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**Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, eds.**  
***Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, and Culture, 1893–1958.***  
**Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2013.**  
**272 pp.**

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understanding of Heschel's debt to modern Jewish thought in constructing his philosophy of Judaism in general and his conception of self-transcendence in particular would have to address a series of complex issues. It would have to determine the common ground and differences between Heschel and his hasidic sources and other neo-hasidic thinkers such as Hillel Zeitlin. It would have to explore Heschel's plea for reorienting the self toward God with similar expressions emanating from the Musar movement. It would have to compare Heschel's ideal of a human shift toward divine concerns with Joseph Dov Soloveitchik's portrayal of the self-abnegation of Adam II and Yeshayahu Leibowitz's theocentric philosophy. It would also require examining the possibility that Heschel's conception of self-transcendence—both its anthropological and theological dimensions—is an implied critique of the naturalism of Mordecai Kaplan, his colleague at the Jewish Theological Seminary. Finally, it would be fruitful to investigate the connection between Heschel's notion of God in search of man and his call for self-transitivity, on the one hand, and Buber's dialogical philosophy, on the other. Held discusses some of these questions (115, 222–225, 250 n. 197). But a more comprehensive treatment would provide greater context for the emergence of Heschel's conceptions.

Finally, I would like briefly to relate to the significance of Held's study for illuminating the reception of Heschel's thought among American Jews. Held does not compare his understanding of Heschel with the American Jewish representation of Heschel, which supports his iconic status. Such a comparison, I believe, would reveal the considerable gap between the way Heschel has been understood and employed and his actual religious philosophy. In the American Jewish Renewal movement, for example, Heschel is perceived as a religious visionary who realizes that the foundation of religious life is spiritual experience. But Held demonstrates that Heschel ascribes to spirituality intermediary value: it must lead to worship (*'avodah*) and God-centeredness. Held's analysis also problematizes the use of Heschel's involvement in liberal social causes to demonstrate his support for modern religious liberalism. As Held establishes, Heschel's prophetic moral criticism of American society flows from his critique of modernity, which he views as overly anthropocentric and utilitarian.

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If Ashkenazic Jewry's dominant visibility has defined much of the discourse on Judaism in modernity, this collection of texts from a panoply of Middle Eastern

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Jewish voices is a signal call for change. The volume arrives at a felicitous moment at the juncture of renewed postcolonial sensibilities, when the interest in reimagining Jewish modernity has become a pressing need. While historically, the role of the Sephardim has not been ignored and their importance for Jewish intellectual history has been recognized well into the late Middle Ages, the experience of modernity brought an increased sense of the vernacularization and nationalization of the various constituents of modern Judaism. As the focus began to shift from traditionally regulated forms of Jewish life to the diverse versions of modernity that arose across Europe and its colonies as well as in the Americas, the Middle East, Asia, and Africa, the various Jewish communities began to move more self-consciously in the societies in which they lived and whose cultural experience increasingly determined local Jewish life. This has produced cultural differences of such a magnitude that the Jewish aspects have often been eclipsed in the eyes of Western observers. As a consequence, discussions on Zionism and Jewish culture more generally have become oblivious of Jewish intellectual life outside Europe, the Americas, and Russia. This has not just led to intellectual atrophy, but come to present direct social and political harm, arguably not only in the way social, political, and cultural life has been affected in Israel. If Jewish studies is to make good on one of its great failures in the past, it must now catch up with the great lacuna regarding the various Maghrebian and Middle Eastern communities that, with the formation of Israel, have now come to be lumped together as one single community: the Mizrahi Jews.

In an illuminating introduction to the volume, the editors Moshe Behar and Zvi-Dor Benite highlight the profoundly transformative role that Ashkenazi-dominated Zionism in Palestine and then Ashkenazi-dominated Israeli Zionism played in the process of turning the various waves of immigration from diverse North African and Middle Eastern countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq, and Yemen, among others, into a seemingly homogeneous group of Mizrahi Jews. This anthology of texts by Jewish intellectuals from the Middle East brings together critical interventions from the period between 1893 and 1958. Focusing on the period of the early Zionist discourse under the British Mandate before the establishment of the State of Israel, and following the consolidation of the state during its first decade, the volume showcases a period during which the Israeli version of the “Arab Question” underwent a decisive transformation, turning the non-Ashkenazic community into what would later be called the “Second Israel.”

As always when one turns to the past, today’s problems appear in a more differentiated light, pointing historically further back than just one or two generations. Today’s discourse receives its most illuminating light from re-examining the historical debates that reflected the issues at the moment of their emergence; more precisely, at a time when many of the concerns that have become commonplace today and have become couched in one or the other form of current postcolonial critique were first articulated with striking frankness, openness, and self-critical awareness, which often remains unmatched. Revisiting the sites of what has become since the second half of the twentieth century the discourse on the Mizrahi Jews, we are given the chance to explore a construction site

whose exploration might offer new opportunities to appreciate the significance that Judaism's rich diversity holds for the future. Resistant to the neat and tidy subordination to Ashkenazic perspectives, critical engagement with this challenge might present Judaism's most promising chance of reimagining itself.

