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Sara Faber April 15, 2013

Between Babylon and Zion: The Concept of Home in Eli Amir's *The Dove Flyer* and *Scapegoat*

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Abstract

Between Babylon and Zion: The Concept of Home in Eli Amir's *The Dove Flyer* and *Scapegoat*
By Sara Faber

In the early 1950s, shortly after the creation of the State of Israel, nearly the entire Iraqi Jewish community emigrated from Iraq to Israel. There they were forced to assimilate to the Israeli identity and suppress their original Mizrahi identity. As a teenager, the novelist Eli Amir was a part of this immigration. His first two novels, *The Dove Flyer* (1992) and *Scapegoat* (1984), focus on the story of the emigration from Iraq (*The Dove Flyer*) and subsequent assimilation into Israeli society (*Scapegoat*). Each narrative is located in a different place—*The Dove Flyer* primarily in Baghdad, and *Scapegoat* in Israel—and each negates the view of that place as home. Because the Iraqi Jews are marginalized as a minority in both places, neither place is a true home to the novels' protagonists. The only home left to them is one that is imagined.

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Introduction

In 1948, fifteen Iraqi Jews immigrated to the newly created State of Israel. In the five years that followed, nearly 125,000 Iraqi Jews immigrated to Israel.[1] This massive emigration was the relocation of almost the entire Iraqi Jewish community to Israel; prior to the 1950s, it is estimated that the millennia-old Iraqi Jewish community totaled 150,000 Jews.[2]

This enormous wave of emigration may seem sudden, particularly for a community that had had such a lasting and prolific presence in Iraq, but the years leading up to this communal departure were increasingly difficult for the Jewish community. They had thrived under British rule in the first quarter of the twentieth century, but the period after British withdrawal saw a rise in anti-Semitism. In the communal Iraqi mindset, anti-imperialism and anti-British sentiment had become intricately tied to anti-Zionism; the resulting anti-Semitism erupted violently in June 1941 in an event known as the *Farhud*. The *Farhud*, which encompassed a few days of massive organized violence against the Baghdadi Jewish community, was a shocking event for the Jewish community, who had long thought themselves an integrated part of Iraqi society. Though there were no other such instances of widespread violence against Jews, the country became increasingly intolerant of Jewish life in the years preceding their exodus. Legislation was enacted to remove them from civil service, and involvement in Zionist organizations became a crime. In

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[1] Abbas Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews: A History of Mass Exodus*. (London: Saqi Books, 2005), 142.
[2] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 34-35. The exact Jewish population of the 1940s is unknown. The 1947 Iraqi census reported there to have been 118,000 Jews living in Iraq, but that figure does not correspond with the 124,638 Jews who left Iraq for Israel between 1948 and 1953 (a number that does not include the amount of Jews who emigrated elsewhere). In an unofficial report from December 1950, Shaul Sasson, the son of the chief rabbi of Baghdad, estimated there to have been around 150,000 Jews in Iraq during the late 1940s.

1948, Shafik Addas, an important Jewish businessman in Iraq, was hung for false charges after a sham of a trial.

It is with this event that Eli Amir's novel *The Dove Flyer* begins.[3] The novel recounts, through the eyes of its adolescent narrator Kabi, the years in Baghdad preceding the mass migration of Baghdad's (and greater Iraq's) Jews. Though it is Amir's second novel, it is in many ways a prequel to his first, *Scapegoat*.[4] *Scapegoat* tells the story of the Iraqi Jews once they arrived in Israel, where they were greeted with a spray of DDT (to exterminate any lice) and shoddy housing in transit camps, called in Hebrew *ma'abarot* (*ma'abara* being the singular form of the word). Like *The Dove Flyer*, this novel also features an adolescent narrator, Nuri, who goes to live on a kibbutz, adjusting to Israeli society while his family live in squalor in the *ma'abara*.

These two novels, Amir's first, are also his most autobiographical. Like his protagonists, Eli Amir spent his childhood in Baghdad before moving to Israel at the age of twelve. *The Dove Flyer* and *Scapegoat* form a picture of Amir's recollections of his complex and fraught transition from Baghdad to Israel. Together, they paint a compelling portrait of the disparity between the expectations of the Iraqi community upon the eve of their immigration to Israel and the harsh living conditions and prejudice they faced in the young state. The narrators in both struggle with questions of religious, ethnic and national identity. When viewed in tandem, the novels portray a multifaceted and often confused understanding of home.

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[3] Eli Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, trans. Hillel Halkin (London: Halban Publishers Ltd., 1993).
[4] Eli Amir, *Scapegoat*, trans. Dalia Bilu (Lond: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1987).

Eli Amir and the Youth Aliyah

Eli Amir was born Fuad Elias Khalaschi in Baghdad in 1937.[5] He immigrated to Israel by himself when he was twelve. Although his family followed him a few months afterward, they remained separated in the Jewish state: Amir spent his first years in Israel living on Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'Emek, while his family lived on the *Pardes Hanna* transit camp. When the family moved to *Katamon Vav*, a lower-class neighborhood in Jerusalem filled with tenement housing for the new immigrants, Amir rejoined them. [6]

Amir was the first of his family to attend college in Israel. He studied Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, and started his career in the civil service as an errand boy. He quickly ascended the ranks of the government: after the 1967 War, he was made the national advisor on Arab affairs. (The government was then controlled by the hegemonic, Ashkenazi-led Mapai/Labor Party.[7]) Though that could have been the start of a promising career, Amir resigned after a year and a half, choosing instead a less-prolific position in the Youth Aliyah Department of the Jewish Agency. Eventually he rose to become the head of the Youth Aliyah, being named the Director General in 1984. He held that position for over twenty years.

The Youth Aliyah was created in 1933 by Recha Freier, a teacher in Germany, as a reaction to Hitler's 1933 rise to power.[8] (The Youth Aliyah was eventually taken over by the Jewish Agency, the governing organization of the pre-Israeli Jewish community in Palestine.) Its

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[5] It is unclear when Amir changed his name to the Israeli-sounding Eli Amir; all he says in this interview is that "nobody could pronounce my name correctly, so I got sick of it and changed it." Peggy Cidor, "Close Encounters of the Literary Kind," *The Jerusalem Post* (Jerusalem, Israel), April 30, 2010.

[6] Eetta Prince-Gibson, "Scent of Jasmine, Taste of the East, Sound of J'lem," *The Jerusalem Post* (Jerusalem, Israel), April 26, 2006.

[7] For more information on the implications of this leadership, see chapter 2.

[8] Simon Griver, "Youth Aliyah Marks Seventy Years of Rescuing Children at Risk," *JWeekly*, last modified May 23, 2003, http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/19954/youth-aliyah-marks-70-years-of-rescuing-children-at-risk/.

mission was to rescue Jewish youth from Nazi Germany by sending them to the pre-Israeli Jewish community in Palestine (known as the Yishuv); the Youth Aliyah brought about five thousand Jewish children to Palestine before the start of World War II.[9] After the war, the Youth Aliyah sent emissaries to displaced persons camps throughout Europe to find Jewish children and send them to Palestine. Youth Aliyah immigrants were placed on kibbutzim for two years to help them assimilate to Yishuv (and, later, Israeli) society.

When Arab Jews began immigrating to Israel in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Youth Aliyah did with the new young Arab immigrants what it had done with the previous displaced European youth: sent them to kibbutzim to acclimate to Israeli society and "become productive Israeli citizens."[10] The Youth Aliyah had been created for Ashkenazi immigrants, many of whom were orphans (orphaned either by the pre-WWII move to Palestine or by the Holocaust); Mizrahi children were therefore inserted into a model that didn't necessarily fit them. Arab children were separated from their parents and communities by the Youth Aliyah initiative; as is shown in several novels of Mizrahi authors, including his own, the separation of

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[9] "The History of the Jewish Agency for Israel," Jewishagency.org, accessed April 1, 2013, http://www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/About/History/; The Youth Aliyah also worked with some Nazis, including Adolf Eichmann, who would later become the only man sentenced to the death penalty by the Israeli state, to transport Jewish children to Palestine during WWII. Brian Amkraut, *Between Home and Homeland: Youth Aliyah from Nazi Germany* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006); Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (New York: Penguin, 1963).

[10] This quote comes from the website of Hadassah, a women's Zionist organization. Hadassah was instrumental in the burgeoning of the Youth Aliyah program and its ultimate absorption by the Jewish Agency. "The History of Youth Aliyah," Hadassah.org, accessed April 1, 2013, http://www.hadassah.org/site/c.keJNIWOvElH/b.5774503/.

Mizrahi children from their families and communities—and therefore from their indigenous culture—was especially scarring for them.[11]

It is therefore interesting that Amir chose to work at the Youth Aliyah, the organization that would have placed him on Kibbutz Mishmar Ha-Emek as an adolescent. Years after his appointment as the organization's Director General, at the Youth Aliyah's seventieth anniversary, Amir acknowledged the failures of the organization during his time spent in its programs, saying that, "We have learned from the mistakes made then, and today we place more emphasis on allowing the children . . . to be proud of the heritage and culture from the countries that they have emigrated from."[12] Specifically, the Youth Aliyah under Amir's leadership introduced "special matriculation tracks, more parental involvement in the education of Youth Aliyah children, programs which integrate stronger and weaker students, and the establishment of long-day residential programs which allow children to sleep at home but spend the entire day at Youth Aliyah villages."[13] In his tenure as Director General of the Youth Aliyah, Amir attempted to prevent the disruption of communal identity—which he had experienced as a recent immigrant—in new generations of immigrant youth.

Amir's first novel, *Scapegoat*, is the most concerned with the practice of placing new immigrant youth in kibbutzim to integrate them into Israeli society. (Interestingly, *Scapegoat* was published just one year before Amir was made the General Director of the Youth Aliyah.) Though it is his first novel, it is the second chapter in his Iraqi trilogy, which includes *The Dove*

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[11] For other novels that focus on the theme of the *ma'abarot*, see Shimon Ballas, *HaMa'abara* (The Transit Camp) (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1964); Sami Michael, *Shavim VeShavim Yoter* (More and More Equal) (Tel Aviv: Boostan, 1974). Neither is available in English.

[12] "The Jewish People' Largest Recue Operation," Jewishagency.org, last modified February 2004, http://www.jewishagency.org/JewishAgency/English/Israel/YouthFutures/YouthAliyah/News/2004/Eli+Amir_+Jewish+People_s+Largest+Rescue+Operation+130.htm.

[13] "The Jewish People' Recue Operation," Jewishagency.org.

Flyer (1992), *Scapegoat* (1983), and *Jasmine* (2005). The novels are all focused on the Imari family, a fictional Baghdadi Jewish family that moves to Israel in the early 1950's. *Scapegoat* and *Jasmine* share a protagonist—Nuri—while *The Dove Flyer* is narrated by Nuri's older brother, Kabi. *The Dove Flyer* is concerned with the years in Baghdad preceding the mass exodus of the Jewish community, *Scapegoat* with the process of assimilation for Mizrahi youth into Israeli-kibbutz society, and *Jasmine* with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (Because *Jasmine* is focused on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict rather than the inter-Israeli Ashkenazi-Mizrahi conflict, I have not included it in the scope of my thesis.) All three novels have been extremely successful— *Scapegoat* is required reading for high school students in Israel and *Jasmine* has proved popular in Arab countries.[14] Atypical for Hebrew Mizrahi literature, all three novels of the Iraqi trilogy have been translated into English, as well as into German (all three), Russian (*Scapegoat*), Turkish (*Scapegoat* and *Jasmine*), French (*Jasmine*), Italian (*Jasmine*), and Arabic (*Jasmine*).

The semi-autobiographical nature of the first two books make them ideal for my study; because they so closely reflect the history of Iraqi Jewry and Mizrahim in Israel, they become, to use Moshe Gat's term, "historical novel[s]."[15] This historical accuracy allows scholars to use them to gain a better understanding of the Mizrahi attitude (which is a minority attitude, and therefore potentially less well-documented) toward their assimilation into and marginalization in Israeli society. Additionally, Amir is one of few Mizrahi authors whose work is available in

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[14] Prince-Gibson, "Scent of Jasmine"; for a discussion of the popularity of *Jasmine* in Arab countries, see Yoav Stern, "Eli Amir's Love Story Brings Israelis and Egyptians Closer," *Ha'Aretz* (Jerusalem, Israel), July 8, 2005.

[15] Moshe Gat, "The Immigration of Iraqi Jewry to Israel as Reflected in Literature," *Revue Europeenne de Migrations Internationales* 14, no. 3 (1998): 45.

English. Of those Mizrahi novels that have been translated into English, few novels by one author reflect such a broad expanse of Iraqi/Mizrahi history.

Comparative Scholarship

In the scholarship on Mizrahi literature and ethnic identity in Israel, a variety of terms are used inconstantly to describe the ethnic and religious groups that comprise Israeli society. To clarify, I will define the following terms as such:

> **Ashkenazi** (plural, Ashkenazim)**:** European Jewry. This is both a religious and ethnic term, as Ashkenazi Jews developed their own religious traditions (such as the augmented list of prohibited foods during the Jewish holiday of Passover), separate from those of Sephardi Jewry. Ashkenazim are also considered a distinct ethnic group within Israeli society.
>
> **Mizrahi** (plural, Mizrahim)**:** Jews descended from communities in Muslim societies. This is an ethnic term used to describe those Jews who originated from Arab societies in the Middle East; the root of the Hebrew word Mizrahi, *mizrach*, literally means 'east.'. This term was coined in Israel to differentiate between Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews.
>
> **Sephardi** (plural, Sephardim)**:** This is primarily a religious designation referring to Jews whose religious practice is derived from the Spanish Jewish community; the root of Hebrew word Sephardi, *sfarad*, is the Hebrew word for 'Spain.' (This term can also refer to those Jews who originated from the Jewish communities in Spain, who emigrated to other diasporic Jewish communities in North Africa, Europe, and the Middle East following the *Reconquista*.) While all Mizrahim are considered Sephardi Jews

(religiously), not all Sephardim are ethnically Arab, and therefore not all are considered Mizrahim.

I will also be using the term 'Arab Jew' to refer to the Mizrahim, though the problematic nature of this term should be noted. The Arab-Jewish conflict in Israel renders the identification of Mizrahim as Arab unpalatable to some Mizrahim, who therefore reject this term as an inaccurate label. The term is used almost exclusively in a scholarly context, by those scholars who seek to redefine and renormalize the term.[16]

There is not much scholarship on Mizrahi literature, and even less on the specific works of Eli Amir. Mizrahi literature, written in both Arabic and Hebrew by authors such as Sami Michael, Shimon Ballas, and Samir Naqqash, is often viewed as a sub-section of Israeli literature rather than as part of the larger body of Israeli literature.[17] Mizrahi literature is often preoccupied with the Mizrahi experience in Israel or otherwise, particularly with the immigration to Israel and the confrontation between Mizrahi and Israeli cultures. As such, these novels are often viewed by scholars as a counter-narrative to that of Ashkenazi immigration to Israel.[18] The novels

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[16] In the novels which I focus on in this work, particularly *The Dove Flyer*, the term 'Arab' is ambiguous. It is used to describe non-Jewish residents of Baghdad and to differentiate them from Jewish characters, although I do not believe that it is meant to be a derogatory term. Nor do I believe that the use of this term to differentiate between Jews and non-Jews in the novel is meant to indicate some ethnic differentiation.

[17] Nancy Berg argues that Mizrahi (which she calls Sephardi) writing should not be classified as separate from greater Israeli literature; Nancy Berg, "Sephardi Writing: From Margins to the Mainstream," *The Boom in Contemporary Israeli Fiction*, ed. Alan Mintz (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 1997).

[18] Lital Levy asserts that, in general, Mizrahi literature is viewed in a dichotomous and unequal relationship with the corresponding Ashkenazi literature, i.e. the story of Mirahi emigration is usually viewed in relation to the Ashkenazi immigration narrative. Levy argues that this comparative relationship is based on an unequal relationship in which the Mizrahi narrative is subordinated by the dominant Ashkenazi narrative. The fact that Mizrahi narratives are still so often looked at in relation to the dominant Ashkenazi narrative belies the view of the Mizrahi narrative as supplemental to the more normative Ashkenazi narrative. Lital Levy, "Self and the City: Literary Representations of Jewish Baghdad," *Prooftexts* 26, no. 1-2 (2006): 137.

containing these stories of Mizrahi immigration and assimilation were first published in Israel in the mid-1970s, long after the narrative of immigration into Israel had been defined and normalized by the journey from Europe to Israel.[19]

In addition to the perceived distinction between mainstream Israeli (Ashkenazi) literature and Mizrahi literature, scholars often perceive identity within Mizrahi literature as dichotomous rather than fluid.[20] According to much of the scholarship, characters in these novels (who are a reflection of the novels' authors) either identify with their original Arab identity or as Israeli.[21] This view of identity as static ignores the dualistic nature of transitioning identity as well as the complex and layered nature of literature.

Scholars further view the Mizrahi conception of home as dichotomous rather than amorphous. Lital Levy argues that Baghdadi Jewish writers focus on Baghdad in their writing because it is their true home.[22] Dvir Abromovich contends that Amir's portrayal of Baghdad is of an environment inherently hostile to Jews, one that the Jews would necessarily and eventually have left regardless of the creation of the Jewish state.[23] Tzvi Ben-Dor insists that Iraqi-Israeli

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[19] See Hannan Hever, "We Have Not Arrived from the Sea: A Mizrahi Literary Geography," *Social Identities: Journal for the Study of Race, Nation, and Culture* 10, no. 1.

[20] When Risa Domb examines Mizrahi identity in Sami Michael's novel *Water Touching Water*; she characterizes the Mizrahi protagonist as isolating himself from the world rather than adopting a new identity, all of which she describes as preventing him from integrating into Israel society. Moshe Gat presents Mizrahim as unable to mitigate the cultural gap; he suggests that Mizrahi authors write the Mizrahi narrative in search of some elusive cultural integration. Risa Domb, *Identity and Modern Israeli Literature* (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), 76; Moshe Gat, "Immigration of Iraqi Jewry," 57.

[21] Reuven Snir analyzes the literature of Mizrahi writers of the 1950s and finds a clear distinction between those authors who embraced Israeli identity and the "political Establishment" and those who identified with the Communist Party and were critical of Israel. Reuven Snir, "We Were Like Those Who Dream: Iraqi-Jewish Writers in Israel in the 1950s," *Prooftexts* 11, no. 2 (1991): 156.

[22] Lital Levy, "Self and the City."

[23] Dvir Abramovich, "Eli Amir's Mafriah Hayonim," *Modern Judaism* 27, no. 1 (2007).

authors write from a perspective of exile.[24] Though some Israeli Mizrahim may categorize either Israel or Iraq as their home,[25] it is an overly simplistic analysis of the literature.

Nancy Berg conflates the dichotomy between conceptions of home and that between the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi narratives. She describes the contemporaneous emergence of the Holocaust narrative (which is an Ashkenazi narrative) and the Mizrahi narrative as a competition for inclusion in the larger, hegemonic Zionist narrative rather than as corresponding additions to that narrative:

> These [Mizrahi] tales of disillusionment constitute a complementary or competitive narrative to the story of the Holocaust that was just beginning to unfold . . . The [Mizrahim] suffered in their own way, and wanted others to know of their experience. While some authors closer to the mainstream were rewriting the Zionist narrative to include the story of the Holocaust—that out of the great tragedy, the State of Israel was born—the Sephardim were offering alternative 'rewrites', which described the Diaspora as home and Israel as not-home.[26]

Not only does Berg's contextualization of the appearance of Mizrahi narratives undermine the validity of these narratives by insinuating that they were motivated by a desire to compete with that of the Holocaust, she also assumes a stark distinction between home and not-home. She reiterates this view in her book, writing that, "While the movement of the Babylonian Jewish community to Israel was seen as partial fulfillment of the Zionist dream, the separation from

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[24] Zvi Ben-Dor, "Invisible Exile: Iraqi Jews in Israel," *Journal of the Interdisciplinary Crossroads* 3, no. 1 (2006): 140.

[25] Sami Chetrit argues that the suppression of Mizrahi identity in the first years of Mizrahi life in Israel was so complete that even second and third generation Mizrahim in Israel will refuse to acknowledge the suppression of their cultural identity. Zvi Ben-Dor offers the sociological analysis that Iraqi Jews either identify Israel as their homes, or identify themselves as in exile from Babylon; Sami Shalom Chetrit, "Mizrahi Politics in Israel: Between Integration and Alternative," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no.4 (2000): 60; Zvi Ben-Dor, "Invisible Exile."

[26] Nancy Berg, "Sephardi Writing," 119.

home created the condition of exile for individuals."[27] This view of one location as home and the other as exile is, at least in Eli Amir's novels, an oversimplification.

While it is true that the story of Arab Jewish assimilation into Israeli society is fraught with mistreatment and prejudice,[28] Amir's novels do not so simply and crudely draw a line between home and not-home. Instead, *The Dove Flyer* and *Scapegoat* tell a complex story of the pain of losing one's home, the longing for it, the difficulty of assimilating into a new country, and the tension between one's former identity and one's place in a new culture (which informs the conception of home). The novels form a picture of a home that no longer is, and a nation which is supposed to be home, but is not. Stephanie Schwartz describes this dual-negation of home as a "double diaspora," a term that she defines as describing the idea that Iraqi Jews in Israel were in exile from Iraq (thus creating the first diaspora, from one's original homeland) and simultaneously segregated from and marginalized in Israeli society by their status as an ethnic minority (thus creating the second diaspora, from one's intended or supposed ancestral/religious homeland).[29] Similarly, Hannan Hever describes the Mizrahi space as "heterotopic," which she defines to mean "a Mizrahi location that is part of the Israeli place while remaining apart from it."[30]

Schwartz and Hever's arguments depend on the negation of Baghdad as the Iraqi home: Schwartz's relies on the assumption that it is no longer their home because of their emigration to Israel, while Hever's seems to maintain a denial of Baghdad ever having been the Mizrahi

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[27] Nancy Berg, *Exile from Exile* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), xiii.
[28] See chapter 2.
[29] Stephanie Schwartz, "The Concept of Double Diaspora in Sami Michael's *Refuge* and Naim Kattan's *Farewell, Babylon*," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 30, no. 1 (2010).
[30] Hannan Hever, "We Have Not Arrived from the Sea: A Mizrahi Literary Geography," *Social Identities* 10, no. 1 (2004): 43.

home.[31] Like that of Israel, though, the depiction of Baghdad in Amir's novels is ambiguous. *The Dove Flyer* reveals that the conception of Baghdad as home began to dissolve before the characters ever left Iraq; at times Kabi feels nervous and even unsafe as a Jew in Baghdad. *Scapegoat,* meanwhile, explicates the difficulties in transferring one' conception of home to a society in which one doesn't quite fit. When viewed in tandem the novels depict the shortcomings of both places, and reveal the fact that neither place is truly home to the novels' protagonists. Individually, each character might present a different unilateral view of home—Kabi, for example, views Israel as the spiritual homeland that predominantly-Muslim Baghdad cannot be for him, while at the beginning of *Scapegoat*, Nuri is incredibly homesick for Baghdad—but when the novels are analyzed together, it becomes clear that neither space lives up to the character's imaginings of it. Rather than telling a story in which one place is deemed 'home' and the other relegated to 'exile' or even simply 'not-home' Amir's novels ultimately depict home as an imagined space. With each known home disappointing in some way, the only home left is one that is imagined.

