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Minorities and the Modern Arab World

New Perspectives

Edited by
Laura Robson



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Contents

Acknowledgments / vii

Introduction

LAURA ROBSON / 1

PART ONE: **Conceptualizing Minorities**

1. From Millet to Minority

*Another Look at the Non-Muslim Communities
in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*

PETER SLUGLETT / 19

2. Across Confessional Borders

A Microhistory of Ottoman Christians and Their Migratory Paths

JACOB NORRIS / 39

3. Becoming a Sectarian Minority

Arab Christians in Twentieth-Century Palestine

LAURA ROBSON / 61

4. Egypt and Its Jews

The Specter of an Absent Minority

JOEL BEININ / 77

PART TWO: **Minorities, Nationalism, and Cultural "Authenticity"**

5. When Anticolonialism Meets Antifascism

Modern Jewish Intellectuals in Baghdad

ALINE SCHLAEPFER / 93

6. Assyrians and the Iraqi Communist Party

Revolution, Urbanization, and the Quest for Equality

ALDA BENJAMEN / 106

7. The Struggle over Egyptianness
A Case Study of the Nayruz Festival
HIROKO MIYOKAWA / 122
8. From Minority to Majority
Inscribing the Mahra and Touareg into the Arab Nation
SAMUEL LIEBHABER / 140

PART THREE: Minorities in the Transnational Sphere

9. Tunisia's Minority Mosaic
Constructing a National Narrative
DAVID BOND / 153
10. Majority and Minority Languages in the Middle East
The Case of Hebrew in Mandate Palestine
LIORA R. HALPERIN / 174
11. The Chaldean Church between Iraq and America
A Transnational Social Field Perspective
YASMEEN HANOOSH / 191
12. Permanent Temporariness in Berlin
The Case of an Arab Muslim Minority in Germany
LUCIA VOLK / 212

Notes / 233

Bibliography / 271

List of Contributors / 301

Index / 305

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10

Majority and Minority Languages
in the Middle East*The Case of Hebrew in Mandate Palestine*

LIORA R. HALPERIN

In terms of relative numbers of speakers, the most basic grounds for defining a majority or minority language, Hebrew in Palestine-Israel underwent a complete transformation from minority language in the Ottoman and British mandate years to a majority language and language of power following Israeli statehood in 1948.¹ This transformation, a result of the twin forces of mass Ashkenazi Jewish immigration and Israel's mass displacement of Palestinians, symbolizes for both Jews and Palestinians the realization of the Zionist vision of Jewish sovereignty, the achievement of a Jewish majority in what would become Israel, and the crushing of Palestinian visions of statehood. Arabic in Palestine is "the rare case in which a major language, once spread by conquest," has become, "without a doubt, a minority language."² However, this binary understanding of interlingual and interethnic relations in which Jews and Palestinians trade places as minority and majority, though of great significance in the post-1948 period, obscures more complex considerations of prestige, relative power, and perceived status that sociolinguists have argued are also significant in discussion of majority and minority languages.³ In our particular case, it ignores the layered frameworks of influence and global connectivity in which Zionist Jewish promoters of Hebrew were located before 1948: a mandated territory in which the British yielded both political and cultural influence, such that both the Jewish and the Arab communities, whatever

their configurations of power, felt themselves to be minority populations who had reason to learn the language of the majority—in this case English—so as to have access to Anglo-European politics and culture.

This chapter looks at Jewish educators' discourses about Hebrew- and English-language instruction to explore two propositions that stood in tension with one another: First, the Jewish community of Palestine (the "Yishuv") aimed to construct a hegemonic Hebrew space that would create the (fictive) impression that Hebrew was a majority language dealing with the typically Western difficulty of receiving (Jewish) immigrants. I suggest that in the perception and presentation of many Zionists, Hebrew was functioning—or seemed to function—as a majority language well before it became numerically so, even while the majority of Palestine's Jews were not speaking Hebrew as a first language. Second, and in contrast, the chapter suggests that the self-declared Hebrew majority community was subject to reminders of that community's perpetual minority status—not only vis-à-vis the Arab community of Palestine, whose influence Zionist leaders believed they could displace through economic separation and continued Jewish immigration, but also relative to global currents of influence and power, currents that persisted as statehood approached. If the leaders of a minority community could construct its language as a majority hegemonic language through discursive maneuvers and relative prestige and political power, this community could not evade its relative lack of power and nonhegemonic status relative to structures larger than the nation-state. Palestine, like the rest of the Middle East and much of the world, navigated (and in certain ways benefited from) a colonial context in which and through which English was growing in status as an international language.⁴ This broader context suggests that the new minority statuses, which emerged as a by-product of anti-imperial nationalist movements (of which Zionism, somewhat counterintuitively, was one), were constructed as much discursively as through hard statistical fact. We must move beyond the numerical fluctuations of Jewish and Arab populations in Palestine toward global and colonial configurations of power and influence when determining who is and is not a minority in the Middle East and, more important, when and for whom the analytical category of "minority" is useful.

Dominance of Hebrew

The Zionist vision, writ large, was to create a self-sufficient Hebrew culture that would not merely be dominant within a small elite community but also construct itself both as a majority host society that could receive and absorb immigrant populations and as a hegemonic language in Gramsci's sense, that is, capable of convincing the masses that "the existing social hierarchy," in this case of Hebrew dominance, "was natural, desirable, and inevitable."⁵ This move toward linguistic dominance would signal the end of dependence on surrounding cultures. Only this way, said leading voices in the Hebrew revival project, would the Jewish people sever their relations both with the Jewish diaspora and with the subservient mindset that, they believed, characterized diasporic existence. This project to create a "majority language" within a self-evidently minority population has been most extensively discussed in the realm of literary studies, following the work on major and minor literatures by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. Despite the small number of Hebrew speakers and writers, writes Hannan Hever, "the mode of Jewish experience in the early twentieth century, as a national minority in the Diaspora, was formulated [by canonical Hebrew writers] in standard utopian terms of a national majority." The project to "present a minority as a national majority," according to Hever, was aimed at rejecting the iconic diasporic status that Jews had so long held (and which most other Jews had long embraced).⁶ Writers constructed a "majority" Hebrew literature through celebrating universalist typologies and aesthetics and creating characters that functioned as free-willed national subjects.

