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“Funny, You Don’t Look Jewish!: ‘Passing’ and the Elasticity of Ethnic Identity among Levantine Sephardic Immigrants in Early Twentieth Century America”

Aviva Ben-Ur, *University of Massachusetts - Amherst*



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KOLOR

Shedding Light on Darkest Africa: Global Reading for Global Understanding

Patti M. Marxsen
Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Abstract

The more Americans have been called upon to play a responsible role in global society in the wake of 9/11, the more insulated and nationalistic they have become. In order to reverse this dangerous paradox, an effort must be made to promote global citizenship within the American educational system. This article focuses on the rich literary tradition of Africa by outlining major themes and proposing texts appropriate for high school students.

Résumé

Plus le rôle joué par les Américains a été important dans la société globale suite au 11 septembre, plus leur isolement et leur nationalisme se sont accentués. Afin de renverser ce paradoxe dangereux, un effort doit être fait pour promouvoir la citoyenneté globale dans le système d'éducation américain. Cet article met en lumière la riche tradition littéraire de l'Afrique en développant des thèmes majeurs et en proposant des textes appropriés aux étudiants du secondaire.

Keywords

colonial and post-colonial literature – peace and citizenship education

An American paradox

There is a paradox operating in America today: the more we are called upon to play a responsible role in global society, the more insulated we become. Our "nation at war" mindset justifies everything from a reduction of civil liberties to budget cuts in education, as we finance extensive military operations to "protect our way of life". Amidst this obsessive emphasis on security and its darker side, fear, world geography has now become confined to the U.S., Afghanistan and perhaps Iraq.

Africa, in particular, is more remote than ever from the American consciousness. Unless you tune into the BBC, NPR, read the *New Yorker* or the *International Herald Tribune*, the mere mention of Africa will sound like a dim memory, a place that existed in the 1970s and had something to do with *apartheid*. Africa today is not considered newsworthy by the American mass media unless Americans are performing heroic acts there. Dying in a foreign land is *always* heroic in American culture. In spite of ancestral and his-

documentary film. Wole Soyinka's *Aké: The Years of Childhood* (Random, House 1992) is a thoughtful memoir of a young Nigerian man who would go on to win the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986. Kwame Anthony Appiah, a well-respected scholar of African and African-American Studies, was raised in Ghana. His *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Knopf, 1978) is rewarding in its insights as it explores African-American identity in the late 20th century. The first volume of Doris Lessing's autobiography *Under My Skin* (Harper Collins Publishers, 1994) offers a privileged white woman's view of the unjust society of Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) in the 1930s and 1940s. Moreover, her 1956 memoir entitled *Going Home* (Ballantine Books, 1968) is full of prophetic insights and observations on the untenable nature of a society divided by "the color bar".

Beyond Africa

Of course, the literature of Africa is not the only literature we must attend to in order to develop worldly readers and global citizens in our classrooms. One could make the same case for Cuba, Vietnam, or China. Inevitably, literature must be regarded as a resource for such understanding. This is hardly a new idea. In an article entitled "Toward a Cultural Approach to Literature" that was published in *College English* in 1946, Louise Rosenblatt said: "In the field of literature, the need to acquaint American youth with the literary achievements of foreign peoples has been urged as an important means of eliminating provincialism and fostering sound international understanding". What was true in the wake of WWII is still true and perhaps for the same reason, an all-American instinct to cling to our nationalistic identity. The success of American public education cannot be reduced to scores on annual tests. It is also about what we teach and what kind of people we are raising in our classrooms. Will we, one day, ask of Africa what we have asked of the Arab world: "Why do they hate us?", while we scramble for maps, workshops, and language classes to help us comprehend places we have never heard of? Unless educators and others take responsibility for shedding light on the "dark continent", how will our young people develop an awareness of all that has happened there and has yet to happen? And how will they ever understand that what happens in a place called Africa is just as real as what is happening to them?

Note

For a list of "Africa's 100 Best Books of the 20th Century" developed as a project of the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, go to www.zibf.org/bestbookslst.htm.

Patti Marxsen is a former high school teacher of English and French and a publications manager for an International Peace and Justice Institute based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century. In that role, she is currently project managing the development of a book on global citizenship education. Her own stories have appeared in small literary journals and her historical novel set in Haiti is currently represented by Marie Brown & Associates, a New York literary agency.