For the purpose of my literary analysis, I have begun my thesis with a thorough historical contextualization of both novels. Chapter 1 describes the long history of the Jewish community in Iraq. Chapter 2 explicates the creation of the Israeli identity and the difficulties Mizrahim faced when they were confronted with and compelled to assimilate to that identity. The latter two chapters analyze each of the novels featured in this survey. Following the narrative's chronology, Chapter 3 focuses on *The Dove Flyer* and Chapter 4 on *Scapegoat*. The conclusion compares the conception of home in the two novels.

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[31] Hever also writes that, "The representation of Baghdad or Alexandria in Mizrahi literature in not nostalgic. It is an attempt to change the present, to entrench within it an antagonistic and defiant Mizrahi present." Hever, "Mizrahi Literary Geography," 49-50.

PART ONE: The Historical and Sociological Contextualization of *The Dove Flyer* and *Scapegoat*

1. The History of Iraqi Jewry

When the Iraqi Jewish community emigrated en masse in the early 1950s, it was the end of a millennia-long Jewish history in the area that comprises modern-day Iraq. Jews have had a strong historical presence in Mesopotamia long before the advent of Christianity or Islam. Though they considered themselves in a state of exile throughout their time there, the community's longstanding presence in the region left them with strong ties to the land in which they lived for nearly three thousand years. The strength of this connection should not be undermined by the fact of their leaving; the decision to leave, as is described in the work of Amir and other exiled Iraqi Jewish authors, was extremely painful.

The Biblical Period

Jewish history in Iraq begins at the very start of Jewish history itself: Abraham, Biblical forefather of the Jews, originated from Mesopotamia. Mesopotamia, which means in Greek 'between the rivers', encompasses the area of the Tigris-Euphrates river system. The Mesopotamian territory corresponds primarily to modern-day Iraq, but also to smaller portions of northeastern Syria, southeastern Turkey, and southwestern Iran. According to Biblical history, Abraham's clan was originally from Sumer, in southern Mesopotamia. It was at God's call that Abraham led his clan out of Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan around 1800 BCE. This tale of Mesopotamian origin matches up with historical examination; as several scholars point out, many

of the pre-Abrahamic Biblical stories are startlingly similar to ancient Mesopotamian epics or religious tales. [32]

After Abraham's emigration from Mesopotamia, the Israelites did not return to their land of origin for many centuries, and when they did return, it was not voluntarily. After their famed enslavement in Egypt, the Israelite community returned to Canaan, where they were eventually unified under one king. This period of unification lasted only about a century—through the rule of Saul, David, and Solomon—before the Israelite kingdom was divided by revolution in about 935 BCE. The northern kingdom of Israel had its capital at Samaria, while the smaller southern kingdom of Judah was centered around Jerusalem. In 745 BCE, the independence of the northern kingdom ended when the king of Israel began paying tribute to the Assyrian king. After a series of rebellions against the Assyrians in the next decade, the Israelite kingdom was destroyed; the area that comprised the Israelite kingdom was made into an Assyrian province and the Israelite population was deported throughout the Assyrian Empire, to places in Assyria and Babylonia (which correspond to modern-day northern Iraq and central Iraq).

The southern Jewish kingdom remained in existence for almost another two centuries. In 597 BCE, the Judean kingdom was conquered by the Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar. Though the Judeans had long paid tribute to the Egyptians, the Judean King Jehoiakim started a rebellion against Babylonian rule. After a short series of rebellions (and two dynastic successions), the Judean kingdom, including the First Temple in Jerusalem, was destroyed in 586

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[32] This is not to conflate the Bible with history; while many of pre-Abrahamic stories in the Jewish tradition (such as those of Creation and of the Flood) are similar to Mesopotamian epics, the Biblical narrative is not coterminous with history. The Biblical account of Mesopotamian origins that is related in this section does, however, play a large role in the construction of the Iraqi Jews' origins story; Cyrus Gordon, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (W.W. Norton and Co., 1997); Yehezkel Kaufmann, "The Biblical Age", in *Great Ages and Ideas of the Jewish People*, ed. Leo W. Schwartz (Modern Library, 1977), 5-6; Nissim Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq*, (London: Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1985), 3.

BCE. Nearly all of the Judeans were exiled to Babylonia. It is this community of exiled Jews that formed the nucleus of later Jewish communities. Scholars note that unlike the previous Israelite exiles who assimilated into the communities to which they were deported, these Judeans maintained their communal identity while in exile.[33] This conservation of communal religious identity is not indicative of any insulation; the exiled Judean community thrived in Babylonia. Not only had they become prosperous in farming—an occupation that had been common among the Jews in the Israelite kingdoms—but they had also begun to act as merchants and financiers, professions that would long be associated with the Jewish people.[34] In fact, the community had become so prosperous that when, in 538 BCE, the Persian Emperor Cyrus allowed them to return to Jerusalem, the majority of the community remained in Babylonia.[35]

The Jewish community in Babylonia was physically separated from the Temple in Jerusalem (which was being rebuilt by those Jews who had returned to Zion from Babylon), and therefore had to create a new kind of Judaism. All previous forms of Jewish practice had revolved around sacrificial worship in the designated space of the Temple in Jerusalem; the Babylonian Jewish community necessarily had to create a new Jewish practice. Prophet Ezekiel, the religious leader at the time, laid the foundations for a Judaism that was based on the Torah rather than sacrificial practice, and which took place in a synagogue rather than in the Temple. The inability to practice sacrificial Judaism increased the importance of other practices; as Rejwan writes, "The school took the place of the temple and the teacher that of the sacrificing

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[33] Isidore Epstein, *Judaism: A Historical Presentation*, (Penguin, 1959), 54; Bernard J. Bamberger, *The Story of Judaism* (Schocken Books, 1974), 33.

[34] Werner Keller argues that the adoption of these professions helped the Jewish community retain their unique identity; rather than being far from one another on farms and subsequently assimilating into the native culture, the Jews lived close to one another in cities, where they were able to preserve their communal ties and identity. Werner Keller, *The Bible as History* (Bantam, 1983), 288-289.

[35] Nissim Rejwan, *The Jews of Iraq* (London: Butler and Tanner Ltd., 1985), 15.

priest; the religious observances, especially the Sabbath, prayer and fasting, took the place of the sacrificial rites."[36]

The Formation of the Babylonian Talmud

The Torah-centric, rather than location-based, form of Judaism that became dominant in the Diaspora is reflected in one of the greatest products of Babylonian Jewry: the Babylonian Talmud. The Babylonian Talmud was written between 367 CE and 500 CE,[37] long after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the subsequent decline of the Jewish community in Palestine. In the intervening centuries, the Babylonian community had risen to religious preeminence; unlike the Palestinian Jewish community, which was struggling against the influence of Hellenization and under the yoke of Roman rule, the Babylonian Jews were prospering economically. This affluence allowed for a higher standard of education and increased religious practice. There were, therefore, a large number of scholars to write and develop the Babylonian Talmud, which is comprised of the Mishnah and the Gemara. The Mishnah, codified around 220 CE, is the record of Jewish oral law; the Gemara is thought of as the completion of the Mishnah. The Gemara sought to answer legal questions that were not addressed by the Mishnah.

There are two versions of the Talmud: the Palestinian Talmud and the Babylonian Talmud. Both are dense texts, but only the Babylonian Talmud has a body of secondary, explicating literature. This slightly more understandable body of work contributes to the Babylonian Talmud's preeminence, but it is not the only reason for its distinction. Because the Babylonian Talmud was written in the Diaspora, it addresses the concerns of a diasporic Jewish

[36] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 17-18.
[37] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 56.

community in a way that the Jerusalem Talmud does not.[38] It speaks to the supremacy of both the Babylonian Talmud and the Babylonian Jewish community that, by the Middle Ages, even the Palestinian Jewish community used the Babylonian Talmud.[39]

The Islamic Arab Period

Relatively shortly after the completion of the Babylonian Talmud, in the late 630s CE, Mesopotamia was conquered by the Islamic Empire. In the roughly hundred year interim between the completion of the Talmud and the rapid advance of the Islamic Empire, the Sassanian Empire, which controlled Mesopotamia, was in a period of decline brought on by internal strife and constant warring with the neighboring Byzantine Empire. The Babylonian Jewish community, meanwhile, had been growing, and was the largest and most influential Jewish community in the world. At the time that the Islamic forces secured Mesopotamia, though, the Jews were enduring a period of harassment and persecution by the Sassanians, and Rejwan suggests that the Jews therefore welcomed the new Muslim reign.[40]

Throughout the millennia of Muslim control over Mesopotamia, the position of the Jews largely depended on the ruling empire or governor. The status of Jews is clearly defined in Islamic law, but the implementation of that doctrine differed among rulers. According to Islamic law, Jews are a protected minority; the Qur'an states that the Jewish tradition is correct in its belief in one God, but that the Jewish scripture and law has been superseded by that of Islam. (The Qur'an also categorizes Christian scripture as such.) Still, as *ahl al-kitab*, or People of the

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[38] Salo Baron notes that the structure of the Babylonian Talmud was based on forms created in Palestine, while the content was more specific to diasporic life. Salo W. Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, 18 vols. (New York:Columbia University Press, 1960), 2:229-235.
[39] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 75.
[40] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 80.

Book, Jews and Christians are considered *dhimmis*, "people with whom the Muslims had made a covenant and towards whom they had an obligation."[41] As such, the Jews were granted protection in exchange for payment of the *jizya*, or poll-tax. The Jews were not considered full subjects of the Islamic Empire, and therefore each community was allowed to govern itself under a leader who acted as an intermediary between the community and the Muslim government. Abraham Halkin notes that this ability to govern themselves contributed to the Jewish community's retention of their Jewish way of life and identity,[42] although the protected status of the Jews did allow them to work with Muslims in commercial and business ventures.[43]

Just as the status of the Jews depended on the ruler of Mesopotamia, so too did the fortunes and subsequent influence of the Jewish community mirror the fortunes of the greater Islamic society in which they lived. During the first centuries of Islamic rule, first under the Umayyad Dynasty and then under the Abbasid Caliphate, the area prospered. The Abbasids founded Baghdad as their capital in 762 CE, and the city soon became a thriving metropolis with an expansive trade network and scholarly centers.[44] The tenth century, however, saw the decline of the Abbasid Caliphate, and the parallel decline of the Babylonian Jewish community. As Rejwan writes, "Baghdad ceased to be the center and hub of the Muslim world, and likewise its Jewry began to lose its intellectual and religious hold on Jews in other parts of the world."[45] This period of decline lasted almost a millennium; the Mongols sacked Baghdad in 1258 and executed the last Abbasid caliph. Baghdad was attacked again in 1401 by the Timurids, an event which

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[41] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 85.
[42] Abraham Halkin, 'The Judeo-Islamic Age', *Great Ages and Ideas of the Jewish People*, ed. Leo W. Schwartz (Modern Library, 1977), 217.
[43] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 88-93; Salo W. Baron, *Social and Religious History,* 3:132-4.
[44] Marr, Phebe. *The Modern History of Iraq* (Boulder: Westview Press, 2012), 5.
[45] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 138.

was, according to Phebe Marr, "the final blows. Baghdad never recuperated."[46] Throughout the centuries of stagnation that followed, the Jewish community was in a period of economic decline.

The Ottoman Period

In 1534, the Ottoman Turks conquered Baghdad from the Safavid Dynasty, a Persian Shi'ite dynasty. With the exception of a fifteen year interruption from 1622 to 1638, the Ottomans ruled Mesopotamia for roughly the next four centuries. The Ottomans governed Mesopotamia through viceroys called pashas or walis, who each ruled their own vilayet, or district. It was at this time that the Baghdadi Jewish community began to reassert themselves. Despite the rapidity with which the viceroy of Baghdad was replaced (there were thirty-seven pashas between 1638-1704[47]), the position towards the Jews remained consistently tolerant for the first half of Ottoman rule.

Beginning in 1705, with the appointment of Hasan Pasha as viceroy of Baghdad, the viceroys of the district governed more efficiently and for longer periods of time. Of the twelve pashas that ruled between 1750 and 1831, some were noticeably benevolent to the Jews—Sulaiman the Great (1780-1802) is said to have been the best governor—while others were noted for their intolerance—Daud Pasha (1817-1831) is remembered as particularly maleficent. It is estimated that over the course of Daud Pasha's reign, the Jewish population of Baghdad

[46] Marr, *Modern History of Iraq*, 5.
[47] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 166.

decreased by four-fifths.[48] (It was his tyranny that forced the eminent Sassoon family to emigrate to India, where they began an extraordinarily successful and influential mercantile business.[49])

Daud Pasha's prejudice seems a bit anachronistic, for it was during the nineteenth century that liberal reforms were first seen in the Ottoman Empire. Mahmud II, who ruled from 1809 to his death in 1839, replaced various types of male head-dress, used at the time to differentiate men by religion and sect, with the fez. In 1839, the reform program called the *Tanzimat* (Regulation) was made law. The *Tanzimat* established several judicial and governmental reforms: it abolished capital punishment, guaranteed justice to all, ordered a new penal code that could not be broken regardless of rank or status, ended the system of tax-farming, and instituted the collection of taxes by government ministers. Most importantly, it applied these regulations to all subjects regardless of religion or sect. Though the complete equality stipulated by this decree was only implemented as much as local governors saw fit to do so, it did have an immediate impact on the Jewish community. They no longer had to pay the *jizya*, or poll tax, for protection under the Ottoman Empire; instead, the Jewish community was made to pay the *badal el-'askar* tax to exempt them from compulsory military service. It must be noted that while most of the community did pay the *badal el-'askar*, Jews could choose not to pay it and instead to enroll in the military.

The nineteenth century also saw the arrival of the British in Iraq. The British began to use new trade routes to India through Basra, and recognized the country as strategically located to help them control and keep India. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the oil

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[48] Shalva Weil, "Bene Israel in Britain," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 3, no. 1-2 (1974): 87.
[49] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 167.

reserves in Iraq would also become increasingly important to the British (particularly during WWI and WWII, when the British needed oil to fuel their military).

The arrival of the British in Iraq was profitable for the Jewish community, who acted as bankers, financiers, and merchants. Jewish mercantile firms spread throughout the Indian Ocean; there were growing Jewish populations in Calcutta and Bombay as the Baghdadi Jewish community took advantage of its strategic network throughout the Indian Ocean arena for its mercantile benefit. The prosperity of the Jews, both in Iraq and throughout the Indian Ocean region, contributed to the resurgence of the community's religious influence. Families like the Sassoons were able to finance "schools, prayerbooks, and even dowries" for Jewish communities throughout the region.[50] It was during this time that modern Western Jewish schools were first established in Iraq. The first was the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* for boys in December 1864, and it was followed by an *Alliance* school for girls in 1893. Jewish schools began opening with increasing frequency: in 1920, there were eight Jewish schools in Baghdad, while in 1949 there were twenty.[51]

As previously noted, it was not just the Jewish community that was experiencing liberalization, but much of Ottoman society. In 1889 a group of students at the Army School of Medicine formed a secret organization called The Ottoman Society for Union and Progress. By 1908, the movement had become so widespread in the army that the Sultan acquiesced to the Society's demands, ratifying a constitution on July 23, 1908. It was the same constitution that had been drafted in 1876, which made all Jews and other non-Muslim inhabitants full citizens of the Ottoman Empire. Unfortunately, though, it was in effect for less than a decade: World War I

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[50] Joan G. Roland, *Jews in British India: Identity in a Colonial Era* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1989), 17.
[51] H.J. Cohen, *The Jews of the Middle East, 1860-1972* (Jerusalem: Israel University Press, 1973), 123.

broke out in 1914, and the British quickly conquered Basra, a major port in southern Iraq. In March 1917, the British invaded and captured Baghdad, ending Ottoman rule and beginning decades of official and unofficial British control of Iraq.

The British Mandate Period

British control of Iraq was internationally sanctioned in 1920, when the British were given the mandate over all of Iraq at the Conference of San Remo. Though disliked by much of the Muslim population, British control of Iraq was favorable for the Jewish community. The growth of British interests in Iraq helped Jewish merchants, who already held a near-monopoly on trade in the region. Because the Jewish population was so much better educated than the majority of the Iraqi population, the British often hired Jews into the Iraqi civil service. The British saw the Jews as intermediaries between them and the larger Iraqi populace—the Jews understood the country, but were able to work with the British. The motivation for Jewish involvement is summed up by Abbas Shiblak: "It is reasonable to assume that the Jews, like other minorities, tended to keep on the right side of authority, be it Turkish or British."[52]

British control also meant greater freedom for the Jews to practice Zionism. Rejwan cites a letter written in 1914 by three young Baghdadi Jews expressing interest in forming a Zionist Association in Baghdad as the first Zionist activity in Iraq.[53] He also writes that in 1920, Jews began buying more land in Palestine (a practice that had long been fairly common among Baghdadi Jewry) and established the first Zionist association in Baghdad, albeit disguised as a literary society.[54] The following year saw the first (and only) openly Zionist organization in Iraq,

[52] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews,* 55.
[53] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 202.
[54] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 204.

but as Rejwan notes, "The new association did not last long . . . there was also a certain lack of interest on the part of the Jewish public."[55] The Jews of Iraq had certainly faced moments of prejudice and even anti-Jewish violence, but they were not compelled to Zionism as were some of the Jews of Europe. As will be discussed, even in the late 1940's when the younger part of the Jewish community was becoming politicized, many Jews chose Communism or nationalism over Zionism.

Though the Jews profited from British rule, much of the rest of the country protested it. There was a nation-wide revolt for three months in 1920 in reaction and opposition to the British mandate. Sir Percy Cox, who was the British high commissioner of Iraq, realized the need for a government headed by Arabs, but actually controlled by Britain. As Youssef Aboul-Enein writes, "British officials were eager to have an Arab at the head of Iraq, and for Iraqis to take charge of security, while asserting British control of key components of Iraqi internal and external affairs, chiefly rights, foreign, fiscal, petroleum, and defense policies."[56]

At the Cairo Convention of 1921, the institutions that would comprise the Iraqi state were planned by British officials: the monarchy was to be the symbolic Arab leadership of the country; the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty would allow for British rule; and the constitution would be the democratic basis for the new state. With this plan, the British were able to construct an Arab-led government to appease the masses while really maintaining control over the country; on August 27, 1921, the British installed the Hashemite prince Faisal ibn Hussein as King of Iraq.

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[55] Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq,* 205.
[56] Youssef H. Aboul-Enein, *Iraq in Turmoil: Historical Perspectives of Dr. Ali al-Wardi, from the Ottoman Empire to King Faisal* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2012), 119.

The Kingdom of Iraq

The situation in Iraq—the government controlled by the British but headed by the Arab monarchy—remained largely the same until 1932, when Iraq was allowed entry into the League of Nations. This ended the mandate period in Iraq, although Britain continued to retain much of their influence there, and began the monarchic period of modern Iraqi history. The monarchic period saw the rapid growth of the middle class while the monarchy itself struggled to maintain the control that the British had exercised over the country. As Shiblak writes, these two processes were inherently opposed to one another, and came to define politics during this period: "The struggle between the newly emergent social classes (with their demands for national sovereignty, termination of the 1930 treaty with Britain, and freedom and democratic rights) and the ruling class became the main factor in Iraq's political life under the monarchy."[57] Nationalist parties began to form, and those that did can generally be split into two groups: the pan-Arabists, who stressed the importance of Arab unity and had little tolerance for minorities; and what Shiblak calls the "national democrats",[58] which encompasses the National Democratic Party (NDP) and (somewhat ironically) the Communist Party, who both sought democratic rights and social reforms.

Iraqi Jews definitely felt a part of and contributed to this period of nationalization. As Orit Bashkin points out, "The Jewish intelligentsia . . . were in general eager to display their markers of Arab identity" by writing in Arabic and stressing the moments of Muslim-Jewish unity in their literary writing.[59] Bashkin sees this as a greater process of ethnicization, which,

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[57] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 68.
[58] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 69.
[59] Orit Bashkin, *New Babylonians: A History of Jews in Modern Iraq* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 23.

according to Bashkin, is a way of viewing nationality and ethnicity as inter-related. Bashkin writes of Iraqi Jews:

> With the Jewish appropriation of Arabic language as a marker of their national identity came new notions of time and space. Iraqi Jews saw themselves as Jews of the East, and correspondingly accepted the idea that the decline and rise of the Arab and Eastern nations had affected them as well. Unlike European Jews, they did not feel that society around them progressed while they remained somehow behind. On the contrary, they argued that their culture had gone into decline with the waning of the East, and that its revival would go hand in hand with that of the East.[60]

At least into the 1920's, the Iraqi intelligentsia and Iraqi nationalist groups supported the inclusion of Jews in Iraqi nationalist activities. Bashkin points to articles in leading Arab journals that "protested the persecution of Jews in Europe . . . [and] celebrated the harmony between Muslims, Jews, and Christians under Islamic rule."[61] Shiblak looks to Iraqi nationalist pronouncements: in 1915, a manifest of the Arab Revolution Committee appealed to Jews and Christians to "Join ranks with your Muslim brethren"; in the 1920s, the nationalist Ja'far Abu'l-Timman sent out pamphlets that addressed Jews and Christians as "brothers" and sought to allay fears of anti-Jewish or anti-Christian prejudice.[62] When Abu'l-Timman renounced the Jewish community in Palestine in the 1920's, he made sure to specify that the Iraqi Jews were not to blame for the situation in Palestine and that they were not like the Jews there.[63]

Still, the growing prominence of the Arab-Jewish conflict in Palestine was complicating Arab-Jewish relations in Iraq. Most Iraqi nationalist groups were unambiguous in their support for Palestinian nationalism. Many Jewish groups acted in line with the larger Iraqi community, condemning the Jewish community in Palestine. In 1919, telegrams were sent to prominent Iraqi

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[60] Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 25.
[61] Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 11.
[62] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 65, 66.
[63] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 67.

newspapers declaring Jewish support of the Arab censure of the Balflour Declaration.[64] Bashkin suggests that Jewish renouncement of the growing community in Palestine was a defensive response to the parallel increase of anti-Jewish activity and rhetoric in Iraq, [65] although the true motivation behind the Jewish action is unclear. Despite Jewish expressions of support for Palestinian nationalism, the situation in Iraq only got worse. After the 1936 Arab revolts in Palestine, exiled Palestinians began moving to Iraq. They brought with them anti-Jewish sentiment, which they began promulgating in Iraq. Compounding matters was the rise of anti-Jewish Nazi propaganda in Iraq throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s. The Germans, who wanted as much as the British to control the Iraqi economy, manpower, and oilfields, attempted to sway Iraqi opinion by construing the Jews as aligned with the British and themselves as opposed to both.