This initially fictive promotion of Hebrew as a majority language also occurred in Palestine, where educators, politicians, and party leaders attempted to sideline other languages by framing them as dangerous foreign imports into a hegemonic cultural center rather than the majority tongues of a host society. A late 1930s flyer from the Jewish National Council proclaimed: "Every Jew in Palestine, whether he has just come or whether he is a longstanding resident, must speak, and conduct all of his business in the old-new language of the Jewish people: Hebrew. Our education, our press, and our theater are Hebrew. Just as in public life,

likewise also in private and family life, Hebrew is heard among us!"⁷ This assertion of hegemony was counterfactual—many languages other than Hebrew were heard on the Jewish street and in Jewish homes—but it nonetheless pervaded discourse on Hebrew study. The presumption that Hebrew was a majority language emerged from a tendency to focus on the New Yishuv, the Zionist-oriented Jewish community of Palestine, not as one of multiple populations in Palestine, and a minority among them, but as the hegemonic center of a diverse Jewish community increasingly bent toward Zionist ideology. In this view, the Ottomans or British rulers were essentially external to the landscape, while the majority Palestinian Arabs were quite literally part of the landscape, natural features, perhaps a wild population to be tamed or convinced, but not a culture that exerted hegemonic power: "The Jews were, of course, aware of the Arab communities, but these towns, villages, and neighborhoods had no place in the Jews' perception of the homeland's landscape. They were just a formless, random collection of three-dimensional entities, totally isolated from the Jewish landscape and viewed as if through an impenetrable glass wall."⁸ As such, Hebrew speakers were a self-imagined majority encountering minority Jewish populations who needed, they thought, to be brought in line. Given the highly successful Hebrew educational system, these various Jewish populations—speaking Yiddish, Polish, Russian, German, or other languages—were indeed minorities relative to Hebrew.

Schools were at the forefront of Hebrew promotion and foreign-language exclusion and the most visible facade in the claim that Hebrew was indeed a majority language. They were places where Hebrew seemed to truly dominate even when it did not permeate settings like the home, the streets, or the coffee shops. The Hebrew pedagogical sanctum, a hegemonic space within a society increasingly claiming its own hegemony, had been built specifically through the exclusion of other languages that could be viewed as alternative bearers of culture—for example, German and French.⁹ New immigrant students often remember arriving, finding, in the words of a student writer, an "all Hebrew space," not knowing if they could master it but eventually being pleased that they could transition to being Hebrew speakers.¹⁰ In the analysis of Benjamin Harshav, through the establishment of "cells in a social desert," bastions of Hebrew

in a space without other claimants to dominance, Hebrew became the "base language" of society.¹¹

The sense that Hebrew could and would function as a majority language led to widespread apathy about and opposition toward learning foreign languages. At times this sentiment was directed at lower-level or rural students and based on an assumption that the "nationalist farmer"—the paradigmatic Zionist figure—ought to be monolingual. In 1892, when the first groups of Zionist teachers attempted to organize themselves, teacher and pioneer of Hebrew education Israel Belkind stated that foreign-language study had no place in the schooling of children in agricultural settlements and that it would be relevant only for those who went abroad: "While children in the cities need to learn other languages, too, like for example Arabic and French . . . because who knows where they will go when they finish their schooling, teachers in the agricultural settlements need to . . . teach children the love of labor at home and the love of the soil in the field and in the garden. Thus it is unnecessary to learn foreign languages in the agricultural colonies."¹² Palestine in this construction was an isolated space, the majority of whose population was imagined to be Hebrew speaking and whose interests did not extend beyond the land itself. Though such dictates sound patronizing, some workers appear to have shared them because they privileged practical education and real-world experience over book learning. Tzvi Elpeleg, the son of a carpenter and a homemaker who had immigrated in 1934 from Poland, recalls that he went to school only until the age of fourteen, because "in the eyes of my parents and other parents—not everyone, but the majority of the neighborhood—[up to age fourteen] was the maximum level of education that a person needed to have."¹³ Succeeding within a self-enclosed Hebrew-dominant Jewish community was the highest ideal, in this view; the status of the community as a minority population in its environment, more broadly conceived, was immaterial.

Engagement even with the proximate rulers—after 1917, the British—was necessarily assumed. While it was self-evident that some elites elsewhere in the British Empire would need English, it was not so clear in Palestine, where the Yishuv (the Jewish community of pre-1948 Palestine) was largely autonomous, where Hebrew had been recognized as an official

language, and where, therefore, elites imagined that they could theoretically manage in Hebrew as though Hebrew were indeed the majority and dominant language. As Oz Almog has noted, the labor movement had a deeply suspicious view of higher education in general and foreign-language study in particular, as such study appeared to have no connection to the quotidian needs of farm labor. Kibbutz schools did not prepare students for university entrance exams.¹⁴ But the sentiment was far more widespread than the labor movement alone. Menahem Ussishkin, head of the Jewish National Fund, once said, "Regarding a foreign language, I don't think we need it at all. We should learn just one language: Hebrew and specifically Hebrew. The multiplicity of languages is unnatural."¹⁵ The proposition that no segment of the Jewish population needed to be educated in multiple languages affirmed a counterfactual discourse about Hebrew's dominance and Jews' self-sufficiency.

The sense that Hebrew would function as a hegemonic majority language, with little space for other language use or instruction, drove educational choices at all levels. Izhac Epstein, known for his writings on the teaching of "Hebrew in Hebrew" (informed by the western European Berlitz method), wrote extensively on the danger of multilingual education. "One of the widespread errors among the public regarding education," he wrote, "is the belief that increasing the number of languages increases knowledge." Noting that many parents were demanding foreign-language study for their children, he proceeded to outline the main psychological danger of combining languages. Cultivating expressive abilities in multiple languages means, in practice, teaching multiple words for the same concepts, words that ultimately become confused with one another in the mind: "The languages that we learn weaken one another."¹⁶

The imperative for monolingualism came from the perception that Jews were, and could manifestly be, an autonomous nation in the European model, the sort of nation in which they had themselves long lived as minorities. Though many Middle Eastern nationalist movements spoke on behalf of existing majority populations, the Zionist project envisioned the transformation of a minority into a hegemonic majority. This counterfactual insistence on national hegemony reflected a bipolar view of the world as divided into hegemonic nations and minority non-nations. To

deny Jews' capacity for nationhood or the self-sufficiency of their language was, symbolically, to acquiesce to diasporic minority status. For Epstein, foreign-language instruction in the schools would therefore reflect and exacerbate the typical Jewish condition of multilingualism, against which the schools were enjoined to fight. "Members of oppressed peoples have to divide their language abilities into two languages from early childhood," he wrote.¹⁷ The antidote to oppression, by this logic, was monolingualism. Unfortunately, Epstein observed, characteristically diasporic conditions did not appear to be dissipating in Palestine, where he observed that individuals regularly switched between languages in their conversations. He called this "hal'azat ha-'Ivrit" (the "foreignizing" of Hebrew, from *La'az*, a rabbinic catchall term for European languages). Epstein, in setting up an equation between oppression and multilingualism, asserts that monolingualism codes to cultural hegemony.