Funny, You Don't Look Jewish!: 'Passing' and The Elasticity of Ethnic Identity Among Levantine Sephardic Immigrants in Early 20th Century America⁽¹⁾

Avim Ben-El
University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA

Abstract

Between 1880 and 1924, 50-60,000 Jews immigrated to the United States from the former Ottoman Empire. The majority of these Jews spoke Ladino, or Judeo-Spanish, and traced their origins to the Iberian peninsula. The most important American city of their settlement was New York, where some of the sociologically richest encounters occurred between Sephardim and primarily Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Ashkenazim. During this time 2 1/2 million of them settled in the U.S. This article explores two of the most important of these encounters: the case of mistaken identity within the American Jewish community (termed 'co-ethnic recognition failure') and the 'passing' of Levantine Sephardim for other ethnic groups, particularly Gentile Hispanics and Turks. This paper considers the multiplicity of ethnic identities intrinsic to the Ottoman Sephardic heritage, intentional and unintentional passing, and the implications of these inter- and intra-ethnic encounters for contemporary concepts of race and ethnicity.

Résumé

Entre 1880 et 1924, 50 000 à 60 000 Juifs originaires de l'ancien Empire Ottoman ont émigré aux Etats-Unis. La majorité de ces Juifs parlaient le ladino, ou judéo-espagnol, qui tire ses origines de la péninsule ibérique. La ville la plus importante de leur établissement était New York, où quelques-unes des plus frappantes rencontres, au sens sociologique du terme, eurent lieu entre sepharadim et ashkenazim d'Europe orientale, qui parlaient principalement le Yiddish. Deux millions et demi d'entre eux se sont établis aux Etats-Unis durant cette période. Cet article examinera deux des plus importantes rencontres: le cas d'identité erronée dans la communauté des Juifs américains (appelé 'manque de reconnaissance co-ethnique') et le 'passage' de sepharades levantins sous d'autres groupes ethniques, surtout comme hispaniques et turcs gentils. Cet article examine la multiplicité des identités ethniques inhérente à l'héritage sepharadi ottoman, le passage intentionnel ou sans intention, et les implications de ces rencontres inter- et intra-ethniques pour les concepts contemporains de race et d'ethnicité.

Keywords

Sephardic – immigrants – coethnic recognition

Introduction

Sometime between 1909 and 1913, a number of Ashkenazic Jews of the Lower East Side, protesting street disturbances and neighborhood disputes, petitioned New York City Mayor William Jay Gaynor to remove the 'Turks in our midst' (Papo, 1987). The main problem with the complaint was that these "Turks" were actually fellow Jews. Upon learning of their mistake, the Ashkenazim – primarily Yiddish-speaking Jews of Eastern European descent – withdrew the petition, deciding to settle the matter 'among themselves' (Thomas, 1971). This case of mistaken identity within the Jewish community represents one of the central experiences of a new group of immigrants that defied conventional Jewish categorizations. The phenomenon of 'passing' among these new immigrants raised (and continues to raise) new questions not only about Jewish ethnicity, but also about the ethnic identity of the non-Jews for whom these new immigrants were often mistaken.

In the first half of the 20th century, the established American Jewish community witnessed the immigration of a group of Jews unlike any it had ever encountered. These Jews did not speak Yiddish, did not 'look Jewish' and to – paraphrase a contemporary satirist – had never seen a *matsah* ball in their entire lives (Amiga Serena, 1996:1). Hailing from the Near East and Balkans, these new immigrants became variably known in the United States as 'Turkish-', 'Levantine-', 'Ottoman-', or 'Oriental Jews'. Although among them were Arabic- and Greek-speaking Jews, the majority called themselves 'Sefaradim', or Sephardic Jews (1). Their ancestors were exiled from the Iberian peninsula during the Inquisition and Expulsion 400 years before and found new homelands in the Ottoman Empire under the benevolent rule of the Sultans. There Sephardim developed a Hebrew-script language known as Judeo-Spanish or Ladino (Harris, 1994), a polyglot tongue based on early modern Castilian with admixtures of Hebrew, Turkish, Greek, Arabic, French, Italian and Portuguese, reflecting the latent multiplicity of identities that was to come into full focus on American shores.

