



Mind the map: charting unexplored territories of in-visible migrations from North Africa and the Middle East to Italy

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To cite this article: Piera Rossetto (2022) Mind the map: charting unexplored territories of in-visible migrations from North Africa and the Middle East to Italy, *Jewish Culture and History*, 23:2, 172-195, DOI: [10.1080/1462169X.2022.2062840](https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2022.2062840)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1462169X.2022.2062840>



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Published online: 16 Apr 2022.



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Mind the map: charting unexplored territories of in-visible migrations from North Africa and the Middle East to Italy

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ABSTRACT

Visibility and invisibility represent crucial categories of analysis in migration studies. However, the multiple manifestations of in-visibility can make it difficult to precisely define them. This article suggests reconsidering these categories not so much in terms of 'what they are' but rather 'when they occur'. By encompassing the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of social interaction and analysis, in-visibility proves to be a viable category to explore the case of Middle Eastern and North African Jewish migrations to Milan, Italy—an area that still remains 'uncharted territory' for scholars of Sephardi and Mizrahi studies.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 20 October 2021

Accepted 30 March 2022

KEYWORDS

In-visibility; Sephardi & Mizrahi Jews; MENA region; Jewish quarter; Italian Jews; mapping

Introduction

If you use Google Maps to look up an address in the southwestern part of Milan, Italy, you will find a curious label: *Quartiere ebraico*, 'Jewish quarter'. However, a Jewish quarter does not exist in Milan; one has never existed there. A Jewish ghetto, like the well-known ones in Venice and Rome, is also not present. So, why does Google Maps identify this area as Jewish? Is there a particularly 'visible' Jewish presence that has prompted the developers of Google's mapping service to include such a label?

The article explores, from a socio-historical perspective, how the production¹ of this 'Jewish space'² is connected to the settlement of a few thousand Jews, mostly from Libya, Egypt, Iran, Syria, and Lebanon, in the city between 1940–1980. By showing how these migrations made possible – and subsequently visible – the creation of new Jewish spaces in the urban environment, this study reveals unexplored aspects of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Jewish migrations to Italy. As MENA Jews established their homes and collective spaces in Milan, a diverse Jewish presence appeared more clearly, not only in the urban portions of the city but also within the social fabric of the receiving Jewish community. In fact, the foundation of synagogues, schools, and cultural centres by the 'newcomers' clearly reflects the will to maintain cultural boundaries and to re-create former social and cultural environments beyond the private sphere of the single household.

These migrations took place during decades of profound historical changes across the Mediterranean, when the Jewish presence in the MENA was almost put to an end by events that destabilised the entire area.³ Although a marginal case in comparison to other

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resettlement directories – such as Israel, France, or Canada – Italy became home to MENA Jews. Although these waves of migration deeply transformed Italian Jewry, especially in demographic terms, the phenomenon lies rather along the ‘periphery’⁴ of (Italian) Jewish studies.

Only in recent years, for instance, have scholars started to investigate the history of contemporary Jewish migrations from Libya to Italy,⁵ exploring in particular their impact on the Jewish community of Rome, where Libyan Jews mainly settled.⁶ On a more general level, they highlight the connections of these migrations with the history and legacies of Italian (post)colonialism,⁷ thus contributing to the growing field of studies on European postcolonial repatriations.⁸

With the exception of few publications,⁹ articles appearing in the local or national Jewish press (i.e., *Pagine ebraiche*; *Bet Magazine*), and a very recent digital humanities project,¹⁰ the case of MENA Jewish migrations in Milan still remains ‘uncharted territory’.