Epstein was aware that foreign languages could not be eliminated completely—"we are enslaved to our environment and its demands"—but he was insistent that languages should be studied no more than necessary and not unless it was deemed absolutely necessary for one's studies. A student learning a language for commercial purposes should focus on commercial language. A language course focused on reading, likewise, should not include speaking exercises or essay assignments.¹⁸ Epstein's words, written just before the British came to power in Palestine, were held up as a model by the Teachers' Federation, which called his research "broad, full, and comprehensive" and repeated his arguments in their assessments of the important work done by early Hebrew educators.¹⁹

The psychological harm of language multiplicity, which so concerned Epstein in the years before World War I, was a central plank in educators' opposition to foreign-language study. If multilingualism, historically speaking, accompanied oppression, it also, in this logic, actively led to oppression as a minority group. Fishel Shneurson, a psychologist and pedagogue, conducted a study for a seminar on bilingualism convened by the Tel Aviv branch of the Hebrew Teachers' Federation. Influenced in his work by the large variety of European studies of bilingualism over the past several decades (including a 1928 conference in Geneva on the problem of

bilingualism), Shneurson began with the premise that "bilingualism is a problem even when it comes during childhood, during the period of the development of language."²⁰ His concern for the deep psychological harm caused by bilingualism was indicative of a generation of educators who could not allow foreign-language study ever to become serious, out of a fear that it might begin to impede Hebrew fluency.

The hope for a situation of monolingualism in which the national tongue would be the language for all purposes bespoke what might only be called *chutzpah*. In practice, I show elsewhere, this premise was regularly questioned and undermined in a society that understood that it had to interact—in other languages—with various other populations, whether the British, with their abundance of global power; the Palestinian Arabs, with their numerical majority; or the Jewish diaspora, which still constituted a majority of the world Jewish population.²¹ The construction of the nation as a majority one, however, is central to the self-imagining of the Zionist movement in this period; the Zionist movement's rhetoric and choices are not intelligible without understanding this promajority, antiminority framework shaped by the philosophy known as "the negation of Diaspora."

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Hebrew, a minority language by all numerical accountings, was constructed nonetheless and for particular ideological reasons as a majority tongue. But the presumption that Arabic was thus the most relevant majority language is not a foregone conclusion. Hebrew's claims to majority status were contested not only by the demographics of Palestine but also by the reality of power relations. In 1924 journalist Mordecai Ben-Hillel Ha-Cohen reflected on the linguistic situation of the Yishuv under British rule, noting the parallel threats posed by English and Arabic but suggesting that English—the language of power—was perhaps more damaging than Arabic, the majority language:

Threats are bursting forth [against our language] from two sides, fighting with all their might. English has come to our country, the language of the authorities, which has not only political value but also—and this is perhaps even more important—a very rich literature, literature in all

fields, inestimably rich and more imaginative than our poor Hebrew literature. . . . And from the other side our Arab neighbors are attacking our language with great exertion. Their literature isn't vast and from this perspective our literature might be able to compete with it and it doesn't have the power to subdue our language. But Arabic is supported by a great mass of people who speak it, by the daily life lived in that language, and by the Arab reality.²²

What is significant here is that while Arabic had the force of numbers behind it (a reality that Zionists actively contested through continued immigration), English was coded to global values that would remain powerful *even if* Hebrew became numerically dominant. Concerns about English tended to evoke both the power of the British government and the historical tendency of Jews to slavishly mimic the cultures of the West. The principle of the Hebrew Gymnasium in Jerusalem warned of a "flood of Anglicization" if the British were to have too much influence on the Jewish schools. Joseph Klausner, alluding to English, warned that Hebrew culture could not "stand up to stronger elements."²³ The Jewish National Council's words to the 'Atid School of Commerce lend insight into this particular combination of insecurity and inferiority vis-à-vis the West: "You surely know the looming danger of assimilation and Levantinism, which is undermining the education of this generation and the styling of its character. How much the more so, then, is it necessary to warn of any move that opens a door to imposing of a non-Hebrew culture in the Hebrew schools."²⁴ In this fascinating paragraph, Hebrew culture faces two threats: "assimilation" and "Levantinism." Levantinism, which would subsequently be used to refer to Arab-like qualities, was most often defined in the Yishuv as a diasporic form of low culture characterized particularly by the mixing of the national language with higher-status European languages (the term derived from a perception that Arab communities, particularly in Lebanon, were characterized by impure cultural mixing with French). This context, however, suggests an alternative meaning of Levantinism: excessive obeisance to the West shown by a people possessing a deficient culture, that is, a minority not primarily in terms of local numbers, but in terms of global hierarchies of power.

These views—alarmist and dismissive—might easily fit into a historical narrative of Hebrew's tireless fight against linguistic rivals. But they are clearly not the sentiments of a majority language pushing out the rabble competition of immigrant diversity but rather a society recognizing that a specific category of language—languages of power—might have a special and threatening place. As Reichel notes, the overt Zionist rejection of any educational undertaking not directly tied to Jewish national aims coexisted with a "covert model" of a student who would in fact have a wide general education.²⁵ As she explores with respect to "general studies" more broadly, a widespread discomfort with multilingualism coexisted with a real sense, at least among some Zionist educators, that Hebrew existed as a minority language not only locally but also globally.