With the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire economic hardships, the extension of compulsory military service to non-Muslim adult males, natural disasters, the Italo-Turkish war of 1911-1912, the Balkan wars of 1912-1913 and World War I, the Sephardim began to abandon their native Levantine lands for more tranquil and auspicious homes in South America, Western Europe and North America (Sephilha, 1977). The most important communities these migrants established sprouted in the United States. Although Levantine Sephardim formed significant enclaves in cities such as Seattle, Los Angeles, Atlanta and Chicago, by far the largest and most dynamic center of Sephardim outside of the former Ottoman Empire developed in the City of New York.

Leaving an environment where they had formed the overwhelming majority of the Jewish community, Levantine Sephardic immigrants now entered a land whose Jewish community was comprised, defined and controlled largely by the Ashkenazim. While both the Ladino language as well as a shared Jewish identity ultimately tied Levantine Sephardim together regardless of their recent origins within the Ottoman Empire, both internal and

external pressures in America compelled these immigrants to question and redefine their national and ethnic identities in ways most previously could not have imagined. Ironically, the group that most pressured these Eastern newcomers to rethink their self- and ascriptive identities were, in fact, fellow Jews.

Co-ethnic recognition failure

The identities of Levantine Sephardim were linked – from the perspective of non-Sephardim in the United States – with a bewildering array of ethnic, geographical and linguistic dimensions. A 1914 article in the New York newspaper *The World*, identified these immigrants, who 'come from Turkey, speak a mixture of Turkish and Spanish, and are Hebrews' as 'a very mixed type of Jew' (2). Samuel M. Auerbach, a Constantinopolitan-born Jewish activist, dramatized the confusion a non-Sephardi encountered when confronted by the new arrivals. Reconstructing a stroll past the Levantine Jewish cafés of the Lower East Side, Auerbach wrote in a 1916 issue of the *Jewish Immigration Bulletin*:

See the signs on these institutions. They read: Cafe Constantinople', 'Cafe Oriental', 'Cafe Smyrna', and there are other signs in Hebrew characters that you perhaps cannot read. Are they Jews? No, it cannot be; they do not look like Jews; they do not speak Yiddish. Listen: what is that strange tongue they are using? It sounds like Spanish or Mexican. Are they Spaniards or Mexicans? If so, where did they get the coffee-houses, an importation from Greece and Turkey? ...On your way home you think and wonder who these alien people can be who speak Spanish, yet are not Spaniards; speak Greek, yet are not Greeks; have Turkish as their mother-tongue and wear turbans, yet are not Muslims.

Auerbach's dramatization describes the most difficult challenge these new immigrants faced: their rejection by the established Jewish community, a phenomenon I have termed 'co-ethnic recognition failure'.

It is very important to emphasize that the Ashkenazic rejection of Sephardic immigrants as fellow Jews was not based on social snobbery, unlike the rejection of Eastern European Jewish immigrants by their German Jewish brethren. While social snobbery caused many tensions between German and Russian Jews, it never resulted in a denial of either group's Jewish identity. Co-ethnic recognition failure, in contrast, may be defined as the failure of one sub-ethnic to recognize common ethnicity in another sub-ethnic from the same overarching ethnic group, out of genuine disbelief of a shared ethnicity (3).

Co-ethnic recognition failure, although most potent in the daily interactions of Sephardim and Ashkenazim, took effect at the very moment of immigration. The United H.L.A.S. Service (United Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society, hereafter, 'HIAS'), established in New York City in 1909, was a Jewish organization dedicated to assisting co-religionists in their successful entrance into and adjustment to the United States. From the first year of its operation, New York City's HIAS recognized that on account of language barriers and idiosyncratic last names, Levantine Jewish immigrants were not recognized

as Jews by Ashkenazic officials, those very employees who were authorized to intervene on their behalf. Many Sephardim were unnecessarily deported or not linked with the established Jewish community on account of co-ethnic recognition failure. For this reason, a HIAS division known as the Oriental Bureau was organized in 1909, its multi-lingual Sephardic officials specifically assigned to identify and assist Near Eastern Jewish immigrants at Ellis Island.

Such officials were of central importance not only for the welfare of Oriental Jewish immigrants themselves, but also for statistical purposes, as the spiritual leader of New York's historic Congregation Shearith Israel (the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue) noted in 1914. A 'considerable number' of Levantine Jews had not been included in federal immigration statistics, Rabbi David de Sola Pool (1914:20) remarked, 'because they have been passed as Turks or Greeks, not being easily recognizable as Jews, either in name, language or physical appearance'. The statistical discrepancy between United States government and HIAS records could be significant. Federal records for the period between 1909 and 1912 estimated the number of Levantine Jewish immigrants at 1,854, while HIAS recorded 2,865. Although this represents a difference of a mere 1,000 persons, cumulative inaccuracies over the years would lead to dramatic underestimates of the Levantine Jewish immigrant population in America. The immigration statistics of the Oriental Bureau, Pool asserted, were far more reliable (de Sola Pool, 1914:19).