The various tensions in Iraq—the struggle for democracy and national sovereignty coupled with rising anti-Jewish sentiment—came to a head in on June 1, 1941. In April 1941, a military coup in Iraq deposed the British regent and installed Rashid Ali al-Gailani as prime minister. Shortly after his political ascent, al-Gailani announced that Iraq would not be participating in WWII. The British saw this as a violation of the Anglo-Iraqi treaty, and moved to reoccupy Iraq. British troops landed in Basra in May 1941 and had neared Baghdad by the end of that month. On May 31, al-Gailani and the other nationalist leaders fled the country while the British troops were still on the outskirts of Baghdad. The following day, in a nationalist frenzy, a riot erupted in Baghdad. The riot became directed primarily against the Baghdadi Jewish community, as stores and homes were looted and anywhere between 135 and 300 people were

[64] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews,* 67.
[65] Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 104.

killed.[66] The event lasted two days. It came to be known as the *Farhud*, which translated literally means 'breakdown of law and order', but colloquially means 'looting and robbing.'

Though the *Farhud* was specifically anti-Jewish, several scholars argue that it should not be seen as simply motivated by religious intolerance. Shiblak points to the decline of the Iraqi economy, which was blamed on the Jewish merchants, and the perceived alignment of the Jewish community with the advancing British forces.[67] David Hirst writes that, "On the rare occasions in Arab history when Muslims . . . turned against the Jews in their midst, it was not anti-Semitism, in its traditional European sense, that drove them, but fanaticism bred of a not unjustified resentment. For like other minorities the Jews had a tendency to associate themselves with, indeed to profit from, what the majority regarded as alien and oppressive rule."[68] Still, the *Farhud* was a pivotal moment in modern Iraqi Jewish history. It is remembered in many Iraqi Jewish narratives as a loss of trust in the greater Iraqi population among whom the Jews lived. It must be noted, though, that many of these narratives recollect good and bad experiences with Muslims during the *Farhud*; Jewish memoirs or fictional narratives often describe an Arab neighbor or friend coming to the rescue of the Jewish protagonists by hiding or protecting them from the mob at their doors.

Despite the lasting memory of the *Farhud*, the Jewish community seems to have recuperated from the event fairly quickly. The economy became more profitable shortly afterwards, leading to another period of tolerance within the greater Iraqi community and success for Jewish merchants. The *Farhud* was also followed by a period of increasing politicization and liberalization throughout Iraq. In 1946, the Iraqi government allowed for greater political activity

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[66] Bashkin reports that the death toll was between 135 and 189, while Shiblak writes it was between 250 and 300; Bashkin, *New Babylonians*, 117; Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 71.
[67] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 73.
[68] David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), 161.

by nationalist groups. This is the first time in their history in Iraq that Jews became politically involved. The *Farhud* had directed some young Jews towards Zionism, but the majority of young, politicized Jewry was more compelled by Iraqi nationalism or Communism. In fact, when the Communist Party was refused permission to operate, the Communists established the Anti-Zionist League (AZL), which, according to Shiblak, would have been supported by Jewish Communists. He writes, "The authorization of the AZL on 16 March 1946 was a significant development for both the Communists and the Jewish community. The Communists needed a platform to express their views, while many Jews saw it as an opportunity to reaffirm their identity as Iraqis and to disassociate themselves from the Zionist movement."[69] In spite of this renewed condemnation of Zionism, the four years following the establishment of the AZL would see the majority of the Iraqi Jewish community emigrating to the newly founded State of Israel.

The Mass Emigration of Iraqi Jewry

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, the Iraqi government was facing great internal pressure to democratize the government. They saw the fledgling Jewish state as a common enemy to distract the Iraqi populace from their political movements and as a tool to reign in those movements. When Iraq joined the Arab League in the war against Israel in 1948, the Iraqi government took advantage of the situation to declare martial law in Iraq. They were thus able to greatly confine any undesirable nationalist activities, particularly those of the Communists. While aligning themselves against liberalism and Zionism, the government found an ally in the right-wing Arab nationalists, the Istiqlal Party. As Shiblak explains, "Both partners saw Zionism as a by-product of Communism, and both seemed more than ready to treat the position of the

[69] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews,* 82.

Iraqi Jews in the context of the hostilities in Palestine."[70] Restrictions began to be imposed on Iraqi Jews in 1948: limitations were placed on Jewish travel abroad and the disposal of property; efforts were made to eliminate Jews from the military and civil service; and Jewish banks were deprived of their license to deal in foreign exchange.[71]

In July 1948, Zionism became a punishable offense. In September of that year, Shafik Addas, an affluent, well-connected, and nearly entirely assimilated Jew was hung for smuggling arms into Iraq. The trial was derided by Jews and Arabs alike as fraudulent: it only lasted three days, as the judge allowed for no witnesses to be presented by the defense. And while the judge's behavior was not necessarily motivated by anti-Jewish sentiment, Addas was the only one of his business partners (the others were Muslims) to be accused of the crime. The trial was an extremely frightening event for the Jewish community. As Shiblak notes:

> "His trial and public hanging caused great anxiety among many Jews, for it showed that even a well-connected, fully integrated Jew was not immune. Zionists were able to exploit this feeling of insecurity to argue that Jews had no future in Iraq. The effect on many non-Jews was to impugn the loyalty of Iraqi Jews, including the most prominent and well-integrated."[72]

It was not only the government that was becoming increasingly anti-Jewish. As Palestinian refugees entered Iraq with stories of Jewish atrocities, anti-Jewish sentiment throughout the Iraqi population grew.

Meanwhile, in line with their policy of becoming a home for all diasporic Jews, the Israeli government had launched a campaign to convince the world that the Iraqi Jews needed to be saved from their precarious minority position in Iraq by immigrating to Israel. The

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[70] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 87.
[71] It must be noted that these restrictions were largely intended to prevent Jews from illegally emigrating from Iraq. The Iraqi government certainly did not like Zionism, but the larger threat in their eyes was Communism.
[72] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 93.

campaign—which was not false, but did not necessarily represent any desire of the larger Iraqi Jewish community to be "saved"—affected the sentiments of wealthy British and American Jews and spurred them to action. The American and British governments began pressuring the Iraqi government to treat its Jewish citizens better, as the Israeli government simultaneously began covertly negotiating with the Iraqi government to allow the Jews to leave. On March 4, 1950, then, succumbing to international pressure and embarrassed by the number of Jews illegally emigrating to Israel, the Iraqi government passed the Senate of Law 1/1950, allowing Jews to leave Iraq on the condition that they renounce their Iraqi citizenship. The physical immigration to Israel— called in Israel Operation Ezra and Nehemiah—was organized by the Israeli government, the Jewish Agency, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.[73] The Iraqi government anticipated that 10,000 Jews—those Communists and Zionists that the government deemed undesirable anyway—would leave.[74] A year after the passage of Law 1/1950, Law 5/1951 and Regulation 3/1951 were passed to freeze the assets of Jews who applied to relinquish Iraqi citizenship and leave the country. Ultimately, the Jews were allowed to bring 50 dinars out of the country with them.

When they were first allowed to leave Iraq, much of the Jewish community was unmotivated to do so. They believed that the current anti-Semitism in Iraq would pass and were largely unenthusiastic about immigrating to the young and impoverished state of Israel, where living conditions were harsh. In the three weeks following the passage of Law 1/1950, only 126 people had applied to emigrate.[75] On April 8, 1950, though, the first of a series of bombs in targeted Jewish sites detonated. The second detonated on January 14, 1951. The number of

[73] The name of the operation is a reference to the Biblical leaders who guided Jews from Babylonian exile to Zion in the fifth century BCE.
[74] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 105, 117.
[75] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 161.

people applying to leave Iraq multiplied immensely: 3,400 registered on the day after the first bombing, and by April 26, 1950, about 25,000 Jews were in the first two stages of the registration process.[76] Adding to the stress of the already-agonizing decision to leave Iraq was the one-year time limit of the denaturalization law. Jews had a year to apply to emigrate, and though the law was eventually extended, by that time an overwhelming majority of the Jewish population had applied for emigration and was awaiting their journey to Israel. By March 8, 1951, when the denaturalization law was supposed to expire (but was actually extended), 105,000 Jews had registered to emigrate from Iraq,[77] thus crippling the remainder of the Jewish community in Iraq and ending the long history of Iraqi Jewry.

[76] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 162.
[77] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 162.

2. Identity Politics of the Mizrahim in Israel

Between 1948 and 1958, almost 350,000 immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East came to Israel,[78] drastically changing the ethnic composition of the new Israeli state, which had previously been comprised almost entirely of European Jews. These Mizrahi immigrants, like all immigrants to the new state of Israel, underwent a process of assimilation to the native Israeli identity. This process was exceptionally difficult for Mizrahi immigrants, who were considered culturally inferior to the Ashkenazi majority by that majority population. When Eli Amir published *Scapegoat* in 1983, it was in the context of the emerging reassertion of Mizrahi identity.

The Rise of the Zionist Movement

Interestingly enough, the conception of the Zionist movement was motivated by a trial not unlike that of Shafik Addas in Iraq (which I discussed in the last chapter). The Dreyfus Affair, which preceded the Addas trial by roughly half a century, occurred in France in 1894. Alfred Dreyfus, an assimilated Jewish captain in the French military, was tried and convicted of treason. Dreyfus was eventually pardoned from his conviction and cleared of his crime, but the incident was shocking to European Jewry in a manner similar to that of the Addas trial for Iraqi Jewry: if a successfully assimilated Jew, one who had risen to the rank of military captain in a Western European country, could be the victim of anti-Semitism, then who couldn't?

[78] Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 142.

For Theodore Herzl, a young Viennese reporter assigned to the case, the Dreyfus Affair was proof that the problem of the Jewish people needed to be solved.[79] Herzl was an assimilated Jew; he was secular, well-educated, and entrenched in the mindset of colonial Europe. His solution for the Jewish problem was to establish a Jewish state, where diaspora Jews could be free from persecution and prejudice. In 1897, he called delegates from all European Jewish communities to a convention in Basel, where the World Zionist Organization was established and a plan for the creation of the Jewish state adopted. It was decided that the Jewish state should be in Palestine, the home of the Biblical Israelite community.

At the time of the convention in Basel, which would later be called the First Zionist Congress, there had already been some European immigration to Palestine. The previous century had seen a huge growth in the world's Jewish population: it is estimated that there were 2.5 to 3 million Jews in the world at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and by its end there were 13 million.[80] Four-fifths of world Jewry lived in Eastern Europe,[81] and the nineteenth century had seen a corresponding rise in anti-Semitic activity in that area of the world. About 40,000 Eastern European, primarily Russian, Jews (which represents only a small percentage of the total number of Russian Jews who emigrated from Russia) had immigrated to Palestine in the last few decades of the nineteenth century.[82] Though these Jews were not committed to Zionist ideology, they would later be called the first *aliyah*, or the first wave of Zionist immigration to Palestine.[83]

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[79] Baruch Kimmerling, *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 23.
[80] Kimmerling, *Invention & Decline of Israeliness*, 21.
[81] Kimmerling, *Invention & Decline of Israeliness*, 21.
[82] Kimmerling, *Invention & Decline of Israeliness*, 26.
[83] The term *aliyah* actually means 'raising' rather than 'immigrating.' It is used specifically in the context of immigration to Israel; immigration elsewhere is called *higer*, which translates as 'immigrating.' The use of this terms reflects the notion that immigration to Israel is an ascendance to a more Jewish, holy place.

The second *aliyah* began in 1904. Unlike the immigrants of the first *aliyah*, who had been wealthy Russian families seeking to escape persecution, the immigrants of the second *aliyah* were young, single idealists who came to Palestine in the hopes of establishing the new Jewish state and, with it, a new Jewish identity. These Jews harbored nationalist, socialist, and communist ideals, and valued physical labor. They sought to rid themselves of the image of the Diaspora Jew—who was weak and subservient—and to instead become a new Jew—who worked for and protected themself. The immigrants of the second *aliyah* were joined by the immigrants of the third *aliyah*, who arrived in Palestine between 1919 and 1923, and were ideologically consistent with those of the second *aliyah*.

The Myth of the Sabra

Though these first Zionist immigrants to Palestine were highly regarded as the pioneer generation of Jewish life in Palestine, it was their children who became the model of Israeli identity. The first generation of children born in Palestine came to be representative of a new Jewish identity, which was believed to be authentic to the Jewish community in Palestine. This new Jew, born in Palestine and raised on Zionist values, was known as a Sabra, a name taken from a non-native cactus plant that nonetheless thrived in the region. The cactus's appearance was said to be representative of the Sabra's personality: they have a tough exterior and fleshy interior, just as the Sabra has a warm heart beneath his rough demeanor.[84]

The Sabra generation, which includes all those born in the Jewish community in Palestine from the 1930s to the 1960s, was considered archetypal and emulative: they were the first generation to have been born in Palestine, and were therefore the embodiment of the new Jew,

[84] Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, trans. Haim Watzman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 4.

which was culturally superior to the Diaspora Jew. The Sabra identity was thought to be unique and completely authentic to this new Jewish community, but Dan Bar-On shows how the Sabra identity was actually a reaction to several figures that the Zionists perceived as separate from themselves or from which they wanted to be separated, particularly that of the Diaspora Jew. [85] Where the Diaspora Jew was a weak and subservient victim, the Sabra was self-reliant and strong enough, physically and militaristically, to defend themself. In many ways, the archetype of the Sabra was a result of the internalization of the negative stereotype of the Diaspora Jew and the positive image of the European non-Jew, who, when compared to the European Jew, was in a position of strength. As Almog notes, this is true in the personality and physical attributes that typified the Sabra, who was described "as a robust youth with 'gentile' characteristics . . . strapping, self-confident, and strong spirited, as opposed to the stereotypical Diaspora Jew, who was pale, soft, servile, and cowardly."[86] Though the new Jewish identity was meant to be the antithesis of the diasporic Jewish identity, it is impossible to separate the two, in part because one of them is a direct reaction to the other.

Despite the characterization of the Sabra as the true Israeli identity, Almog points out that the amount of people who actually embodied the characteristics of this stereotype were quite small; though the Sabra generation encompassed those born over a period of three decades, only a fraction truly matched the profile of the Sabra.[87] Still, the members of the generation who comprised the "generational nucleus . . . served as a behavioral model for the entire generation" and were extremely influential to Israeli culture.[88] Their literary prowess from the late 1930s to

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[85] Dan Bar-On, *The Others Within Us*, trans. Noel Canin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8-9.
[86] Almog, *The Sabra*, 78.
[87] Almog, *The Sabra,* 3.
[88] Almog, *The Sabra*, 3.

the early 1950s cemented their status as cultural leaders, as did the heroicization of their involvement in the 1948 war, known in Israel as the War of Independence. It was this to model of identity that immigrants were compelled to assimilate.

The Israeli Melting Pot and Its Implications for Mizrahi Immigrants

In May 1948, the State of Israel was established. One of the first laws passed by the new nation was the Law of Return, which allowed for any Jew to immigrate to Israel. As Kimmerling writes, "This law was considered the true embodiment of Zionism—the creation of a Jewish nation-state that would be a *terre d'asile* for any Jew in the world, whether persecuted or not."[89] In fact, the policy of absorbing all Jews was not just an ideological tenet, but a policy actively pursued by the new state. As was briefly discussed in the previous chapter in regards to Iraqi Jewry, Israel successfully worked to secure the immigration of Arab Jews;[90] in the five years following the creation of the state of Israel, the population doubled.[91]

Like other immigrant societies, the immigrants arriving in Israel had to undergo a process of assimilation. Israel's "melting pot" was an ideology as well as a process; the forceful distinction between Israel and Diaspora demanded not only the assumption of Israeli identity, but the additional erasure of the immigrant's original identity. As Almog writes, "The immigrant understood that in order to be accepted into Hebrew culture he had to abandon or keep in low profile his previous Diaspora culture and faith, and had to fit himself into the Hebrew mold."[92]

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[89] Kimmerling, *Invention & Decline of Israeliness*, 41.
[90] For more on the Israeli involvement in Iraqi immigration, see Shiblak, *Iraqi Jews*, 107-165. For more on Israeli involvement in greater Arab Jewish immigration, see Howard Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 395-403.
[91] Sachar, *History of Israel*, 395.
[92] Almog, *The Sabra*, 91.

Additionally, in Israeli society the process of assimilation was encouraged and facilitated by the government. With the massive influx of immigrants from Arab countries following the creation of the state of Israel, the Israeli leadership, who relied on public support to remain in power, had a vested interest in maintaining and preserving the national character that they had created. Schools and state-run youth groups were used to acculturate immigrant youth into the dominant Zionist culture, encouraging youths to take new Hebrew or Hebraicized names and teaching Zionist lore and dogma.[93]

This forceful process of assimilation was not only thrust upon Mizrahi immigrants, [94] but all new immigrants. Any sign of the Diaspora identity was undesirable, and all immigrants were therefore compelled to integrate into Israeli society. In fact, Holocaust survivors, who would later come to be of central importance in the Zionist narrative of universal victimization, were deemed especially unfortunate products of the Diaspora because of their passivity during the Holocaust. They were subsequently pressured to erase their previous identity, which included the suppressing the trauma of the Holocaust. This repression had lasting effects on those survivors and their families.[95]

Still, the process of assimilation was particularly difficult for the Mizrahim. Ella Shohat argues that the Mizrahim were uniquely challenged by the melting pot ideology because their original identity was uniquely incompatible with the new Israeli identity, which was based on secular, Western, European ideals. The Zionist identity had created dichotomies of "savagery

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[93] Almog, *The Sabra*, 91-95, 100.
[94] As defined in the introduction, the term 'Mizrahi' refers to Jews descended from Arab and Muslim countries.
[95] Bar-On, *Others Within Us*.

versus civilization, tradition versus modernity, East versus West, and Arab versus Jew,"[96] all of which left the Mizrahim identity specifically in tension with the Israeli identity. Shohat continues, "These ruptures were not only physical (the movement across border) but also cultural (a rift in relation to previous cultural affiliations) as well as conceptual (in the very ways time and space, history, and geography were conceived)."[97] So while it is true that Ashkenazi immigrants also had to assimilate into a new culture, their original (European) identity was the foundation of the Israel identity; the original identity of Mizrahi immigrants, on the other hand, was inherently incompatible with the Israeli identity. Their assimilation therefore demanded a much greater and more harmful suppression or erasure of their previous identity.

These incompatibilities between original Mizrahi identity and Israeli identity were driven by two forces, the first of which, according to Shohat, was the necessary portrayal of the Arab as the enemy. The Zionist narrative, in its claim to universal Jewish victimhood, necessitates that the Arab be the historical enemy of the Jews, and even compares Arabs to the Nazis.[98] The Zionist narrative then suppresses the Arab side of the Arab Jewish identity in an attempt to prevent any implication of Arab-Jewish equivalency. Furthermore, the Zionist narrative modifies Mizrahi history in an attempt to portray all Jewish history as one of persecution. The Zionist narrative highlights the instances of Jewish oppression in the Arab world, while simultaneously overlooking the ways in which Jewish communities in the Arab world were integrated into Arab society. Thus, the Israeli narrative of East versus West and Arab versus Jew makes the Arab

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[96] Ella Shohat, "Rupture and Return: Zionist Discourse and the Study of Arab Jews," *Social Text* 21, no. 2 (2003): 50.
[97] Shohat, "Rupture and Return," 50.
[98] Ella Shohat, "The Invention of the Mizrahim," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 1 (1999): 6.

Jewish identity mutually exclusive from itself, and forces Mizrahim to choose between the dual facets of their collective identity.

The second force creating the irreconcilability of Mizrahi and Israeli identity was the Orientalism with which the established Ashkenazi Jewish community viewed the Mizrahi immigrants.[99] The Ashkenazi Jews viewed the Mizrahim in typically Orientalist terms: they considered them backwards, traditional, and delinquent, and assumed that the Mizrahim needed Ashkenazi help to become more cultured and refined.[100] The paternalistic attitude with which the Israelis subsequently treated the Mizrahim did not help the new Mizrahi immigrants, but widened the gap between the two ethnic groups.[101] It is worthwhile to note that this condescending and superior attitude was actually articulated by members of the Israeli government.[102] As Ella Shohat mentions, this articulation by official leaders served to reinforce these prejudices.[103]

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[99] The concept of Orientalism was first articulated by Edward Said, who defined it as the generally patronizing attitude of Western nations and people toward Middle Eastern, Asian, and North African societies, and the view of those societies as uncivilized, stagnant, and therefore requiring the assistance of better-developed Western nations. Several scholars also discuss the Orientalist attitude with which the first Jewish immigrants to Palestine viewed the indigenous Arab population, including the usurpation of certain facets of Arab identity by the newly-created Sabra identity. Aziza Khazzoom further argues that the Ashkenazi Orientalism was a product of the internalization of the characterization of European Jewry as Oriental. Edward Said, *Orientalism (*New York: Random House, 1978); Zion Zohar, "Sephardim and Oriental Jews in Israel: Rethinking the Sociopolitical Paradigm," in *Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry: From the Golden Age of Spain to Modern Times*, ed. Zion Zohar (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Amnon Rubinstein, *The Zionist Dream Revisited* (Schocken Books, 1984), 53-54; *Orientalism and the Jews*, ed. Ivan Kalmar and Derek Penslar (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2005); Almog, *The Sabra*, 185-208; Aziza Khazzoom, "The Great Chain of Orientalism: Jewish Identity, Stigma Management, and Ethnic Exclusion in Israel," *American Sociological Review* 68, no. 4 (2003).

[100] Almog, *The Sabra*, 96.

[101] Almog, *The Sabra*, 103.

[102] Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text* 19/20 (1988): 4-5; Zohar, "Sephardim and Oriental Jews," 305.

[103] Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel," 4.