Learning a Global Language

Teachers spoke bombastically about the creation of a Hebrew school system and presented Hebrew as a newly dominant language. Nonetheless, their enthusiasm about Hebrew's victory—shared by scholars of Zionist education in later generations—has meant that the existence of foreign-language instruction in the prestate period and real awareness about Hebrew's functional weakness have tended to be obscured.²⁶ Zionist schools in the mandate period did not exclude all other tongues: they nearly all taught English as well as Arabic. Moreover, justifications for language study were not concerned only with the practical necessity of language knowledge; they also reflected a level of awareness that Hebrew would achieve dominance not only by overtaking Jewish immigrant tongues and displacing Arabic, but also by rivaling global languages like English. This latter ambition, of course, was unrealizable by a small national group, and anxiety about this fact is palpable in discussions about the place of English in school curricula. Set against a notion of diaspora marked by Jewish rootlessness, alienation, and economic and civic underdevelopment, English seemed to offer an antidote: the removal of provincial (or "Levantine") tendencies—it was a powerful language not despite the fact that Hebrew was dominant, but precisely because Hebrew was a minority language and because its promoters were aware that they were embedded in global power structures.

Beyond the Practical: The Stakes of Being a Global Minority

To the extent that English was viewed as simply “technically helpful,”²⁷ study could be utilitarian and locally focused, nothing more than a technique to manage a foreign pressure on an otherwise hegemonic Jewish community where Hebrew effectively functioned as a hegemonic language. For some who found themselves in Palestine as refugees before and during World War II, English was indeed occasionally a conduit for physically leaving Palestine and getting employment in Europe. But the fact that Jews went from being the quintessential minority to a hegemonic society, and eventually a numerical majority, overlooks real continuities between the diasporic Jewish experience and the experience in Palestine. The Jewish community, even as it gained strength and as more of its number in fact became Hebrew speakers, continued to exist in the shadow of and in relationship to foreign—and especially European—languages.

Teachers’ discussions about English instruction reflected a persistent anxiety about Zionists’ inability to be fully Western. A teacher who signed his or her name Y. S., writing in the educational journal *Hed ha-hinukh* (Education Echo) disagreed with a fellow teacher who had recommended getting nearer to the Orient through studying Arabic. The truth, Y. S. wrote, is that the Arabs should turn to the Jews “and learn something from Westerners.”²⁸ For all the emphasis on the authentic Semitic character of the Jews, members of the Zionist movement by and large wished to act and appear European. But the appeal for Zionists to act as Western moderns—in their relations with Arabs or otherwise—was not straightforward. Zionist anxiety over their lack of Semitic authenticity and lack of claim to Palestine was matched only by their concern about lack of sufficient modernity and development, and in this state of anxiety English could be presumed to be a way out, an antidote against the corrosive influences of the East and a means toward ensuring the European quality of the Yishuv. English, wrote Ben-Zion Dinaburg (historian and head of the Jewish Teachers Training College in Jerusalem), was “the chief conduit of European influence” in the Yishuv, and learning it might help Jews escape the degenerative effects of the East and establish a functioning European society.²⁹

Two impulses were characteristic of Zionist educators, who were concerned that the Yishuv was only tenuously Western, despite the fact that their European origins and imperial benefactors would eventually help them gain independence. First, from the beginning of the British presence in Palestine, some expressed the hope that the study of English literature might serve as a model for the still incomplete Hebrew literary tradition. Second, many felt that an introduction to the modern culture, nature, and political system of the English (seen as a beacon of democracy particularly in the Nazi era) might serve as a model for the emerging Hebrew society. In both of these discussions, the relative weakness of Hebrew was a touchstone.

A great strength of English was its rich literature, and familiarity with English literature could serve as a model for its still lacking literary tradition. English, Mordecai Ben-Hillel Ha-Cohen noted in 1923, has “a very rich literature, literature in all fields, inestimably rich and more imaginative than our poor Hebrew literature.”³⁰ When the Education Department of the Va’ad Ha-Le’umi published a 1941 report on the teaching of English in Hebrew secondary schools, it asserted that the gymnasiums in particular needed to move beyond language itself to broader cultural concerns. The report cited a 1918 British document that recommended “modern studies,” including the study of modern European languages, as “an instrument of culture” that could help “develop the higher faculties, the imagination, the sense of beauty, and the intellectual comprehension.” Applying that document’s conclusions to the Palestine context, the report recommended that “a similar cultural aim should pervade the study of English in our schools.” Exposure to English in Palestine was even more important than the study of other European languages in England, for “Hebrew literature is poorer than English both in content and form.”³¹

Literature was not the only exemplary creation of the English; their culture, society, and civic structures, too, could serve as models for an emerging Zionist polity. At root, the recommendation to study foreign languages was premised on the idea that, like its literature, Zionist civic culture itself was stunted in its development and needed an infusion of Western sensibilities. The Safra School of Commerce in Tel Aviv, which taught English largely for professional reasons, noted in its promotional

material that through foreign language study, "every educated person can probe the international world of cultures and recognize their achievements."³² English was at the core of this proposition. The Va'ad Ha-Le'umi report on English insisted that the curriculum focus not only on English literature, but also on English life: "Pupils who have been fed only belles lettres remain often with only a poor understanding of the English people." Moreover, a connection with modern people would transmit a set of modern values to the Yishuv, for "the study of modern English thought and institutions can provoke useful discussion and help to correct provincial tendencies."³³ The use of language here is revealing. The word "provincial," used here, evokes the parallel term "Levantine/*levantini*," a word used at this time to describe failed or incomplete Europeanization, ill-formed institutions, and illogical cultural mixtures, if also a sort of exotic allure (it would later be used to refer mainly to Jews of Arab descent).³⁴ The main feature of cultural provincialism was multilingualism, and its main antidote was adherence to Hebrew only (which was precisely the diasporic impulse against which Hebrew writers militated). But in this case, ironically, one path away from provincialism was the study of a foreign language understood to embody an opposite tendency.