To chart these unexplored migrations, this study takes ‘in-visibility’ – a central category of analysis in the area of migration studies – as its privileged methodological perspective. By doing so, the article aims to join the new directions that the fields of Sephardi and Mizrahi studies have undertaken in the last two decades.¹¹ These include advocating for a methodological shift, which consists of enlarging the framework of references and adopting current theories and categories of analysis¹² – thus bringing the studies of MENA Jews migrations closer to the globalizing fields of migration, ethnic, and racial studies.¹³

The first section, *The map: Jewish spaces in a transforming city*, outlines – from a macro-level perspective – the historical development of contemporary Jewish migrations from the MENA to Italy while also recalling the context of Italian internal migrations. In the *Community Papers* section, I explore archival and institutional sources of the Jewish community of Milan that are more directly concerned with Jewish migrations from the MENA region to the city. Although scarce, these sources offer some important insights – from a meso-level perspective – of the progressive arrivals and settlements of migrants and refugees. Finally, the third section, *City Lights*, opens with a night view of the Piazza Duomo, the historical centre of Milan, as recalled by C.C.: a six-year-old child during that time, who has just arrived as refugee from Egypt with her family. The personal memories and recollections of the MENA Jews I interviewed in Milan between November 2018 and February 2020 constitute the core of this section, which aims to explore the migratory phenomenon and its sociological implications from a micro-level perspective.

Before virtually setting foot in Milan, let me sketch the methodological framework of this article by addressing the following questions: Why consider in-visibility in such a case study? How is in-visibility to be understood in this context?

In-visibility and expanding categories of analysis

As I started researching contemporary Jewish migrations from the Middle East and North Africa in Milan, I realised how the same phenomenon was simultaneously visible and invisible. While a Jewish quarter stands visible on the city-plan of Milan, this area does not possess the signs of what is often associated with a ‘Jewish space’ – as I will later articulate.

While MENA Jews were relatively invisible in institutional sources, individual refugees – such as young Egyptian refugees who arrived in Milan in the mid-1950s – were ‘seen’ by their classmates and perceived as being ‘other’.

Beyond the label on the city-plan – I started asking myself – does this spatial production trigger other realms of visibility connected to migration, where in-visibility is often associated with processes of racialisation; with regimes of representation; with identity formation processes?

Visibility and invisibility have been used in the field of Sephardic and Mizrahi studies, such as in Adriana Brodsky’s account of the history and integration of diverse Jewish migrations from North Africa and the Middle East to Argentina.¹⁴ Brodsky’s research is part of a larger, recent body of inspiring works on Sephardi and Mizrahi migrations to the American continent.¹⁵ Brodsky extensively employs the terms ‘visible’ and ‘invisible’ to account for the history and integration of diverse Jewish migrations to Argentina, stemming from the Ottoman Empire but also from Iraq and Morocco. As Brodsky explains, Sephardim were invisible as Jews in the eyes of the Argentines. For Argentines, to be Jewish meant to be an Ashkenazi Jew – a Jew of European descent. Since Sephardim spoke a different language, lived in different quarters, dressed in different ways, and had different cultural and political practices than Ashkenazi Jews, they were invisible. As the Sephardim realised their invisibility in the narrations of how Jews contributed to making modern Argentina, they also started to claim visibility: ‘asserting both difference from Ashkenazim as well as belonging to Argentina and to its organized Jewish community.’¹⁶ The positions they managed to reach within Jewish organisations – including those representing Jews to the state – made them eventually visible, and their migration was, in this sense, considered successful.¹⁷

However, if visibility is a measure of a group’s successful integration into a receiving society, the opposite is also true. As discussed by Kristine Juul,¹⁸ visibility and invisibility are strategies used to simultaneously become full members of the receiving society and retain cultural particularities. In the case Juul discusses, invisibility, ‘or “blending in” is the product of integration and acceptance rather than the outcome of conditions of marginalisation and imposed silence, as has been the case with, for example, black Americans.’¹⁹

Brodsky’s and Juul’s case studies are but an example of the loose nature of this category. Their studies exemplify how the multiple variations in which visibility and invisibility can unfold, make it difficult to precisely define them. Indeed, it has been argued that, as both visibility and invisibility have been used in the context of migration ‘quite loosely and often without any clear conceptual definition,’ it seems neither possible nor desirable to embark on ‘an exhaustive unearthing of the literature’²⁰ that uses them. Is it the loose way in which the concepts have been used that makes it impossible to define visibility and invisibility? Or is it the very agenda of defining such unstable categories that is doomed to fail?

