. For instance, Respondent #23 removed the 'a' at the end of his name, which made it sound more 'Anglo' but he did not show any other sign of shedding his identity as a Jew from Egypt. In the case of Respondent #31, it was her father who had started the process of assimilation in Egypt, by changing the obviously Jewish family surname to a British one after World War II and the daughter followed suit. The other two cases had intermarried. The husbands were Maltese and Greek respectively, also from Egypt.⁷⁹ Generally speaking, the practice of anglicising surnames in order to better identify with Australian 'Anglo' society seems more prevalent in the Maltese community.

Intermarriage was rare at the level of my respondents' generation. However, it is definitely on the rise with the Australian-born generation, and constitutes a growing source of concern for my respondents. Their concerns in that respect are no different from those of the broader Jewish community, because 'recent demographic studies indicate a significant increase in intermarriage amongst the younger generation' and a 'declining birthrate'.⁸⁰

It is undeniable that the Egyptian Jewish heritage of my sample group has remained a significant ethnic marker. It identified them as a group sharing common characteristics such as: collective memories, both sweet and bitter; a language or two or even three, mainly French, Arabic and Italian; a religious tradition, mainly Sephardi but not exclusively; a diverse cuisine, Sephardi, Egyptian and Western; and a Western culture. Because of what Beinun called their 'Levantine cosmopolitanism', the respondents had internalised the strategies to accommodate within themselves their inner and outer identities and to live in

⁷⁷ Egyptian Jews are not that different from the majority of Australian Jews in that respect. As noted by Rutland in *the Jews in Australia*, p.97, 'Most Australian Jews can best be described as non-practising orthodox... [They] define themselves as Jewish but not religious, and observe some rituals.'

⁷⁸ It was not surprising to find that the level of socialisation of the older members of the group - over the age of 28 upon arrival - with other Egyptian Jews, was significantly higher than for those under the age of 28 (68% compared to 33%).

⁷⁹ Respondents #83 and #60.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p.105.

symbiosis with people from other ethnic backgrounds without assimilating.⁸¹ In their new diaspora, they have tried to integrate successfully in Australian society, finding their place in the middle or upper middle class and preserving some aspects of their identity by reacculturating the Egyptian diaspora to the Australian/Egyptian diaspora, thus adding another layer to their identity. However, they represent the last authentic Egyptian Jews, the last generation, and their ethnic specificity is bound to be diluted and maybe disappear completely as their children acculturate more and more into Australian society. Clearly, the dwindling Jewish community that remains in Egypt and its handful of members is not likely to reproduce itself. One would have to study the first generation born outside Egypt, in order to assess what, if anything, is left of those distinguishing features.⁸²

I have attempted to identify the interviewees' perception of self to determine their level of integration in the Australian social landscape and their contribution to the broader Jewish community. Earlier on, I investigated the depth of their feelings of belonging in Egypt and discovered how they gradually evaporated after 1948 and totally shattered when they were forced to leave. They came into Australia with a multi-layered identity because of their diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In the monolingual and monocultural Australia of the 1950s, they brought multilingual and multicultural skills, a strong sense of family, a strong sense of Jewish tradition, without being overly observant and a strong connection with Israel. They remained aloof of political involvement and few of them were visible within the ranks of Australian Jewry leadership apart from the Adelaide group. Although they were mainly Sephardi, in Australia they have mixed freely with the Ashkenazi majority in the synagogues, the dayschools, and the various communal functions. They claim that their predominant feeling of identity is Jewish Australian, but they still carry the signs of their previous identities, through their accent when they speak English, through the language they use in their closed family circles, the food they eat when they get together, and the way they think and see the world.

⁸¹ Beinun wrote in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.32: 'Decades after the liquidation of the community, some Egyptian Jews have reclaimed their Levantine cosmopolitanism through nostalgic literary reconstructions of Egypt...'

⁸² The PhD thesis of Joelle Rouchou, 'Nuits d'été au parfum de jasmin: Souvenirs des juifs d'Égypte à Rio de Janeiro – 1956/57, Université de Sao Paulo, 2003, investigated the transmission of memory from one generation to the next, through the interviewing of the children particularly for the Jews leaving one diaspora for another.

CHAPTER IX:

The French Migration Experience - A Case Study

The analysis of the various aspects of the migration of Jews from Egypt to Australia, at a time when it was still overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic in its culture and world view, led me to compare the immigration experience of the same ethno-religious group to a different cultural and social context, again using oral history as a tool. I chose France because, after Brazil, it was the Diaspora community that received the largest number of Egyptian Jewish émigrés. Whereas less than 2000 Egyptian Jews migrated to Australia, at least 10,000 migrated to France. Both the secondary sources and the oral history responses of the French respondents indicated significant differences in their integration experience. However, in spite of their contrasting contexts, there were also instances of interesting similarities between the respondents' stories within the two groups.

The French sample consisted of an elite and for the most part, highly educated group of Parisian and ex-Parisian Jews from Egypt, who arrived in France in the early 1950s and 1960s. Through their testimonies, this study has looked at the interconnected themes of culture, integration, identity and preservation of memory. Since the majority of Egyptian Jews was more or less steeped in French culture, it was important to assess how significant this element was to the overall success of their integration in French society, compared to the situation in Australia where most Egyptian Jews had to adjust to a new language and a foreign culture. Did the fact they were already familiar with the national language and culture render them more acceptable to French society, and at what level? On the other hand, I examined the link between the size and the socio-economic configuration of the French migration and the migrants' ability to organise themselves as a distinct ethnic entity, to gain recognition from the broader French Jewish community and to develop their own sense of identity, taking into account their inherent diversity. Finally, I looked at the extent of their commitment to the preservation and transmission of the Jewish Egyptian cultural heritage to the next generation.

France in the 1950s

The Jews of Egypt who migrated to Australia, in the late 1940s and 1950s, landed there at a time when Australia was experiencing a dramatic increase in its population base. It was trying to absorb hundreds of thousands of non-British migrants, while it was still reintegrating its returned soldiers into civilian life. To cope with this mass influx of people, housing and jobs had to be provided; new infrastructure needed to be built and new industries had to be developed. Equally, when the Jews of Egypt arrived in France in the mid 1950s, France was also going through a period of dynamic social and economic change as the country was being reconstructed after the physical and psychological ravages of wartime occupation. The country was in the middle of what popularly became known as '*les Trente Glorieuses*,' the thirty glorious years between liberation in 1945 and the first oil crisis of 1973, a period of consistent economic growth, unbroken prosperity and abrupt social change.¹ As testified by one of my French interviewees, there was a crucial need of workers to rebuild France's economic base:

A ce moment-là en France, on demandait des gens qui savaient travailler. Non seulement il n'y avait pas de problème de chômage mais on manquait de main d'oeuvre. Le pays était à reconstruire. En 1956, on a très facilement absorbé les dizaines de milliers de Juifs qui sont venus, pour lesquels on avait commencé à préparer des cités-dortoir, comme Villiers-le-Bel, dans lesquelles on les a installés.²

In fact, the economic recovery of France was largely due to the active role of the state in industry and its program of nationalisation of public utilities such as electricity, gas, coal, banks, airlines and many private companies.³ Another critical factor of that recovery was the implementation of the Marshall Aid Plan, an American initiative, which gave grants, loans and subsidies to struggling post-war nations, namely France.⁴ All these initiatives contributed

¹ This expression was first used by the eminent French economist, Jean Fourastié (1907-1990). It refers to the famous '*Trois Glorieuses*', the three days in July 1830 (27, 28 and 29) that became emblematic of the 1830 Revolution, when Charles X was overthrown and the so-called 'monarchie de juillet' of Louis-Philippe I was established. Fourastié's book, '*les Trente Glorieuses*', published in Paris in 1979 by Editions Fayard, referred to the extraordinary period of economic growth, between the years of 1946 to 1975, when the average standard of living in France trebled in thirty years and impacted on every aspect of French social reality: demography, work conditions, buying power and leisure.

² Case study #15F.

³ Amongst other big enterprises, the private company of Renault was nationalised and became the Régie Nationale des Usines Renault.

⁴ National Archives & Records Administration, Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Marshall Plan B File, 'The Marshall Proposal of Assistance to Europe 10 July 1947; European recovery Program; Secretary of the Treasury; Alphabetical File; John Snyder Paper.

to the increasing modernisation of both industry and agriculture. It was a period of full employment, rising wages and new patterns of consumption and leisure.

In order to repopulate and respond to labour demands, the state was offering attractive incentives to encourage couples to have more children and consequently the birth rate rose sharply. Families with more than three children were entitled to generous '*allocations familiales*', housing allowances, tax relief, and cheaper transport.⁵ Furthermore, the rapid process of urbanisation that characterised the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, popularly called '*les années de béton*', led to an extensive program of massive reconstruction of France's housing infrastructure to alleviate the acute shortage of accommodation in the larger cities. At the end of the war, whatever was available was old and lacked modern amenities like bathrooms and running hot and cold water. The situation was predominantly critical in Paris and remained so in the late 1950s, as experienced by most of my respondents who were there either in transit or permanent residence. They reported that it was common for the hotels where the various welfare agencies had placed them, to have only one toilet per floor, no bathroom or hot water, which meant they had to use public baths for their daily ablutions. Cooking in the rooms was strictly forbidden although, out of sheer necessity, especially with young children, this rule was surreptitiously and regularly broken. The housing shortage was gradually eased by the large-scale construction of council estates in the periphery of nearly every French city.⁶ As previously indicated by Respondent #15, the newly built council estate called Villiers-le-Bel accommodated a large number of Jewish refugees from Egypt.

French Jewry and the Egyptian refugees

During that period, French Jewry was also in the process of reconstruction and renewal. The Holocaust had devastated a community that stood at approximately 330,000 at the end of

⁵ The French social welfare system was greatly admired and its reputation had travelled as far as Egypt, particularly the generous '*allocations familiales*' and other privileges for larger families. Case study #1, with a family of four children, reported that this was one of the reasons her husband wanted to settle in France, long before the events of 1956.

⁶ Those new massive suburban dwellings called HLM (*habitation à loyer modéré*) were vigorously criticised by French intellectuals such as Christiane Rochefort for having no soul. Her most popular book, *Les Petits Enfants du siècle*, published in 1961, was read as a critique of the growing materialism of postwar French society, and of France's birth control policy (*politique nataliste*) and its impact on women. Marc Bernard in *Sarcellopolis*, published in 1964 by Flammarion, Paris, blamed the quality of life on those huge council estates for a new kind of psychological malaise and alienation affecting mainly non-working women, which he called *Sarcellitis* after Sarcelles, one such housing complex near Le Bourget airport.

1940. Approximately 80,000 Jews were murdered by the Nazis.⁷ Between 1945 and 1948, there was a large influx of Ashkenazi refugees from Eastern Europe, who swelled the ranks of the depleted Jewish population, as pointed out by Laskier in his study of contemporary French Jewry:

Already in 1944 and 1945 the French Jewish communities, consisting of over 200,000 Jews, were the only ones outside Israel to be inundated by consecutive waves of immigrants. The French government's liberal policy of keeping the gates open to refugees meant that the Jewish communities in France became havens for those who had fled their homelands for Western Europe. Hundreds of thousands of refugees were granted temporary asylum, pending permanent resettlement elsewhere. However, tens of thousands preferred to make France their permanent home.⁸

Laskier added that the task of assisting these refugees to settle in France was largely undertaken by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) from 1944, with the help of Jewish communal leaders and local welfare institutions such as the *Comité Juif d'Action Sociale et de Reconstruction* (COJASOR), established in 1945. In order to streamline the various local Jewish agencies, AJDC encouraged the creation in 1949 of an umbrella organisation, the *Fonds Social Juif Unifié* (FSJU), with the major objectives of organising relief, raising funds and distributing them where they were needed most.⁹ Nevertheless, it is obvious that a task of this magnitude could not have been undertaken without the cooperation and contribution of the French government.