No doubt, it was England itself that first promoted that country as a model society with model values, in Palestine as well as in the rest of the empire. British publishers offered accessible texts about the greatness of the empire in simple English texts, distributed in multiple countries overseas. In a small book called *Here and There in the British Empire*, published in 1902 and transported to the Yishuv, students read that "Greater Britain" had become "a power to which Rome in the height of her glory was not be compared," and it goes on to suggest that this stunning success could be attributed, "in no small measure, to the fact that the British are a hardy, determined, persevering, maritime race" who love adventure, order and justice, and the spirit of law.³⁵ Tendentious as they may seem to today's reader, these texts by and large confirmed beliefs that Zionists held already. The West's embodiment of modern values was broadly assumed; its epistemic privilege was unquestioned and unquestionable.³⁶

Britain was an evident, though complicated, model for a society looking to establish its Western *bona fides* and, thus, its claims to hegemonic

rule while also asserting its distance and independence from Europe. We can see an explicit attempt to negotiate these poles of attraction and distancing in the writings of Professor Hayim Yehuda (Leon) Roth, an Anglo-Jewish professor of philosophy at the Hebrew University. In his 1943 article "The Desired Direction in the Teaching of English," Roth rationalizes the instruction of English in a way that showcases the multiple, often conflicting, sentiments bound up in the decision to teach English in the Zionist schools.

Roth's first question, one that follows him through the essay, is the following: to what extent do we (Jews, Zionists, or the Yishuv) want to be English or be like the English? He begins by stressing unequivocally, "We are not engaging in these studies in order to be English." Immediately, however, he allows himself a bit of wistful musing—"It is true that if we did want to change our skin we would prefer them over any other nation"—and then cuts himself off abruptly: "This isn't a choice we can make because we have already chosen—or been chosen by—another choice. We are Jewish and we have returned to the land of our fathers in order to rebuild Jewish life. And a principal part of this life is Hebrew language and culture." At the end of these serpentine musings, he attempts to distance himself from the language entirely. "English for us is a secondary language, a foreign language."³⁷ Roth, a native English speaker, makes this point as one who has chosen to leave English behind and cast his lot with the Hebrew project in Palestine. His uncertainty, however, appears to run deeper than a personal crisis of identity: speaking in the name of the Jewish collectivity in Palestine, he admits that the Yishuv experiences the conflicting desires to be a society much like England and to be a society whose uniqueness is marked by and bound up in its commitment to Hebrew.

Why should a society principally committed to Hebrew devote time to English as a foreign language? He proceeds first to discount the older generation's attraction to "great world literature," calling this attraction a characteristic of the "transitional generation" (*dor ha-ma'avar*) that the younger generation might be able to overcome. In fact, echoing voices cited earlier, the need for English derives from a set of practical demands: "commercial needs, recreational needs, and social needs." English is necessary, he writes, first for understanding the words present on road signs,

packaging, and advertisements; second, for reading textbooks and manuals in fields from agriculture to commerce; and third for comprehending the many English words that have made their way into Hebrew newspapers and radio broadcasts.³⁸

But English for Roth is not merely a means of satisfying day-to-day needs that derive from unavoidable local contacts between the Yishuv and the British. Like Arabic, English study could also be an important means of strengthening the otherwise deficient Hebrew culture: "Hebrew is important and it will remain important, but it needs completion. This completion must come from outside, from a secondary language, an assisting language [*lashon-'ezer*], a foreign language." While some may ask why this additional language has to be English and cannot be French, Russian, or German, history, he says, has shown that English must be the language. "To whom are we connected through family, literary, commercial, political, and diplomatic ties?" he asks, and answers, "With English speaking countries." Indeed, English is to be "the center of gravity of our future."³⁹

■ ■ ■

What do the Yishuv's deliberations about the place of foreign language in its Hebrew curriculum tell us about its status, whether majority or minority, within Palestine and the Middle East? On the one hand, the Yishuv, over the course of the early twentieth century, positioned itself as a hegemonic language vis-à-vis the numerous Jewish immigrant languages whose speakers were flowing into the country; vis-à-vis the Arabic-speaking majority, which it eventually dispossessed in order to become the numerical majority in Palestine; and, at least outwardly, vis-à-vis European languages that might be deemed influential. As such, the Yishuv might be positioned as either an immigrant-receiving country in the European or American mold or a settler colonial society that eventually displaced the native population to become the majority. In neither of these senses was the Yishuv a minority population. But neither of these perspectives, though each relevant in understanding the cultural formation of the Yishuv, explains its vexed attitudes toward English, attitudes that more closely resemble the beliefs of smaller national groups, whether in Europe or in the postcolonial sphere.

English was not simply another modern language, but rather the language of the sovereign and the language of global power, which both Jews and Palestinians in subsequent generations would come to study as global English and what Braj Kachru would call "the other tongue," the highly symbolic additional language that stood for often ruthless power but also facilitated international trade and political engagement.⁴⁰ Increasingly, globalization meant that whatever their nationalist commitments, nations considered the merits of foreign-language proficiency and came to understand that their relative hegemony in local settings was largely immaterial in light of the global lingua franca. Like postcolonial states in Africa and Asia, the Yishuv and then Israel created an educational system that cultivated knowledge of the national language (in this case, not unlike the situation with Kiswahili in East Africa and Hausa in West Africa, a national language not spoken natively by all members of the nation).⁴¹ Nonetheless, like those communities, it was forced to acknowledge the benefits of English-language knowledge for administration, commerce, and politics—the local hegemony of elites took on a different cast when held up against a global tongue, against which they were a small national group, comparable in certain ways to a national minority within a hegemonic state.

And like in those settings, English was by no means a neutral code, a tool to deploy in a simple or uncomplicated way: "A view that holds that the spread of English is natural, neutral and beneficial needs to be investigated as a particular discursive construct."⁴² As in these other emerging national societies, educators in the Yishuv expressed anxieties that their emerging national language could be swept away by the language of the occupier, which was also the global lingua franca. At the same time, they felt that British society could offer models for development—indeed, that there existed no models for modernity outside the ones offered by the West. If mastery of Arabic meant the mastery of the East for a movement that was, quite evidently, not Eastern, mastery of English meant the appropriation of the West by a society that, though its majority was European in origin, did not consider itself reliably, deeply Western.

This discussion has suggested that while Arabic, the majority language, reminded Zionists of their relative weakness in Palestine, it was

English that provoked more fundamental concerns about the sophistication and maturity of the Zionist project. While Hebrew signaled internally the process of cultural consolidation and Arabic knowledge provided concrete tools for propaganda and intelligence work, Jewish control over Palestine would not have been possible without proficiency in English, for it was the relative sophistication of the Zionist project and its international ambitions that earned it international respect through ongoing negotiations with both Britain and, later, the United States that solidified its political rule. As scholars of global English have noted, "Mastery of global English generates a significant amount of linguistic capital. . . . [G]lobal English capital becomes critical for attaining elite status."⁴³ To the extent that Britain enabled the creation of a Jewish state and the United States has heavily funded it, it is the hegemony of English, a global language of power not only of Hebrew, the language of the current numerical majority among Israeli citizens, that explains the relative strength of the Zionist project and Israel. If anything, over time and since 1948, skepticism about English as the language of the foreigner imperial power has given way to a sense that speakers of Hebrew can thrive only if they learn English as a second language.