Co-ethnic recognition failure was particularly painful and frustrating when it impeded Levantine Sephardim from securing employment in Ashkenazic firms. Bulgarian-born Moise Gadol, editor of *La America* (America), lamented in 1910 that "[m]any of our Turkinos [Ladino-speaking Jews,] with tears in their eyes, tell us how, when they present themselves for employment, they are not believed by the Ashkenazim to be Jews, except with very great efforts and with all sorts of explanations..." These experiences were not isolated incidents. Gadol (1910) related that "the columns of our small and precious journal would not suffice to recount one part of this sad situation". The Ladino press was an important medium through which Sephardim struggled to achieve recognition as Jews in the eyes of their Ashkenazic co-religionists. One of the earliest issues of Moise Gadol's *La America*, one of 19 Judeo-Spanish periodicals appearing in the United States between 1910 and 1948 (Ben-Ur, 2001), observed that *Turkinos* seeking positions in Ashkenazic establishments were often able to convince incredulous employers of their Jewish identity 'by showing our tabloid with [its] Hebrew letters', peppered with announcements from the Ashkenazic Jewish press (4).

The American Ladino press was also tested to prove Jewishness to prospective Ashkenazic marriage partners. In 1916, Clara, a Russian-born Jewish girl wrote to the editor of the Ladino weekly, *La Bos del Pueblo* (The Voice of the People) of her introduction to Jack, a young Sephardi she met at a ball organized by that Judeo-Spanish newspaper. Clara was quite taken with Jack, but was not certain of his religious affiliation. 'At first glance', she wrote, 'I thought him Italian. The way he spoke, his countenance and his gestures were like those of the Italians. But later, when we began seeing each other, he swore to me that he is a Spanish-speaking Jew'. Though the couple was in

love, Clara's parents objected to the union because they did not believe that Jack was indeed Jewish. Addressing the editor, Clara wrote, 'Now, I beg you to tell me through your esteemed newspaper if it is possible, that a Jew who doesn't speak Jewish, and doesn't look Jewish, can nevertheless have a Jewish soul'. Gently reprimanding her for her ignorance, the editor replied pedantically, "...Yes, Clara, the boy speaking Spanish, having Italian gestures, who can read our newspaper, is Jewish. ...No, we don't see any inconvenience in the inter-marriage of Sephardim with Ashkenazim. There are many examples of Sephardim living with Ashkenazim in the greatest harmony..." (5).

The editors' observation, however, was overly generous. Intra-marriage between Sephardim and Ashkenazim during the early 20th century was extremely rare, particularly among the first immigrant generation. According to Marc D. Angel (1973), 'Almost all Sephardi immigrants of the early 20th century had Sephardi spouses...'. In his early 1970s study Hayyim Cohen found that 81% of first generation Sephardic men, some of whom arrived in the United States with their wives, had married fellow Sephardim. Most of the first generation Jews interviewed were elderly, especially the Turks, Greeks and Syrians, who had immigrated between the end of the 19th century and the 1920s (Cohen, 1971-72).

Co-ethnic recognition failure is probably one factor, in addition to cultural and linguistic affinities, that led Sephardic immigrants to seek romantic liaisons with Gentile Mediterranean and Hispanic newcomers. In his satirical advice column 'Pet Peeves of a Woman', Salonikan-born Moise Soulam noted with alarm the rise in dating, intermarriage, and even affairs between Sephardic women and Greeks, Italians, and Puerto Ricans (6). Such incidents became so frequent that in a 1927 issue of *La Vara* (The Staff), Soulam made an impassioned plea to young Sephardic women that 'if they wish and desire to live happily and prosperously, if they desire to gladden their parents, they should absolutely marry Sephardic men, [who are] brothers of the same religion, of the same sentiments, and they will live happily, joyful and united all of their lives...' (Bula Satula, 1927). We might be tempted to dismiss such commentaries as sensationalist and even fictional if they were not confirmed by sources outside the immigrant Ottoman Sephardic community. A Dr. H. Goldstein of the Jewish Center reported in a 1926 interview '...that Porto Ricans (non-Jews) in large numbers had moved to the district of his center [Harlem] and had driven out the Sephardim because of the fear of intermarriage, many moving to the Bronx-one group forming a Synagogue in the Grand Concourse' (Menken, 1926), while Henry Pereira Mendes, Minister Emeritus of Congregation Shearith Israel, noted in 1933 'cases of intermarriage with Porto-Ricans [*sic*] or other Spanish-speaking people' (7).