At this junction in time, French Jewry was still predominantly Ashkenazi – Germanic and Eastern European - with a small mixture of veteran Sephardi families, well integrated into the broader French society. By the early 1950s, as the Muslim nationalist struggle in North Africa against French colonial rule gained momentum with the rise of the Arab-Israeli conflict compounding the existing tension, the Jews of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia came to the realisation that their status in their native lands was becoming increasingly precarious.

⁷ Doris Bensimon, 'L'Immigration juive en France, 1945-1999', *Yod*, 6, 1999, pp.53-66. See also Susan Zuccotti, *The Holocaust, the French, and the Jews*, New York: BasicBooks, 1993, p.280. The general population of France at that time was approximately 40 million.

⁸ Laskier, 'The Regeneration of French Jewry: the Influx and Integration of North African Jews into France', *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 10, No.1-2, Spring 1998, p. 40. According to the 2004-2005 statistics published by the World Jewish Congress (WJC) the number of refugees from Central and Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1948 was about 80,000.

⁹ In the case of Australia, it was the AJWS that assisted the Jews from Egypt in the areas of cash relief, employment and housing loans. According to the minutes of the Jewish Welfare Societies of 5 May 1957, in order to maximise and streamline the relief effort, Syd Einfeld proposed that all Welfare Societies – New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, and Queensland – 'decide on a policy and thus act uniformly.'

Following decolonisation, a massive exodus of North African Jews occurred between 1955 and 1965, in the direction of Israel and France. The eminent orientalist Michel Abitbol noted that the wave of migration to France radically altered the face of French Jewry not only demographically but also geographically, and ethnically.¹⁰ In just one decade, confirmed Laskier, ‘the Maghribi Jewish segment emerged as the majority of the Jewish population’ and French Jewry, now predominantly Sephardi, became the ‘second largest Jewish community in the Western World, with over 550,000 people’.¹¹

The huge task of resettlement and absorption of such a large group required a great deal of assistance from both government and Jewish institutions. The Algerian Jews, who were French nationals since 1870 by virtue of the Crémieux Decree, had chosen overwhelmingly to relocate in France, thus 120,000 fled to France while only 10,000 went to Israel. It was not the case for the Jews of Tunisia who had been naturalised on ‘a selective and individual basis’ and the Jews of Morocco who were never granted French citizenship.¹² This fundamental difference in status between the three groups of North African Jews often determined their final destination. The majority of Moroccan Jews – more than two-thirds - immigrated to Israel, together with half of Tunisia’s Jewry, with the help of the Jewish Agency. Nevertheless, a significant number preferred to settle in France, because of their affinity with the French language and culture. Although they were granted the ‘right of asylum’, and were allowed to work, they were not eligible for the substantial assistance the French government bestowed on its repatriated citizens. Therefore, they had to rely heavily on the various Jewish welfare agencies, subsidised by the AJDC and FSJU.¹³

The North African Jewish communities were not the only Jewish communities of the region being uprooted in the 1950s. As has been amply demonstrated in the present study, the Jews

¹⁰ Michel Abitbol, ‘The Integration of North African Jews in France’, *Yale French Studies*, No.85, 1994, pp.248-261.

¹¹ Laskier, ‘The Regeneration of French Jewry’, p.39. See also Doris Bensimon and Sergio Della Pergola, *La Population juive de France: socio-démographie et identité*, Paris: CNRS, 1984. According to their estimate, the total Jewish population in France is 530,000. The WJC 2004-2005 report estimate is 600,000 out of a general population of 58,333,000. However, the latest 2005 statistics from the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute (JPPPI) in Israel indicates a contested figure of 494,000.

¹² Abitbol in ‘The Integration of North African Jews’, p.250, explained that these differences were a function of the colonial status of each of the three countries. While Algeria was a French colony, Tunisia and Morocco were only French protectorates.

¹³ Laskier in ‘The Regeneration of...’, pp.40-4, elaborated further: ‘one fourth of Tunisia’s Jewry obtained French citizenship during the French Protectorate, whereas Moroccan Jews...remained subjects of Morocco’s Sherifian Sultan.’ See also, Doris Bensimon, ‘L’immigration juive en France: 1945-1999’, *Yod*, No.6, pp.53-66, 1999.

of Egypt were also being forced out of their native country, escaping discrimination and persecution in the wake of the 1956 Suez War. Apart from Israel, a relatively large number of those refugees looked towards France, because of its geographical proximity, its reputation as the traditional haven for political refugees, and because of their own cultural and linguistic affinity with France. The group that landed in France was made up, for the most part, of repatriated French nationals and stateless refugees. The latter included those who were forced to renounce their Egyptian nationality before leaving the country and the so-called *sujets locaux* who were never naturalised for the reasons previously outlined. How did they face the challenges posed by their forced emigration, such as accommodation, work, schools for the children while trying to acculturate to a society with whom they shared the language but not much more? As pointed out by Laskier, the plight of the French nationals was somewhat alleviated as the French government had ‘organised complete reception services that included emergency housing, financial aid, and employment assistance’, as it did for the repatriates from Algeria.¹⁴ They were also eligible to receive social security benefits and medical assistance. The situation of the stateless refugees was more complicated. Some were in need of a temporary sanctuary while waiting for visas to other countries, such as Australia or the United States. Others were allowed into the country because, as already mentioned, France traditionally supported stateless refugees, through the *Office Français de Protection des Réfugiés et Apatrides* (OFPRA) and their knowledge of French facilitated the formalities. According to Respondent #15F, France probably felt responsible for their plight, in view of her role in the 1956 Suez War, although other respondents commented that Great Britain, which was just as responsible as France, did not extend the same degree of assistance to the stateless refugees who landed on her shores.

Notwithstanding the subsidies of both the French government and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), most of the funds needed to settle and integrate the Egyptian refugees into the local economy or to assist their emigration to other countries, were provided by AJDC. France was its main theatre of operation, particularly between 1957 and 1960. The large number of stateless Egyptian Jews who wished to settle in France needed urgent assistance. A ‘Special Programs assistance fund’ was established by AJDC specifically to cope with the

¹⁴ Those amongst my Australian respondents who were French nationals, confirmed they had been accommodated free of charge, in hotels especially requisitioned by the French authorities for this very purpose, until such time as their Australian visa was processed. They were also offered food coupons and medical assistance.

needs of Jewish refugees from Egypt and Eastern Europe.¹⁵ This fund subsidised local Jewish agencies, such as COJASOR and the Service Social des Jeunes (SSJ), who were in charge of ‘Care and Maintenance’ and provided the refugees with cash relief as well as assistance with rent, food, child care and housing for a year or until the head of the family found suitable employment.¹⁶ Two of my case studies were immediately recruited by COJASOR to help deal with the needs of the Egyptian refugees.¹⁷ The financial help and moral support provided by this relief agency were acknowledged by all my participants, who testified to its valuable contribution towards their initial integration into French society, as illustrated by the following example:

Quand mes parents sont arrivés, ils ont eu eu cinq jours, logés et nourris par la Croix Rouge...Ensuite le COJASOR les a pris en charge. Ils ont été mis dans un hotel, rue Cadet. Ils recevaient une prime de logement et une prime de bouffe. C’était un hotel où toutes les chambres étaient prises par des immigrés juifs, essentiellement des Egyptiens mais il y avait aussi des Marocains et des Algériens. Ils ont vécu un an là-bas.¹⁸

Nevertheless, the French authorities’ welcoming attitude towards the stateless refugees was not open-ended. To be able to reside in France on a permanent basis, the refugees still had to obtain a work permit (*carte de travail*), which in turn would give them a resident permit (*permis de séjour*). Often they found themselves in a vicious circle, as prospective employers would not offer them work until they held a resident permit. Egyptian-born Frédéric Galimidi noted in his memoirs, *Alexandrie-sur-Seine*, that it was the AJDC that saved him *in extremis* from deportation, by offering him a position in their personnel office.¹⁹ Another respondent decided to go back to university, which gave him a student status and allowed him to extend his stay in the country until such time as he could secure a job:

N’ayant pas ici de permis de séjour, on tournait en rond. On ne pouvait avoir ce permis que si on avait un contrat de travail et on ne pouvait pas avoir un contrat de

¹⁵ Laskier, in ‘The Regeneration of...’, p. 47, indicated that, according to AJDC’s records, ‘6,000 families, or over 23,000 Jews, had been received by the AJDC-sponsored COJASOR agency’ since the Sinai/Suez War of 1956. It is not clear whether the Hungarian Jewish refugees were included in those figures.

¹⁶ Laskier, ‘Egyptian Jewry under the Nasser Regime, 1956-70’, *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 3, July 1995, pp. 595-6.

¹⁷ Case study #7F was 17 at the time and ended up settling in France. Case study #56, who was 20, worked for a year while waiting for her Australian immigration papers to be processed.

¹⁸ Case study #14F came to France to study at university in 1954 but his parents only joined him in 1957.

¹⁹ Frédéric Galimidi, *Alexandrie-sur-Seine*, Collection L’Echelle de Jacob IV, France: Cousins de Salonique, 1999, pp. 175-181. In this memoir, the Alexandrian-born author has evoked the personal trauma of his exile from Egypt and settlement in France.

*travail sans permis de séjour. Finalement, j'ai repris mes études à l'université. J'ai eu un contrat de travail et donc le permis de séjour mais il a fallu que ce soit grâce à des gens de chez nous, des Juifs d'Égypte qui étaient de nationalité française.*²⁰

Although there were cases of hardship particularly amongst the economically vulnerable and the older members of the group, this was not very different from the situation in Australia and the 1956 wave of young and old refugees seem to have been well taken care. After a few years, most of them had adjusted reasonably well to their new conditions. That same respondent remembered that some of his compatriots were even blessing the circumstances that had brought them forcibly to such a wonderful country as France, an attitude also prevalent within the Australian sample:

La plupart d'entre eux s'étaient refaits et finissaient par dire: nous allons élever une statue en or à Nasser, pour nous avoir chassés, parce qu'ici nous avons des voitures, des autobus qui marchent, une vie culturelle, des écoles, des cinémas.

From this overall picture of France in the mid 1950s, it appears that the social welfare infrastructure was more developed than in Australia where social services were still in their infancy. In addition, French Jewry was significantly larger, more established and possibly better funded to deal with a large influx of refugees. The subsidies granted by AJDC to local welfare agencies, for the purpose of assisting the refugees from Egypt, were relatively generous and that assistance covered many of their essential needs. Furthermore, the presence of a relatively large 'Egyptian' network in France around 1956 constituted a safety net for the incoming refugees from Egypt, just as it did in Australia, particularly in Adelaide, albeit on a smaller level. Solidarity was found to be the key to facilitate their integration. Respondent #15F, who was in France since 1952, recalled that by joining forces with other émigrés from Egypt, together they were able establish their own enterprises, thus creating employment opportunities for themselves and their compatriots:

Quand nous sommes venus ici, nous nous sommes retrouvés à essayer de gagner notre vie. On s'est aperçu qu'en définitive, ... il n'y avait qu'un seul moyen, c'était de nous rapprocher les uns des autres, de nous entr'aider et de créer nos propres affaires.

²⁰ In 1948, upon the establishment of the Jewish state, this respondent (#15F) was arrested for his communist activities, stripped of his Egyptian nationality and ordered to leave the country. He arrived in Europe as a stateless refugee and tried to settle in Italy because his wife had an Italian passport but he was not allowed to work there. In 1952, he moved to France where, thanks to the 'Jewish Egyptian network', he succeeded in obtaining a work permit and settled there permanently. With Jacques Hassoun, he was one of the founding members of ASPCJE.