The Discriminatory Attitude towards the Mizrahim

When the Mizrahim arrived en masse in Israel in first years of the country's statehood, the country was largely unprepared to accommodate this massive influx of immigrants. Aside from any prejudice based on ethnicity or newcomer status, there was no physical or economic infrastructure to support the new population. The new immigrants were therefore given hastily-constructed housing in transit camps, called *ma'abarot* (singular: *ma'abara*), before being moved to communal agricultural towns, called *moshavim,* or development towns, called *ayarot pituhot*. This is not to say that the treatment of Mizrahim was on par with that of other immigrant groups; on the contrary, the Mizrahim remained systematically inferior to the Ashkenazi population for decades after their arrival in Israel. While other immigrant groups successfully moved out of the *ma'barot*, for example, the transit camps remained heavily populated by Mizrahim for decades.[104]

Even those who did move out of the *ma'abarot* were not redeemed from systematic prejudice. The development towns that were constructed for or given to (because they had been vacated by previous Palestinian Muslim residents) Mizrahim were often dilapidated. They were located on the fringes of Israeli society—often on the border of the Israeli state as a means of securing said border.[105] In comparison to Ashkenazi towns on the border, those populated by Mizrahim had less military protection. According to Shohat, the authorities put multiple families in one house "on the assumption that they were 'accustomed' to such conditions,"[106] and refused to renovate or fix these towns, whose infrastructure was poorer than that of Ashkenazi

[104] Sachar, *History of Israel*, 420.
[105] Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel," 18.
[106] Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel,' 18.

communities. Several scholars note that the placement of the Mizrahim in *ma'abarot* and development towns on the fringes of Israeli society impeded the Mizrahim's ability to become politically active.[107] Furthermore, Aziza Khazzom shows that the placement of Mizrahim in these peripheral towns was purposeful, and based on ethnicity rather than any other factor.[108]

In addition to their physical segregation from Ashkenazi communities, there were several other factors that contributed to the continued inferiority of Mizrahim in the Israeli state. First, the celebration and heroization of the pioneer and Sabra generations in schools and national folklore only widened the gap between the Ashkenazi and Mizrahi communities. The Mizrahi youth who were being taught Zionist lore could not claim these stories as part of their own history, and were thus alienated from the national celebration of the early years of Jewish life in Palestine.[109] Second was the lack of social mobilization for Mizrahim. Ascension in the ranks of the military and civil services was often based on previous involvement in Zionist organizations— i.e. kibbutz youth groups, the Palmach (an elite force of the underground military during the British Mandate of Palestine), or the Israeli military—which made advancement accessible to Sabras.[110] The Mizrahim were not able to advance in those ranks because they had not been allowed or had not been able (because they needed to work to help support their families) to participate in youth groups, and were usually not chosen for elite units in the military.[111] So while the native Sabras advanced in the ranks of the civil and military services, the Mizrahim remained inferior. So too was advancement blocked to Mizrahim in

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[107] As'ad Ghanem, *Ethnic Politics in Israel: The Margins and the Ashkenazi Center* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 19, 62; Erz Tzfadia, "Immigrant Dispersal in Settler Societies: Mizrahim and Russians in Israel Under the Press of Hegemony," *Geography Research Forum* 20 (2009).
[108] Aziza Khazzoom, "Did the Israeli State Engineer Segregation? On the Placement of Jewish Immigrants in Development Towns in the 1950s," *Social Forces* 84, no. 1 (2005).
[109] Almog, *The Sabra*, 100.
[110] Almog, *The Sabra*, 101-102.
[111] Almog, *The Sabra*, 102.

careers not controlled by the state. Mizrahim were relegated to manual labor or menial jobs, allowing Ashkenazim to occupy more advanced positions. As Shohat writes, "While the system relegated Sephardim to a future-less bottom, it propelled Ashkenazim up the social scale, creating mobility in management, marketing, banking and technical jobs."[112]

The lack of professional jobs for Mizrahim was so pronounced that in 1951, the Iraqi Jews mounted protests in Tel Aviv against the "'race discrimination in the Jewish state'" and their treatment as "'second-class' citizens."[113] As was discussed in the previous chapter, the Iraqi immigrants were well-educated, and they therefore felt that they deserved jobs that better reflected their previous status and professions in Iraq. Their protest was ultimately successful: only 3 percent of the Iraqi community was moved to frontier or development towns, a much lower percentage than the rest of the Mizrahi community.[114] More importantly, the Iraqi Jewish community was not relegated to doing physical labor. "By 1951, 33 percent of [Iraqi] breadwinners had managed to resume their former vocations as merchants; 42 percent found well-paying employment as skilled manual workers; while another 21 percent served as professionals, clerical workers, or members of the police force."[115] There was an Iraqi Kurdish minority that did not adhere to this mobilization, but remained in the *ma'abarot* as late as 1959.[116]

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[112] Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel," 20.
[113] Sachar, *History of Israel*, 420.
[114] Zohar, "Sephardim and Oriental Jews," 325.
[115] Sachar, *History of Israel*, 420.
[116] Sachar, *History of Israel*, 420.

The Reclamation of the Mizrahi Identity

In spite of the Iraqis' success, Mizrahim as a whole remained politically as well as socially subordinate to Ashkenazim for decades after their arrival in Israel. For several years, they were discouraged by Israeli leadership from entering politics; when they tried, Ashkenazi leaders accused them of dividing the populace.[117] There were some small protests through the years: that of the Iraqis in 1951, and the Wadi Salib Uprising in 1959, which occurred when a conflict between residents of the Wadi Salib neighborhood and the police led to the death of a Moroccan Jew. After his death, there were protests regarding police brutality. Zion Zohar suggests that this clash between residents of the ma'abara and the police was typical of the time period, in which economic hardships spurred conflicts between police and Mizrahim.[118]

Regardless of these small protests, it was not until the 1970s that the Mizrahi community really began to assert itself. Dan Bar-On argues that the dominant monolithic collective identity in Israel had been able to survive for so long because of the precarious situation in which Israel found itself in regards to the nations surrounding it. Collective identity tends to unify during times of turbulence,[119] and in the first twenty-five years of the Israeli state, life was nothing if not turbulent.[120] As Bar-On writes, "It may also be that the disintegration process could not evolve when unity was an existential need during the early years of statehood. Instead, the process manifested itself when the state of the collective and its external environment was more

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[117] Ghanem, *Ethnic Politics in Israel*, 63.
[118] Zohar, "Sephardim and Oriental Jews," 311-312.
[119] Bar-On, *Others Within Us*, 6.
[120] The first quarter century of Israeli existence, from 1948-1973, saw five wars (1948 War, 1956 War, 1967 War, War of Attrition, and 1973 War). The interim periods were tense and fraught with skirmishes between Israel and its neighbors.

relaxed,"[121] namely, once the peace process with Egypt had begun. Baruch Kimmerling, on the other hand, argues that it was the failure of the 1973 War that prompted the increased activity of minorities within Israeli society.[122] Since the country's founding, it had been governed by one political party—the Mapai Party, which became the Labor Party in 1968—that was led by Ashkenazim.[123] The near-defeat in the 1973 War weakened their hegemonic leadership, allowing minority groups to better assert themselves.

For whatever reason, the first Mizrahi movement began in the early 1970's. Called the Black Panthers (in Hebrew, *HaPanterim HaSh'horim*; they were named for the contemporary African-American civil rights group), their first demonstration was in March 1971. Sami Chetrit labels the Black Panthers as a "naïve protest" movement,[124] in that they only sought equality within the societal paradigm that had been established by the Ashkenazi majority, rather than seeking to change the paradigm itself. Ultimately, the Black Panthers failed to attract a large part of the Mizrahi population, but they did effectively change the Israeli discourse. The Movement increased the awareness of the inequality between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim in Israel, were the first to link the subordination of the Mizrahim with the plight of the Muslim Palestinian population, and paved the way for subsequent Mizrahi political involvement.[125]

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[121] Bar-On, *Others Within Us*, 52.
[122] Kimmerling, *Invention & Decline of Israeliness*, 83.
[123] This continued hegemonic leadership by Ashkenazim prompts Oren Yiftachel to call Israel an ethnocracy rather than a true democracy. Oren Yiftachel, "Centralized Power and Divided Space: 'Fractured Regions' in the Israeli Ethnocracy," *GeoJournal* 53, no. 3 (2001): 283-293.
[124] Chetrit, "Mizrahi Politics in Israel," 53.
[125] For more information on the background and evolution of the Israeli Black Panther Movement, see Sami Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews.* (New York: Routledge, 2010).

Though the Black Panthers had been recognized by greater Israeli society and the Ashkenazi leadership,[126] it was not until the election of 1977 that the political power of the large Mizrahi population was realized.[127] As noted above, the Mapai Party had controlled the government since the inception of the state, but in the election of 1977, Mizrahim largely voted for Menahem Begin of the Likud Party. Begin's subsequent election finally overthrew the hegemonic rule of the Mapai Party and its Ashkenazi-Sabra leaders. Though Begin, the leader of the Likud Party, was himself Ashkenazi, he convinced Mizrahim of his respect for their plight and his desire to help them. And, largely, Begin was elected as an alternative to the Labor Party: Avishai Margalit writes that, "Begin became the voice—the roar—of all those who felt insulted and rejected by the Labor movement."[128]

Ultimately, Begin and the Likud Party did little to help the position of Mizrahim in Israeli society,[129] but the toppling of the Mapai hegemony by the Mizrahi vote awoke the Mizrahi conscious, politically and otherwise. As Moshe Behar points out, "In the case of the Mizrahi collectivity, contexts, texts, activism, and scholarship have always been heavily intertwined, leading to a correlation between activism and the production of critical texts."[130] The 1970s saw the beginnings of a new literary and scholarly Mizrahi presence which added the Mizrahi narrative to the established, typically Ashkenazi Zionist narrative. The first novel about the Mizrahi experience in Israel written by a Mizrahi author was *The Transit Camp*, written by

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[126] Golda Meir, then the prime minister, met with leaders of the Black Panthers in April 1971.
[127] The Mizrahim had for decades constituted a huge portion of the Israeli population: while in 1948 80% of the country's Jews were Ashkenazi and only 20% Mizrahi, by 1958 58% were Ashkenazi and 42% Mizrahi.
[128] Avishai Margalit, *Views in Review: Politics and Culture in the State of the Jews* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1998), 36-37.
[129] Chetrit, "Mizrahi Politics in Israel," 54.
[130] Moshe Behar, "Mizrahim Abstracted: Action, Reflection, and the Academization of the Mizrahi Cause," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 37, no. 2 (2008): 89

Shimon Ballas and published in 1964. Sami Michael's *More and More Equal* (1974) and Amir's first novel, *Scapegoat* (first published in Hebrew in 1983), both fit into the sub-genre of transit camp literature as well. Though Ballas's *The Transit Camp* was published almost twenty years before Amir's *Scapegoat*, they come from the same cultural context. All three of these novels assert a vision of Israeli identity that is does not exactly align with that the Ashkenazi majority;[131] they presented Israeli society with a new chapter in Israeli history. As one reviewer said of Michael's *Equal and More Equal*, it is "[a window to the world] we couldn't find our way to by ourselves."[132]

[131] Author Sami Michael explicates the tensions he felt as an Iraqi in Israeli society that now inform his writing. Sami Michael, "On Being an Iraqi-Jewish Writer in Israel," *Prooftexts* 4, no.1 (1984).
[132] Quoted by Berg, *Exile from Exile,* 99.

PART TWO: Literary Analyses

3. The Dialectical Conception of Home in *The Dove Flyer*

Eli Amir's second novel, *The Dove Flyer*, published in 1992, is at once a complex work about the various processes that led to the massive Jewish evacuation of Iraq in the early 1950s, and a personal narrative about the upheaval of one boy's life. The narrative takes place at a time of great change in Iraq, but rather than simply trace those changes, the novel focuses on Kabi Imari, an adolescent Baghdadi Jew. Kabi's father, who is named Salman Imari but usually referred to simply as Abu Kabi, and his uncle Hizkel are leaders of the Zionist Movement in Baghdad; at the very start of the novel, Hizkel is arrested for smuggling arms into Iraq. Though some of his family members are ardent Zionists, Kabi is unsure of how he feels about the state of the Jewish community in Iraq. He hears his father's debates about the shortcomings of Baghdad and the virtues of Israel, and remembers the fear of the *Farhud*, but throughout the novel Kabi is deeply ambivalent about the thought of leaving Baghdad. Not only is it his home, the only home he has ever known, it is also home to a great communal, religious, and familial heritage. In spite of the prejudice he faces as a Jew in Baghdad, throughout the majority of the novel Kabi remains uncertain about the prospect of leaving.

Kabi's uncertainty is paralleled by the novel's own ambiguity. What is most remarkable about *The Dove Flyer* is the variety of perspectives it presents on the impending Jewish emigration. The events of the novel are told by two narrators: Kabi, who narrates his own life and thoughts; and a subjective and omniscient third person narrator, whose narration allows the reader to gain a much broader perspective of the novel's events. Kabi's narration gives the novel

a central protagonist and a personal story to follow, while the second narrator allows Amir to place Kabi's personal story (which is highly influenced by Amir's own personal story) in a greater context. Reuven Snir writes that:

> The narrator's stance is double edged: on the one hand, the consciousness of a young Jewish boy at the end of the forties and on the other, Eli Amir's point of view overlooking the events from a certain time distance and weighting them up according to their pragmatic historical consequences. In this way, the author is able to follow the maturing of one Jewish boy in one of the most important crossroads of Babylonian Jewry and at the same time present the Israeli reader with an historical document about the collective Jew in Iraq.[133]

All of the events that are recounted by the second narrator can be related back to Kabi through personal or familial relationships with the characters that the narrative follows. These connections keep the narrative grounded in Kabi's personal story rather than lost in the much greater historical narrative, while also allowing the reader to gain multiple perspectives on the situation as it unfolds in the novel. It is this narrator, for example, who recounts the conversation between Kabi's wealthy and estranged cousin, Big Imari, with the Prime Minister of Iraq about the future of the Jewish community in Iraq. This narrator also provides insight into the mind of Kabi's cousin and teacher, the Communist Salim Effendi, who believes that it is only through an erasure of class, ethnic and religious structures that Iraqis (and, implicitly, specifically Iraqi Jews) will all be equal. While Kabi's narration grounds the novel in his personal story, the second narrator allows for the greater political and social history to be told.

Because the second narrative voice inserts itself into the minds of various characters and displays their thoughts and feelings for the reader, the novel is able to be as multifaceted as there are characters in it. This provides a more democratic perspective on the events that unfold in the narrative. Though some of the the novel's most prominent characters—namely Kabi's father and

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[133] Reuven Snir, "Baghdad Iri Ha'auva," *Haaretz*, April 24, 1993, p. 9B.

uncle—are Zionists, the wide scope of the narrative ensures that the novel does not tell the story of the eventual immigration to Israel simply as a historical inevitability, but as a contextualized struggle for the Jewish and greater Iraqi communities. This thorough contextualization is what prompts Moshe Gat to call *The Dove Flyer* "an historical novel," [134] arguing that the novel can be used as a historical document in "reflecting the concepts, feelings, thoughts, and spiritual life of the generation."[135]

Contrary to Gat's idea of *The Dove Flyer* as a multiperspectival historical novel, Dvir Abramovich argues that the novel puts forth the idea that Jews would never have been allowed to integrate fully into the Iraqi community, and that the novel therefore suggests Zionism is the sole solution to the Jewish community's question of identity. Abramovich writes that, "Amir is promoting the idea that the Zionist plan was the only feasible and available alternative and that, even if the nascent Israel would not have been founded, the Jews could not have integrated into the Iraqi nation as equals and protected citizens."[136] By making this claim, Abramovich is inserting into the novel a dichotomy of Iraqi OR Jewish identity, when in reality the novel portrays a community for whom those two identifiers are not paradoxical, but a genuine description of the populace. While it is true that several of the novel's characters feel that the anti-Semitism in Iraq has fractured their once seamless communal identity and rendered their Jewish religious identity irreconcilable with their Iraqi national identity, it is also clear in the novel that these characters are only one part of the Iraqi Jewish population. Many of the novel's characters do not want to leave Iraq; they believe that the current waves of anti-Semitism will pass and they will be able to regain their comfortable assimilation in Iraqi society. Because the

[134] Gat, "Immigration of Iraqi Jewry," 2.
[135] Gat, "Immigration of Iraqi Jewry," 2.
[136] Abramovich, "Eli Amir's Mafriah Hayonim," 7.

novels speaks so directly to the thoughts of individual characters, it is difficult to say where the opinion of the Iraqi Jewish community at large lies, but when the government does eventually allow Jews to leave Iraq for Israel, "emigration was still a thin trickle."[137]

Abramovich's argument ignores the multitude of opinions offered in the novel that do not conform to this dichotomy. There are numerous perspectives on identity and home depicted in the novel, all of which contribute to Kabi's own complex conceptions of identity and home. Before examining Kabi's confusion, I will discuss the other, more clearly defined identities and conceptions of homeland that are embodied by various characters in the novel.

The Multiperspectival Conception of Home in the Greater Iraqi Jewish Community

Throughout the novel, it becomes clear that the identity of the Iraqi Jewish community is extremely multifaceted: they are at once Arab, Jewish, and increasingly modernist. These identifiers may seem contradictory, or at least in competition with one another, but the Iraqi Jewish community has forged this conglomerate identity over the course of centuries. Much of the Jewish community in the novel perceives this identity as completely unified: having come by this identity organically, they do not perceive the various aspects—Arab, Iraqi, and Jewish—as separate or disparate. It is one identity. For several characters in the novel, however, the recent anti-Semitism in Iraq has divided their identity. Characters like Hizkel, Abu Kabi and Salim Effendi feel that they cannot live peacefully as Jews in Iraq. They are convinced that they will always be perceived as the 'other' in Iraqi society, and that they will subsequently be subject to indiscriminate prejudice and violence. (This conviction, of course, is not without cause. Each man has, in course of his life, faced prejudice and violence for the fact of his Judaism, and all

[137] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 432.

lived through the horrors of the *Farhud*.) Without hope for the possibility of equality within Iraq, these men do not search for ways to unify their divided identity, but ways to escape one part of their identity entirely. What they do not yet realize is the cost of the new identity that they wish to assume. They impose upon themselves a dichotomy of Iraqi or Jewish (the same dichotomy that Abramovich asserts) without imagining the difficulty of actually dividing their identity. They seem to imagine that they can simply cast off a part of themselves without repercussion; they do not imagine the pain that accompanies losing one part of oneself.

The divided identity that these characters espouse is the source of much tension for the greater Jewish community in the novel. However adamant the Zionist Movement is about their need to emigrate, there is also a large portion of the Jewish population that does not want or feel the need to redefine their identity. They conceive of themselves and their identity as integrated: they are just as Arab and Iraqi as they are Jewish, and they see the current anti-Semitism as largely inconsequential when compared to the long history of integration in Iraq. This view of themselves as Arab and Jewish is significant in that it is unquestioning; their Arab identity is not forced or imposed upon themselves as a means of faking assimilation to deflect racism, but an organic result of having lived in Iraq for thousands of years. For this part of the community, these two facets of their communal identity are not, and have never been, at odds with one another.

The novel presents three modes of Jewish identity, each of which is embodied by different characters: integrated identity, as represented by Kabi's mother, Um Kabi; Communist identity, as represented by Kabi's cousin and teacher, Salim Effendi; and Zionist identity, as represented by Kabi's father, Abu Kabi, and uncle, Hizkel. These are three different conceptions of identity, which must be distinguished from conceptions of home. Of these identifications, only

those characters that identity as Zionist wish to leave Iraq. The other perspectives conceive of Iraq as their home and wish to continue to do so (although the Communist seeks to relinquish his Jewish identity in order to be completely integrated into Iraqi society.)

Um Kabi: The Integrated Perspective

One of the characters who best exemplifies the dual Iraqi-Jewish identity is Um Kabi, Kabi's religious and staunchly Iraqi mother. Unlike her husband and brother-in-law, Um Kabi does not want to leave Iraq. She views her husband's Zionist dreams as "an impulsive male fantasy of distant conquests and adventures spawned by a sense of personal discontent" and wishes fervently—and loudly—that the family would return to the home in the Arab neighborhood that they left on the eve of the *Farhud*.[138] Um Kabi is one of the characters in the novel whose Iraqi and Jewish aspects are completely integrated; she does not ignore the increased anti-Semitism in Iraq, but neither does she think that it should control her life:

> It was beyond her. The Moslems had always been good neighbours. They had looked after us and protected us. We had all drunk from the same well. And then ten years ago, along came the Farhood, the anti-Jewish riots, and nothing was quite the same again. But, since daily life had gone back to a semblance of normality, why set up underground groups and run risks for a Jewish country far away?[139]

Um Kabi sees no distinction in herself as Iraqi or Jewish, and therefore sees no reason to leave Iraq for the fledgling Jewish state. She believes, as do several characters in the novel, that the current anti-Semitism will eventually pass, and that she ultimately belongs in Iraq, where her family has lived for thousands of years.

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[138] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 33.
[139] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 8.

The absolute union of Um Kabi's identity is reflected in the ways that she practices Judaism. Um Kabi is one the few characters in the novel that has remained a devout Jew even after the *Farhud*. Her father was a rabbi and her mother a pious woman, and Um Kabi's spiritual devotion is based on that religious heritage. The religious tradition that she follows is established in and specific to Iraq, both physically and spiritually.

Every year, Um Kabi makes an annual pilgrimage to the tomb of Prophet Ezekiel in Kifl. "She waited a whole year for this journey and spent several days in the prophet's sanctuary, praying, lighting candles, bathing in the holy fountain, and asking for the health and prosperity of her family and the Jewish people."[140] The ritual visit is, for Um Kabi, rooted in religious and familial history. Her husband's grandfather prevented the tomb from being destroyed by Turkish officials, and "the Imaris had been the shrine's patrons ever since."[141] This piece of Jewish history was thus integrated into the history of an Iraqi Jewish family, rendering it a uniquely Iraqi Jewish site. In addition to those yearly pilgrimages, Um Kabi also visits the graves of her family "every new moon and holiday eve."[142] Her devotion to her family's graves and the Prophet Ezekiel's tomb is evidence to the way in which her faith is profoundly tied to the land in which she practices it. These physical expressions of faith—pilgrimage and visiting graves—are deeply meaningful for her, and are an integral part of the way in which she practices Judaism. And, of course, they would be impossible anywhere but in Iraq.