Lest we suspect that resistance to intra-marriage was largely informed by cultural and religious differences (foodways and prayer rites, for example), anecdotes related to Sephardic immigrants and their descendants often demonstrate the physical appearance as the ultimate determining factor. Hank Halio, in his anecdotal recollections of the Sephardic Lower East Side, notes that co-ethnic recognition failure constantly arose as he and his Sephardic friends began to date Ashkenazic girls, particularly when being introduced to Yiddish-speaking parents. 'To try to prove we were indeed Jewish', Halio

recalls, 'we recited some Hebrew prayers, but we pronounced the words differently than they did, and they didn't believe us'. Other measures contemplated were more extreme. 'A certain unmentionable thought crossed the minds of some of the wise guys as a source of proof that they were Jewish', Halio notes euphemistically, 'but I don't think any of them tried it' (Halio, 1996). The tell-tale sign of circumcision was, as Halio's anecdote hints, the only concrete proof of Jewishness in such situations (Muslims, after all, numbered only a few thousand in the United States in the early 20th century). Such anecdotes, which find their echoes throughout contemporary written sources and recent oral testimony, suggest that in daily encounters with Eastern Sephardim, Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazim often constructed Jewishness as an embodiment – literally – of shared physical characteristics.

Passing as a means of escaping anti-semitism

Although being mistaken for Gentile Italians, Greeks, and Hispanics cut off Sephardim from the American Ashkenazic community, the phenomenon of 'passing' could sometimes work to their advantage. Having recently arrived in New York from Turkey, Albert A. Amateau, a Sephardic colony leader who recently passed away at the age of 106, found employment in 1911 in the Ward Baking Company, an establishment he later found to be openly anti-Semitic. With the approach of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement), arguably Judaism's holiest day, Amateau informed his boss that he would not be present at work that day. As soon as he returned to his job, his superiors questioned him on his absence.

The next day, I came and they were kidding with me, 'Who was it? Where did you go? You had a sweetheart? – No, I say, I went to the synagogue'.

'Synagogue? You are a Frenchman or Italian, what are you kidding? Synagogue?'

'I'm not a Frenchman, I'm a French Jew, I was born in Turkey'. The more I talked to them, the more prejudiced they became. Next thing I knew they didn't want me any more (8).

Other immigrants intentionally employed passing to their advantage. Fannie Israel Alvo and Esther Israel, daughters of Sephardic immigrants from Istanbul, recall the story of an immigrant Sephardic woman with a Spanish last name who intentionally used her Hispanic appearance to pass for a Christian and thus was able to secure employment by an establishment notorious for its refusal to hire Jews. This woman also managed to maintain her Jewish observance through subterfuge reminiscent of the ploys of secret Jews, or *marranos* – descendants of Iberian Jews forcibly converted to Catholicism in the 14th and 15th centuries (Roth, 1959). A few days before a Jewish holiday, she would call in sick, thus avoiding any suspicion her absence might have aroused (Ben-Ur, 1997).

The dynamics of passing were in some cases already set into before immigration. The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* schools in the Near East, dedicated to providing a French-oriented and Western education to Levantine Jewish children, imparted secularizing influences, which often encouraged pupils to distance themselves from their religious, lin-

guistic and ethnic heritage (Rodrigue, 1990). Joseph Gedalecia, a Turkish Jew of mixed Ashkenazic and Sephardic ancestry (Papo, 1987: 363) and President of the Federation of Oriental Jews of America (founded in 1912) confessed in 1914 that since he immigrated to the United States via Paris, he came as 'a Frenchman'. Similarly, he noted that Mediterranean Jews who immigrated from Greece and other countries also passed as non-Jewish. Gedalecia blamed the secularizing influences of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* for exacerbating this tendency. He stated that 'it is due to the spirit of the Alliance that they [Levantine Jews] hide their Jewishness' (9).