Besides strikingly eloquent pleas to wake up to the colonialist and, in the eyes of its critics, racist complicities of the Zionist project, the anthology offers remarkable early feminist and gender-critical views. While the Marxist critique of Zionism as the lackey of British colonial interest in the Middle East has become well known, albeit too conveniently ignored, its Arab Jewish version deserves attention not simply for who addresses which audience but for the more original first-hand insights that lace the authors' critical views. While the collection could easily be dismissed as a memorial to so many forgotten voices and those few that have survived oblivion, the hope remains that these voices will inspire the current debate to renewed engagement with the missed opportunities that continue to haunt the present. Offering glimpses into an archive that calls for rethinking modern Jewish history in principal terms, the collection of these voices redirects our perspective on the Middle East as more than just an Oriental fantasy of the European imagination.

If Judaism, as this volume's thinkers so impressively remind us, needs to recognize itself no less as Arab as it has come to comprehend itself as profoundly European, this might well be its greatest contribution at the current juncture. Many of the issues and concerns these voices express still await our attention, and to ignore them further seems no longer a feasible option. As little as we might be prepared to confront the challenge, the point that, for instance, Zionism and colonialism are in the eyes of many Arab Jews not just problematic but directly hostile to Judaism itself—as the Iraqi Yussuf Harun Zihlka argued in 1946—can no longer be explained away as a simple provocation. Rather, this concern has to be recognized in its more serious implications as a legitimate issue if Arab Jewish sensibilities are to be given a sympathetic ear. The point that the Arabic language should be recognized at the side of *'ivrit* as the two official languages in a bilingual Jewish state, as David Asar, born in 1888 in Hebron, had proposed as early as 1930 in response to the Zionist debates on the national language of the Jews in the future state, reflects an equally significant point. So does the call for an Arab-Jewish Federation as Elie (Eliyahu) Eliachar, born in 1899 in Jerusalem, had argued in 1936, in order to facilitate genuine flourishing of the Jewish settlements in an environment that Jewish initiative would help to revitalize. Another surprising fact is that it was not the Ashkenazic but the Sephardic chief rabbi, Ben-Zion Me'ir Hai Uziel, born in Jerusalem, who called—first in Mandatory Palestine, and then as the first Sephardic chief rabbi of the new state—for women's suffrage, while his counterpart, the Ashkenazic chief rabbi Avraham Yizhak Kook, opposed it.

But the volume's ultimate significance might well point beyond the call for the overdue recognition of Mizrahi Jewry and its role during the half century before the foundation of the State of Israel and the first decade into the state's infancy. It might also well go beyond making us finally recognize the enduring presence of Arab Jewry and its constitutive role in the experience of Zionism and the State of Israel. Rather, its greatest significance might consist in the

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recognition that Maghrebi, Arab, and Middle Eastern Jewish experiences (and not just the “Mizrahi” Jewish experience) played a decisive part in Jewish modernity at large. Understanding this will enable us to go beyond simply following the cues of postcolonial discourse and help us recognize the critical potential Jewish studies can offer to the rethinking of the terms of postcolonial discourse.

If seen this way, this might be only a beginning of a more encompassing project of ambitious proportions; the editors present us with the opportunity to at last begin to understand how crucially important this project will be. For the change in perspective is not just an urgently overdue revision of the role the Arab Jewish community plays in Israel and at large. It also helps us to put into new perspective Zionist and other non-Arab Jewish discourses that would, with often strikingly similar words, emphasize the bridge function that Middle Eastern and “Asian” Jews might bring to the task of producing a more inclusive, richer, and more promising vision of modernity.

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### CONTEMPORARY JEWISH THOUGHT

Claire Elise Katz. *Levinas and the Crisis of Humanism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2013. 247 pp.  
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The theme of this very interesting book is the distinctive and central contribution that Judaism and Jewish education make to Emmanuel Levinas’s overall philosophical achievement. Education, Katz argues, is the link between the crisis of humanism that we face in part as a result of the hegemony of privileging personal interests and claims, on the one hand, and the realization of the Levinasian conception of ethical subjectivity as infinite responsibility to and for the other person, on the other. Education as the link between the situation in which we find ourselves and the attainment of our ideals can be found in Rousseau, and it recurs here in the case of Levinas in a distinctive way. But in much twentieth-century moral and political philosophy it is a forgotten theme.

Katz argues that education provides more than a route or procedure whereby children or others without a developed moral sensibility acquire the requisite orientation and understanding. In addition, it contributes to the very normativity of the ethical, as Levinas understands it. She calls this normative element ceding “one’s own ego to the Other.” Education, then, and specifically Jewish education, are what give one’s intersubjective relations their normative dimension, the claim upon the “I” to give up its rights and interests to the other person. This is a very strong claim on Katz’s part. On the one hand, it makes Levinas’s thinking about