The undivided nature of Um Kabi's Iraqi Jewish identity is further exemplified by her belief in mysticism. One of the major issues for the Imari family throughout the novel is the incarceration of Kabi's uncle Hizkel. Kabi's father Salman, as elder brother and head of the

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[140] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 322.
[141] Amir, *The Dove Flyer,* 144.
[142] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 159.

family, is responsible for freeing his brother from jail. While Kabi's father and Hizkel's wife Rashel rely on a Muslim lawyer to free Hizkel from jail, Um Kabi turns to various mystics and "blesser[s]".[143] She has "the coffee-grounds reader Ezra A'aa" come to the house to read Rashel and Hizkel's future in the grinds left at the bottom of Rashel's cup of coffee.[144] He tells her that a messenger will bring her good news the following Wednesday, but "when Wednesday came around there was no messenger and no sign of Ezra A'aa."[145] After that failure, Um Kabi hears about Sheikh Abu el-Tanag, a Shi'ite who conjures a *djinn* and asks it about Hizkel's whereabouts. The Imari family visits Sheikh el-Tanag in spite of his moderate anti-Semitism, but he provides them with very little substantive information. When Rashel refuses to visit the tomb of the Prophet Ezekiel with Um Kabi, she turns to two other Jewish venerables: the "blesser" S'hak Limnashir,[146] "a man whose good wishes for health, wealth, happiness, and success in studies, business and marital life were of great value";[147] and the kabbalist Shimeil Yosef Darzi, who privately instructs Kabi's youngest brother to read Hebrew letters announcing Hizkel's impending freedom in oil.

Of course, none of these miracle men actually help to free Hizkel from prison—at the end of the novel when Kabi's family is in Israel, Hizkel remains in Iraqi custody. What is significant is the fact that Um Kabi's faith in this type of divination transcends the boundaries of specific religious tradition. The fact that she is equally willing—in fact, eager—to go to a Muslim sheikh and a Jewish mystic belies the fact that her conviction of the righteousness of these practices is not derived strictly from her religious beliefs. Um Kabi has absorbed a belief in these practices,

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[143] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 145.
[144] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 88.
[145] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 91.
[146] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 145.
[147] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 145.

which are all described by Kabi with similar cynicism and disbelief, from an amalgamation of Jewish and Muslim mysticism that is possible only for a truly assimilated Arab Jew. Thus, her spiritual beliefs as well as her religious rituals are derived from a deep relationship to the place in which she lives and practices Judaism.

Salim Effendi: The Communist Perspective

Of the novel's two radical movements—Communism and Zionism—it is the former that least disappoints its Jewish followers in the novel. Salim Effendi found Communism after being rejected from the Iraqi National Democratic Party (NDP) for being a Jew. The basis for this rejection is ironic, as Salim Effendi wants nothing more than to distance himself from the Jewish community. He does not live in the Jewish quarter of Baghdad and has few Jewish friends. He teaches in the Jewish school, but it can be surmised from the unfailing anti-Semitism that haunts him in all his endeavors that he could get a job only at the Jewish school. He does not practice Judaism, and wishes only to be rid of the stigma that his Jewishness lends him. He had thought that the NDP was an egalitarian organization for Iraqis who wanted to free Iraq from the British, only to find "that Jews were hated in the organization no less than Englishmen."[148] Upset by the anti-Semitism that seems to have plagued him all his life, Salim Effendi comes to the conclusion that only the radical equality demanded by Communism will finally allow him to be equal in Iraq. That idea is strengthened by his meeting with the Party's leader in Iraq, who is known as the Red Armenian:

> One day Tarik introduced him to their leader, the Red Armenian. This meeting changed Salim Effendi's life. He was captivated by the Armenian's warm, fatherly figure and by the charm and authority that he projected. He felt reborn, touched by a divine presence that made him an equal among equals, as important

[148] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 70.

> as anyone else. All he had wanted and never received from life until now seemed promised to him by that single audience. For the first time he believed with perfect faith that the country of his ancestor, the land of Abraham, was as much his as any Moslem's and would forever be so in the new world built upon the ruins of the old.[149]

The description of the meeting seems to suggest that it was not only the Red Armenian's charm that captivated Salim Effendi, but also the implication of his acceptance as a Jew. Tarik, the friend who facilitated the meeting, was in the NDP with Salim Effendi and left the party at the same time. Tarik knows that Salim Effendi is Jewish and that he was rejected by the NDP for being such, and still offers him a place in the Communist Party. The contrast between the NDP's rejection of Salim Effendi as a Jew and Tarik's subsequent invitation to him not only to join the Communist Party, but also to meet its leader, is indicative of Tarik and the Communist Party's implicit acceptance of Salim Effendi's Jewish heritage. It is, of course, ironic that Salim Effendi looks to an organization that is accepting of his Jewish heritage to help him repudiate it. For what Salim Effendi sees in Communism is the possibility of finally ridding himself of the stigma of being a Jew, by ushering in a "new world" in which religious divisions are irrelevant. He sees this not only in the members of the Communist Party, but in the doctrine that they espouse.

It is therefore all the more surprising when Tarik exposes him as a Jew while they are on a Muslim sheikh's boat cruising the Tigris. The boat ride itself had been evidence to Salim Effendi that "the children of Moses and Muhammed could build a new world together,"[150] but when Tarik calls him by his Jewish name, Rahamim, he is attacked the boat's crazed owner for being a Jew and on the boat. And when, later in the narrative, Salim Effendi is reported to the police for engaging in Communist activities, he believes Tarik may have tipped them off.

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[149] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 72.
[150] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 65.

Despite Tarik and the Communist Party's initial acceptance of Salim Effendi's Jewish heritage, they become more anti-Semitic throughout the novel:

> Could someone have informed on him, just when was about to be sent to Moscow for a course and be given a high position in the Party? At their last [Party] meeting, Tarik, his rival for the job, had argued that Baghdad was a Moslem city and should have a Party led by Moslems. Not that this had surprised him after their midnight cruise . . . but still . . . to think that his best friend was for a Jewish quota![151]

> It was about this time that people began to whisper that Jews should be barred from the Party. He himself was told to play his Jewishness down if he wanted to get anywhere. Although he had made a point of it, this infuriated him. Just because [there were Jews who worked with the Iraqi government on behalf of the Jewish community], did that mean they couldn't fight against the regime? Had he again chosen wrongly?[152]

However much Salim Effendi wishes to divorce himself from his Judaism, he seems incapable of escaping it. Ultimately, though, his everlasting Jewish connection is what saves him.

After being reported to the police for Communist activities, Salim Effendi realizes that he has nowhere to turn. Suspicious of his Communist comrades, he cannot ask for their help. Nor can he go to the house of his cousin Abu Kabi—because of the arrest of Hizkel, Abu Kabi is likely also being watched by the police. "Great God, he thought, here I am in my own city with not a straw to clutch at, more alone than I've ever been in my life."[153] Though he is in the city that he calls "my own," he is not safe in it and has no real community that will protect him. In forsaking his Jewish identity for a strictly Iraqi Communist one, he has isolated himself almost entirely. Luckily for him, like the Communists, the Jewish community has not forgotten his connection to them. Salim Effendi goes to the Zionist baker, Abu Saleh, who hides him and helps him escape out of Iraq to Israel. There, Salim Effendi resumes his Communist activities

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[151] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 396.
[152] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 397.
[153] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 393.

and rises quickly to prominence within the Communist Party in Israel. Though Salim Effendi was undeterred by the anti-Semitism (and hypocrisy) of the Iraqi Communist Party, is it notable that it is only in a society and Party of fellow Jews that he advances in the Party. He may have sought, and once in Israel may still seek, to separate himself from his Jewish legacy, but it is that exact legacy that ultimately allows him to pursue his Communist ideals. Salim Effendi is unable to effectively divide his identity.

Abu Kabi and Hizkel: The Zionist Perspective

Salim Effendi is not the only character who tries and fails to renounce one portion of their Iraqi-Jewish identity. While Salim Effendi looks to Communism, and the erasure of his religious identity, as the solution to the problem of inequality in Iraqi society, Abu Kabi and Hizkel see Zionism, and the erasure of their Iraqi identities, as the solution. Ultimately, none of these characters can successfully divide their identity.

Abu Kabi and Hizkel were convinced by the *Farhud* in 1941 of the need for a Jewish state. As Hizkel writes in his journal, that event was a turning point in his conception of his Iraqi and Jewish identities:

> " . . . Until the *Farhood* in 1941," wrote Hizkel in his notebook, "I laughed at Jews who dreamed of a state in Palestine. I thought they were eccentrics, like so many before them in our history. Their outlook was foreign to me, for I did not believe in the appeal to power or the resort to physical force . . . Then came the war and the *Farhood* and everything changed . . . More than ever it became clear how dangerous being a Jew in Iraq was . . . far more than being an Assyrian Christian, Kurd, or Armenian. I was forced to realize that we had no choice but to have our own homeland like other nations, even if this meant taking up arms and killing and being killed.[154]

[154] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 237-238.

The horrors of the *Farhud* cause Hizkel and Abu Kabi to come to the conclusion that the tenuous position of Jews in Iraq is ultimately unsustainable, and that there needs to be a major change in order for them to survive. The Imari brothers see Zionism as the means for the survival of the Iraqi Jewish community; unfortunately, the survival that they envision demands the emigration of the Iraqi Jews from Iraq to the Jewish state. The Imari brothers clearly understand that the relocation of the Iraqi Jewish community will necessitate the alteration of the communal Jewish identity—Abu Kabi prepares for this by rejecting, as did the Zionist pioneers, professional work in favor of physical labor—but they do not foresee the total transformation that will be demanded of them in Israel. Abu Kabi in particular romanticizes the idea of life in Israel. Though he outwardly rejects his Iraqi identity, adopting the Zionist rejection of the Diaspora, he actually pictures his life there as an amalgam of his Iraqi and Zionist identities. He is therefore unprepared for the subsequent negation of his Iraqi identity.

Abu Kabi becomes convinced of the merits of Zionism after the *Farhud*. Unlike other Jews (including his wife) who believe that the *Farhud* was a singular event, the product of ill fortune and not indicative of any larger anti-Jewish sentiment in Baghdad, following the carnage Abu Kabi seems to lose all hope in the idea of a return to peaceful Muslim-Jewish relations in Iraq. Though he had once lived happily in a Muslim neighborhood— he had even "enjoyed the Muslim call to prayer" as an non-exclusive display of the greatness of God[155]–and was saved during the *Farhud* by his former Muslim neighbor, after the *Farhud* Abu Kabi abandons any idea of returning to his old neighborhood. He gives the keys to his house in the Muslim neighborhood to his old neighbor, telling her that, "It's hard to believe we'll ever need them again."[156] Abu Kabi comes to the conclusion that the events unfolding in the region—the progressing conflict

[155] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 110.
[156] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 171.

between the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine, and the later creation of Israel and subsequent influx of Palestinian refugees to Iraq—will prevent the continued peaceful existence of Jews in Iraq. Given the depth of Abu Kabi's foolish idealism in regards to Zionism and the Jewish state, Abu Kabi's clarity on the progression of events that have ruined the future of Iraqi Jewry is actually quite startling. He remarks that while Iraqi Muslims will always remind Jews of the *Farhud*, the Jews will in turn always remind Muslims of Palestine. He additionally (and somewhat surprisingly) comprehends the role of Israel in exacerbating the tension between the larger Iraqi and Iraqi Jewish communities, saying that "the establishment of Israel has killed all hope of living in peace" with the greater Iraqi community.[157]

In spite of his broad understanding of the problems facing the Jewish community, Abu Kabi is completely blind to the problems that they will face in Israel. He is so singularly focused on his dream of a Jewish homeland that he fails to realize the incongruity between his Zionist ideals and his actual person (and by extension, that between Zionist and Arab-Iraqi identity). This is best exemplified in his rejection of professional work in favor of physical labor, part of his adoption of the Zionist rejection of the Diaspora identity. Numerous times throughout the novel, Abu Kabi insists on the importance of Jewish labor and the physical creation of the Jewish state by Jewish labor. As he tells his neighbor Abu Edouard, "When the land is yours, you take care of it yourself."[158] Abu Kabi seems blind to—or perhaps willfully ignorant of—the fact that he is entirely unprepared to do any sort of physical labor. Even Kabi, who idolizes his father, cannot imagine him able to perform manual labor. "This pampered, pressed-and-ironed, tied-and-suited, perfumed-and-hair-oiled, red-carnationed man? . . . I tried to picture him looking like the [Zionist] pioneers . . . ploughing, sowing, and spreading manure. It was too much for

[157] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 314.
[158] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 83.

even my fertile imagination."[159] In Iraq, all physical labor is performed by poor Arabs or Kurds; although Abu Kabi grew up among his grandfather's rice plantations, he has never done any manual labor.

Furthermore, Abu Kabi's conception of the physical labor he will perform in Israel is incompatible with the reality of the Jewish state, and reveals his inability to completely relinquish his Iraqi sensibilities, despite his statements to the contrary. As noted above, Abu Kabi's grandfather was a wealthy owner of rice plantations. Abu Kabi imagines that, once in Israel, he will reclaim not only his familial occupation by becoming a rice farmer, but also his familial legacy by becoming the most prominent and successful rice farmer in Israel. Abu Kabi does not simply want to help create the Jewish state by performing whatever task is needed, he wants to becomes "Israel's biggest rice grower."[160] His assumption of the Zionist work ethic is partial: whereas the Zionist pioneers were prepared to drain swamps, move rocks, and fight malaria while doing it, Abu Kabi imagines only the glamour of being a wealthy farmer. He has not relinquished his Iraqi focus on prestige and economic wealth, and is therefore not ready for the menial labor that will be asked of him in Israel.

Nor is he prepared for the utter renunciation of his Iraqi identity that will be asked of him in Israel. Abu Kabi thinks that he is ready to relinquish his Iraqi identity, but in actuality he has conceived of an amalgamated Iraqi-Israeli identity in which he will be able to reclaim his familial heritage and prominence (which is an Iraqi heritage and prominence) in the new Jewish state. He does not realize that so many facets of his identity—his ethics, conception of leadership, fashion sense—and assumptions about the nature of society—that Israeli society will function as does Iraqi society and that there will be developed infrastructure in Israel as in

[159] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 347.
[160] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 346.

Baghdad—will be negated or proved false in Israel. Abu Kabi cannot yet imagine how naïve he is for believing that he can so easily amputate a portion of his identity, nor does he think the day will come when he will want or need to reclaim the Iraqi part of his identity, which he thought he had renounced.

Kabi's Dialectical Conception of Home

In the course of the narrative, Kabi is asked by his school's headmaster to write an essay on patriotism as the school's submission to a government-sponsored competition. Kabi, who prides himself on his talent as a writer, is thrown by the assignment. Never before has he felt so hesitant to write an essay:

> I had never before gathered so much material for a single composition. But though I had pages full of notes, the essay refused to write itself. What country was I a patriot of: the one I had never been to though my father said it was my real home, or the one I was born and raised in that he called a temporary asylum?[161]

It should not be surprising that Kabi has a confused idea of patriotism. Within his family and his community, there is a constant conflict about the idea of home and national-religious identity. When he was seven years old, the *Farhud* occurred and caused his father and his uncle to embrace Zionism. For the latter half of Kabi's life, then, two of his role models have been espousing an idea of home that is contradictory to the actual, physical home that Kabi knows and in which he lives. Meanwhile, his mother still thinks of Baghdad as home (and of his father and uncle as crazy), and argues against the eventual move to Israel. Kabi is surrounded by such a cacophony of opinions about Baghdad, Iraqi anti-Semitism, Zionism, Communism, and Israel, that he is unsure of who to believe and where his own feelings lie. He is not even sure what

[161] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 247.

Zionism actually means. Compounding the confusion created by the many opinions in his community is Baghdad itself. At times Kabi feels completely at home in the city in which he was born, but it seems that that comfort only extends to certain, predominantly Jewish portions of the city. He feels at best uneasy, and at worst afraid, in other, Muslim parts of the city. (It is unclear if this fear is a product of frightening experiences that he has had in Baghdad or a fear of Muslims that he has inherited and learned from his father. Most likely it is an amalgam of the two.) Kabi's conception of home is dialectical because he has lived his life in a city in which he has been taught, both by experience and his father, to be afraid. He naturally loves the landscape of his childhood and adolescent life, but his feelings for the city are also confused by the prejudice and violence that he faces there because of his religion. And despite his father's passionate Zionism, Kabi is equally unable to claim Israel—a country to which he has never been, and about which he hears both good and bad things—as his own. Kabi is stuck between a home that rejects him and a nation that is not really home.

At the start of the novel, the tension between Muslims and Jews in Baghdad has just culminated in the hasty and fraudulent trial and execution of a wealthy Jewish businessman, Shafik Addas. The trial is significant for Iraqi Jewry because of the prominence of the defendant and the lawlessness with which the case was tried. Though it was widely recognized that the accusations against Addas were false, the judge was a notorious "Jew-hating army officer."[162] He refused to allow the defense to present any witnesses, and the high-profile case was concluded in three days with the verdict calling for the execution of Addas. The implications of the trial are frightening for Iraqi Jewry; Hizkel writes in his Zionist newspaper that, "The trial of Shafik

[162] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 3.

Addas . . . was the trial of every Jew. If an Addas can be hung, who will save the rest of us?"[163] The condonation of anti-Semitism that existed in Iraq to allow such a farcical trial to happen at the state level indicates a much more widespread and popular practice of anti-Semitism throughout the country. Iraq was not always so discriminatory, though. Kabi, who is only a young teenager at the beginning of the novel, can remember a time when Baghdad's Jews and Muslims lived together in peace.

Kabi was born in the Muslim neighborhood el-Me'azzam. His family lived next to a Muslim family with whom they had close friendship; Kabi and the neighbor's eldest son Ismail were born two days apart. Ismail's mother Hairiyya and Um Kabi shared the nursing of the two boys, who retained that brotherly relationship throughout the first years of their lives. Kabi's fragmented memories of his earliest years are a picture of inter-religious friendship:

> On Fridays I was sent off to Hairiyya's garden while my mother prepared for the Sabbath unhindered, after which I was bathed in the large basin, dressed in a *dishdasha*, a white smock like Ismail's, and allowed to watch the lighting of the Sabbath candles . . . Saturday mornings, when we were forbidden by the Sabbath laws to light the gas burner, Hairiyya came with Ismail to make us tea, boiling milk fresh from her brown cow. Sometimes Ismail spent the day with us, listening with a white skullcap on his head as my father recited the kiddush and sang Sabbath hymns to the melodies of the Iraqi singer Abd el-Wahab.[164]

> Summer nights we slept on the roof . . . I liked sleeping under the sky. Sometimes I was woken at night by the call of the muezzin, from whom I learned that there was a Moslem God as well as a Jewish one. My father enjoyed the Moslem call to prayer. When it ended he would proclaim huskily, as though he too were one of the faithful: "*Sadaka Allah el-azim*. Just is the great God."[165]

The religious continuum described in these passages is remarkable, especially considering the estrangement from his Muslim neighbors that Kabi later feels. On the Sabbath, Kabi was dressed by Hairiyya in a *dishdasha*, a traditional Arab garment, for the Jewish holiday. The fact that the

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[163] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 4.
[164] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 110.
[165] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 110.

smock is foreign to him except in his association of it with Ismail indicates the fact that it is not a Jewish garment, but that seems unimportant to his parents, even on a holy Jewish day. They are unworried that he is dressed like a Muslim for the holiday, just as Ismail's parents are unthreatened by his observation of the Jewish prayers and traditions on the Sabbath. These passages lack any sign of animosity between the families, or even between the greater religious communities in Iraq. The Imaris live in a Muslim neighborhood, where they feel free to observe their own religious rituals while also taking pleasure in the Islamic traditions occurring around them. Kabi is not frightened of the Muslims, but enlightened by their religious practice, which he sees as complementary, not opposed, to his own.

When religious tensions in Baghdad rose, though, Abu Kabi decided that the family should leave el-Me'azzam. They moved to the Jewish quarter where they would be isolated from prejudice among the safety of their religious community. Though they planned to eventually move back to el-Me'azzam, the anti-Semitism in Iraq only escalated until the *Farhud* in 1941, probably two to four years after they left al-Me'azzam.[166] They remained in the Jewish quarter until emigrating from Iraq.

It is significant that, at the narrative's beginning, Kabi does not even remember the details of his life in el-Me'azzam. He knows Ismail only as the leader of a gang of Muslims who come into Kabi's Jewish neighborhood "at least once a week to challenge [Kabi's group of friends] to a holy war,"[167] daring them to say the *Shahada* or fight. It is only when Ismail calls Kabi by the old nickname that Hairiyya gave him—Id, the shortened version of his Arab name,

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[166] The narration states that Kabi was seven when the *Farhud* occurred, but it does not give his age when which the family left el-Me'azzam. Based on his vague memories of leaving and his description of himself as throwing a fit over a toy when they left, I estimate that Kabi was between three and five when they left.

[167] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 102.

Sa'id, and the Arabic word for holiday—that he remembers Ismail as the brother of his childhood. He had so long forgotten the memories of his first years spent in el-Me'azzam, and later known Ismail only as an anti-Semitic bully, that the revelation of their past together is a shock to him. He follows Ismail back to el-Me'azzam, where he sees his old house. Once the surprise of remembering wears off, he realizes that he is in an unfamiliar part of Baghdad. He feels vulnerable in this Muslim part of the city, and grows so anxious while trying to find his way home that he urinates in his pants.

The episode is quite indicative of Kabi's relationship to Baghdad: layered memories and feelings, the bad and good overlapping and eclipsing one another, creating confusion. Kabi had thought Ismail a simple anti-Semitic thug, but when he remembers their shared past, he can no longer think of him as starkly evil. Instead, he feels a surprising kinship to and protection from Ismail. He follows Ismail to el-Me'azzam "in a kind of ecstasy,"[168] almost as though he is hoping that once they are apart from their friends and in the place they were both born, Ismail will embrace him and erase his marginality and subordination in Iraqi society. Once in el-Me'azzam, though, Kabi realizes what a mistake he has made. He had imagined Ismail would want to talk to him, but he sees that Ismail has no room or need for him in his life. And however familiar that neighborhood used to be to him, it is now the place of his nightmares:

> All around me – or so I had been taught to believe from childhood, the monstrous fear of them as much a part of me as my native language – was an alien crowd of vengeful killer and loathsome sodomites. What was I doing among them? I could be kidnapped and thrown into the river. "If you're ever alone among Moslems," my father had told me, "don't attract attention, whatever you do. Try to behave naturally as if you were a born-and-bred Arab."[169]
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> Only now did I grasp what a crazy thing I had done. To hitch a ride to the heart of Moslem Baghdad! How had I failed to be afraid when now, just thinking of it,

[168] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 114.
[169] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 112-113.

> made me shudder? The fact was – to be honest, I had known it all along – that my courage came from Ismail. Deep down I had felt sure that I need only call him to be rescued from any trouble I got into.[170]

It's almost ironic that Abu Kabi told his son to "try to behave naturally as if you were a born-and-bred Arab," because, for the first few years of his life, Kabi would not have had to try to behave that way. Though Kabi is not Hairiyya's biological son, she helped to nurse him and raise him, and she called him her son. In those years of his life, Kabi was even called by a familiarized version of his Arab name. Kabi may not be a "born-and-bred Arab," but in those first years of his life, he would not have felt so distant from them as to have to attempt to fit in among them. He did fit it among them. Now, though, he feels only terror and panic in his old neighborhood. His good memories have been overwritten by bad experiences and negative associations with Muslims. Though this was once his home, it is now just an unfamiliar Muslim neighborhood in which he is vulnerable because he is Jewish.

