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(review)

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Impossible Exodus: Iraqi Jews in Israel. By Orit Bashkin (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2017) 320 pp. \$24.95

A woman in advanced labor arrived at an Israeli hospital. Seeing that she was a newly arrived Iraqi Jew, a nurse attributed her delay to her primitive Iraqi ways: This woman was probably used to giving birth at home with witches as her attendants. The woman calmly replied, however, that she had been a teacher in Iraq and spoke Arabic, English, and French. Lack of access to services, supercilious attitudes from Ashkenazi Israelis, and a massive decline in the status of Iraqi Jews in Israel combined in this situation to create an experience of misunderstanding and humiliation.

Stories like the one above, culled from the letters, memoirs, and fiction written by Iraqi Jewish immigrants to Israel, form the backbone of Bashkin's *Impossible Exodus*. Confronting a historiography of the Iraqi immigration largely drawn from official Zionist agency records, Bashkin constructs an interdisciplinary cultural history of Iraqi Jews' immigration and rocky integration process in early 1950s Israel. Bashkin draws from Arabic and Hebrew writings of the immigrants themselves alongside archives, statistics, official reports, and newspaper coverage, including a trove of Arabic language newspapers written by or for Arabic speaking Jews. Through chapters focused on the physical condition, economic well-being, childhood, and political horizon of immigrants, she chronicles the suffering of Israeli Iraqis forced to live in flooded freezing tents, far removed from the middle-class comforts that many of them had experienced in Iraq before their departure. But she also weaves these dire assessments with a quiet heroism of ordinary resistance at multiple societal levels, integration into political parties as sites of claiming rights, and quotidian resistance such as refusing official dictates or taking control of family choices, limited as they were.

Impossible Exodus also shows how two different oppressed communities, Palestinians and Iraqi Jews, shared both physical and conceptual spaces in Israel even though the two groups differed in their circumstances. Political alliances between Iraqi Jews and Palestinians were relatively scarce, limited to the Communist Party of Israel, but more ordinary contacts persisted as the communities did business with one another, worked in the same menial jobs, and faced a nominally democratic system that nonetheless denied them participation. Moreover, Iraqi immigrants often physically occupied the areas that the Israeli state had emptied of Palestinians and appropriated after 1948. When, in the view of landowning farmers, the cheap labor force of Arabs disappeared, almost overnight, the new Iraqi Jewish immigrants living on or near these same lands stepped into the same roles, sometimes working alongside Palestinians who had returned in the years before Israel formalized its citizenship and border-control regimes.

Bashkin's evaluation of the complex identities and nomenclature of Iraqi Jews in Israel could serve as a model for scholars studying populations

shaped by common loyalties, migrations, and responses to shifting political circumstances. Three distinct and overlapping identities defined the Iraqi Jewish population—Iraqi, Arab, and Mizrahi. Nostalgia for Iraq, class identities within this community, and linguistic particularities created intimate bonds with others from the same place of origin. A broader Arab culture, marked particularly by language, linked these immigrants to other Arabic-speaking immigrants and ultimately to a state apparatus that was running intelligence and propaganda exercises that required native Arabic-speaking staff.

These identity categories merged to form the larger category of Mizrahi (“Oriental”), which also included non-Arab Middle Easterners. Mizrahim came into being as a negative identity category consisting of those who were not Ashkenazi or, often, those who were not white-skinned. Iraqi Jews in Israel may have defined themselves by a sense of distance from, and neglect by, the centers of Israeli power, but they also demonstrated a fervent desire to fight marginality and to make the political system work for them.

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Conflict and Commerce in Maritime East Asia: The Zheng Family and the Shaping of the Modern World, c.1620–1720. By Xing Hang (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2016) 346 pp. \$99.99 cloth \$32.99 paper

It has been forty-one years since Croizier published his milestone research on Koxinga or Zheng Chenggong.¹ The name Koxinga never fails to catch the attention of maritime historians of East Asia. The military leader built a name for himself among his European contemporaries as a ruthless pirate who ousted the Dutch East India Company, or the VOC, from the island of Formosa (present-day Taiwan)—the first Dutch overseas “territorial republic” (van Veen’s term)—after the *Pax Hollandica* (Andrade’s term) there.² The merchant and military forces of Koxinga’s family dominated East Asian maritime trade and played havoc with the commercial interests of competitors for decades. Hang’s book is the latest addition to the story of Koxinga, following Cheng’s *War, Trade and Piracy in the China Seas, 1622–1683*.³ It is remarkable for offering a comprehensive history of four generations of Koxinga’s family, from his father Nicholas Iquan Gaspard to his grandson Zheng Keshuang, including their political and economic careers.

1 Ralph C. Croizier, *Koxinga and Chinese Nationalism: History, Myths, and the Hero* (New York, 1977).

2 Ernst van Veen, “How the Dutch Ran a Seventeenth-Century Colony: The Occupation and Loss of Formosa 1624–1662,” *Itinerario*, XX (1996), 59–77; Tonio Andrade, *How Taiwan Became Chinese: Dutch, Spanish, and Han Colonization in the Seventeenth Century* (New York, 2008).

3 Wei-chung Cheng, *War, Trade and Piracy in the China Seas, 1622–1683* (Leiden, 2013).