The Egyptian refugees seem to have successfully confronted the many challenges posed by their forced emigration and acculturation to French society through personal and group solidarity with the assistance provided by international and local Jewish agencies and government-funded schemes.

There was nevertheless a fundamental difference in the status of Egyptian Jews landing in France and those landing in Australia. Whereas in France, the majority arrived stateless, on a temporary visa, seeking asylum, those who came to Australia, arrived as legal migrants after a rigorous screening procedure. As such, they were automatically entitled to permanent residency in Australia whether they had found employment or not, and they were entitled to all the relevant social services enjoyed by the general population almost immediately. In addition, although the conditions of entry of refugees into France were not as stringent *a priori* as for Australia, a permanent resident status was far from assured, as confirmed by the personal experiences of the majority of the French participants. It depended on finding work and accommodation within a certain time frame. It required presenting oneself regularly at the *Préfecture* to apply for a residency extension and the whole bureaucratic process reportedly caused undue hardship and humiliation to the already traumatised refugees. The obvious question is: why did so many Egyptian Jews choose to settle in France in spite of this uncertainty? This study has attempted to answer this question by identifying the ethnic, socio-economic, cultural and ideological characteristics of the participants in the French study and evaluating the extent of their similarities to and differences from the Australian participants.

Ethnic and socio-economic configuration of the French sample group

The Egyptian background of the Australian and French sample groups did not differ significantly as far as ethnicity, nationality, class, level of education and language skills were concerned. There were, in some instances, slight variations, but in view of the disproportionate size of the two groups, these variations could not be considered as truly representative of distinct characteristics pertaining to one group or the other. As was the case for Australia, the French group typified the ethnic diversity and linguistic pluralism that were the intrinsic components of modern Egyptian Jewry. For instance, the wide Sephardi category, which characterized the majority of the French respondents, included several ethnic subgroups: the Ladino-speaking ‘Spanish’ Sephardim from places such as Istanbul, Izmir,

Salonika, Algeria, and Morocco; the Arabic-speaking Oriental or Mizrahi Jews from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and Palestine; the *Romaniot* or Greek Jews from mainland Greece; and the Italian Jews from Leghorn and Corfu.²¹ On the other hand, the Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim were greatly underrepresented compared to the Australian group. There were only two cases of mixed Sephardi and Ashkenazi origins, and they were mostly acculturated to the Sephardi tradition.²² There were also two cases of Karaite Jews. On the other hand, the three categories of passports that Jews from Egypt could possess - Egyptian, foreign and stateless - were represented in about the same proportions for both the French and the Australian respondents, except for the fact there were no British subjects within the French sample.

The Egyptian socio-economic configuration of the French group broadly replicated the Australian findings of an educated, multilingual and westernised group, consisting of a predominant middle class, a small upper middle class and an even smaller lower middle class.²³ As was the case for the Australian group, very few within the French sample were strictly observant although the majority strongly identified with its Jewish roots and with Israel. On the issue of intermarriage in Egypt, although the French data showed a slightly higher percentage of intermarriage of nine percent compared to three percent for the Australian group, the difference was not important enough to indicate a definite trend.²⁴ However, according to my data, the percentage rate of intermarriage in the generation born in France was significantly higher and could be a sign of a deeper assimilation in the host society than in Australia. One would need to check demographic studies such as those undertaken by Sergio Della Pergola, where intermarriage within French Jewry is seen as growing steadily.²⁵

²¹ 80% of the French group was Sephardi compared to 69% in Australia. As noted previously, the Ashkenazim within the Australian group represented 20% plus 9% who were of mixed origin.

²² There was also one respondent with an Ashkenazi father and a Catholic mother.

²³ The two Karaite respondents #18K & 21K, were committed and active members of their community in France and in the United States respectively. Respondent #18K was at one stage vice-president of ASPCJE. Respondent #21K was involved with the Jewish Federation of San Francisco; he was president of the San Francisco Karaite Synagogue and co-founder of an association called 'Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa' (JIMENA), whose declared goal is 'to achieve justice for the Middle East's 900,000 forgotten Jewish refugees.'

²⁴ Rutland, in *The Jews in Australia*, p.151, reported that the 1996 Census figures 'give an overall intermarriage rate of 15 percent for Australian Jewry.'

²⁵ Sergio Della Pergola, 'World Jewish Population, 2002', *American Jewish Year Book*, Vol. 102, 2002, pp.601-642. According to the Israeli daily, *Ha'aretz*, 24 June 2004, a report prepared by the Jewish Agency's Institute for Jewish People Policy Planning and headed by Sergio Della Pergola, on the condition of the Jewish people in the year 2004, estimates an alarming rate of intermarriage in France at 45% and in Australia at 22%.

According to my data, the circumstances surrounding the exodus from Egypt followed a similar pattern for both samples. Comparable to the Australian participants, over half of the French group left Egypt in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez war, which confirmed the general trend of Jewish migration from Egypt between 1947 and 1967 and the reasons for leaving were more or less the same in both cases. A slightly higher proportion of French respondents – about 40% compared to 35% for the Australian group – had been expelled for their political convictions, either as communists or Zionists after the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, or as French nationals after the 1956 War, while others were forced out by the government sequestration of their assets or by the sudden loss of their livelihood. About the same proportion of French and Australian respondents stated they left Egypt because they believed there was no future for them as Jews. It has been established that the interviewees who were looking for a better and safer future as far away as possible from the troubles of the Middle East, chose Australia because of its distant location. Paradoxically, for some of the French respondents, it was in fact Australia's isolation and remoteness that were perceived as negatives. To be so far removed from Europe, the hub of the prestigious Western civilisation, was considered a long-term sentence. Australia was reputed to be a place where one went 'for work and for ever.'

A question of culture

The most salient difference between the immigration experiences of the two sample groups arose from the all-important issue of culture. Beyond the incentives of family reunion, economic opportunities and search of political security which, in that order of preference, motivated immigration to Australia, the fundamental reason why France was chosen as a refuge by such a relatively large number of Egyptian Jews, was their deep affinity with the French language and culture.²⁶ According to the sweeping statement of one of the original founders of ASPCJE, those who settled in France were obviously not the Zionists, nor the 'uneducated' - since both went to Israel -, but the 'true intellectuals', the middle classes, educated in the French schools of Egypt, who had appropriated the French culture as their own.²⁷ According to my data, not only had the majority of the French sample attended those schools, which was to be expected, but also a significantly greater percentage of that group -

²⁶ The research of Ethel Carasso for her Masters Thesis, 'La Communauté d'Égypte de 1948 à 1957', Université de Paris X, 1982, revealed that all her 20 respondents identified their cultural and linguistic affinities with France as the main reason for choosing to settle there.

²⁷ Respondent #15F stated: '*Ceux qui sont venus en France, c'était principalement les classes moyennes qui avaient une culture française, donc les anciens élèves des écoles des Frères, du Lycée français, de l'Union juive... Les vrais intellectuels étaient les élèves des lycées et des écoles chrétiennes.*'

61% - had attended Jewish day schools at the primary or secondary level compared with 22% in Australia, which could explain their greater commitment to the preservation of their cultural heritage as Jews of Egypt. Furthermore, seeing that both the Jewish day schools and the secular French Lycées were following the French education curriculum, these findings mainly corroborated the solid foundation of French culture inculcated into the Jews of Egypt and embraced by them.

There was another reason that motivated Egyptian Jews to turn to France, even before the outbreak of the Suez crisis. It was their wish to pursue their university education in France, a dream that was facilitated by both the geographical proximity and the somewhat cultural continuity between Egypt and France.²⁸ In fact, seven French respondents or 33% were in that category. It is true that, initially, these students had every intention of eventually going back 'home' at the end of their studies. Clearly, these initial plans were never carried out as a consequence of the political events that unfolded. On the other hand, although these students were not necessarily French citizens, university education in France was an attractive proposition since it was nearly free of charge at the time, except for books, library fees and a small contribution to social security.²⁹ At first, their living expenses were mostly subsidised by their parents or, in cases of hardship, by philanthropists from within the Jewish community in Egypt.³⁰ Their personal situation and their official status changed dramatically as a result of the outbreak of the Suez War and France's involvement. Since their Egyptian-sourced allowance could not reach them anymore because of the breakdown of relations between Egypt and France, they found themselves financially stranded. Their 'foreign student' status changed. They became political refugees and as such were entitled to assistance from the French government. This was the case of one of my interviewees who after two preparatory years at the selective high school, Lycée Louis-le-Grand, had just been accepted at the prestigious 'Grande Ecole Supérieure de Physique et Chimie Industrielle' (ESPCI), when the

²⁸ Abitbol, in 'The Integration of...', p.251, pointed out that the uniqueness and the success of North African Jews integration to France, was also due to the fact they arrived 'with a perfect knowledge of the language, history, climate and geography of their new home.' This uniqueness also applied to the Egyptian refugees.

²⁹ Even the prestigious *Grandes Ecoles*, where admission was strictly regulated by highly competitive *concours*, were not charging student fees.

³⁰ Two of those students who later became leaders in their respective fields of medicine and engineering, recognised the debt of gratitude they had towards the same philanthropist, who anonymously subsidised their studies up to the time of the Suez crisis. Years later, they discovered his identity but he had already migrated to Australia, having been stripped of all his fortune by the Nasser regime. He died in 1987 without ever mentioning his good deed. As it happened, his son was a participant in the Australian pilot study (#8) and one of the recipients was a participant in the French study (#2F).

Suez War erupted.³¹ As his personal funds were exhausted, he appealed to the French government and succeeded in obtaining a scholarship, as a dissident of Nasser's regime:

J'étais venu ici faire des études et franchement je n'avais aucune idée de quitter l'Égypte. Mais en 1956, j'étais dans l'incapacité de continuer mes études parce que la situation des Juifs en Égypte s'était définitivement détériorée. Il n'y avait plus aucune possibilité de me faire envoyer même un centime quand finalement j'ai été admis à l'École.... Il me restait 100 Francs à la banque, de quoi vivre pour une semaine. Je suis donc allé chercher cet argent avec mon passeport égyptien et là j'ai appris que les passeports égyptiens étaient bloqués...Un copain musulman m'a suggéré d'aller au Quai d'Orsay, pleurer et dire que le gouvernement égyptien m'enverrait faire mes études en Russie (!), et que moi j'aime la France...C'est comme cela que j'ai pu avoir une grosse bourse de quatre ans du gouvernement français comme Égyptien résistant à Nasser.³²

Another respondent (#14) also reported that because he had been arrested and then expelled from Egypt in 1956, he arrived in France as a political refugee. As such, he was subsidised during his first four years of university studies by the French government and Jewish institutions. In general, all of these students who were popularly called '*les Juifs de Nasser*', were eventually allowed to remain in France and their parents joined them when, in turn, they were also forced out of Egypt. A comparative analysis of the research data revealed that the number of university graduates amongst the respondents in France was significantly higher than in Australia, while the number of white-collar workers and businessmen was higher for Australia. I suggest that this disparity was not surprising if one considers that migrants with French university degrees were more likely to be gainfully employed in France, whereas those with business experience and no diplomas would have had better chances to use their skills, either by employing themselves or starting their own enterprise in a promising new country like Australia. It is also probable that, in view of the small size of the French sample compared to the total group, there were many less educated Egyptian Jewish migrants that were not accessible for this case study.

Another characteristic of the French group was a higher ideological involvement both in Egypt and later in France, at least initially.³³ Confirming what Beinin wrote about 'the political inflection of a French education' in Egypt as being generally tilted to the left, a

³¹ ESPCI is reputed to have produced the greatest number of Nobel prizes laureates in France. The graduates of the *Grandes Ecoles* are usually guaranteed the best positions available in their field.