This is not the only time that Kabi is anxious outside of the Jewish quarter of Baghdad. When his family goes to visit the Sheikh Abu el-Tanag in a Muslim neighborhood, "It was only thanks to old Hiyawi [Kabi's very assimilated neighbor], who could have passed for a Moslem dignitary with his striped robe and black turban, that we gradually began to feel safe."[171] Kabi has become so conditioned to avoid Muslim neighborhoods that, even though he grew up in one, he now needs a Muslim-looking figure to deflect his own Jewishness and make him feel safe among Muslims. (Hiyawi, though Jewish, acts similarly to Ismail in protecting Kabi by virtue of Arab-ness.) When he accompanies his aunt Rashel to visit the prison where her husband is being kept, he hears the shout of a mob and immediately feels fear. No longer does he like listening to the Muslim prayers, but begins to hear in it an accusation of his otherness. "Once again, in this

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[170] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 113.
[171] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 91.

city of endless mosques, I had to listen to the *Shahada*, the Muslim confession of faith. The hundred of raised buttocks in the air frightened me."[172] Gone is the continuum of religious expression and friendship that he experienced with Ismail's family in el-Me'azzam. The same voice of the muezzin that gave him a greater understanding of Islam by teaching him that "there was a Moslem God as well as a Jewish one" now instills in him fear.[173] The daily calls from the muezzin are unwelcome reminders that he is only a barely-tolerated minority in this land.

Still, in spite of his fear and feelings of otherness, Kabi cannot simply hate the city in which he grew up and still lives. Just as the recollection of his childhood spent with Ismail makes him unable to view Ismail as simply a thug, his happy memories in Baghdad and his long familial and cultural history there confuse the negative associations he has with the city. For Baghdad is his cultural home. The smell of pittas cooking in Souk Hinuni, the Jewish market, are to Kabi "the smell of life itself."[174] Certain Jewish parts of the city also comprise Kabi's early conception of home. After visiting his estranged cousin George Imari at his mansion in a wealthy suburb of Baghdad that Kabi would normally have no reason to visit, Kabi takes comfort in walking through the Jewish market, as though needing to remind himself from where he comes. "For a long while I wandered through the Jewish souk, imbibing the smells, taking in the sights, and rubbing elbows with the shoppers. I was home."[175] It is one of only two times in the novel that Kabi calls any place home. Both times, he refers to the Jewish quarter of Baghdad.

Part of the strength of Kabi's connection to Baghdad is the great familial and cultural history that he knows exists solely in Baghdad. His father and uncle Hizkel see immigration to Israel as the return from exile, the fulfillment of their Jewish history in Baghdad, but Kabi

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[172] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 212.
[173] See footnote 27.
[174] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 17.
[175] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 259.

recognizes that they will be leaving behind an integral part of their communal identity. When Kabi goes with his parents and Hiyawi to the Jewish cemetery to visit their family's graves in preparation of their departure, Kabi worries for the souls of his late family members:

> "Someone has to look after these graves," [Hiyawi] would say to us. "The souls of our ancestors hover over them. If we all leave Iraq, they'll be left here by themselves" . . . Was [Kabi's grandfather's] soul really circling above us protectively as my mother said? And would it come with us if we went to Israel or stay behind with its bones, forever haunting the rows of graves?[176]

It is not only the souls of his own family for which Kabi worries. He seems to understand that it isn't just those who remain in Baghdad (dead or alive) that will suffer the loss of the Iraqi Jewish community, but those who leave will also have to endure the pain of withdrawal from their community. The emigrants will be displaced not only into a new physical space, but displaced from the familial, communal and religious heritage that exists in this place and that is so important to their communal and individual identities.

This sense of the impending erasure of the Iraqi Jewish identity, which is a complex combination of ethnic, religious and national identification, is most noticeable on the metaphorical eve of the Jews' departure from Iraq. When the Iraqi government first allows Jews to apply for emigration to Israel, Jews pour into the synagogue where the applications for emigration will be distributed. Before they can apply to leave their home, they must sit through the morning service, performing long-standing religious rituals in a place that has housed their religious community for many years. The sense of imminent ending is palpable in the synagogue:

> Inside the synagogue, the cantor began the morning service. My father's thoughts were so exclusively on Israel that we had forgotten to bring our prayer shawls and phylacteries, but no one seemed to mind, not on a day like this. The congregation's chant had a different, more poignant tone than usual. The faces of

[176] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 160, 161.

> the worshippers were radiant. The act of prayer dissolved their tension, restored them to the solid ground of a familiar reality.
> Yes as soon as the service was over, the fear of the unknown returned. No one knew the answers to all their questions and all harboured doubts about taking the plunge. Applying for emigration meant giving up Iraqi citizenship for good. In a moment, by a single act, seventy generations of life in Iraq would come to an end.
> An awkward silence descended upon the synagogue. I looked at the memorial lamps on the walls with the names of the dead in gold letters. The bones of my great-grandfather – of his ancestors, of the multitude of forebears in the great plain of Babylon – were with us. But what were they saying? To go or to stay?[177]

The familiar routine of the morning service help relieve some of the Jews of "their tension, restored them to the solid ground of a familiar reality." They are used to the morning service as it is practiced here, in this synagogue in Baghdad, where and in the same way it has been conducted for centuries. They are comforted from their anxiety by the long and well-known tradition of the service, but ultimately "the fear of the unknown returned." For Kabi, it is not only a fear of the unknown, but a fear of relinquishing and losing what is known. "In a moment, by a single act, seventy generations of life in Iraq would come to an end . . . The bones of my great-grandfather – of his ancestors, of the multitude of forebears in the great plain of Babylon – were with us." The bones and souls of those forebears are with them there, in Baghdad. As Kabi asks at the cemetery, will they travel with their descendants to Israel or remain in Baghdad? By leaving, will the Iraqi Jews be leaving behind their ancestry, heritage, and known traditions? Will the familiarity of this service translate once they are in Israel, or will they never again feel the comfort of a routine that is centuries old?

Clearly, the immediate prospect of actually leaving Baghdad frightens Kabi and further confuses him. Just after he fills out the forms to apply for emigration from Iraq to Israel, he has a realization of the depth of his love for and connection to Baghdad:

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[177] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 339.

> But it was the only country that I knew. I had always felt at home in it. I loved its river, its palm trees, its oleanders lining the roads. I belonged to That ek-Takya and I wasn't ready to say goodbye to Baghdad. I looked at the little, huddled shops, at the crowded market from which women shopper were emerging with their arms full, and felt a twinge.[178]

It is only after applying for emigration that Kabi admits the strength of his feelings for Baghdad and foresees the amount that he will miss the city. For, unlike his father, Kabi seems to understand the pull of Baghdad before he leaves. Despite the bad experiences he has had and the prejudice he faces there, he sees that the city of his youth will be irreplaceable to him and to his community. As Big Imari says in an argument about Zionism with Abu Kabi, "And if [Hizkel] talks [the Jews] into leaving Baghdad, can he talk them into forgetting it? We are the sons of an Arab land; its culture is our culture."[179] Abu Kabi's Zionist fervor makes him forget or disregard the power of Baghdad's allure, but Kabi is fully aware that leaving will be a bittersweet moment.

Kabi's conception of Baghdad as home is dialectical because he at once loves Baghdad as the city of his familial and religious heritage and the city of childhood, and also fears Baghdad as a city in which his Judaism makes him vulnerable to prejudice and attack. While he may think of the Jewish quarter of the city as his home, his minority status alienates him from the city as a whole, and he cannot claim it as his own. So though Kabi does love Baghdad, it cannot be his home. Towards the end of the novel, as Kabi becomes increasingly disenfranchised by the prejudice against him as a Jew in Baghdad, he begins to look to Israel as a space that could be home.

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[178] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 342.
[179] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 313.

Transitioning from Baghdad to the *Ma'abarot*: The End of Iraqi Jewry

Though the narrative of *The Dove Flyer* seems to culminate in the emigration of the Imari family from Iraq, the actual moment of the Imari family's departure is not depicted in the novel. Rather than depicting the withdrawal of this one specific family, the novel symbolically portrays the eventual end of the entire Jewish community in Iraq. (The narrative does resume the Imaris' story, but only after their arrival in Israel.) The last scene of the Imaris in Baghdad is at the funeral of Hiyawi, Kabi's neighbor and friend. Hiyawi, one of the elders of the Iraqi Jewish community, is the last bastion of historically integrated Iraqi-Jewish identity. He served in the Ottoman army and had Muslim Ottoman officers at his wedding. Throughout the novel he decries the idea of emigration of Iraq, which is considers his true homeland. He is a model of Jewish- Iraqi integration, and his death symbolically foretells the imminent demise of all Jewish life in Iraq.

The chapter that follows Hiyawi's death interrupts the Imaris' emigration narrative to focus on Big Imari, Abu Kabi's wealthy and assimilated cousin. In it, Big Imari visits the Pasha, Nuri es-Sa'id. Though Big Imari has always tried to distance himself from his Jewish roots—particularly in front and in the mind of the Pasha—the two debate the position of Jews in Iraq. The debate itself lends some credence and sympathy to the Pasha (who, in the course of the debate, is described not as anti-Jewish but as stuck in a political quagmire involving the Israel, Britain, and the Muslim majority of Iraq), but more importantly, it forces Big Imari, who usually tries to hide his own Jewishness, to defend the Jews of Iraq. Despite his economic prosperity in Iraq and his friendships with men in high levels of government there, at the end of the debate he leaves the Pasha's house questioning his place in Iraq and entertaining the possibility of his own

emigration (which, typical of wealthy Iraqi Jews, would be to England rather than Israel).[180] He even repeats Abu Kabi's oft-recited phrase, "Never trust a goy!"[181] The implication of the future departure of Big Imari, coupled with the death of Hiyawi, represent the imminent end of the entirety of Jewish life in Iraq. If even these two, who clung staunchly to their Iraqi identity throughout the tumultuous events depicted in the novel, have or will leave Iraq, then there can be no hope of a Jewish future there.

When the narrative resumes the story of the Imari family, they have arrived in Israel, where they are almost immediately confronted with the disintegration of their community. While in Iraq Jews could rely on the goodwill of and safety in the Jewish community (as did Salim Effendi), in the Israeli *ma'abara* where the Imari family is taken there is constant thievery and no one is to be trusted. Abed, Abu Kabi's old servant who arrived in Israel three months before the Imaris, teaches the Imaris how to navigate life in the *ma'abara*: by taking what you want, regardless of the rules or of other people. He leads them in cutting the lines for ration tickets and food, and shows them how to leave the *ma'abara* through a hole in the fence that surrounds it. Abed is not an inconsiderate man, nor is he a lawbreaker, but the culture of the *ma'abara* seems to necessitate a certain self-centeredness. (Just as Abed takes what he wants, so too are things taken from him: when he and Kabi choose cots for the family and leave them on the side of the road, they return to find them gone. Abed, who is the voice of *ma'abara* experience, remarks that, "You can't leave a pin unguarded here."[182]) The deeply ingrained sense of community that characterized the Iraqi Jewish community is missing in Israel, and soon, the Iraqi community is

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[180] Abbas, *Iraqi Jews*, 143.
[181] *Goy*, abbreviated from *goyim*, is the Yiddish word used to describe any non-Jew. I think that its use in the translation is not anachronistic (Yiddish being the language of Ashkenazi Jews, while Big Imari is clearly Mizrahi), but purposeful. *Goy* carries a specific colloquial connotation that is appropriate for this oft-repeated phrase; Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 480.
[182] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 488.

physically dispersed as well, as those members of the Iraqi community who arrived in Israel with the Imaris move to various *ma'abarot* and development towns throughout Israel.

Thus the Imari family is left mostly alone, save for Abed and his new Romanian girlfriend, Nadia. But even that smallest unit of Iraqi community—the family—is quickly broken down in Israel, as Abu Kabi becomes increasingly disoriented and diminutive, and Kabi and his mother, who would be traditionally subordinated to their father/husband, assume familial leadership. (So too is Abed's guidance an upheaval of the traditional Iraqi hierarchy.) Abu Kabi had imagined that he would become a successful farmer and person of prominence in Israel, but instead he is treated by the native Israelis as a lunatic who wants to grow rice in a country with no water.[183] In Baghdad, he had claimed that he would be willing to work as anything in Israel, even to "sell kerosene from a wagon if [he] had to,"[184] but now that he is Israel he is unable to relinquish his dream of rice farming.

Ironically, while Abu Kabi languishes and bemoans the lack of respect afforded him, Um Kabi, who never wanted to come to Israel, begins to make a place for herself in the new country. Though the Imaris live in a canvas-roofed shelter, she decorates it and begins planting a garden in front. She attends Hebrew classes, makes friends with two female Israeli soldiers, and starts to sell her embroidery, providing financial support in a way that never would have been allowed in Baghdad. Kabi too provides for the family in his father's economic and emotional absentia. He takes a job on a road gang to help support the family financially, and begins to watch over and care for his little brothers.

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[183] The young Israeli nation had very little water resources for irrigation. See "Israel's Water Problem," *The Science News-Letter* 64, no. 10 (1964): 150.
[184] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 517.

So does the novel's ending narrate the ending of the Iraqi Jewish community, not only the ending of the community in Iraq or the ending of the community as a one bound by physical proximity, but in all aspects, even the most basic hierarchal structures. The community was initially uprooted by their emigration from Iraq, but they are being uprooted again in a different, much deeper, way in Israel. The traditional familial hierarchy, a structure that helped them define themselves, is overturned as sons claim the patriarchal role and wives become independent.

This novel, which shows so little of life in Israel, does not really probe the conception of home from within Israel. Abu Kabi's overwhelming disappointment and subsequent wish to return to Baghdad, is depicted at length, but the novel's conclusion is ambiguous: as Abu Kabi dwells on his failure and his homesickness for Baghdad, his new son is born. Thus a new generation of Iraqi Jew emerges into the world, but it is unclear what his future will bring. Kabi's own conception of home is not really discussed. He still loves and misses Baghdad, and is confused at having become, by virtue of his immigration to Israel, "the enemy of my native land and of the city I loved!,"[185] but he is also beginning to integrate into Israeli society. He learns Hebrew, prepares to join the army and finds a job. He is astonished by the physical land of Israel—particularly by the sea and the mountains, the likes of which he has never before seen—but it is unclear how, if at all, his conception of home has changed since immigrating to Israel. In order to view the tension inherent in the conception of home between Baghdad and Israel, one must view this novel as a continuum with the second novel of Amir's Iraqi trilogy, *Scapegoat*.

[185] Amir, *The Dove Flyer*, 494.

4. The Dual Conflicts of Identity and Home in *Scapegoat*

In an interview about his first novel *Scapegoat*, published in 1983, Eli Amir says that the novel, which is based on his own experiences as a young immigrant in Israel, is indicative of and true to the larger experience of Israeli immigration. "The novel is an initiation of a child to become adolescent, confronting the other and himself and shaping his identity. And in a way, this novel became the story of every refugee, every newcomer, who came to this country."[186] As was discussed in chapter 2, all immigrants to the State of Israel in the early 1950s had to conform to the Israeli Sabra identity. *Scapegoat* narrates the first years of cultural confrontation and assimilation of a new immigrant, Nuri, as he struggles to reconcile his original Iraqi identity with the new model of identity he is presented in Israel.

At the start of the narrative, Nuri is on a bus to Ahuza, an immigrant youth transit camp, from where he will be taken to live on a kibbutz. It is the first time that Nuri is away from his family, and he takes comfort in the passing landscape, which looks to him "exactly like the illustrated brochures about Israel I had seen in Baghdad."[187] This description is remarkable in that Nuri finds something in Israel that corresponds to his conception of the country from before his arrival. Everything else, including the journey he is on now, is "unknown."[188]

Nuri eventually reaches Ahuza, where he spends some months before being chosen with a group of Iraqi youth to live on the kibbutz Kiryat-Oranim.[189] There the Iraqi youth are expected

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[186] Eli Amir, interview by William Sterneberg, "Eli Amir Brief Description of His First Book, Scapegoat," *YouTube.com*, published October 24, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNYpwRtNkIA.
[187] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 9.
[188] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 9.
[189] Kiryat-Oranim is not a real kibbutz, but it is based on Amir's own experiences as a youth on Kibbutz Mishmar Ha'Emek.

to integrate into the kibbutz society, which functions in the novel as a synecdoche for larger Israeli society. Nuri in particular has trouble ascertaining how much and how he should assimilate into kibbutz society. Like Kabi in *The Dove Flyer*, he is surrounded by an array of people who have different conceptions of assimilation, and again like Kabi, he is influenced by that and has trouble determining his own perspective among it.

While Nuri's identity is torn among the dichotomy between Israeli and Iraqi identity, his conception of home is split among a trichotomy of Baghdad, the kibbutz, and the *ma'abara* where his family and the Iraqi community live. Kabi's adoption of and appreciation for some facets of Israeli identity confuse his idea of home; as he becomes increasingly assimilated into and comfortable on the kibbutz, he stops looking to Baghdad as home and begins to question whether he belongs on the kibbutz or in the *ma'abara*. For while he does not entirely assume the Sabra identity, he is not sure if his transformation, though partial, has alienated him from the community which was once his own.

Though Nuri is the novel's central protagonist and its only narrator, the narrative focuses on the experiences of the larger group of Iraqis who are living on the kibbutz. This group of teenagers does not present a unified model of assimilation; instead, each individual is depicted as incorporating their new home into their identity in different ways and amounts and at different rates. Because Nuri is the novel's sole narrator, though, it is difficult to completely separate the group's varied processes of assimilation from Nuri's individual process. Nuri often narrates on behalf of the collective, writing about the group experience and their feelings as a whole. Of course, there certain events in the narrative which are meaningful to all of them because they force every member of the group to confront the increasing duality of their identities and the inherent tension between the two parts of their identities. When the family of one of the Iraqi

girls, for example, attempts to make her leave the kibbutz to marry the old man to whom they had betrothed her when they were still in Baghdad, the group makes an unexplained collective choice to shelter her from her parents and that fate. Rather than helping her parents, and thereby condoning traditions that were normal in Baghdad but which are completely antiquated and out of place in Kiryat Oranim, the Iraqi youth chase her parents away. As Nuri writes of it, "That was the beginning of our reconciliation with our new home."[190] That situation is a distinct and explicit turning point for the Iraqi youth group as a whole, far more so than other instances in which Nuri narrates the emotions of the collective.

In spite of the potential limitations presented by the first-person narrative voice utilized in the novel, the novel does not portray the issue of assimilation one-dimensionally. As in *The Dove Flyer*, the narrative provides specific characters who occupy and exemplify opposite sides of the debate that is central to the novel, which, in this novel, is that of assimilation. Because these characters are some of Nuri's best friends on the kibbutz—Masul, who stubbornly attempts to retain his Iraqi identity and not be influenced by the kibbutz; Nilly, who seems to want to erase her Iraqi identity in her pursuit of integration into the kibbutz community; Dolek, who runs the cowshed where Nuri works; and Sonia, one of the counselors for the Iraqi youth group–Nuri's narration is able to depict a range opinions on the assimilation of the Iraqis into kibbutz society. The wide variety of these responses and Nuri's attitude towards them—inherent in his narration of them—emphasize Nuri's own intermediary position.

Whatever their process of integration, the group of Iraqis is deeply influenced by questions of family and religion. Central to Iraqi Jewish society were the traditional familial and religious structures that have now been broken down in the secular, communal kibbutz. No

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[190] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 61.

longer do these Iraqi adolescents have to bear the weight of these societal constraints, which dictated that they obey their fathers and practice a minimum of Jewish customs, but neither do they have these familiar patterns to help make sense of their lives. Now that they have been separated from these significant parts of their lives, the question of how much or how little their family and their religion should affect their lives—be it their daily life (i.e. laying *tefillin* every morning) or their futures—becomes meaningful in a way they may never have expected.

The Iraqi youth are also influenced by doubts about the perceived inferiority of Mizrahi culture. The tension between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi culture—and the question of which, if either, is superior—is different than the question of familial and religious values in that it is not organically produced by the Iraqi group. Their uncertainty about the status of Mizrahi culture is based on the assumption made by the members of the kibbutz of the superiority of Ashkenazi culture and the inherent undesirability of Mizrahi culture. The kibbutz members do not only seem to think that Mizrahi culture is lesser than Ashkenazi or Sabra culture, but that it is innately backwards and wrong. The Iraqi youth internalize this rejection of their culture and, as will be noted, respond in a variety of ways, including rebellion (Masul), curiosity (Nuri), and the attempted erasure of original identity (Nilly). The uncertainty about culture and the question of familial and religious practice influence their assimilation, because fully assimilating into life on the kibbutz would mean rejecting the culture, religious practice, and familial structure that was integral to their conception of self and community in Iraq.

The Other Iraqis

One of Nuri's friends who acts as a different example of how (or how not) to assimilate to kibbutz society is Masul. Masul does not rebel against the values of the kibbutz immediately,

but becomes a stalwart of Iraqi identity once that identity is threatened. This is first evidenced when the Iraqi youth, with the help of their Hasidic schoolteacher named Zalman, attempt to put on a play about Hasidic Jews. At first, Masul refuses to play the part of the rabbi unless he is allowed to wear Kurdish harem pants. When the play becomes a fiasco because of the ludicrousness of the Iraqis attempting to play Hasidic Jews, Masul suggests that the Iraqis write a new play; he insists that they write it in Arabic. When that performance too fails—this time because no one came to watch it—Masul once again saves the day with his suggestion that they have a *hafla*, a typical Arab party, instead. Throughout this debacle, Masul continually rejects the encroachment of Israeli customs upon his Iraqi identity:

> As soon as [Zalman, their Hasidic teacher] dressed [Masul] in the rabbi's clothes he said 'Look!' and began giving him a demonstration of how an authentic rabbi, a dynastic *rebbe* with a court of Hasids, moved and sang and danced and talked. This presented no problems for Zalman: his own father was an Hasidic rabbi from Galicia. In his enthusiasm the director did not notice the expression on the face of his actor, and he was overcome with astonishment when he woke from his trance of his dancing and singing, and opened his eyes to the sight of Masul standing in front of him in nothing but his underpants. This time, I was sure, he really would give up the ghost. Especially when Masul opened his mouth and said:
> 'Zalman, you're terrific. You play the rabbi. Do you think I'm crazy? Ten minutes in that get-up and I'll die of the heat. You want to send Masul back to his parents in a coffin? If you agree to let me wear Kurdish harem pants maybe I'll agree to play the rabbi.'
> 'It'll be all right, Masul, you'll see. You'll be a great rabbi. Great, I'm telling you. It's the chance of your life,' coaxed Zalman.
> 'Only in harem pants.'
> 'Impossible.'
> Masul stood his ground. 'When I look for a Kurdish rabbi, you won't get the part,' he flung at Zalman and walked out.[191]

Ostensibly, Masul refuses to play the rabbi because it is too hot to wear the costume of a Hasidic Jew, but upon closer inspection it becomes clear that Zalman's insistence is not only on the costume itself, but on this specific practice of Judaism as the correct practice. Zalman "began

[191] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 109-110.

giving him a demonstration of how an authentic rabbi . . . moved and sang and danced and talked." If an authentic rabbi moves and talks like a Hasidic rabbi, then the Judaism of the Iraqis, who cannot even portray Hasidic Jews without being laughed offstage for the preposterousness of their portrayal, would somehow be inaccurate. As Masul points out, though, Zalman's type of Judaism is only one type of Judaism, and if it were the Iraqis' Jewish practice being depicted onstage, Zalman would be just as inappropriate an actor.