The circumstances surrounding the creation of Israel are unique in the Middle Eastern context and often are excluded from regional discussions. Certainly, the project of positing a minority language as a majority language was neither feasible nor necessary in most other Middle Eastern nationalist contexts, where the national tongue was also the spoken language of the numerical majority. But the looming force of English touched the Middle East as a whole: where there has been active resistance to it, it has in part been resistance to those local elites who wield the linguistic capital of English to their own benefit.⁴⁴ In light of this observation, we might expand the scope of our discussion about minorities from the proximate demographic relations in any given country to the global hierarchies of power that hovered over more local political developments.

11

The Chaldean Church between Iraq and America

A Transnational Social Field Perspective

YASMEEN HANOOSH

In September 2006, at the height of sectarian violence that followed the invasion of Iraq in 2003, Pope Benedict XVI made controversial remarks about Islam in Regensburg, Germany, that provoked an outrage in parts of the Muslim world.¹ Almost immediately following that incident, a Chaldean Catholic priest, Father Basel Yaldo, thirty-six, received death threats and was kidnapped from his home in Baghdad for three days. The situation seemed so dismal that he was transferred from Baghdad to a parish in Michigan, where his victimization received ample coverage from local and international media. A year later, in November 2007, the same pope elevated Chaldean patriarch Emmanuel-Karim III Delly to the rank of cardinal bishop, a status that placed him among the most prestigious prelates of the Catholic Church. In Pope Benedict's own words, this gesture was made by way of "concretely expressing my spiritual closeness and my affection" for Iraq's Christian minorities.² This "closeness" and "affection" are not a newfound, top-down compassion from a powerful institution for the weak and plighted Christians of Iraq. It has a long and spirited history that is not only hierarchical but, notably, also reciprocal and transnational.

The connection between the Roman Catholic Church and the Chaldean Church as we know it today dates back at least to 1445 CE, when the first official union between the Church of the East and the Catholic Church in Rome took place during the Council of Florence. Ever since, the

67. Finzi, "Il Progetto della Memoria," 5.
68. Daniela Melfa, "De l'italianité aux Italiens de Tunisie: Identité nationale et recherche historique."
69. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*, 64.
70. Anthony Santilli, "Un mythe historiographique au service de deux nations: Les 'Italiens' d'Égypte au XIXe siècle." Details of the career of Angelo Sammarco can be found in Anthony Gorman's *Historians, State and Politics in Twentieth Century Egypt*, 14-16.
71. Armando Sanguini, *Architectures italiennes de Tunisie*. See also Finzi, "Il Progetto della Memoria."
72. Henein Bey Henein in *L'Égypte: Aperçu historique et géographique gouvernement et institutions vie économique et sociale*, edited by Yusuf Qattawi, 382, quoted by Gorman, *Historians, State and Politics*, 178.
73. Daniela Melfa and David Bond, "All Things to All Men: Postcolonial History's Many Guises," 216.
74. Armando Sanguini, preface to *Architectures italiennes de Tunisie*.
75. Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and Colonized*, 13-15.
76. Angelo Del Boca, *Italiani, brava gente? Un mito duro a morire*.
77. Michel Péraldi, Alain Tarrius, and Geneviève Marotel, *L'Aménagement à contre-temps*, 118.
78. Pierre George, *Précis de géographie urbaine*, 157-60.
79. See, for example, Jellal Abdelkafi, *La médina de Tunis*, 102.
80. Justin McGuinness and Zubeir Mouhli, *Tunis, 1800-1950*, 75. See also Myriam Bacha, "La construction patrimoniale tunisienne."
81. Bacha, "La construction patrimoniale tunisienne," 120, 118.
82. McGuinness and Mouhli, *Tunis, 1800-1950*, 37.
83. *Ibid.*, 75.
84. For "colonial city," see Péraldi, Tarrius, and Marotel, *L'Aménagement à contre-temps*, 118. McGuinness and Mouhli generally avoid the term "colonial." Prosper Ricard's *Guide Bleu: Algérie, Tunisie, Tripolitaine, Malte* refers to the "modern European city."
85. Charles Bilas and Thomas Bilanges, *Tunis: L'Orient de la modernité*, 114, 309.
86. Sémia Akrouit-Yaïche, ed., *Tunis patrimoine vivant: Conservation et créativité, Association de Sauvegarde de la Médina, 1980-2012*.
87. Christopher Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*, 183-97; Veronica Della Dora, "The Rhetoric of Nostalgia: Postcolonial Alexandria between Uncanny Memories and Global Geographies."
88. Della Dora, "Rhetoric of Nostalgia," 210.
89. *Ibid.*
90. "Vers le cœur de la ville: La veine de sauvegarde."
91. *Archibat* 20 (2010): 53.
92. Roderick Beaton, *Byron's War: Romantic Rebellion, Greek Revolution*, 14.

93. Lord Byron, *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage: A Romaunt*, 2:831-82, stanza added in Athens, early 1811. On "preserver l'esprit des lieux," see Akrouit-Yaïche, *Tunis patrimoine vivant*, 255.
94. Personal observation of the author, May 2010.
95. Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 49; David Lowenthal, "Past Time, Present Place: Landscape and Memory," 26, quoted in Della Dora, "Rhetoric of Nostalgia," 229.
96. Alaa al-Aswany, *The Yacoubian Building*, 164.
97. Rivet, *Le Maghreb à l'épreuve*, 284-90.
98. Ennahda Electoral Programme, 2011, <http://www.sapereau.de/se/val2011ennahda.pdf>, 7-8.
99. <http://www.leaders.com.tn/article/100-juifs-100-tunisiens?id=8355>.
100. Stéphanie Pouessel, "Du fantasme d'une Tunisie tolérante à la transition démocratique: La bombe de l'anti-racisme," *La Presse*, June 19, 2012, <http://www.lapresse.tn/19062012/51539/la-bombe-de-lanti-racisme.html>.
101. Stéphanie Pouessel, "Les marges renaissantes: Amazigh, Juif, Noir."
102. <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/news/habib-kazdaghli-honoured-by-scholars-at-risk/2012520.article>.
103. Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, xxiv.
104. Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, 131.