³² Case Study #2F.

³³ My analysis revealed a significantly higher proportion of communist activists within the French group, eighteen percent compared to one percent for the Australian group.

relatively greater proportion of French respondents, particularly those who went through the Jewish schools, confirmed they were introduced to Marxism and socialist Zionism through their French teachers or the Zionist youth movement emissaries from Palestine.³⁴ Often their Zionist and/or communist activism was mainly restricted to attending a few meetings. It still caused some of them to be arrested in 1948 and consequently expelled from Egypt.³⁵ Once in France, they joined the French Communist party for a number of years but were eventually forced out or they opted out due to the anti-Israel stance adopted by the Party.³⁶ However, they still favoured the left side of politics, contrary to the Australian respondents who, with one single exception, were mainly conservative in their worldview and apolitical.³⁷ Interviewee #4F, for instance, stated that he had sided for the 1968 student revolution and its efforts to change the rigidity of French bourgeois society:

Pendant la révolution des étudiants en 68, nous étions pour. C'était une révolution de bourgeois. On avait commencé à bien gagner notre vie, mais on avait gardé l'esprit étudiant. Il y avait beaucoup de Juifs activistes dans cette révolution. Cette révolution m'a marqué pendant très longtemps.

Notwithstanding those few differences, the majority of French interviewees agreed that their deep acculturation to the French language and culture, was indeed the determining factor for Egyptian Jews in choosing France over other countries and the prime facilitator of their migration experience. Egyptian-born Jewish author, Eglal Errera, pointed out that while in Egypt, French was perceived as the language of cultural sophistication, in the new reality of their forced exile, it suddenly acquired the attributes of a refuge, of an existential tool in the idealised space of France:

³⁴ Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, pp.50-1.

³⁵ For instance, Case Study #14F, who attended the Jewish dayschool, *Lycée de l'Union juive pour l'Enseignement*, was initially recruited as a member of DROR, the Zionist socialist youth movement. He was introduced to Marxism by that same geography teacher Beinin mentioned in *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, p.51. When DROR went underground after the creation of the State of Israel, a Jewish friend recruited him into the Egyptian communist party. He was arrested in 1953 after attending a few meetings and released after four months in prison. As soon as he was able to secure an exit visa, he left Egypt for France. Another respondent (#15F), a comrade of the late Henri Curriel - one of the founders of the Egyptian communist party - was also arrested in 1948 and expelled. He eventually settled in France and was highly instrumental in the creation of the ASPCJE.

³⁶ Respondent #2F had joined the Egyptian communist party since the age of 16. When he went to university in France, he joined *l'Union des Jeunesses communistes* but left the party in June 1967, because of its bias against Israel. According to Case study #10F, in the mid- 1970s, the central committee of the French communist party had issued directives to unilaterally cancel the membership of card-bearing Jewish communists from Egypt. This caused him to leave the party in protest although he remained a communist at heart.

³⁷ Only one respondent (#54) declared her political activism for the left both in Egypt and Australia.

Ils [les Juifs d’Egypte] ont, au début de ces années 1960, le sentiment de l’imminence et de l’irréversibilité de leur exode. La langue française qui jusqu’ici avait été la langue du raffinement et du luxe culturel devient refuge et arme existentielle. Riche de son bilinguisme, le “Juif d’Egypte”, débarque en France....³⁸

For Respondent #2F, it was more the impact of French thought on impressionable young minds that made the move to France inevitable, rather than the rise of Egyptian-Arab nationalism, and the creation of the state of Israel:

Je pense donc que, plus que la montée du nationalisme arabe, plus que la création de l’état d’Israël, le fait que nous avons déjà l’esprit à la française nous a amenés, un jour ou l’autre, à quitter l’Egypte, malgré nous.

This special affinity with France and French culture was intense at several levels. Year after year, teachers of various persuasions had rigorously and persistently taught their students in the French schools of Egypt about French history, geography, literature and ideals. A typical example was Frédéric Galimidi, whose ‘love’ of France was so deeply ingrained that, when the time came to leave Egypt, he would not even consider migrating to any other country:

La police [égyptienne] avait fait se former plusieurs files selon les pays de destination les plus ‘demandés’.... Je pris place, avec ma mère, dans la file d’attente ‘France’. Pourquoi celle-ci et non une autre? Je ne m’étais même pas posé la question, tant cela allait de soi. Non seulement parce que j’étais titulaire de trois diplômes de droit français, ce qui était déjà en soi une bonne raison, mais surtout parce que Monsieur Dumont, ce cher et vieux professeur de Français avait su, tout au long de notre scolarité, trouver la voie du coeur en nous distillant jour après jour l’amour de la France et de la langue de Descartes.³⁹

Based on the perception of the sample group while bearing in mind its elite characteristics and the restricted numbers of French testimonies, the cultural integration of Egyptian Jews in France appeared to have been understandably smoother than in Australia.

Economic integration

A proficiency in the national language facilitated the employment prospects of even older Egyptian refugees, particularly in the economic climate of those ‘glorious’ years. They were able to secure respectable positions, sometimes within their field of expertise. This was not always the case for their Australian counterparts who were often considered too old at the age

³⁸ Hassoun, *Histoire des Juifs du Nil*, p.101.

³⁹ Galimidi, *Alexandrie sur Seine*, p. 43.

of fifty and had to content themselves with menial work if their English was not adequate. For instance, Interviewee #2F believed the success of his father's immigration experience was due to his French cultural training long before his exodus from Egypt in 1957. He was already prepared for his eventual uprooting. As a result, once in France, although he was already 52-years old at the time, he immediately found work in his profession as an engraver:

Mon père était très bien en France...bien qu'il soit arrivé ici à 52 ans, parce que pour la première fois, il avait un mois de vacances; pour la première fois, le samedi et dimanche, il ne travaillait pas; il avait la sécurité sociale. Quand il tombait malade, il était couvert. Il est rentré tout de suite dans une usine où il a travaillé comme graveur.

Obviously, there were exceptions, even within this elite sample group, particularly amongst the respondents' parents. In one instance, Interviewee #56, who was in France for two years before migrating to Australia, reported that her 50-year old mother could not find work in her profession as a teacher and had to contend with being a nanny. Others were never able to re-enter the workplace in France either due to age, ill health, or because they were psychologically overwhelmed by the dramatic economic and social upheaval in their lives after their forced emigration. Even those extreme cases drew some sense of comfort and continuity from being in a free country where they knew the language and could at least communicate. One respondent (#8F) related that his father was too sick to work, but still felt more at home in France than anywhere else because of the culture. Participant #14F recalled that after being forced out of Egypt, his sixty-year old father could never regain enough self-confidence to find work in France. Yet, he never expressed any regrets for leaving Egypt and the 'police state' atmosphere that was so prevalent towards the last few years: '*en France, mon père s'est senti totalement libéré. Il était heureux à ce point de vue.*' In fact, the majority of the French respondents claimed that their parents had acculturated remarkably well to the French conditions, considering their age, lack of local qualifications or specific expertise. It is important to point out that the success of that integration was not primarily a question of great financial achievement, as Egyptian Jews in France – just like in Australia - are not generally reputed to have reached the highest pinnacles of economic achievements.⁴⁰ While young and old managed to achieve varying degrees of financial comfort and professional

⁴⁰ According to Case study #4F, who arrived in Paris in 1954 to pursue his university studies and now lives in a comfortable apartment in the XVIth *arrondissement*, the rich and privileged amongst the Egyptian Jews settled mostly in Switzerland. I am not aware of any studies to support this claim.

success, the majority just felt particularly privileged and lucky to be living in a country such as France:

Quel que soit l'âge, finalement, tout le monde était content de vivre ici. Pour ceux qui sont venus ici à l'âge de 18 ans, dans une démocratie, à l'époque où l'éducation était gratuite, c'était une chance incroyable.⁴¹

One particular interviewee (#2F) went as far as stating that even the experience of his Zionist friends who had opted to settle in Israel, was disappointing both culturally and economically, compared to the French experience:

L'expérience de plusieurs de mes amis qui sont partis en Israël avec un idéal a été négative...Par contre, ceux qui se sont installés en France sont très heureux parce qu'ils sont venus dans une culture qu'ils connaissaient. Economiquement, la France a eu des années glorieuses entre 1960 et 1975, où tout le monde a fait de l'argent.

In fact, most respondents gradually reintegrated their place in the comfortable ranks of middle class. Once they secured stable employment, they were able to buy their own apartment through loans provided by COJASOR, the institution that had helped them when they first arrived.⁴²

Socialisation with the host society

When asked to what extent their fluency in the national language actually facilitated social interaction with their French hosts, the interviewees' responses again covered the whole range of possibilities, in line with the diversity of the group. Once more, the age factor was a determining element in that respect. The majority of respondents concurred that, as far as their parents' generation was concerned, socialisation was mostly a closed-circuit phenomenon, at least during the initial years. They interacted mostly with other members of their own group, as is generally the case for migrant groups anywhere in the world. At times, the older generation experienced a sense of alienation due to the difference in mentalities between Egypt and France, in spite of the familiar language. Only by socialising and sharing their experience with people of the same background, could they cope with the inherent difficulties of their new circumstances. This was one of their strategies of acculturation.

⁴¹ Case study #2F.

⁴² These loans were called *prêts d'honneur*, because the first repayments of the loan were met by COJASOR, without collateral, on the personal undertaking by the borrower that this debt would be reimbursed at a later stage, when he or she would become more solvent.

Respondent #4F recalled the high spirits of his parents and compatriots, living together in a very basic Paris hotel requisitioned by COJASOR for Egyptian and North African refugees, where they stayed for nearly a year: *'ils étaient là, tous ensemble. Quand j'allais les voir, ils étaient là à se lamenter et à rigoler en même temps.'*⁴³ Later, when they were in a position to buy their own apartments, they happily ended up in the same housing complexes known as HLM, at Villiers-le-Bel and Genevilliers, in the *banlieue* of Paris.

Even for those who had settled in the south of France, where the locals were reputed to be friendlier than the more xenophobic Parisians, they were still far from the easygoing and openness of Southern Mediterranean societies. Respondent #14F recalled the sense of isolation experienced by his parents and others like them, when they came to settle in Montpellier, to be close to their children who were university students. Again their way of coping with uprooting and dislocation was to form their own familiar social nucleus, their own 'insiders' group. This structure gave them the kind of support that no amount of financial aid or social services could provide.⁴⁴ This situation was even more common in Australia because of the cultural divide. I have already mentioned as a typical example, those 40 or 50 Jewish families from Egypt who, through chain migration, had settled in the St George area of Sydney in the early 1950s, isolated from the traditional Jewish centres in the Eastern Suburbs, in an environment that was doubly foreign to them. Again, it was by forming a solidary 'insiders' group and a strong network of their own that they were able to cope with the angst of exile and the difficulty of adapting to a new country and culture.

As has just been demonstrated, adjusting to such a fundamental change as forced immigration and trying to face up to its many challenges, proved even more daunting for the older and less resilient refugees, particularly for those whose mentality remained fundamentally Middle Eastern. The clash between the value systems of the two cultures necessarily impacted on their identification with and integration into the host society, causing them to feel even more alienated. One interviewee recalled how shocked his 70-year old father was, whenever he witnessed the amorous behaviour of young people in the streets of Paris.⁴⁵ He used to reproach his son – in Arabic - for bringing him to such a wanton place: *'mon fils, dans quel*

⁴³ Case study #4F was a university student in Paris and lived on campus.

⁴⁴ Case study #14F graduated from the University of Montpellier and now holds a Ph.D. in Chemical Engineering.