When it is suggested that his religion (which is part of his identity) is somehow wrong, Masul becomes increasingly stubborn in his refusal to surrender that identity in any way. Following the first failed performance, Masul becomes even more stubborn in his insistence on not only maintaining but flaunting their different, but equally Jewish, identity:

> Masul was the hero of the hour. We were ashamed to look him in the eye, and he said: 'Let's put on a play of our own. You,' he turned to me, 'get me a lute. You're on the committee, aren't you?'
> . . . 'Not just a lute. We need a whole performance, a play in Arabic,' continued [Masul].
> '*Yallah*, we'll write it together,' I agreed. Sonia [their counselor], whose presence we had not been aware of, intervened:
> 'A wonderful idea,' she said, 'but why not in Hebrew? Your Hebrew is very good already.'
> 'In Arabic,' said Masul, very firmly.
> . . . That same night we sat down and wrote a play about a young Jew from Basra, a member of the Zionist underground.[192]

He insists on writing a play that, rather than portraying the historical story of Ashkenazi Jewry, depicts Iraqi Jews as Zionists in Iraq. Though it might seem that Masul chooses this narrative in an attempt to prove Iraqi Jews as Jewish and as Zionist as the kibbutz members, he also demands that the play be written in Arabic. Rather than asserting their own history as equal to that of European Jewry, by insisting that they perform the play in their native language, Masul is instead asserting their culture as equal to that of the Ashkenazi kibbutz members. (As he points out, the

[192] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 111.

Ashkenazi members of the kibbutz still speak in Yiddish, so why should the Iraqis speak solely in Hebrew? Is Arabic, and by extension their Arab culture, inferior to Yiddish and Ashkenazi culture?) And indeed, his second suggestion of the *hafla* reminds even the Iraqis of the importance of their cultural identity. As Masul prepares to the play the lute for his peers, he calls another Iraqi boy, Yigal, to the stage to accompany him on an Arab drum. "Yigal must have been ashamed of [the drum] and kept it hidden away, and now Masul's initiative had brought it out of hiding."[193] Masul's insistence on the legitimacy and pride in their Iraqi identity reaffirms that collective identity, which had begun to be suppressed in favor of assimilating into the kibbutz. Even Nuri, who wants to assimilate, is carried away by Masul's music:

> I couldn't take my eyes off [Masul's] fingers, his radiant, dreamy face. There was great sadness in his expression, and it seemed to us that he was somewhere very far away, calling us to follow him . . . With flushed faces and dreamy eyes, yearning for a distant and forgotten way of life, we were swept away on the currents of sound.[194]

Masul becomes emblematic of the persistence of Iraqi identity: by proclaiming his unwillingness to renounce it, he causes the other Iraqis to remember it with the fresh pain and happiness that remembering brings.

And throughout the novel, Masul continues to assert his Iraqi identity in a variety of ways. When the Iraqis visit the school of the native kibbutz children—called the "regional school"[195]—the native Israelis are playing a musical quiz game. The two kibbutz youth groups compete with one another to name pieces of classical Western music, which the Iraqis have never heard. To Nuri's shock and shame, Masul leaves in the middle of the musical quiz,

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[193] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 114.
[194] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 114, 115.
[195] Amir, *Scapegoat*,

"treat[ing] them with the contempt they deserved."[196] While Nuri is impressed by Dolek's, one of the kibbutz founders, achievements in the field of manure, Masul remains unimpressed. He is not swayed by the degrees Dolek has earned, the books he has written, nor the conferences at which he's invited to speak. He does not absorb the pastoral or socialist ambitions of the kibbutz, but remains committed to the dream he had in Iraq of becoming a lawyer, a white collar profession that the kibbutz workers like Dolek rail against. Nor is he convinced by the kibbutz ideals of breaking down the family structure, instead asking, "'Why don't they ever talk about loyalty to your family instead of rebellion against your parents? Why revolution, not tradition?'"[197] Masul's protests against the kibbutz identity encompass multiple tensions felt by the Iraqis: between Ashkenazi-Sabra and Mizrahi culture (in his protest of the European-skewed music quiz and his assertion of Arab language and the *haflas)*, communal living and traditional familial structure (in his inability to understand the kibbutz desire for the Iraqis to rebel against their parents), and secularism and religious values (in his objection to the play about Hasidic Jewry). Masul does not see the appeal of the kibbutz way of life: they espouse equality, but he sees a large disparity between his Iraqi youth group and that of the regional kibbutz youth groups. Not finding the kibbutz a convincing alternative, he is loyal to the identity and traditions with which he grew up.

On the other end of the spectrum is Nilly, who tramples Iraqi identity and custom in her ambition to embrace Israeli identity. Although Nilly is often the revolutionary of the Iraqi group—she was the first to try to emulate the native Sabra youth, and always seemed fascinated

[196] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 125.
[197] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 144.

by Ashkenazi culture[198]—she arrived at the kibbutz as traditional and modest as were all the Iraqi girls. (They had come to the liberal, secular, communal kibbutz wearing long skirts and constantly separating themselves from the Iraqi boys.) At the beginning of their time on the kibbutz, when one of the Iraqi boys tries to kiss Nilly on the cheek, she calls him a pig and "push[es] him away and run[s] off like a frightened cat."[199] Despite her initial modesty, throughout the narrative Nilly fashions herself (both literally, as in her sartorial choices, and figuratively, as in her actions and her attitude) to be like the native Sabra girls.

Nilly's transformation begins with her desire to adopt the short pants that, though fashionable among the regional girls, are quite risqué when compared to the skirts that the Iraqi girls are used to wearing. In that endeavor, she enlists the help of her parents, writing to her mother to, "'Please buy me a pair of short, blue bloomers, with elastic at the bottom—they'll know what I meant in the shop. All the girls have got them except me,' she lied."[200] Though her mother does not exactly comply with Nilly's request—instead of the scandalous shorts, Nilly is sent "a pair of long, wide, blue trousers" that she then shortens to her liking[201]-—Nilly does not try to hide her desire for the immodest shorts from her parents. Her lie that "all the girls have got them except me" reveals her anticipation of her parents' reluctance to buy her such an indelicate item of clothing (in fact her mother had to eventually buy them without her father's knowledge), but she does not feel the need to hide her desire for the shorts from her parents. Though they will surely think them indecent, Nilly does not yet think her behavior is brazen enough to warrant secrecy.

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[198] When the group first learned about Hasidic Jewish culture, Nilly decided to decorate the Iraqi youth's clubhouse as "an Hasidic clubhouse!" It was this enthusiasm that inspired their teacher Zalman to mount the play about Hasidic Jews, which eventually failed. Amir, *Scapegoat*, 109.
[199] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 82.
[200] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 106.
[201] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 106.

Soon, though, Nilly discovers the motivation to become even more increasingly assimilated into liberal kibbutz society. When Nuri goes back to the regional school for another musical quiz, Nilly, alone out of the Iraqis, accompanies him. There, she meets a kibbutz boy, Zvika, and from then on becomes obsessed with seeming as Israeli as possible. She, who was once so enamored of the group's *haflas*, now interrupts the traditional Arab songs with new Hebrew ones she has learned. She begins to dress even more provocatively, and this time she knows that her changed appearance would provoke a far more extreme reaction from her parents. Nilly is careful not to tell them about her new look:

> Nilly's appearance had changed: A bronzed body, a Russian belt, an embroidered blouse, the old mania for short pants, and a new dream of long plaits. Nilly would cut and shorten her pants until they were the merest strip of cloth barely covering her groin; and as if that weren't enough she would tighten her blouse and pull it down as far as it would go, making her breasts stick out . . . 'A small waist and high breasts, that's the most important thing,' she would say. If her father had seen her he probably would have killed her. Or at least removed her immediately from the kibbutz. When she went home on leave she would wear long skirts and long sleeves; but on the kibbutz she flaunted her body and wagged her backside shamelessly, and the rest of the girls followed suit.[202]

Nilly may never have worn home the shorts that she adjusted from the ones her mother sent her, but she did not think the idea of those shorts so scandalous that she did not ask her parents to get them for her. Here, though, Nuri is unequivocal in his description of what would happen if Nilly's father knew what she was wearing. Furthermore, Nilly's focus is no longer solely on the item of clothing—the shorts—but on the sexualized depiction of herself that her new clothing enhances. "'A small waist and high breasts, that's the most important thing,' she would say." Whereas before she simply wanted an article of clothing to help her assimilate into native kibbutz life, she has now adopted an attitude toward her body that would be antithetical to the modesty of the Iraqi Jewish community. In this passage, Nilly is also like Masul in that she

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[202] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 138.

becomes an example for the other Iraqis to follow. The Iraqi girls, who were at first so shocked and repulsed by the kibbutz women's khaki shorts, follow her and come to embrace the miniscule shorts that are popular among the regional youths.

Surely, in the time between the start of the narrative and her makeover, Nilly must become more aware of her burgeoning adolescent sexuality, but her transformation cannot be attributed only to the process of sexual maturity. In her pursuit of integration, Nilly loses track of her sense of boundaries and decorum—however innocent her relationship to Zvika began, she soon becomes pregnant. As she tells Nuri, "'I thought that all the 'regional' girls did it,' she whimpered, pressing herself against the wall as if she wanted to disappear into it."[203] Nilly insists that she loves Zvika, but the fact that she thought sex was the expected and standard behavior of the regional girls reveals that in her haste to be like them, she allowed herself to be lost.

Nuri, for his part, warned Nilly about the impossibility of erasing a part of herself from the start of her love affair with the idea of the regionals. She imagines that she can be just like them, but Nuri knows better:

> And indeed, she would have been a perfect copy of her models [the regionals] but for the two little holes which her mother had pierced in the lobes of her ears when she was a child. 'In another month or two nobody will see them either,' she told me. 'By then my hair will have grown long enough to hide them.'
> 'You'll hide them, but you'll always know they're there.'[204]

Nilly attempts to suppress her original, Iraqi identity, thinking that if she inhabits the role and appearance of the regional girls—if she acts like them and dresses like them—than she will able to fool herself as well as others into thinking that her assumed identity is her true one. But Nuri knows that no matter how much she "hide[s]" her Iraqiness with the trappings of kibbutz life, she will never truly be able to obscure her otherness from herself.

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[203] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 151.
[204] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 139.

Indeed, even though she does marry Zvika and remain on the kibbutz with him, their child becomes a reminder of her Iraqi heritage. When Sonia and Nuri go to the *ma'abara* and tell Nilly's parents about her pregnancy and impending marriage, her father tears his clothes and begins to sit shivah for Nilly as though she has died. Only when Zvika agreed to name the Omer Avraham, after Nilly's grandfather, does her father stop mourning for her. So even though she becomes as integrated into the kibbutz as she is able—marrying a kibbutz boy and becoming the mother of a true Sabra—her child's name carries the legacy of her Iraqi heritage.

The *Kibbutzniks*[205]

The Iraqis aren't the only characters in the novel who present alternative visions of how to assimilate into kibbutz society. The members of the kibbutz contribute to the wide array of opinions in the narrative; like those of Nilly and Masul, the kibbutz members' notions of assimilation affect Nuri's own process of assimilation and add to his confusion. Throughout the course of the narrative, Nuri befriends two of the founders of the kibbutz, Dolek and Sonia, who believe that the Iraqis should subscribe to their Zionist and socialist beliefs and rebel against traditional familial and religious structures and against their original culture. Dolek and Sonia believe that the Iraqis need to do as they, the pioneer generation of Jewish immigrants, did when they left their homes to establish a new society and identity. Sonia, in particular, explicitly pressures Nuri to lead the Iraqis in their own form of the Zionist rebellion, in which she imagines the Iraqis will choose the secular, communal values of the kibbutz over the traditional lives of their families on the *ma'abarot*.

[205] *Kibbutznik* is an Israeli term used to describe a person who lives on a kibbutz. *Kibbutznik* is an identity as well as a description of one's home.

Nuri meets Dolek when he volunteers—because none of other Iraqis will—to work shoveling manure in the cowshed. Dolek, who runs the cowshed, left his family, livelihood, and girlfriend in Eastern Europe when he immigrated to Palestine in the hopes of forming a new Jewish identity. His immigration was prompted by a particularly shocking display of anti-Semitism that he witnessed in his native Poland:

> He was traveling in a train when he saw some Polish thugs shaving off a rabbi's beard with a razor. The rabbi's skin was torn off his face and his beard dripped blood. Dolek never forgave himself for not going to the rescue of the rabbi. 'What could I do,' he muttered now, between the heaps of manure. 'The train was full of goyim.'[206]

To Dolek, what was most disturbing about the incident was his own helplessness. Even years later, he "never forgave himself for not going to the rescue of the rabbi." In a train he perceived to be full of hostile "goyim," or non-Jews, he felt that he would have put himself in great danger had he helped the rabbi. It is unclear whether or not he was already identifiable on the train as a Jew, but regardless, his own Jewishness made him as easy a target as the rabbi was, and his safety was at the mercy of the train's passengers.

Though Dolek had long been planning to immigrate to Palestine, this incident was the catalyst for his immediate immigration. It seems that his immigration was motivated not only by a desire to be away from anti-Semitism, but also to help form a society that was self-reliant in a way that the European Jewish community could never be. To Dolek, the European Jewish community was ultimately one of outsiders relying on the good will of the population among whom they lived. He set out to create a Jewish society, and a Jewish identity, in which the Jews would be dependent on no one but themselves. He "formulated, together with others, theses on

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[206] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 140.

communal life and socialism, collectivism and equality in our times."[207] Though he had been a chemistry student in Warsaw, he became devoted to the benefits of physical labor, developing a theory about the need to "overturn the inverted pyramid . . . of the Jewish people: [by] convert[ing] it into a nation of workers."[208] The "inverted pyramid" of which he speaks is the amount of Jews in various professions—while the majority of Jews in Europe at the time strove to be professionals, Dolek thinks that the pyramid of professions should be reshuffled so that the majority of Jews are "workers." In Palestine, he becomes a leader of this movement that glorifies physical labor, independence, and new Jewish way of life:

> For months he had laboured with his comrades to drain the deadly swamps and clear the fields of stones, struggled with malaria and other diseases, and most of all with himself, the most exhausting battle of all, the battle to create a new Jew, to transform himself, his habits and desires. He had struggled against temptations and weaknesses of body and soul and survived with the nucleus which had remained here, in Kiryat-Oranim.[209]

> 'Look here, my boy . . . we came to Eretz-Israel to redeem the land. We wanted to sacrifice something for it . . . We had then, and we still have to this day, one great wish: to build the land, to be simple workers, good workers, first-class farmers. That was our aim and aspiration, and it should be yours too . . . All work brings respect to the person who does it! . . . Work is the cure for the diseases of the diaspora.'[210]

Dolek thinks it important for the future of Jewish identity that Jews do their own physical labor as a means of self-sufficiency rather than entering the professional world. He "laboured with his comrades" and "struggled against the temptations and weakness of body and soul" as a "cure for the diseases of the diaspora." He sees his new Jewish society, in which physical labor is valued, as producing a new type of Jew. This new Jew would be free from the weakness and subservience that characterized the Diaspora Jew; the new Jew would never be in a position in

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[207] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 142.
[208] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 65.
[209] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 142.
[210] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 143.

which he could be harassed like the rabbi on the train, nor one in which he would feel helpless in the face of such abuse. The importance of physical labor is not only that it is an better alternative to professional jobs, but also that it is a shift away from a weak, dependent identity—in which one is susceptible to prejudice and harassment—to one of self-reliance and strength. By creating a new society, Dolek would never again have to endure the shame or pain of being a tolerated outsider. With his new independent identity and within the society he created, he would be protected from the harassment and prejudice that he had faced in the Diaspora.

Dolek and Sonia believe that the choices they made—to leave their homes and establish a new Jewish identity and society in Palestine—were correct, and they hope that the Iraqis will make similar choices regarding their own futures. Sonia, in particular, pressures Nuri to realize her dream for him and the Iraqis by renouncing his past in favor of the socialist and Zionist ideals of the kibbutz. She is very demanding of Nuri, but he does not seem to mind her high expectations of him. Instead, he understands that her wish for them is motivated by her conviction that communal Zionism (as realized by kibbutz society) is the best future for the Iraqis:

> From the day she arrived in Ahuza and selected us from the boy market, we occupied all her thoughts . . . She wanted to change us: she forbade us to speak Arabic, concealed her revulsion for Masul's *haflas* with difficulty, and sent us home on vacation unwillingly. 'The *ma'abara* unsettles you, undermines your progress.' She thought we were like her, committed pioneers, in her form and image, and that if only we would burn our bridges behind us, as she herself had done, we would march in her footsteps and realize her collective dream for us . . . She insisted on calling me Nimrod, which means in Hebrew, 'We will rebel', and she wanted us all to rebel and break our chains, even at the cost of tearing our families apart, and begin everything again from the beginning, just as she had done.[211]

[211] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 204, 205.

Sonia asks that the Iraqis "rebel and break our chains, even at the cost of tearing our families apart," but it is not a malicious wish. On the contrary, Sonia thinks that this break with their past is the best way for the Iraqis to proceed into the future; she believes that they must cut the ties that bind them to their original homes and cultures in order to be fully immersed in Zionist culture. This conviction, of course, stems from her own experience—as a Zionist pioneer in Palestine, she left her family and her society behind, and then successfully formed a new society and identity in Palestine. Despite her good intentions, though, inherent in Sonia's dream for the Iraqis is the implication that their original culture and identity are inferior to the society and identity which she helped create and which she wants them to emulate: Israeli-Zionist-kibbutz society and the EuroSabra identity. It isn't surprising that Sonia believes the society and identity that she helped found and create are ideal, but the fact that "she wanted [the Iraqis] to change" implies that they aren't good enough as they are.

Sonia is not the only kibbutz member to express this sentiment; in fact, she is much more accepting of the Iraqis than much of the kibbutz. When they first arrive at Kiryat-Oranim, they are welcomed with racist, insensitive remarks by one *kibbutznik*, who calls them "animals," "savages," "primitive," and, as though this one word encompassed all the others, "Asiatic."[212] Their house mother treats them as though they are uncivilized—checking to make sure that they wear pajamas to bed—and delinquent—constantly watching them to ensure that they aren't stealing anything from the kibbutz. These early interactions with the *kibbutzniks* instill in the Iraqis a sense of shame and inferiority. When they are first given their clothes, they do not realize that some of the clothes are meant specifically for work, and others for rest. Some of the kibbutz members condescendingly discuss their apparel choices, shaming the boys:

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[212] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 41, 47, 48.

> 'Look how they're dressed,' he said to her. We couldn't understand what he was getting at. The boys jumping from the roof were wearing grey vests and underpants.
> 'Savages! That's your underwear for work, not sports wear!' yelled Ze'evik.
> One by one the jumpers stole back to their rooms with an obscure, humiliating sense of failure.[213]

Because the Iraqis are initially and immediately treated by the established kibbutz members as though they are somehow lesser, the Iraqis come to feel that they must assimilate to the kibbutz society and identity to be seen as equals.

The standard of identity to which the Iraqis are being held is embodied by the native Sabra youth, called in the novel the regional youth, who especially treat the Iraqis as though the Iraqis are beneath them. "They would saunter past us as if we didn't exist."[214] When the Iraqis are first officially introduced to the regional youth group, they are met with unhesitating animosity. Upon being told that the regional youth group and the Iraqi youth group are to have cultural activities together, a regional shouts out, "'There's no basis for any kind of co-operation with them,"[215] and walks out. Indeed, some of the regional youth do collaborate in cultural activities with the Iraqis, but it is not a true collaboration. All cultural activities in which the two groups participate together are European or Sabra cultural activities, and when the Iraqi group mounts their own cultural activities, like the *haflas*, the regional youth do not deign to attend. The regional youth, and by extension the entire kibbutz, are not interested in learning about the Iraqis' original culture; like Sonia, they merely want to mold the Iraqis into a version of themselves:

> Their efforts to teach us how to behave, what to sing, how to dance, what to read and how to be different from what we were imposed a strain on us and on them. They tried to provide us with ready-made identities, which we were supposed to

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[213] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 47.
[214] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 69.
[215] Amir, *Scapegoat,* 70.

> put on like a new suit of clothes in order to be like them. We had, indeed, shed our old clothes, but the new ones were too new, as uncomfortable as brand new shoes.[216]

Ultimately, this imposition of the Ashkenazi-Sabra identity onto the Iraqi youth causes "a strain" on all parties involved, although it seems more damaging to the Iraqis. Because the regional youth are both the Iraqis' contemporaries and the embodiment of the Sabra-kibbutz identity, they emphasize the disparities between the Iraqis' identities and culture and that of the Sabra youth. The Iraqis are compared (and compare themselves) to their Sabra contemporaries; this comparison is bound to reflect poorly on the Iraqis, who weren't raised with the Zionist and socialist values of the kibbutz and haven't yet (and perhaps never will be) fully assimilated to the dominant culture. The Iraqis come to possess confused identities, torn between their old ones, which are now considered sub-standard, and the new ones they are supposed to inhabit, which are too foreign to be genuine.

Nuri's Own Complicated Process of Assimilation

In the time Nuri spends on the kibbutz, he begins to assimilate into the kibbutz society and conform to the kibbutz identity. Nuri notices the changes in himself, and isn't sure how to feel about them. He is being pressured—explicitly and implicitly—by the *kibbutzniks* to renounce his old identity in favor of that of the kibbutz, while simultaneously watching and admiring Masul's assertion of his Iraqi identity. He is not sure how or how much he should be assimilating into the kibbutz, a dilemma that is first expressed in his conflicted attitude about his work in the cowshed with Dolek:

> 'Your friends work like a herd in the vegetable garden and the orchards, the supervisors don't even know their names, but with me you're like an only son.'