10. Majority and Minority Languages in the Middle East

- Jonathan Owens, introduction to *Arabic as a Minority Language*, 1.
- Bernard J. Spolsky and Elana Goldberg Shohamy, *The Languages of Israel: Policy, Ideology, and Practice*, 116-17. On the majority-minority relations of Hebrew and Arabic in Israel, see Yasir Suleiman, *A War of Words: Language and Conflict in the Middle East*. See also Rafael Talmon, "Arabic as a Minority Language in Israel."
- Owens, introduction to *Arabic as a Minority Language*, 2-6.
- The cultural implications of English's rise and the relationship of this trend to colonialism, including settler colonialism, have been explored at length. See Alastair Pennycook, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*; Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*; Braj B. Kachru, *The Other Tongue: English across Cultures*; and James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Angloworld, 1783-1939*.
- Selma K. Sonntag, *The Local Politics of Global English: Case Studies in Linguistic Globalization*, 6.
- Hannan Hever, *Producing the Modern Hebrew Canon: Nation Building and Minority Discourse*, 31.
- Central Zionist Archives (CZA) DD1/1915, bolded text in the original. Original in four languages: Yiddish, Hebrew, Ladino, and German.
- Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948*, 56.

9. Many of the earliest language battles in the Yishuv focused on creating an all-Hebrew school system to replace the collection of foreign philanthropic institutions, religious academies, and missionary schools that were educating Palestine's Jewish youth. This process got under way with the creation of the Hebrew Teachers' Federation in 1903, the formation of the Gimnasya Herzliya in 1905, and the Reali School in 1913. Following actions against the French missionary schools, the decisive move to bar European language instruction occurred at the Haifa Technikum, whose governing board had proposed teaching scientific courses in German. See Arieh Bruce Saposnik, *Becoming Hebrew: The Creation of a Jewish National Culture in Ottoman Palestine*, 213-32; Margalit Shilo, "Milhemet ha-safot ki-tenu'ah'amamit"; Yaakov Ben-Yosef, *Milhemet ha-safot: Ha-ma'avak le-'Ivrit, 1914*; Moshe Rinott, "Capitulations: The Case of the German-Jewish Hilfsverein Schools in Palestine, 1901-1914"; and N. Tamir, *Seminaristim be-ma'avak'am: Sipur mi-yeme milhemet ha-safot be-Eretz Yisra'el*.

10. See, for example, an article in the school bulletin from the Carmi School in Haifa, from 1929 to 1930, in which an eighth grade girl worked hard on acquiring Hebrew until "the foreignness disappeared." "Ha-Shahar," Carmi School, Haifa, 1929-1930, Aviezer Yellin Education Archives, 3.147/12.

11. Benjamin Harshav, *Language in Time of Revolution*, 91, 133.

12. Cited in *Et-Mol* 8, no. 4 (1983): 16.

13. Tzvi Elpeleg interview, July 23, 1998, Oral History Division of the Hebrew University's Institute of Contemporary Jewry 31 (240), 1.

14. Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew*, 140.

15. Menahem Ussishkin's comments, Protocol of the General Assembly of Teachers in Zikhron Yaakov, *Sefer ha-yovel alef*, 392, cited in Nurit Reichel, "Ben 'kartanut' le-'ofke-tarbut': Mekomah shel ha-haskalah ha-kelalit ba-Hinukh ha-'Ivri be-Eretz-Yisra'el, 1882-1935," 33.

16. Izhac Epstein, "Ha-hitrakzut ha-milulit be-hora'at ha-leshonot ha-zarot, Part 1," 87.

17. *Ibid.*, 92-93.

18. Izhac Epstein, "Ha-hitrakzut ha-milulit be-hora'at ha-leshonot ha-zarot, Part 4."

19. Y. A. Zaydman, "Morim: Avot tehiyat ha-lashon," 86.

20. Fishel Shneurson, *La-psikhologiyah shel du ha-leshoniyut ba-aretz: Hakirah be-vate ha-sefer ha-'ironiyim be-Tel Aviv bi-shenot 1936-7, 37-8, 2-3*.

21. Liora R. Halperin, *Babel in Zion: Language Politics and Jewish Nationalism in Palestine, 1920-1948*.

22. Mordecai Ben Hillel Ha-Cohen, "Eretz Yisra'el tahat shilton-ha-tzava ha-Briti."

23. M. Schiller, 1927, cited in Shoshana Sitton, "Zionist Education in an Encounter between the British Colonial and the Hebrew Cultures," 110; Klausner, "Possibilities," *Ha-Shiloah* 31 (1915): 481-86, cited in *ibid.*, 111.

24. Report: Central Council for the Enforcement of Hebrew, Aug. 27, 1941, CZA J1/2228/7.

25. Reichel, "Ben 'kartanut' le-'ofke-tarbut,'" 3.

26. Roberta Kraemer and Elite Olshtain, "The Social Context of Second Language Learning in Israeli Schools"; H. Brosh, "The Sociocultural Message of Language Text-books: Arabic in the Israeli Setting"; Bernard Spolsky, "Conditions for Second Language Learning in Israel"; Bernard Spolsky and Elana Shohamy, *The Languages of Israel: Policy, Ideology, and Practice*; Joel Walters, "The Anglos Are Coming, the Anglos Are Coming: English Language Instruction in Israeli Schools." On Israeli language policy more generally, see Spolsky and Shohamy, *Languages of Israel*.

27. Anat Helman, "Even the Dogs in the Street Bark in Hebrew: National Ideology and Everyday Culture in Tel-Aviv," 360.

28. Y. S., "Le-she'elat anahnu u-shekhenenu," *Hed Ha-hinukh* 1, nos. 10-12 (1927): 169.

29. Letter from Ben-Zion Dinaburg, principal of the Hebrew Teachers' College, to Yosef Azaryahu, head of the Va'ad ha-Le'umi Department of Education, Nov. 15, 1939, CZA J17/320.

30. Ha-Cohen, "Eretz Yisra'el tahat shilton-ha-tzava ha-Briti," 231.

31. J. S. Bentwich, "The Teaching of English in Hebrew Secondary Schools" (Jerusalem, May 1941), 2, CZA J17/317.

32. Bet sefer le-mishar Safra, Tel Aviv, 1940, CZA DD1/3085.

33. Bentwich, "Teaching of English," 18.

34. On Levantinism, see Gil Z. Hochberg, *In Spite of Partition: Jews, Arabs, and the Limits of Separatist Imagination, Translation/Transnation*, 44-50.

35. *Here and There in the British Empire, with Illustrations*, 2-3.

36. Partha Chatterjee writes of the "moral privilege" of the West, saying that even when anticolonial movements challenge the West's supremacy, they maintain the perception that it encompasses theories of progress: "It is the epistemic privilege which has become the last bastion of global supremacy for the cultural values of Western industrial societies." Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?*, 16-17. Prasenjit Duara writes that postcolonial nations are caught in a discursive framework that denies a history to postcolonial peoples, and thus denies them the prerequisites of nationalism and of freedom. Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China*.

37. H. Y. Roth, "Al ha-kivun ha-ratzui shel limude ha-Anglit," 143.

38. *Ibid.*, 146, 145.

39. *Ibid.*, 146, 147.

40. Kachru, *Other Tongue*, 1.

41. Ali A. Mazrui and Alamin M. Mazrui, *The Power of Babel: Language & Governance in the African Experience*, 128-32.

42. Alastair Pennycook critiques the idea, spread often by England, that English could be simply neutral. "To view it as neutral," he continues, "is to . . . assume that the apparent international status of English raises it above local social, cultural, political, or economic concerns. To view it as beneficial is to take a rather naively optimistic position on global relations and to ignore the relationships between English and inequitable distributions and flows of wealth, resources, culture, and knowledge." Pennycook, *Cultural Politics of English*, 23-24.

43. Sonntag, *Local Politics of Global English*, 8.

44. *Ibid.*, 114.

11. The Chaldean Church between Iraq and America

1. During a lecture delivered at the University of Regensburg, the pope quoted an unfavorable remark about Islam made by the fourteenth-century Byzantine emperor Manuel II Palaiologos. The Vatican-published English translation of the quote was "Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached." See "Lecture of the Holy Father: Faith, Reason and the University, Memories and Reflections," *Libreria Editrice Vaticana*, Sept. 12, 2006, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html.

2. "Pope Names 23 Cardinals from 14 Countries," *Catholic News & Herald*, Nov. 30, 2007, http://issuu.com/catholicnewsherald/docs/cnh_issue_11_30_07/9.

3. Wilhelm Baum and Dietmar W. Winkler, *The Church of the East: A Concise History*, 112, 128.

4. No exact counts exist, and the (politicized) figures available from community sources are mostly misleading for two reasons: they operate with a political agenda that benefits from promoting a numerically larger-than-real image of the Chaldean minority and because, in order to augment the size of the minority, the figures available often temporarily overlook the social and religious distinctions between Chaldeans and Assyrians in order to represent them as one unified and sizable ethnoreligious population. See, for example, <http://www.aina.org/faq.html>.

5. Peggy Levitt and Nina Glick Schiller, "Conceptualizing Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society," 1026.

6. See, for instance, L. Dinnerstein and D. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*, who argue that "the decline of foreign language in churches [in the United States] was indicative of the growing Americanization and loss of ethnicity in American religion in the twentieth century" (184). The late-nineteenth-century German Catholic church slogan "Language Saves Faith" (*ibid.*) is also indicative of the threat of assimilation perceived by certain ethnoreligious immigrants upon settling in the United States.

7. Stuart Hall, "Ethnicity: Identity and Difference," 15.

8. Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture*, 35.

9. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 6.

10. Anthony O'Mahony, "The Chaldean Catholic Church: The Politics of Church-State Relations in Modern Iraq," 436.

11. The largest and oldest settled concentration of Chaldeans outside of Iraq can be found today in Southeast Michigan, where approximately 34,000-113,000 individuals are estimated to live (Walsh College of Business and United Way for Southeastern Michigan, *Chaldean Household Survey*; Josephine Sarafa, ed., "Chaldean Americans: Past and Present"; Mary Sengstock, *Chaldeans in America*; US Census Bureau, *Census 2000*).

12. See "Iraq."

13. For a detailed account of the various Christian missions and their schools in Iraq during the twentieth century, see Suha Rassam, *Christianity in Iraq: Its Origins and Development to the Present Day*. See also Joseph MacDonnell, *Jesuits by the Tigris: Men for Others in Baghdad*, for detailed descriptions of the arrival of the American Jesuits to Iraq upon the request of the Chaldean patriarch, their systematic expulsion between 1932 and 1969, and the nationalization of their two Vatican-sponsored schools in Iraq, Baghdad College and al-Hikma University.

14. Revolution Command Council Decree No. 251 of 1972, "Elimination of Racial Discrimination," recognized the cultural rights of Syriac-speaking citizens (paras. 3, 9, 6, and 7).

15. Alda Benjamen, "Assyrians in Iraq's Nineveh Plains: Grass-Root Organizations and Inter-communal Conflict," 13.

16. I. Younan, "Les chrétiens sous le poids de l'Islam dominant: Entre peur et compromis."

17. Anthony O'Mahony, "Christianity in Modern Iraq," 129.

18. O'Mahony, "Chaldean Catholic Church," 442.

19. According to O'Mahony, between 1961 and 1995 the number of Chaldeans and Assyrians in northern Iraq dwindled from 1 million to 150,000 owing to the war of attrition between the Kurds and the Iraqi army. See O'Mahony, "Chaldean Catholic Church," 438.

20. J. M. Mérioux, *Va à Ninive! Un dialogue avec l'Irak*, 445-75.

21. "Iraq."

22. Rassam, *Christianity in Iraq*, 172.

23. O'Mahony, "Chaldean Catholic Church," 434.

24. *Ibid.*, 438-44.

25. *Los Angeles Times*, Jan. 15, 2015.

26. J. F. Coakley, *The Typography of Syriac: A Historical Catalogue of Printing Types, 1537-1958*, 239.

27. "The History," in *Mother of God Church, 50th Anniversary, 1948-98: Celebrating the Historical Growth of the Chaldean Community in Mother of God Parish*.