It was this affinity with non-Jewish ethnic groups that in fact provided some Sephardim with easy entry into ethnic enclaves, such as the French and Hispanic. Salonikan-born Maurice S. Nessim, editor of the New York Ladino socialist tabloid, *La Bos del Pueblo*, was forced to flee the United States when American censors during World War I interpreted his editorials as communist propaganda. Nessim fled to France in November of 1919, but later returned under the pseudonym, Maurice Lacoste. Eventually, 'Lacoste' became publisher of *Le Courier des Etats Unis*, America's only French-language publication, which was eventually transformed into the illustrated weekly, *L'Amérique* (Papo, 1987: 82). Similarly, Professor Mair José Benardete, a native of Çanakkale (Dardanelles), Turkey, discovered a natural kinship with the world of Hispanic scholarship, becoming a prominent professor of Hispanic and Sephardic Studies at various institutions from 1925 to 1965, including Hunter College and Brooklyn College (Bernadete, 1982). The intellectual sphere of Sephardic/Hispanic Studies is, perhaps, the only sphere where Jewish and Hispanic identities were harmonized and where 'passing' was neither required nor desirable.

Conclusion

Passing among Sephardic Jews in America is distinct from the phenomenon as it has been conventionally understood: Americans of African descent posing for white. For African Americans, passing meant 'escaping the subordination and oppression accompanying one identity and accessing the privileges and status of the other' (Ginsberg, 1996). For Ottoman Sephardic immigrants, passing was initially an unwelcome experience, as it usually denied social, economic and humanitarian access to the privileged group: established Ashkenazim able to extend their philanthropic assistance and status to their recently arrived brethren.

Yet, in certain cases, passing proved beneficial for Sephardic Jews. Under the cover of French, Italian, or Hispanic identities, Sephardim could secure employment in anti-Semitic establishments that did not hire Jews. Passing also allowed Sephardic immigrants social access to other groups, who could promise economic opportunities, as in the case of Maurice Nessim and his French-language publication.

Another way in which Sephardic passing differs from conventional passing is that in the latter, 'one cannot pass for something one *is not* unless there is some other, prepassing, identity that one *is*'. (Ginsberg, 1996: 4. The italics are Ginsberg's). Sephardim, in con-

trast, were, in numerous and complicated ways, that for which they passed. Sephardic immigrants were Hispanic based on remote geographical origins and language, Mediterranean based on their Iberian and, in some cases, Balkan, geographical origins and Near Eastern by virtue of their recent homes in the Levant. The only inauthentic element of their passing identities was Gentile.

In the American context the Jewish identity of Sephardim interfered with their often tacit or unchallenged adherence to Hispanic, Mediterranean and Near Eastern identities. In Sephardic America, ethnic identification with non-Jewish groups became a matter of convenience for some, a matter of survival for others and an unwelcome surprise for most. It is essential to emphasize that the passing of Sephardim in America was intimately intertwined with co-ethnic recognition failure and cannot be understood without an examination of Sephardic/Ashkenazic relations.

Daniel Itzkovitz has noted that 'the Jew, by virtue of the unconventional Jewish relation to race, nation and culture occupies a position of fundamental instability that could be mobilized to various, and particular, effects' (Itzkovitz, 1997: 185). While Itzkovitz was referring to Ashkenazic Jews, his statement is intensified when applied to Levantine Sephardic Jews. The elasticity of Sephardic identity, coupled with the profound ramifications of co-ethnic recognition failure, led to a kind of Jewish passing previously unexamined in the history of American Jews. The phenomenon of passing among Sephardic immigrants in America has implications for and raises new questions about ethnic identity not only within the Ashkenazic Jewish community, but also within non-Jewish immigrant communities, most notably, the Hispanic and Turkish. Passing among Levantine Sephardim forces us to reconsider the lines of intersection between race, religion, ethnicity and nationality. It also challenges the common and perhaps universal impulse of defining and classifying an individual or group based on physical appearance, so often an accident of birth or perception, or both.

Notes

(*) All translations and transliterations from the Judeo-Spanish are mine. Throughout this essay, I employ the word 'race' as an ethnic intensifier rather than as a scientific reality, sharing Gerda Lerner's view of race as a 'racist construct'. See Lerner, G., 1997. *Why History Matters: Life and Thought*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, viii and 184-197.