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[216] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 72.

> This gave me a good feeling, as if I was part of him [Dolek] and of the kibbutz, but when he told me that I should be proud of being a manure-man I would lower my eyes in embarrassment. I understood by now that the work was necessary – but what was there to be proud of? Wasn't it enough that I had lied to my father? 'I'm a mechanic, working in the garage,' I wrote to him. What should I have written? That I was an assistant manure-man? He wouldn't have understood, just as I sometimes didn't understand myself when I got up at dawn every day, occasionally skipping the laying of *tefillin* and feeling a frightening empty void opening up inside me, simply in order to arrive on time for my stinking, dirty job.[217]

> The changes were evident in everything, at every hour of the day, and in the busy schedule which filled the time. In the evening, when I was alone, I could not help but think of little Nuri in Baghdad, riding to school every morning on his bicycle with the broken lamp, his satchel on his back, dreaming great dreams about a sign that read: 'Doctor Nuri, Specialist in Childhood Diseases'.
> The future doctor stomped through the muck of the cowshed in his big rubber boots. Although in the secret places of my heart I was proud of my swelling muscles, I had not abandoned that dream and rebellious thoughts would often stir in me.[218]

As displayed in the passages above, the tension between Nuri's old and new identities is borne of several conflicts: the upheaval of familial and religious structures that once guided his life; his desire to please Dolek, and by extension the kibbutz in general; and the tension between his old professional aspirations and the new work ethic he has been taught in the kibbutz. Complicating his confusion, these conflicts are not unrelated to one another, but each contributes to and informs one another. For example, his relationship to Dolek, who calls him an "only son," is confusing for Nuri because it creates comparisons between Dolek and his father. And while those comparisons may have at one time been favorable for his father, in Israeli society it is his father who is bereft, unable to reconcile his professional skills to the society that does not value them. As Nancy Berg writes, "The Iraqi Jewish family as a unit was losing its prestige in this

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[217] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 67.
[218] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 91.

culture that favored the individual and the nation."[219] The father's role, specifically, was lost once Mizrahim immigrated to Israel:

> The father, the traditional head of the household in Iraq, could no longer fulfill the role. He lost the status that he held in Iraqi society and his ability to provide for the family; therefore he also lost his standing within the family. Economics plays a large part in the disintegration of the family. In many cases the adolescent replaced the father, assuming the role of the head of the household (in whole or in part) in an uncomfortable realization of a common fantasy.[220]

At this point in the novel, Nuri has not yet become his family's primary source of income, but he has surely surpassed his father in cultural assimilation and comfortableness. Nuri has also assumed the typically patriarchal role as the most knowledgeable: it is he who can navigate Israeli culture, while his father is nearly impotent at home, unable even to get a local café to admit him.

And yet, Nuri is unable to escape the need for his father's approval. His desire to have "a sign that read[s]: 'Doctor Nuri, Specialist in Childhood Diseases'" is certainly his own, but it must be in some part motivated by familial expectations.[221] He knows that his father would disapprove of his job as in the cowshed, and purposefully (and ashamedly) lies to him about it. He wants his father to think that he is performing honorable work, such as would garner his father's approval, and cannot relinquish his original dream of the kind of highly professional work that would have been respected by his father and the Iraqi community at large.

Just as Nuri is unsure about the place of his father and of work in his life, so too is he uncertain about the role of religion in his life. Israeli society is by definition Jewish, but actual religious practice is deemed unimportant on the kibbutz, and Nuri begins "occasionally skipping

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[219] Berg, *Exile from Exile*, 75.
[220] Berg, *Exile from Exile*, 75.
[221] As noted by Nissim Rejwan, one of the legacies of the Babylonian Jewish community was its emphasis on education and knowledge. Rejwan, *Jews of Iraq*, 40-41, 153.

the laying of *tefillin* and feeling a frightening empty void opening up inside me, simply in order to arrive on time for my stinking, dirty job." He sacrifices his religious practice for the religion of the kibbutz—the work-centric, communal ideals of the "Ineffable" kibbutz movement[222]—but does not feel so at ease with the lack of religion as do the native kibbutz members. The lack of religious strictures, which guided Jewish life in Iraq, makes him feel "a frightening empty void opening up inside me." Despite that void, his religion becomes progressively less significant to his everyday life, a fact which is mirrored by his less frequent comments about religion in his narration. It is not until he goes to the nearby *ma'abara* as a leader of the youth movement that the extent of his break with religion is evident.

That return to the *ma'abara* (although not the *ma'abara* where his family lives) is not exactly voluntary. He is asked by the kibbutz movement to go represent them in the nearby *ma'abara*, and to try to recruit youths there to join or participate in the movement. As is typical for him, Nuri acquiesces to this request because Sonia asks him to do so, but his increased involvement with the movement does not have the effect that Sonia intended. Sonia seems to believe that if Nuri becomes more active in the youth movement on the kibbutz, then he will absorb their values even more than he already has. In actuality, his return to the *ma'abara* reminds him of his cultural roots; once he is there, he realizes that he relates to the Mizrahim on the *ma'abara* in a way that he will never relate to the kibbutz members, and that the kibbutz will never truly be his.

It is odd that Nuri's experiences representing the kibbutz on the *ma'abara* eventually cause him to reject the kibbutz in favor of the *ma'abara*, for he does not feel fully comfortable in

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[222] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 160.

the *ma'abara* or among its people. At the end of an informational session about the youth movement, a group of people from the *ma'abara* crowds him, making him uneasy:

> I felt suffocated by their strange smell and heavy breath . . . When we left the *ma'abara* behind us and began walking though the maize fields which stretched out on either side of the road, I breathed a sigh of relief. I pulled my shirt out of my trousers, wiped my face and hair, and breathed deeply. The country air filled my lungs.[223]

It is not just the closeness or amount of people surrounding him that makes Nuri uncomfortable, but the unfamiliarity of them, "their strange smell and heavy breath." Though the people who crowd him are akin to those with whom he grew up (and indeed some of them are the people around whom he grew up), it is not until he is back in a pastoral setting, similar to that of the kibbutz, that he once again can breathe easily. Just as he is uncomfortable with his transitional identity, so too is Nuri uncomfortable in the transitional space of the *ma'abara*.

Still, there are elements of familial and religious structures there that are familiar and comforting to him. Salima, his old neighbor from Baghdad, makes him Iraqi *pitta* and tea. He is invited to visit a rabbi's table in the *ma'abara*, and "it was a far cry from the sanctity and dignity of the room of my grandfather, the rabbi, in Baghdad, but nevertheless I felt a sense of reverence."[224] And, of course, it is there that he can once again speak in his native language, Arabic. What might be most important, though, is not his familiarity with the *ma'abara*, but their familiarity with him. Unlike the kibbutz members, who will never truly think of him as belonging to their clan, the people on the *ma'abara* immediately trust him as "one of us."[225] And though he no longer feels fully at home among these people, he takes responsibility for them, promising to respect their traditions when forming youth groups from the children of the

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[223] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 170.
[224] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 176.
[225] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 170.

ma'abara. To the dismay of the native kibbutz leadership, he promises that there will be two youth groups—one for boys and one for girls—and insists that the parents from the *ma'abara* be included in all facets of the formation of the youth groups. He fights with the kibbutz leadership to enable the *ma'abara* community to retain their religious and familial structures even while being included on the kibbutz.

This small rebellion is not unusual for Nuri. Despite his desire to assimilate into kibbutz society and his tendency to give in to the demands of the kibbutz, he has never allowed Sonia, Yishai or kibbutz to trample his original identity. He refuses to allow the counselors to call him by the Hebrew name that they give him (ironically, this name, Nimrod, means "we will rebel"), asks them on the behalf of the whole Iraqi group for increased visits to the *ma'abarot* where their parents live, and ultimately refuses their greatest hope for him: that he follow in their footsteps and break with his past by establishing his own kibbutz in he Negev. Unlike Nilly, Nuri has not allowed the influence of the kibbutz to overwhelm or overrun his Iraqi identity. But neither has he tried to entirely prevent Israel from infiltrating it like Masul. He has respected his former identity while still allowing the kibbutz to influence his changing identity.

Nuri's Confused Identity and Ambiguous Conception of Home

Throughout the novel, Nuri questions how and how much to assimilate to the kibbutz society. Certainly, his confusion stems from the conflict between his desire to integrate and his resistance to eradicate his old identity completely, but his questions of identity are also related to his ambiguous conception of home. Nuri left his first home, Baghdad, and is not preoccupied with the thought of returning—perhaps because he knows that to be an impossibility—but the kibbutz has not replaced Baghdad as his home. To be sure, the kibbutz is the homiest place that he has

lived since leaving Baghdad—it is the first place where he has again had his own things and his own physical space—but on the kibbutz he will ultimately always be seen as outsider. Nuri is stuck in a liminal space—he has no real home and a very confused, partially integrated identity—that mirrors the transitivity of the *ma'abara*, which is, by definition, a transit camp. As is fitting, then, it is when Nuri visits the nearby *ma'abara* that the relationship between his conception of home and his sense of identity is explicated. When he left Baghdad, he left the only home he'd ever known. The kibbutz cannot be his home because he can never integrate into that community, but also because his family and community, who contribute greatly to his identity, are not on the kibbutz. They are in the *ma'abara*, but his visit proved that he does belong there either.

Although he does not feel fully at home there, his experience on the *ma'abara* reminds him that the people there are his people, and that he cannot abandon them. Doing so would be akin to abandoning himself. Therein lies the true difference between his transformation and that of Zionist pioneers like Sonia and Dolek: Nuri may not feel fully comfortable on the *ma'abara* or in his old Iraqi identity, but he is still part of that community. He cannot forsake his family nor his community on the *ma'abara* as the founders of the kibbutz left their families in Eastern Europe. He immigrated to Israel out of a certain necessity, not solely for an ideology. He cannot commit himself so wholly to that ideology at the expense of his family and entire heritage. As he tells Sonia about his conflicted identity:

> The difference is that I didn't come here on my own, like you, like Dolek and Faivush. I came here with my family and relations and friends, all of Jewish Baghdad moved out here, and now it's in the *ma'abarot*. Which makes it harder to burn our bridges. You've built a society founded on individuals, because you came here alone. I belong to a clan. But to tell you the truth: I don't belong to the

> clan any more either. I don't know who I am any more. I'm always running between the hilltop where the "regionals" are and the *ma'abara*.[226]

Because Nuri has developed a close relationship to Dolek and Sonia, he is able to understand the genuine (if ignorant) goodwill behind their belief that the Iraqis should adopt the same "aim and aspiration" of the kibbutz founders, of breaking with their traditional values in favor of a new identity. And while Nuri's understanding of their motivations, coupled with his own desire to assimilate, initially confuse Nuri, it is this same understanding that eventually allows him to locate and define the key difference between Dolek and Sonia's experience and his own. While the Ashkenazi Zionists who founded Israeli kibbutzim chose to leave their families and attempt to establish a new society, the Iraqi youth living on Kiryat-Oranim never chose to leave their families nor their way of life behind them. In coming to Jewish state, then, they did not imagine that they would be asked to relinquish their devout Jewish practice, nor any facet of their identities. As Hannan Hever points out, even the geographical transition from Baghdad to Israel was not perceived as distinct and definitive a move as that from Europe to Israel:

> Therefore, from the viewpoint of the Zionist hegemony, the movement of the Mizrahi—which takes place inside a **spatial continuity** that never necessitates a symbolic crossing of a maritime spatial expanse, which would be a symbolic division between past and future, i.e., between the Exilic and the Zionist stories—does not involve a clean-cut break and transition from one experiential state to another, as required by the hegemonic Ashkenazi Zionist story.[227]

When Dolek and Sonia moved to Israel, they imagined themselves crossing a boundary between diaspora and home, and the power of that boundary was such that they were able to redefine their identities. They had gone from the old world to the new, and were prepared to adjust their lives accordingly. The Iraqis, though, did not perceive such a radical division between their countries

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[226] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 199-200.
[227] Hannan Hever, "We Have Not Arrived from the Sea: A Mizrahi Literary Geography," Social Identities 10.1 (2004): 31-51.

of origin and Israel; the subsequent realization of the enormous disparity between the two resulted in a confused and fragmented identity.

Nuri and the other Iraqis are stuck in a transitory space. And though Nuri does ultimately return to his family on the *ma'abara*, choosing traditional familial values over "the ideal of 'self-realization,'"[228] he does not quite belong with them either. Trapped between two cultures and two parts of his identity, Nuri becomes like the novel's titular sacrifice. The English translation of the title is "scapegoat," but the original Hebrew, תרנגול כפרות (*Tarnegol Kapurot)*, refers to the Jewish tradition of symbolically transferring one's sins to a rooster and using it to atone for one's sin one the eve of Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement.

At the end of the novel, which happens to be two days before the Day of Atonement, Nuri brings a butchered rooster home to his family when he returns to the *ma'abara* for good. Just as his mother is wondering where they will find "a fowl for atonement,"[229] Nuri shows her the one he has brought. At first the family is delighted, but his mother soon realizes that the chicken was not slaughtered according to the Jewish laws of *kashrut.* His parents throw away the chicken. Of course, it speaks to Nuri's assimilation in kibbutz society that he did not even consider the traditional Jewish laws when bringing home food for his family, but more important is the significance of the chicken itself. Nuri brought it home right as they needed it, and though it came from a Jewish space, it was unfit for religious use or eating under religious law. So too is Nuri unfit for life in the traditional culture of the *ma'abara*; he may have chosen life there instead of life in the kibbutz, but he no longer belongs there. His appreciation for the traditional life of Iraqi Jewry has been sullied by his time on the kibbutz; though, like the chicken, he came to the *ma'abara* from a Jewish space, he is not properly Jewish enough for the *ma'abara.* For

[228] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 206.
[229] Amir, *Scapegoat*, 212.

while he has retained some parts of his Iraqi identity and assumed some parts of Israeli identity, he is not able to call any place his home: in Baghdad he is the enemy, on the kibbutz he is an outsider, and in the *ma'abara* he is too assimilated to be comfortable. For the time being, Nuri is left homeless.

Conclusion: The Imaginary Space of Home

The two novels analyzed in this work, *The Dove Flyer* and *Scapegoat*, are not exactly one continuous narrative. They do not share a narrator, protagonist, or even a narrative style. The two books were written eight years apart, and, though the novels' protagonists are brothers, there are inconsistencies between the descriptions of the Imari family in the novels. When read as a continuum, though, the novels tell of the greater Iraqi narrative, from life in Baghdad to assimilation into Israeli society. Together, the novels form a more complete picture of the Iraqi Jewish community: who they were in Baghdad, and how they changed in Israel.

Because of the large scope of history covered by the novels, I found it helpful to conduct more thorough historical research than is usually done in literary analyses. The greater understanding of the history of Jews in Iraq helped me to understand and explicate the communal mindset of the Iraqi Jewish community in *The Dove Flyer*. So too did the extensive explanation of the process of the formation of Israeli identity help me to recognize the enormity of the identity transformation asked of the Mizrahim in *Scapegoat*.

Many scholars argue that the immigration to Israel—largely propelled by the Israeli and Iraqi governments rather than truly sought after by the entire Iraqi Jewish community—and the subsequent suppression of the immigrant's Arab identity by Israeli society created a condition of exile for these Iraqi, and also the larger community of Mizrahi, immigrants. This supposed exile is seen in ironic contrast to the claim that Israel is the Jewish homeland. In these novels, though, it is not so easy to label either Iraq or Israel as home or as exile. Both places are depicted as being deficit in some way that prevents the novel's protagonist from conceiving of that place as home, but neither place is isolating enough to be called exile, either. And while each novel might

present its own view of home, when the two novels are read as a continuum, the experiences of each protagonist in their residence nullifies the hopes the other may have had about that location as home.

In *The Dove Flyer*, Kabi's Judaism renders him vulnerable in some part of Baghdad, and subsequently deeply afraid of those parts of the city; despite his deep love of the city, he will therefore never be able to truly claim the city as his own. Throughout the narrative, Kabi begins to increasingly look to Israel as his potential home. He does not think that he will forget Baghdad, but he imagines that Israel will be the place in which his Jewish and Arab identities can be integrated. Nuri's experiences in *Scapegoat*, though, prove that hope to be unfortunately false. Nuri becomes increasingly integrated into the kibbutz (and by extension, greater Israeli) society, but because he is unable erase his original identity and assimilate fully into Israeli society, he cannot claim Israel as his. And while he may remember Baghdad as the home of his childhood, where he had a unified identity and conception of home because he only knew one identity and one home, Kabi's depiction of the city as frightening belie Nuri's nostalgic romanticism of Baghdad. So the experience of each protagonist renders the others' residence untenable as home; each place that could potentially be home is invalidated by the characters' minority status and subsequent marginalization in that place: Kabi as a Jew in Baghdad, and Nuri as an Arab in Israel. Together, then, the novels depict characters plagued by homelessness. The only home left to them, then, would be one that is imagined.

This idea of home as an imagined concept can perhaps be best explicated by Benedict Anderson's theory of the nation as an imagined space.[230] Anderson's theory says that the concept of a nation is an imagined concept in part because the union of citizens of a nation is an imagined

[230] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

union; though two citizens of the same country may have never met, they share the same conception of national belonging. The imagined home in these novels is distinguished by its lack of others; Kabi and Nuri are isolated from their friends, family and peers by their otherness and their unique confusion. Though their peers may be experiencing similar confusion, both Kabi and Nuri are confused in a way that is singular to them, and therefore experience home as a concept that is also singular unto them. Because they can't conceive of either Israel or Baghdad as home, they have no national homeland and no conception of collective belonging. Home in these novels is an imagined space that is unique unto the two protagonists.

The depiction of the protagonists as homeless is corroborated by certain symbols implicit in the novels, particularly the symbolism inherent in their titles. The titular character in *The Dove Flyer*, a man of that profession named Abu Edouard, is quite marginal to the main narrative of the novel, particularly for a character who bears the novel's title. He is Kabi's neighbor who constantly rails against the Jewish state; Abu Edouard wants to stay in Iraq and retain his Iraqi identity and way of life. Dove flyers, though, are defamed in Judaism; the Mishnah bars them from testifying in court,[231] presumably because of the unreliability of a man whose profession necessitates the theft of other dove flyers' doves in order to augment his own flock. Abu Edouard's arguments for life in Iraq, and conversely against Israel, are therefore implicitly invalidated by the author, who calls attention to Abu Edouard's personal unreliability by naming the novel after his occupation. With Abu Edouard's claims of Iraq as the Jews' true home rendered unreliable, the title *The Dove Flyer* therefore insinuates the rejection of Baghdad as the protagonist's home.

[231] Mishnah, Seder Nezikin, 3:3.

The renunciation of Baghdad as home is further implied by the author in the relationship between Hizkel and his namesake, the Biblical prophet Ezekiel. In Ezekiel's Vision of the Dry Bones, Ezekiel is brought to a valley filled with bones, and guided to revive them. The passage explicitly describes the bones as representative of the exiled Jews in Babylon; he prophesies that they will be brought by him to the land of Israel, where God will bring them back to life. Thus the relationship created by the author between the Biblical prophet Ezekiel and Kabi's uncle Hizkel by virtue of their shared name and history likens Hizkel, the Zionist leader, to Ezekiel, who was to help guide the Babylonian Jews back to Israel. Hizkel's Zionist mission is therefore made the fulfillment of that Biblical prophecy.

The title *Scapegoat* also has dual implications: the term (*tarnegol kapurot* in Hebrew) refers to the Yom Kippur rooster which symbolically assumes Jews' sins in place of sacrifice, as well as to the non-Kosher rooster which Nuri brings from the kibbutz to the *ma'abara*. The rooster Nuri brings to the *ma'abara*, which could have been used by his family as the Yom Kippur rooster (he arrives on the *ma'abara* two days before Yom Kippur), is rejected and discarded by his family because it is not Kosher. The fact that the novel is titled for this discarded rooster draws an analogy between the rooster and the novel's main character, Nuri, who is marginalized by Israeli society for his Arab-ness and simultaneously rendered too assimilated for life on the *ma'abara*. Thus, he is "discarded" in both places for the "sins" that, like the Yom Kippur rooster, he has absorbed from the other place.

With neither physical space able to be called home, any conception of home held by the novels' protagonists can only be an imagined one. This imagined home would encompass parts of Iraq and Israel, but would not truly be a part of either. When, in *The Dove Flyer*, Hiyawi dies childless, Kabi's family takes some of his things with them to Israel. One of the items that Kabi

takes is Hiyawi's tattered Book of Psalms. Years later in Israel, Kabi has the book rebound with extra pages in the front where he writes his family tree:

> I recorded all my ancestors as far back as I could remember, writing the name of Shmuel Yosef Yoel Avraham Hiyawi next to that of my grandparents along with the date of his death. No one knew when he was born. And so, though he died alone and childless, he was given a family in the end.[232]

This act of transporting and rewriting history is akin to Kabi's and Nuri's conception of an imagined home. The Book of Psalms is a relic of Kabi's childhood in Baghdad, and by bringing it to Israel and recording in it the names of his ancestors, he brings them to Israel too. But Kabi changes his family history, writing in Hiyawi's name next to his grandparents'. Kabi intends the book to be handed down to his own children, so it is not only his own history that he changes, but that of all future generations of Imaris. Eventually, there will come a generation who does not know that Shmuel Yosef Yoel Avraham Hiyawi was not actually part of the Imari family. Just as Kabi brought the Book of Psalms from Iraq to Israel, and with it, symbolically, his Iraqi ancestry, so too have Kabi and Nuri brought their conception of home with them from Baghdad to Israel, where it too has been altered. Baghdad was not truly home to Kabi, and he hoped that Israel would be, but his idea of Israel was of a place of religious tolerance and inclusion, not unlike the Baghdad of his early youth. Unfortunately, Nuri's experience of Israel is one of exclusivity; he therefore cannot call it home either. Though Nuri doesn't think of Baghdad as his home, his inability to relinquish the traditional religious and familial structures from Baghdad indicate that they remain crucial to his conception of home. So Kabi and Nuri's conception of home is imagined somewhere between the two spaces. It is a distinctly and uniquely Mizrahi space, stuck between their original culture and their new nation, that is separate from both places while being influenced by both as well. The Book of Psalms came from Baghdad, and has

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[232] Amir, *The Dove Flyer,* 465.

brought with it to Israel all the history of Baghdad, but that history has been irrevocably changed to suit Kabi's idea of family; so too are Kabi and Nuri's conception of home influenced by their lives in Baghdad and Israel, but amended to be a place that is truly home to them.

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