⁴⁵ In traditional Egyptian society, this kind of behaviour was totally unacceptable in public.

pays m'as-tu emmené?'⁴⁶ He could never get used to the permissiveness of French society and his immigration experience was consequently very unhappy. It is clear that, in such cases, the confrontation between different customs and codes of behaviour put a strain on their socialisation with the host society.

As was the case for the Australian sample, socialisation was to be significantly easier for the younger members of the group. The majority of those who came in their late teens and went to school or university in France, experienced much less difficulty in that respect than their older compatriots. In view of their indoctrination in the French schools of Egypt, they arrived in France, '*le plus beau pays du monde*', with the usual expectations of youth of being accepted as equals. The fact that their country of origin had rejected them, made them even more anxious to acculturate and be accepted in their adoptive country. Their proficiency in French and affinity with Western culture ensured they did not have any serious problems of communication on the professional or personal level. When asked today, they all stated that they loved France and never regretted their decision to settle there.⁴⁷

In spite of these glowing reports, a few more details about the outer signs of the integration of the French respondents such as the level of socialisation with the locals and level of acceptance, still needed clarification. Again, the responses varied from one case to the other. One common denominator was the clear sign of an enduring connection between themselves. For instance, Participant #2F, who came to France at the age of 18, claimed that although he had developed an excellent rapport with his French colleagues during his professional life as a scientist, he still considered his old friends from Egypt as family and socialised with them even more since his retirement: '*les copains d'Egypte, c'est comme mes frères; c'est notre enfance*'. Another also stated that he mixed very comfortably with French people both at the personal and professional level. However, in his retirement years, he has realised the importance of his relationship with his ex-compatriots, a relationship he neglected after his early university years.⁴⁸ In contrast, some interviewees claimed they very rarely socialised

⁴⁶ Case study #12F was born in the village of Tantah and used to speak Arabic at home with his parents. He learned French at the Alliance Israélite Universelle school in Tantah. He studied Law in Cairo and did his doctorate in Paris. He practised as a lawyer before becoming a judge.

⁴⁷ A few left France within the first three years as they were already committed to immigrate to the United States or Australia before their arrival in France (Australian case studies #9, #56, #69, French case studies #20F, #21F, #22F).

⁴⁸ Case study #14F spoke of his early years in Montpellier as being in a sort of a ghetto, in the sense of a protective and familiar place: '*notre ghetto, c'était les Juifs d'Egypte.*' He has now become a regular contributor

with the French on a personal level as they found them generally cold and inhospitable. For example, the same participant who, earlier on, was quoted for praising the French immigration experience as by far the best for the Jews of Egypt, admitted he only socialised with ex-Egyptians for that very reason:

Je suis en France depuis 51 ans et je n'ai pas un ami français, juif ou pas juif. Mes amis sont des anciens Egyptiens que je connaissais avant mon arrivée en France ou que j'ai connus depuis... Je n'ai jamais formé des liens d'amitié [avec les Français] parce que j'ai été frappé par [leur] sécheresse et [leur] indifférence.... Ce n'est qu'au parti communiste, quand j'étais jeune, que je me suis fait quelques amis.⁴⁹

Another respondent also admitted that, after nearly fifty years in the country, although he had achieved a successful career as an engineer and led a very comfortable lifestyle, he still was never able to break down the social barrier put up by the '*Français de France*'. Until the present day, although he never regretted settling in France, he did not feel truly accepted as a Frenchman, and consequently most of his friends were Jews from Egypt.⁵⁰

There were a few cases who had completely lost contact with their compatriots over the years for a variety of motives, distance, profession, apathy or just a desire to blend in, to assimilate into mainstream society, without attracting attention to their differences.⁵¹ However, in those last few years they also experienced the need to reconnect with their roots by joining various associations founded by expatriate Egyptians, either on a regular or occasional basis.⁵²

One other obstacle to the acceptance of my French respondents by the host society was their distinctive 'Egyptian' accent and 'Egyptian French', '*le français égyptien*' and its linguistic idiosyncrasies. It identified them immediately in the eyes of the locals as not 'true blue'.⁵³ This distinction has remained a sensitive issue, even after more than forty years in France, as demonstrated by the annoyance of the next respondent. He resented being asked every time

to the resurrected *Nahar Misraïm*. See *Bulletin de Liaison* no. 20, septembre 2004, p. 9; No. 21, décembre 2004, pp. 3-4; no.22, mars 2005, p. 16.

⁴⁹ Case study #10F.

⁵⁰ Case study #4F attributed this rejection to the fact that '*les Français sont coincés*', blaming that stiffness on the rigidity of French social structures.

⁵¹ Case study #1F confessed that for forty years he consciously cut himself out of his past. By the time of the interview, he was socialising mainly with Egyptian Jews.

⁵² Case study #7F, who declared herself unambiguously integrated into French society, has of late become very involved with the Paris branch of *Amicale Alexandrie, Hier et Aujourd'hui* (AAHA), an association of Egyptians expatriates of all religious persuasions from all over the world.

⁵³ According to Case study #10F, this attitude came from the chauvinism of the French: '*j'ai connu un peu de discrimination à cause de mon accent. Les Français sont toujours un peu méprisants à l'égard de ceux qui ne sont pas purement français.*'

he made a new acquaintance, either socially or professionally, the question ‘where do you come from’, as soon as he starts talking:

*Il faut admettre que nous avons un handicap, c'est l'accent...Chaque fois que je rencontre un gas en voyage et que je veux lui montrer une usine qu'on a construite, au bout de dix minutes, il me demande d'où vous venez. J'en ai marre!*⁵⁴

This respondent considered the questioning about his origins as clearly implying exclusion, since it stated he was not from France. It reminded him he would always be an outsider, ‘one who did not belong’. The question ‘where do you come from’ would not have the same connotation in Australia because the majority of the Australian population originally came from somewhere else. On the other hand, according to that particular respondent, settling in a country such as France, with an old and established culture and a prestigious past, was potentially more alienating than settling in a new country such as Australia, where everybody had a share in making Australia into what it is today and thus, developed a greater sense of belonging:

*Parce que j'ai émigré en France, dans une vieille culture qui a existé sans moi, je me sens redevable de quelque chose. Vous en Australie, non, parce que vous avez fait l'Australie en même temps que les autres... Vous étiez des pionniers.*⁵⁵

The problem of a foreign accent also impacted on the employment opportunities of the migrants from Egypt. One respondent reported that, at first, several of his applications were consistently rejected, although he was a graduate of the prestigious *Grande Ecole*, ESPCI, because his Egyptian accent was not considered appropriate in leadership positions:

*Celui qui m'employait à 24 ans, savait qu'un jour j'allais diriger d'autres personnes et donc mon accent égyptien les gênait. J'ai été chez beaucoup de boîtes américaines, comme IBM, et ils m'ont tous dit non à cause de mon accent.*⁵⁶

Comparatively, in the Australian study, the issue of accent arose only in one instance when a respondent, who wanted to work as a primary school teacher, was told by the South Australia Education Department that the pupils would be negatively affected by her foreign accent. After much deliberation, she was given a Grade 5 class, where it was believed her ‘accent

⁵⁴ Case study #4F came to France at the age of 17 to sit for his Baccalauréat examination and then pursued engineering studies.

⁵⁵ Case study #4F.

⁵⁶ Case study #2F.

would do the least harm'.⁵⁷ It is nevertheless interesting to note a certain similarity between the attitudes to foreigners prevalent in the 1950s both in France and Australia, even when those foreigners had a perfect command of the dominant language, albeit with a different accent.

Antisemitism

If there was a certain level of discrimination against the Jews of Egypt on the grounds of their national identity, few of the respondents admitted to overt discrimination on the grounds of their religion. It is well known that in the French Republic, secular by definition, religion has been traditionally relegated to the private realm and it was and still is considered unpatriotic to identify oneself publicly and solely as a member of a religious community.⁵⁸ The majority of French participants stated unequivocally that the question of one's personal religion is never discussed in mixed French society.⁵⁹ However, they were aware of a certain 'in-house' antisemitism that would manifest itself only when Jews were not around. One respondent stated that he was never at the receiving end of such derogatory remarks because of his very typical Jewish surname, whereas others with less obvious patronymics would often overhear 'off the cuff' antisemitic comments in their work or social environment. '*J'ai toujours eu des pointes ici et là... Il y a de ceux qui savent que je suis Juif et d'autres qui ne veulent pas le savoir*', said one participant who just shrugged his shoulders.⁶⁰ Others recalled seeing antisemitic graffiti such as '*Mort aux Juifs*', on the walls of the underground metro, but they did not consider this kind of manifestation as particularly threatening or significant. Very few reported antisemitic incidents in which they were specifically targeted. Only one respondent remembered that his son was once called 'a dirty Jew' at school, but, he proudly added, the son immediately 'punched the offender in the face' and it never happened again. The respondent was in fact saying that even if there was antisemitism in France, the Jews were not helpless victims anymore. He was not just proud of his son, he was proud of living in a

⁵⁷ Case study #71.

⁵⁸ The French Republic is commonly defined as: '*indivisible, laïque, démocratique et sociale*' (my emphasis).

⁵⁹ A few even said that they never mentioned the fact they were Jewish outside their Jewish milieu 'as the question never came up.'

⁶⁰ This respondent (#12F) recalled one significant incident: one day, while watching a television program with some friends, he casually pointed out that the singer was Jewish and the reaction was: '*mais vous voyez le mal partout*', in other words 'God forbid'.

country such as France where Jews could not be racially vilified with impunity, even in the context of a school playground.⁶¹

In contrast to these testimonies, there were a few respondents who were deeply disturbed by this kind of covert antisemitism that still existed in some circles. One of them declared outright:

I lived in Paris for twenty years but always felt a foreigner. I feel much more comfortable here [in Australia] than in France, more at home. The people are more accessible and hospitable. The French are antisemitic, arrogant and with [sic] a feeling of superiority.⁶²

Another respondent (#21F), who lived in France from 1957 to 1961, claimed that in those days, she faced discrimination and antagonism both as a Jew and as a foreigner and was happy to leave the country when her visa to the United States came through:

The minute we landed in New York and saw the blatant signs of Judaism, it blew my mind! We didn't have to hide anymore that we were Jews or foreigners, which we did even more in France than in Egypt.⁶³

With the increasing reports of anti-Zionist and politically motivated antisemitic incidents in France today, the next quote was found to be clearly symptomatic of that new climate. It came from a respondent (#6F) who has been living happily in France since 1958. A computer engineer who graduated from the prestigious *Ecole Polytechnique de France*, he has just retired from the workforce. He confessed that the last few years have deeply affected his sense of belonging in France and, for the first time since his arrival, he viewed his future as a Jew in France as grim: '*Je suis convaincu que nous devons faire nos valises un jour avec l'antisémitisme croissant au niveau de la presse.* Equally, in the context of the recent suicide bombings in Great Britain, I had to reassess an earlier comment made by a London-based

⁶¹ This incident had a profound resonance for this particular respondent (#10F). In 1948, when he was incarcerated with other Jews and communists at the camp of Huckstep, the fundamentalist Muslim Brothers tried to enter the camp and attack them. The camp commandant had abandoned them and they had to organise their own self-defence without any outside help.

⁶² This participant (#67) is a highly educated and enterprising woman, with degrees from the American University in Cairo, the University of Sydney and the Sorbonne in Paris. She left Egypt after the burning of Cairo in 1952 and migrated to Australia with her British husband. She lived in Adelaide and Sydney for over 25 years before moving to Paris where she worked as a university lecturer and an interpreter at international exhibitions in Europe and the United States for another 20 years. Since the death of her husband in 1999, she has returned 'home' to Sydney.

⁶³ Case study #21F.

respondent (#8F) that although he felt more at home in France because of the culture, he felt safer in England as a Jew.⁶⁴ That was in 2003. The events of the last few years raise the question of whether, once again, Jews are under threat in Europe.

Notwithstanding those dissenting voices, antisemitism does not seem to have ultimately hindered the successful integration of the Jews from Egypt into French society and French economy. The testimonies gathered in the course of this research have clearly shown they made good use of the opportunities that were available when they first arrived, such as communal and government assistance, cheap housing and free tertiary education for the young. They gradually regained a comfortable middle class status, through their chosen professions. They did not regret having chosen to settle in France and they would never live anywhere else but Paris. By the time this research was conducted, the majority was enjoying a secure retirement and the picture of integration was not substantially different from the Australian case study. Nevertheless, it is still important to point out that, in marked contrast to the French Egyptian Jewish experience, no Australian respondent reported having been at the receiving end of an antisemitic remark or having suffered from religious discrimination.

Identity and identification

When the time came to compare the issue of identity in the two migration experiences, there was some commonality attached to both. Like their compatriots at ‘the edge of the diaspora’, the French participants reported that they often found it awkward to describe themselves to others because of their multi-layered identity. Thus, their presentation of self varied according to the context and depending on who asked the question. To outsiders, they would suppress their pluralistic identity and declare themselves simply as French without any mention of religion or ethnic origin; to insiders, they would qualify that answer in a variety of ways: a Jew originally from Egypt and now French, an Egyptian Jew, a Sephardi Jew or any other label combination. However, they all recognised that their inner perception of self - the way they saw themselves - remained a constant: a Jew from Egypt first, French by culture, ‘by choice and not by birth’. For some participants, there was no conflict between their ethno-religious identity and their adopted national identity. For instance, one woman declared

⁶⁴ Case study #8F indicated that he had already experienced antisemitism in the 1960s, when he used to work in the principality of Monaco for a Greek shipping firm. His employers apparently had a policy of not employing Jews and made his life unbearable when they found out his religion, until he left. He found another job in London and decided to move there where he now resides with his family.

that although she was Jewish first, she felt deeply French since France had given her everything.⁶⁵ Another respondent dealt pragmatically with the intricacies of a multi-layered identity:

*Si c'est un Français qui me pose la question, je suis français, point final. Si c'est Madame Barda qui me pose la question, je lui dis: je suis comme vous. Je suis un Juif d'Egypte. Quant à moi, je me sens Juif d'Egypte; je me sens français; je me sens sépharade.*⁶⁶

Others were still struggling between their multiple co-existing identities, trying to construct a succinct definition of self. One particularly interesting participant who came from a mixture of Venetian, Greek, Turkish and Ladino backgrounds, had lived consecutively in Italy, France and England since his exodus from Egypt. Not only did he speak all the relevant languages, he also knew some of the regional dialects. He was now a British subject but could not decide which one of those respective cultures he identified with most. In response to my question about his core identity, he started by stating that he was first a Jew, although he was hardly observant and then added: 'I am closer to the French culture but I want all my other cultures together, I don't want to give up any of them.'⁶⁷ In other words, the cosmopolitanism that used to be the essence of life in Egypt for the elite minorities and that he had grown up with, was his permanent and preferred condition. In the same vein, Participant #2F, who had obviously reflected on the issue of identity long before our interview, stated that he always described himself to others as an Alexandrian Jew, but culturally he saw himself as French:

Si on est français par la culture, je suis d'abord français. Si on est français par le sang, alors je suis alexandrin. Je n'ai pas de sang bleu... Dans le passé, je n'ai jamais refoulé mon identité. J'ai toujours dit que j'étais alexandrin et juif en même temps.

In his opinion, Alexandria, because of its ancient association with Hellenism and its geographical positioning, on the edge of the Mediterranean, facing Europe, was separate and different from the rest of Egypt. It was a place that still resonated from the legacy of a culture that influenced the entire Western world. For him, being an Alexandrian signified much more than merely being born in Alexandria. It meant that one always retained the essential

⁶⁵ Respondent #7 dramatic choice of words illustrated how much she identified with France: '*Je suis à fond française, à mort. J'adore la France.*'

⁶⁶ Case study #15F. See also an essay by Jacques Hassoun about the complexity of the Jewish/Egyptian identity, 'Can Egyptian-Jewish identity be Reconstructed in France', *Bulletin of the Israeli Academic Centre in Cairo*, No.23, June 1998, pp.8-10.

⁶⁷ In spite of his perception of self as a Jew first, this respondent's (#18F) religious observance was very lax.

characteristic of the culture that once flourished there, which was an open and tolerant view of that world. This notion that Alexandria had a defining influence on its minorities' worldview and aptitude to function anywhere in the world, was also raised by Respondent #14F, in regard to his tolerance towards people from different religious backgrounds, both in Egypt and in France:

J'ai continué à fonctionner en France avec ma mentalité du Lycée de l'Union Juive, ou du Lycée français, ou même simplement d'Alexandrie, ce qui est à mon avis notre fonds culturel; c'est-à-dire que pour nous, Juifs ou non-Juifs, c'était la même chose.

It was clear from the complexity of those few comments on identity that this was an issue my respondents, as part of the Jewish/Egyptian/French intelligentsia, have struggled with at a personal level and somewhat resolved at an intellectual level. The result was that they still identified with their compatriots since they admitted that they mainly socialised with other Jews from Egypt, particularly in their later years. On the other hand, by the time this research was conducted, they were sufficiently settled and secure in their identity within their ethno-religious boundaries, for them not to mention any significant real or perceived discrimination from Jews from different ethnic backgrounds, unlike the situation in Australia with the Iraqi Jews and the Ashkenazi Jews. Not only did they create new institutions, but they also rebuilt older ones. As per the testimony of respondent #15, the Egyptian émigrés were able to negotiate with the *Consistoire*⁶⁸ very soon after their arrival, the loan of a separate hall, on the same premises as the Great Synagogue of Paris *La Victoire*:

Tout de suite, les Juifs d'Egypte ont voulu avoir leur synagogue, avec son organisation propre, son rite etc., et ils l'ont obtenu très facilement.

It is known as *L'Oratoire Egyptien – Eliaou Hannabi*, in remembrance of the Great Synagogue of Alexandria, and this is where Egyptian Jews have been conducting their religious services according to the Egyptian/Sephardi liturgy for the past 45 years.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ The *Consistoire* is the official representative of Jewish congregations in France. It is a French state creation, introduced by Napoleon in 1808. See Paula E. Hyman. *The Jews of Modern France*, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998, pp.44-48 and Esther Benbassa, *The Jews of France - A History from Antiquity to the Present*, (translated by M.B DeBevoise), Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999, pp.86-92.

⁶⁹ The vice-president of the *Oratoire* (#12F) reported that initially, this arrangement was supposed to be temporary. The *Oratoire* had on record five or six hundred congregants. As was the custom in Egypt, there were no fixed membership fees but seats were sold for the High Holy Days. However, the vice-president explained that people who could not afford a seat were still welcome. They employed a cantor or *hazan* to read

Furthermore, as Sephardim, they belonged to the dominant group within French Jewry, that is, the North Africans, with whom they shared an ethnic and religious tradition, a past history in an Arab land, a multiplicity of cultures, and a relatively recent migration experience.

As already pointed out, the fundamental difference between the French and the Australian groups related to their numbers and to their visibility and impact as a distinctive ethnic group. The French participants represented a community at least five times larger than the Egyptian community in Australia. Given that important numerical difference, the French group was significantly better equipped to retain its distinctive characteristics and assert itself independently.

Preservation and transmission of cultural heritage

Another distinctive feature of the Egyptian French group was a particularly strong awareness of its history, culture and ethnic identity and an equally strong and dynamic commitment to the preservation and transmission of its cultural heritage. This awareness was dormant during the early years of settlement in France, while the émigrés were working hard at establishing themselves in their new home, founding a family and raising their children. After some twenty years, once their socio-economic base was more solidly anchored, the sense of having lived through a unique chapter of Jewish history that was now closed, resurfaced and they joined forces with other ex-Egyptian/Jewish intellectuals who shared the same perspective. They were among the first if not the first of all the other groups of Jews from Egypt dispersed throughout the world – outside of Israel – to lobby for a remembrance of things past as well as raise the awareness of the larger community to their specificity as a minority group.⁷⁰ They formed the *Association pour la Sauvegarde du Patrimoine Culturel des Juifs d’Egypte* (ASPCJE) in 1979, with the specific aim of safeguarding the rich and diverse history of their community. The *Association* requested all the Jews of Egypt to be oral historians and participate in the task of sharing their memories and recording their testimonies for the benefit of present and future generations.

the Torah and chant the prayers. They did not have the funds to employ a permanent rabbi, as the congregation was not rich and survived thanks to individual donations.

⁷⁰ Respondent #12F stated that, apart from the ASPCJE, there was another organisation called *L’Union des Juifs d’Egypte en France*, to which he also belonged but he did not specify the nature or the extent of his involvement.

According to one of my participants, a founding member of ASPCJE, two vastly different but highly significant events triggered that awakening. The first one was Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's dramatic visit to Israel in 1977, which led to the signing of a peace treaty between the two countries in March 1979.⁷¹ Beside the political – both national and international – importance of this very public event, it certainly had a very personal and emotional significance for the expelled or self-exiled Egyptian Jews. In order to understand why this represented a watershed event for them, one must remember that when the Jews left Egypt after 1956, their *laissez-passer* bore the stamp: '*Valable pour un seul voyage sans retour*'. Consequently, not only were they forced to leave empty-handed a country where most of them had lived for at least two or three generations, but they were also barred from ever returning.⁷² To be suddenly free to revisit their birthplace was like the re-opening of a door that had long been closed. It brought back the memory of their exceptional lifestyle and carefree days of youth. Somehow, this event does not seem to have had the same resonance for the ex-Jews of Egypt living in Australia, maybe because the physical isolation and remoteness of their new home had somewhat dulled their sensitivities in this respect. The second event, much smaller in scope but also definitive in its outcome, was the funeral of the communist militant, Egyptian-born Henri Curiel, shot in the lift of his Paris apartment in 1978, by unknown assassins believed to be from the Far Right.⁷³ The fact that none of the various eulogies delivered during the official ceremony ever mentioned the fact that Curiel was a Jew from Egypt, greatly disturbed the small group of his Egyptian/Jewish friends, also affiliated to the left side of politics, including a number of my respondents, who were present at the funeral.⁷⁴ Together they decided to act by initiating a series of measures in order to inform the general public as to the identity of the Jews of Egypt. They started by producing and distributing a small booklet called *A la Rencontre des Juifs d'Egypte*.⁷⁵ In 1979, they

⁷¹ One respondent claimed that Sadat published an open letter in a leading Egyptian newspaper *El-Ahram*, addressed to the Jews of Egypt, inviting them to come back. This particular claim could be mythical as I have not been able to verify its veracity.

⁷² In fact, that period was so traumatic for the Jews of Egypt that they used a code word whenever they discussed it, calling it simply '*les événements*'.

⁷³ See Gilles Perrault, *Un Homme à part*. After his imprisonment and subsequent expulsion from Egypt for his high involvement in the Egyptian communist party, Curiel had relocated in Paris where he continued to pursue his militant activities. He was heavily criticised for his involvement with the Algerian FLN and with other violent Third-World liberation movements.

⁷⁴ Curiel was known to a number of my participants, who, in their younger years, had been involved with the communist party both in Egypt and in France. Curiel's funeral was held at the famous cemetery of Père-La-Chaise in Paris, attended by several political figures from the left who only spoke of Curiel's achievements as a Communist in France and never mentioned his 'Egyptian' life.

⁷⁵ An interesting aspect of that booklet was its cover page. It was a reproduction of an old map of the Jewish quarter in Cairo, drawn by the artists who accompanied Napoleon Bonaparte's expedition into Egypt of 1798.

organised a major reunion, held at the Jewish community centre of Paris, *Espace Rachi*, which attracted over 300 people originally from Egypt. Following the success of that reunion, the ASPCJE was created and its committee, which included a number of respondents, decided on a number of initiatives. They organised a four-day colloquium on Jewish, Mediterranean and Oriental cultures, at the Centre Georges Pompidou.⁷⁶ They also planned a series of lectures by academics on various topics of Jewish/Egyptian history, and helped with the publication of a number of books written by Egyptian Jews in France. The Association's Bulletin, '*Nahar Misraïm*' which appeared from December 1980 to May 1989, was the brainchild of one of my respondents who worked very closely with the Egyptian-born historian, Jacques Hassoun:

*A la suite des journées de Beaubourg, j'ai dit à Jacques [Hassoun], il faut qu'on fasse une petite publication pour garder le contact avec tout le monde. Il m'a dit, tu veux t'en occuper? J'ai dit oui, j'ai trouvé un imprimeur, une femme qui tapait à la machine et on a commencé. Ça a marché pendant dix ans.*⁷⁷

Several respondents were actively involved in the production of the Bulletin by contributing articles or attending to administrative duties at the ASPCJE, until its publication was suspended in 1990 due to a gradual fallout of the membership database.⁷⁸ The Association resumed its activities in 1999, with the help of old and new members, again including some of my respondents, who continued to show dedication and commitment to the cause of safeguarding and transmitting the heritage of the Jews of Egypt. The publication *Nahar Misraïm* now appears quarterly as a newsletter, and discusses various topics such as personal memories of life in Egypt, the latest books written by Egyptian Jews or significant events in the Jewish/Egyptian world such as the coming World Congress of the Jews of Egypt to be

According to Respondent #2F, who helped compile the booklet, there were no street names on that map. Together with other members of the team, my respondent filled in the blanks and claimed that this map has since been used by the Egyptian Tourist Bureau.

⁷⁶ The papers delivered during the colloquium were published thanks to the support of the *Centre National des Lettres* in a book called *Cultures Juives méditerranéennes et orientales*, Paris: Syros, 1982.

⁷⁷ Case study #2F. Jacques Hassoun's vital contribution to the work of the ASPCJE and his many books on the Jewish Egyptian cultural heritage has already been discussed at length in the first chapter.

⁷⁸ For instance, apart from the regular and numerous articles written by Jacques Hassoun for every issue of the ASPCJE Bulletin, there were contributions by Respondents #2F, #3F and #4 in Bulletin no.1, December 1980. In Bulletin nos. 18-19, October 1985, Respondent #12F contributed an article on 'Maimonide, le symbole de l'espoir', pp. 33-46 and Case study #15F on 'Témoignages des communautés juives d'Égypte – Le Caire', pp. 54-57.

held in July 2006 in Haifa, marking the fiftieth anniversary of the events that led to the ‘second exodus’ from Egypt.⁷⁹

Thanks to the efforts of their intellectual elite, the self-awareness of the Jews of Egypt in France seems to have grown in strength. Not only were they more secure in their identity but they also tried to inform outsiders of their past history. Their physical and emotional connection to Egypt has not been totally severed since all the French respondents as well as most of my other contacts in France made the trip back, at least twice, individually and on organised group tours, contrary to the sample group in Australia, where a much smaller proportion of 28% percent re-visited Egypt.⁸⁰ One of those tours, conducted by Jacques Hassoun in 1993, accompanied by Egyptian-born journalist and author, Paula Jacques, was recorded live for a special radio program called ‘*Nuits magnétiques, six jours et sept nuits, le temps d’un retour au pays natal*’ and broadcasted nationally over four nights.⁸¹ In 1999, in the context of a school program on the themes of exile, displacement and revisiting the past, the nephew of one of my respondents spoke about the land his mother and grandparents had to leave, their lifestyle, the food they ate and the many languages they spoke with a ‘funny accent’. His story sparked the interest of the teacher who organised a trip to Egypt for the whole class, accompanied by a film crew. The film was shown on television nationally, with the nephew of my respondent as the main protagonist.⁸² Egyptian Jews were also regularly invited to speak about their specific traditions on community radio programs run by the North African Jews.⁸³

In the last decade, inspired by the achievements of the pioneering ASPCJE, similar initiatives have sprung up in France, as well as other countries where Jews from Egypt have settled in sufficient numbers. For example, the *Association Internationale Nébi Daniel* (AINB), supported by the Association of Jews from Egypt (AJE), United Kingdom, the *Association des Juifs Originaires d’Egypte* (AJOE), France, and the ASPCJE, is lobbying through official

⁷⁹ See Albert Oudiz, ‘Mes années aux établissements de la Mission Laïque Française du Caire’ in *Nahar Misraïm Bulletin de Liaison*, no.22, March 2005, pp. 3-8; Sarina Rohmer, ‘Témoignage des Juifs d’Egypte installés au Brésil’ in *Nahar Misraïm Bulletin de Liaison* no. 21, December 2004, pp.5-8.

⁸⁰ It could be argued that, for the Australian group, the issue of distance and cost would have made a trip to Egypt more difficult than for the French group.

⁸¹ I obtained the complete tapes of that special program from one of my respondents (#14F). Paula Jacques had already reported on an earlier trip to Egypt undertaken in 1981, on a radio program called ‘*L’Oreille en Coin*’. The broadcast was transcribed by Yvette Gabbay and published in the Bulletin of the ASPCJE, nos.4-5, novembre 1981, pp. 28-40.

⁸² I was shown the film by Respondent #4F.

⁸³ *Radio Communautaire juive, émission du 19/4/90, ‘Juifs d’Egypte’*.

channels, both in France and in Egypt, for the preservation *in situ* of the remaining assets of the Jewish community in Alexandria such as its synagogues, cemeteries, religious artefacts and archives, as well as ensuring unrestricted access to its civil records. In the United States, the Historical Society of Jews from Egypt (HSJE) was created in 1995 with the aim of ‘highlighting the necessity of preserving the memory of Egypt’s Jewish community’, emphasising the need for ‘members of the community to learn about their past in order to preserve it’. This organisation has adopted a different approach from AIND, by strongly lobbying for the return of the patrimony Jews left behind when they were forced out Egypt, and for its transfer to an academic institution in the United States.⁸⁴ The International Association of Jews from Egypt (IAJE), established in 1997 in New York, has tried to establish a link between the Jews from Egypt living in various parts of the world, in order to preserve the memory of ‘a glorious past’. Professor Victor D. Sanua, its director, recognised the debt his association owed to people like Jacques Hassoun and the ASPCJE. He stated that ‘if any centre of Egyptian Jewry is established, it should be dedicated in his name.’⁸⁵ Other associations such as AAHA⁸⁶, AJOE, AJE, tend to have more of a mix between intellectual and social activities, organising monthly dinners, outings, occasional conferences, guided trips to Egypt, with the ultimate aim of being together, sharing their experience and keeping in touch with others from the same ethnic background, thus demonstrating their strong attachment to their cultural heritage and their determination not to let it be forgotten.⁸⁷

In the past decade, there has been an upsurge of books being written by Jews from Egypt in French and English, about their reconstructed memories of their lives in Egypt, before and after ‘*les événements*’, and about their experience in their respective diasporas. Nevertheless,

⁸⁴ Report on the Inaugural Meeting of the Historical Society of Jews from Egypt, by Victor D. Sanua, 22 October 1995.

⁸⁵ IAJE Newsletter, 1999 Vol. 2, no.2, p.2.

⁸⁶ Egyptian-born Sandro Manzoni, the founder of *Amicale Alexandrie, Hier et Aujourd’hui* (AAHA) in 1993, has set the agenda of AAHA as ‘a cultural and recreational society made up mainly of people who have lived or live in Alexandria’, Jews and non-Jews. Its aim is to increase the knowledge of Alexandria’s past and present. By creating bridges between its members spread over all continents, it encourages the meeting and sharing of diverse cultures and traditions.’ The motto of the Association ‘*Dispersés, mais unis; unis, mais divers*’ expresses the essence of ‘Alexandrians’. Its Bulletin *Alexandrie Info* appears twice a year and keeps the membership informed of incoming activities, such as organised trips and reunions, relevant publications and other news that might be of interest.

⁸⁷ Most of these associations have established interactive websites and ‘chat rooms’ such as ‘egyjews@yahoogroups.com’ or ‘aroundtheworldjews@yahoogroups.com’ and they attract a lot of visitors. Aside from the usual banter, the online exchanges cover a variety of serious topics, specifically relevant to the Jews from Egypt. They often reveal certain aspects of life in Egypt that cannot be found in any books, such as linguistic expressions that have long been forgotten, personal anecdotes, special memories and traditional recipes.

from the examination of primary and secondary sources, the evaluation of the interviews, and the many informal discussions with ex-Jews of Egypt, it seems evident that, with the obvious exception of Israel, the push and the motivation to put on record, to remember and to tell others about the personal stories and the general history and cultural heritage of the Jews from Egypt, were initiated in France, in the late 1970s, by an elite micro-group of Jews from Egypt, some of whom were part of this study. A number of basic elements such as the size of the transplanted community in France, a tradition of cosmopolitanism, an ethnicity shared with the dominant group within French Jewry, and an affinity with the national culture and language, combined with the professionalism of the micro-group and its preoccupation with intellectual pursuit, seem to have provided the right climate for their creativity to flourish. In that respect, there was no similar climate in Australia, maybe because of a different combination of those basic elements: smaller numbers, greater isolation, multi-level alienation and unfamiliar culture. The small size of the community of Jews from Egypt in Australia made them a nearly invisible minority. The isolation of the Australian continent and the physical distance between the new and the old country cut them off from their past and the spread of Australia's main cities separated them from each other. The overriding preoccupation common to most migrants, which is the need to adapt to an unfamiliar culture and language as well as achieve a comfortable lifestyle, was all-consuming, at least initially. Nevertheless, fifty years later, the anguish and trauma of new beginnings are forgotten. The Jews from Egypt are successfully integrated into their respective host societies at every level, culturally, economically and socially. Both sample groups in Australia and France expressed their gratitude towards the country that took them in as refugees and gave them freedom, security and opportunities.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has tried to construct a complete analysis of a clearly defined Jewish community from Egypt. It is based on the oral history of a number of Egyptian-born interviewees who migrated to Australia and to France. Built around the conceptual framework of forced emigration, integration and acculturation, this study looks at the successful acculturation experience of a particular migrant group within Australian society.

Like all the other Jewish communities of Arab lands, the Egyptian community has come to an end, without any prospect of being revived in the near or distant future, as it was either expelled or forced into exile in the aftermath of the three wars waged between Egypt and Israel (1948, 1956 and 1967). This thesis argues that the rise of an exclusively Arab-Islamic type of nationalism, the growing threat of Islamic fundamentalism and the escalating Arab-Israeli conflict constituted the fundamental causes for the demise of Egyptian Jewry. As a consequence, almost half of the Jewish population of Egypt went to Israel. The rest dispersed throughout the Western world, mainly in France, North and South America. In Australia, a small group of less than 2,000 found a new home.

Before the events that led to their dispersion, the Jews of Egypt had occupied what they thought was a safe and respected place in Egyptian society. Their contribution to the economic development and modernisation of the country was immense and 'totally out of proportion to their actual numbers'¹, not unlike the situation in Australia.² Apart from a small group of indigenous Jews, most of the Jewish population of modern Egypt had emigrated from countries within the Ottoman Empire, North Africa, Western and Eastern Europe. Searching for better economic conditions and political stability, or fleeing persecution in their country of origin, the Jews migrated to Egypt, from the mid-nineteenth century, attracted by the policy of economic liberalism and legal privilege for foreigners, promoted by Egyptian rulers and guaranteed by British occupation. As a consequence of that immigration, they

¹ Krämer, *The Jews in Modern Egypt*, p.37.

² See Rutland, *The Jews in Australia*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.121: 'Over the last twenty years, Jews have featured in the *Business Review Weekly's* 'Rich List', the 200 wealthiest individuals and families in Australia. Between 20 to 25 per cent of these 200 names are Jewish business people ... This is a remarkable contribution from a community that constitutes less than half a per cent of Australia's population.'

were not a homogeneous community. They were divided along the lines of ethnic origin, rite, nationality, language, and class. As per Ottoman and Islamic tradition, they were defined by their religion and lived side by side with several non-Muslim communities, such as the Copts, the Greeks, the Syrians, and the Armenians as well as colonies of Italians, French, and British expatriates. Their common characteristics were their multiple language skills born of their exposure to such a diversity of cultures and a relatively high standard of Western education acquired through a network of religious and secular French and English private schools. In the process of westernisation, they grew more and more alienated from the local Egyptian population and culture. By 1948, except for a small group of indigenous Egyptian Jews of low socio-economic status, most of Egyptian Jewry identified with the Western world and its culture. The middle and upper middle class spoke French at home and with members of the other religious and ethnic minorities. The use of Arabic was relegated to communication with servants and shopkeepers.

After their exile, apart from those who migrated to Israel, the majority of Jews from Egypt had to go through a waiting period in the capitals of Europe before they were accepted by any of the countries of immigration except for Brazil. That transit period was facilitated by the assistance of international and local Jewish agencies. The analysis of the reasons my interviewees gave for choosing Australia has shown that it was mostly the desire to be reunited with family members. They first had to overcome the racial discrimination of the 'White Australia' Immigration policy towards Jews of Middle Eastern origin. This hurdle was surmounted thanks to the tireless efforts of leaders of the Australian Jewish community such as Syd Einfeld and the AJWS, combined with the intervention of some politicians, namely Patrick Galvin, Labor Federal Member for Kingston, South Australia.

The analysis of the testimonies of those interviewed confirmed that, in addition to their ethnic and national diversity and middle class background, the newcomers were young, healthy, Western educated, and multilingual, with a fair to good knowledge of English. They had a liberal and tolerant mindset. In other words, they were good 'migrant material'. Beginnings in Australia were not always smooth, especially for those who arrived in the late 1940s and 1950s as refugees, without means of support, when Australian social services were in their infancy, accommodation was scarce and non-British migrants were not made to feel particularly welcome. Nevertheless, they were faced with the necessity to integrate into their

new environment. A relatively large number of Egyptian Jews settled in Adelaide from 1948 onwards, as a result of chain migration, where they made a greater impact than in Sydney and Melbourne because of the small size of the local Jewish community.

Due to a combination of factors such as level of education, linguistic skills and adaptability, as well as economic climate, Egyptian Jews entered the workforce as white-collar workers without great difficulty. In a relatively short time, they were contributing to the economy of the country. Within two to three years of their arrival, they had successfully reintegrated into the ranks of middle class. Most of them had already bought their own home, often thanks to a loan from the Jewish Welfare Building Society. Some of them even owned a car. The younger migrants, who were of school age upon arrival, eventually pursued tertiary education in Australian universities, often with the help of Commonwealth scholarships. At the time of the interviews, their Australian-born children were, for the most part, university graduates and professionals. One can safely conclude that, as a rule, their socio-economic integration was remarkably rapid.

At first, like all non-British migrants, they were expected to shed distinctive signs of their previous culture and allegiances, particularly their language, and totally assimilate into the host society. The Egyptian Jews responded to that challenge by creating their own familial network, sharing accommodation and resources and helping each other to adjust to their new environment. The failure of the policy of assimilation caused it to be abandoned for the projected integration of migrants into the emerging multicultural society of the 1970s. In that context, the Jews of Egypt were on familiar grounds. They very skilfully drew on their past experience of living in a multicultural society. They possessed the skills of dealing with people from different ethnic backgrounds. They knew how to accommodate the various layers of their identities, and gradually reacculturated themselves both within the Australian Jewish community and the broader Australian society, whilst maintaining their ties to their religious and cultural background and preserving a Jewish identity. For instance, they retained the use of French amongst themselves, as well as some of their traditional Sephardi and Oriental cuisine, which they introduced to their friends in the Jewish community and the broader Australian society. In Adelaide, where they were more prominent, they included some of the Egyptian rites and tunes as an integral part of the synagogue service.

Their relationship with other Sephardim and with the dominant Ashkenazi community was not without its problems. As a group, they were often criticised for a low level of communal involvement. A notable exception consisted of a number of individuals in Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney, who distinguished themselves in different fields of endeavour. By the time this study was conducted, these early frictions seem forgotten. Egyptian Jews were generally accepted by their peers as different but valuable members of the Jewish community. They have retained their multi-layered identity with a strong Jewish core and identification with Israel as the home of the Jewish people.

In spite of the trauma they experienced when they were forced out of Egypt, whether through direct expulsion or economic strangulation, they have shed long ago any significant resentment towards their country of birth. They still remember with nostalgia the atmosphere of tolerance and conviviality prevalent in Egypt before 1948. The Egyptian/Jewish heritage has remained a significant identity marker for the majority of my respondents, even though they feel very patriotic towards Australia.

Obviously, with the passage of time, this particular Egyptian Jewish diaspora will belong to the past. My interviewees are members of the last generation of authentic Egyptian Jews. They are fully aware that their Egyptian Jewish heritage is bound to be diluted and gradually vanish. The features that kept Egyptian Jews together are disappearing as their children and grandchildren integrate into Australian society. In an open society such as Australia, assimilation is regarded as the biggest threat to Jewish continuity. My research has shown that intermarriage was rare among the Egyptian-born Jews. This was even true, to some extent, of their children, whose non-Jewish partners often converted. However, intermarriage within the ranks of the grandchildren seems to be on the increase, confirming Rutland's findings that 'recent demographic studies indicate a significant increase in intermarriage amongst the younger generation'.³ My study could not draw a definitive conclusion because most of the grandchildren have not yet married. However, it can be assumed that the generally low level of religious observance of Egyptian Jews and the tradition of liberalism and tolerance towards other cultures, will contribute to a higher level of intermarriage than in more orthodox communities.

³ Rutland, *The Jews in Australia*, p.105.

I applied the concepts of forced emigration, integration and acculturation to my study of the migration experience of this small group of Jews. With their multiple language skills, multi-layered identity and innate ability to adapt and interact with a variety of ethnic groups, they have succeeded in establishing themselves in an unfamiliar country that initially welcomed them reluctantly, before embracing their pluralism. As such, they can be said to have successfully acculturated and integrated into Australian society, whilst retaining their own cultural diversity.

The high concentration of Egyptian Jews in Adelaide brought them to the forefront of the Jewish community and they had a significant impact on Jewish community life in that city. In Sydney and Melbourne, on the other hand, the small group of Egyptian Jews successfully blended into the existing Jewish communities but they hardly ever attempted to organise themselves independently or to create their own institutions. There never was a formal association of Egyptian Jews in Australia although they retained to this day a high level of unstructured socialising amongst themselves.

In addition, because the Jews from Egypt did not have a 'ghetto mentality', which was more prevalent amongst Ashkenazi Jews, they did not always settle in Jewish areas upon arrival in the country. They dispersed in the large cities of Sydney and Melbourne particularly, not realising the impact of the great distances and the inadequate public transport system within those cities on their Jewish identity. In Sydney, for example, there were small isolated pockets of Egyptian Jews in the Northern, Southern, and South-Western Suburbs, apart from those in the traditional Jewish areas of the Eastern Suburbs. Once the Jews of Egypt realised their isolation, the option of moving had often become too expensive. It took some of my respondents over fifteen years before they could relocate closer to the stronger Jewish community in the East, so that their children could grow up in a Jewish environment. Furthermore, their diversity and tolerant view of the world, which served them well in their interaction with people from different ethnic backgrounds, did not necessarily motivate them to assert themselves as a distinctive group. They preferred to blend into the existing community. Thus, their identity was somewhat diluted by the combination of their small numbers, dispersion, intrinsic diversity, and ability to adapt and connect to other cultures.

In contrast to what was happening in France, very few of my respondents - with one notable exception who is involved in a number of associations of Jews from Egypt - articulated an

active commitment to the transmission and safeguarding of their Jewish Egyptian heritage, although telling their stories to a researcher constitutes in itself an act of transmission and safeguard.⁴ They all expressed a high level of satisfaction with their lives in Australia and considered themselves lucky to have ended up at ‘the Edge of the Diaspora’, in spite of the different culture and geographical isolation. They just added an additional layer to their diverse identity.

Comparing the Australian sample with the French sample highlighted some of the similarities and differences. The French respondents represented a community of over 10,000 whereas the Australian respondents were part of a community that was estimated to be fewer than 2,000. It is clear that such a difference affected their status as a distinctive ethnic group and their visibility in their ethno-religious community and in the host society.

Although I have made allowances for the small size of the French sample compared to the Australian sample in my conclusions, I had to take into consideration the fact that the French sample represented an elite group. Made up of a majority of highly acculturated intellectuals who not only talked about their past history but were also actively committed to the preservation of their heritage for the next generations, this micro group could articulate better than any other the preoccupations and aspirations of the macro group. They also inspired other Egyptian Diasporas dispersed throughout the Western world to gather and record the personal testimonies of the Jews from Egypt. In spite of their strong and active commitment to informing others of their distinctive history and identity, their level of religious observance and Jewish affiliation was significantly lower than the Australian respondents. As such, they have been influenced by the secularism of French society. Their identity as Jews from Egypt was, more often than not, just an ethnic marker although the majority expressed solidarity with Israel.

It is self-evident that the more numerous Egyptian Jews living in France were better equipped to assert themselves within the older Jewish/French community and to retain their distinctive features, particularly since, as Sephardim, they belonged to the dominant group within French Jewry. This added to their prestige. There were a number of reasons for their rapid

⁴ Respondent #8 has been trying for a number of years to create a ‘Jews of Egypt Foundation’ to promote and finance in perpetuity the study and research of the recent history of the Jews of Egypt, under the auspices of an academic institution. His negotiations have just reached the final stages and his funding campaign will start next year.

acculturation. They were greatly assisted by international and local Jewish institutions when they first arrived. Their children were educated free of charge in French universities. In addition, their deep affinity with the French language and culture ensured a smoother and deeper integration into the host society. However, their integration was not as smooth as one may have expected. Particularly in the initial stages, they were not readily accepted into French society, even though they were fluent in the national language, because their accent and their brand of French exposed them as foreigners. On the other hand, whereas none of the Australian respondents reported any personal experience of antisemitism, the French respondents were aware of a latent antisemitism still existing in some circles of French society, and, at times, found themselves at the receiving end of antisemitic remarks. Nevertheless, they also stated they never regretted settling in France and felt very privileged to be living there. Since 2000, with the rising level of antisemitism disguised as anti-Zionism, as found in the general press and some sections of French society, I detected a few signs of growing uneasiness amongst Egyptian Jews.

As time unfolds, the Jews from Egypt, as a distinct group, are disappearing. Their history will constitute a part of the greater picture of Jews of Arab lands and their subsequent dispersion throughout Israel and the Western world. There are lessons to be learned from the migration experience of Egyptian Jews, both in Australia and France, lessons about the process of integration and identity reconstruction, about the diverse strategies used to ensure a successful acculturation, and the value of a multi-layered identity. They would be lost if studies such as the present one were not undertaken. It is, therefore, crucial to record the personal testimonies of all these individuals who, through the vagaries of history, were forced to leave their birthplace. Their stories cannot be found in history books and their voice would otherwise not be heard beyond the confines of their closed family circles

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