(1) Since medieval times, Iberian Jews and their diasporic descendants have been identified as Sephardi, while Eastern European Jews of Germanic ancestry were denoted as Ashkenazi. These groups are considered the two major branches of world Jewry, though Jews native to the Middle and Far East far outnumber Sephardim.

(2) No author cited, 1914. 'Turkish Jews Latest Comers on East Side', *The World* (New York), 22 February, p.1 N (Second News Section).

(3) On intra-ethnic tensions between German and Eastern European Jews see Goren, Arthur A., 1970. *New York Jews and the Quest for Community: The Kehillah Experiment, 1908-*

1922, New York and London: Columbia University Press; Aschheim, Steven A., 1984. 'The East European Jew and German Jewish Identity', in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 1: 3-25; and Mendes-Flohr, P., 1984. 'Fin-de-Siècle Orientalism, the Ostjuden and the Aesthetics of Jewish Self-Affirmation', in *ibid.*, 96-139. In Portuguese American history, the classical case of co-ethnic recognition failure occurred between established European Portuguese and Cape Verdean immigrants. For encounters between these two groups see Halter, M., 1993. *Between Race and Ethnicity: Cape Verdean American Immigrants, 1860-1965*, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

(4) Presumably Gadol, M., 1910. 'Por La Lingua', 1.

(5) No author, 1916. 'Tribuna Libera: Lo Ke Nuestros Lektors Pensan: Porke No?', in *La Bos del Pueblo*, 26 May, 6. Clara's letter appears in Ladino translation only.

(6) See, for example, Bula Satula (pseudonym for Moise Soulam), 'Postemas de Mujer' ('Pet Peeves of a Woman'), *La Vara* (New York), 10 October 1924; 8 and 15 May 1925; 14 and 21 October 1927; 26 July and 23 August, 1929, all on p.10.

(7) Henry Pereira Mendes to Alice Davis Menken, 17 December 1933. Alice Davis Menken Papers. Folder: Correspondence re: *On the Side of Mercy*. American Jewish Historical Society.

(8) Amado Bortnick, R., 1989. *One Century in the Life of Albert J. Amateau, 1889: The Americanization of a Sephardic Turk*, Berkeley, California, privately reproduced, 57.

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Aviva Ben-Ur is an American Jewish historian specializing in Ladino and Sephardic Studies. She is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies and Adjunct Assistant Professor to the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Her first book, *A Ladino Legacy: The Judeo-Spanish Collection of Louis N. Levy* (2001) will be followed by a monograph on the Afro-Sephardic community of colonial Suriname.

The Jews from Egypt and Peace

Ada Aharoni
Technion, Haifa, Israel

Abstract

This paper attempts to explore the cultural heritage of the Jews from Egypt and their historical "Second Exodus" (1948-1967), as potential factors that may contribute to the promotion of peace between Jews and Arabs

Résumé

Cet article est une tentative d'explorer l'héritage culturel des Juifs d'Égypte ainsi que leur "Second Exode" historique (1948-1967), en tant que facteurs potentiels pouvant contribuer à la promotion de la paix entre Juifs et Arabes

Keywords

Jews – Egypt – multiculturalism – peace

A tradition of bridges between cultures

Jews have lived in Egypt almost continuously for two millennia. After the destruction of the First Temple, the Prophet Jeremiah came to Egypt with a following, and since then until 1967, there had always been a Jewish community in Egypt. On examination of major historical periods and events in the history of the Jews in Egypt, from ancient times to the modern era, it is interesting to note that the Jews of Egypt have traditionally and for long periods, contributed to the creation of bridges between cultures.

In the first century, when the philosopher, Philo from Alexandria translated the Bible into Greek (*the Septuaginta*), he introduced Jewish cultural elements into Hellenic culture and contributed to the bridging of the two cultures. In the 10th century, when Saadia Hagoan translated the Bible into Arabic, it introduced Jewish values into Islamic culture, and promoted intercultural Jewish – Islamic symbiotic relations and traditions.

In the 11th century, when the great Jewish philosopher, Moses Maimonides, came to Egypt from Spain as a young man, he wrote all his important philosophical and creative publications in Egypt. His writings were influential not only among the Jews but also among the Muslims. He wrote both in Hebrew and Arabic, and even sometimes in Hebrew using Arabic letters or in Arabic using Hebrew letters. He was revered by both Jews and Muslims under his Hebrew name: Moshe Ben Maimon, and his Arabic name: