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Palestinians Born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a
Homeland (review)

Celia Rothenberg

Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies, Volume 24,
Number 3, Spring 2006, pp. 194-196 (Review)

Published by Purdue University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/sho.2006.0073>



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paper pages of today, Cline is quick to point out that it is too early to put such events into their proper historical perspective.

Overall this text is a welcome addition to histories of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. The weaving together of ancient and modern, at which Cline excels, is something that everyone interested in the modern Middle East should appreciate.

Rachel Hallote
Director, Jewish Studies Program
Purchase College, SUNY



Palestinians Born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a Homeland, by Juliane Hammer. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005. 271 pp. \$22.95.

If you are interested in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, chances are you have an opinion on the issue of Palestinians' "right to return"—and most likely, a strong opinion. In that case, the book reviewed here may answer some of your questions about returnees, including what actually happens to them when they "return" to Palestine, how they are received by those who never left, and where they actually feel most at home. Juliane Hammer sets out to study the experiences of a small group of young Palestinian returnees to the West Bank in the years following the 1993 Oslo Peace Accords. The study is revealing for what it shows us about the nature of these returnees' experiences, including the variability of their experiences, their emotional and intellectual discomfort with the realities they found "on the ground," and their negotiated integration into Palestinian society in some instances, and, in others, their decisions to leave for homelands in other places. By revealing the complexities and uncertainties surrounding these returnees' experiences, Hammer effectively demonstrates the "disconnect" for many Palestinian returnees between imagined homelands and real returns, as well as between professed nationalism and self-interested individualism.

Throughout the book, a central focus is on the tension between two groups of returnees whom Hammer refers to as "Amrikan" and "Aideen." The former are returnees from North America and Europe. The latter are returnees from Arab countries, many of whose fathers typically worked for the PLO in diaspora. Many of the Aideens' fathers returned to Palestine in order to work for the Palestinian Authority. Many Aideen, Hammer tells us, had to cope with "the negative perceptions of local Palestinians" (p. 106) who felt that the PA was a "synonym for corruption, privilege, and the takeover of political power" (p. 140). Throughout the study Hammer compares the two

groups (and their inevitable subgroupings). While this serves to highlight a key source of the diversity of experience among Palestinian returnees, it also inevitably sells one group's experiences short and minimizes other key differences (such as religion and class). Amrikans, for example, demonstrate various "acts of resistance" to assimilating to the requirements of life in Palestine, such as refusing to improve their Arabic. The Aideen, on the other hand, are more involved in political issues than the Amrikan. I argue that these assertions by Hammer may be more connected to small sample size than to the social reality of her informants' experiences. While it may be possible to propose certain generalizations based on the influence of the two groups' diaspora experiences, in-depth interviews of more informants and a closer look at the ethnographic data already at hand could have served to bolster her assertions or have led her to different conclusions. (Surely some Aideen at times resist assimilation, and some Amrikan become politically involved, although the strategies of each group may at times be subtle.)

Perhaps most important, if you are not interested in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict specifically, but with the broader theoretical issues of identity, diaspora, and homelands, *Palestinians Born in Exile* may not have much to offer. Hammer stays close to her ethnographic material to the detriment of generating broader insights. For example, to understand the return process, Hammer draws on and elaborates Turner's concept of liminality in rites of passage: She argues that the return process has five stages—return decision, arrival, meeting Palestine, living in Palestine, and staying in Palestine (p. 117). The Palestinian homeland has both real and imagined components; it is often difficult for returnees to reconcile these images and facts. Palestinians themselves are a diverse group who live in diverse places and yet feel that they are part of a unified Palestinian people. The reader is left to wonder how this ethnographic case study may contribute to attempts to analytically define diaspora and the limits and role of imagination; how religious identity factors into and shapes homeland imaginings; and the role gender plays in facilitating or hindering assimilation.

A few specific points of critique are worth mentioning here. Hammer claims to have interviewed 60 returnees (p. 105) but lists only 50 in her "List of Respondents"; not all of the sources listed in her bibliography are referred to in her text; she often draws on interview material from other authors' works to support her points when she surely could have used her own material; she leans heavily on Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity* to the exclusion of a number of other authors on the subject; and the text is in many places exceedingly awkward.

I enjoyed *Palestinians Born in Exile*, but I bring to the book experiences from my own fieldwork in the West Bank, including a number of months in Ramallah while at Bir Zeit University, and many evenings in Checkers (the favored hangout for Amrikan Palestinians to which Hammer often refers). I, too, was fascinated by this subgroup of Palestinians who both blended in and stood out in ways both similar to and different from me. Although I would have liked Hammer to push her material further so that it would appeal to those outside the field of Palestinian studies, I applaud her work for pointing to the complexities of the experiences of this little known group of returnees who are carrying the weight of (at least) two worlds on their shoulders.

Celia Rothenberg
Department of Religious Studies
and Health Studies Programme
McMaster University
Hamilton, Ontario



The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times, edited by Reeva Spector Simon, Michael Menachem Laskier, and Sara Reuger. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. 549 pp. \$26.00.

The past fifty years have witnessed the emergence of an extensive scholarly literature, across a range of disciplines, on Middle Eastern and North African Jewries. Although this scholarship is no longer as marginal as it once was in Jewish Studies, there has yet to appear a coherent synthesis of modern Jewish history in the region. It is to fill this gap that Reeva Spector Simon, Michael Menachem Laskier, and Sara Reuger offer *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times*. Whether or not the editors have succeeded in compiling a coherent and compelling synthesis, we are fortunate that they have made the attempt. The result is a useful collection that furthers the cause of both expanding the scope of Jewish Studies and integrating Jewish history into the broader historiography of the region.

Insofar as one theme unites the historical narratives compiled in this edited volume, it is the conventional theme of the transition from tradition to modernity. Beyond this, and even though nearly one-third of the chapters are authored by the editors themselves, there are notable tensions and contradictions between specific contributions. To take one significant example, there is a disagreement between some of the authors regarding the extent to which local rabbis “had a vested interest in the continuation of traditional ways” (p. 287) as opposed to the extent to which rabbinical authorities emphasized “the