In the present study, I suggest considering these categories not in terms of ‘what they are’ but rather ‘when they occur.’ Following this methodological line, the article delves into the ‘various acts’²¹ in which visibility and invisibility can unfold: on the map, in the archives, in personal recollections – the different levels on which I articulate my analysis.

Although it was precisely the sign of a ‘Jewish quarter’ on the map that elicited my curiosity – as the title of the paper recalls, this essay does not focus primarily on what a ‘Jewish space’ is, nor does it set out to provide a clear-cut definition of this complex topic.

In the next section, however, while discussing the map and how Jewish spaces evolved in the transforming city of Milan (macro-level), I will unpack the different ways in which a 'Jewish space' can be understood in relation to this specific case study. The multifarious concept of 'Jewish space' – as it developed under the influence of the 'spatial turn' in Jewish studies during the mid-1990s²² – serves as a general framework of reference.

To begin, let us turn to the map.

The map: Jewish spaces in a transforming city



Figure 1. Google Maps, 2022. Milan, <https://www.google.com/maps/@45.4552091,9.1359847,15z> (accessed 30.03.2022).

The city, however, does not tell its past, but contains it like the lines of a hand, written in the corners of the streets, the gratings of the windows, the banisters of the steps, the antennae of the lightning rods, the poles of the flags, every segment marked in turn with scratches, indentations, scrolls.

- Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

Some years ago, I first heard – via a colleague in Venice – about a Jewish quarter in the periphery of Milan, where Jewish schools and a retirement home for members of the Jewish community were located. I remember imagining, from my colleague's description, a sort of residential lot inhabited by mainly – I never thought *only* – Jewish families. As I looked at Google Maps to locate the Jewish school where I had an appointment, the label *Quartiere ebraico* appeared, and I remembered my colleague's remarks about a Jewish quarter in Milan (Figure 1).

However, when I started walking the streets surrounding the Jewish school, the features of the so-called 'Jewish quarter' did not match those I had imagined. The school building was undoubtedly imposing, and the security presence at its entrance – operated

by the Italian army – revealed that it was, like most Jewish buildings in Italy, a sensitive space. There were some kosher shops and restaurants nearby that intensified the Jewish presence in the neighbourhood, although their signboards did not blatantly evoke a Jewish identity. However, for Jews themselves, or for people familiar with Jewish culture, the signboards of these shops and restaurants would be clearly identifiable.²³ They speak to those who can read them, and they are clearly visible and articulable.²⁴

My personal reaction while navigating in a space digitally marked as ‘Jewish’ resonates with one of the ways ‘Jewish spaces’ can be understood: ‘as spatial environments in which Jewish things happen, where Jewish activities are performed, and which in turn are shaped and defined by those Jewish activities, such as a sukkah or a Bundist summer camp for children.’²⁵ While I was walking within the loose, invisible perimeter of the Jewish quarter, I found myself looking for material traces, visible and identifiable markers.²⁶ I recall feeling a kind of disappointment, a result – as I interpret it now – of how I experienced Jewish quarters in other European cities: ‘products of the symbolic topography and historical map of each city, which are created, on the one hand, by efforts to commemorate their Jewish residents and the history of the Holocaust, and, on the other hand, by those promoting urban culture and tourism.’²⁷

As I mentioned before, a Jewish quarter has never existed in Milan, and a Jewish ghetto has never been a part of the historical map of the city. The area currently named *Quartiere ebraico* is not part of ‘the branding of the city in relation to an ethnic product, specifically in connection with Jewish heritage,’²⁸ nor does it play a particular role in memory and memorialisation projects in the context of what has been defined as *Erinnerungskultur* or *Erinnerungspolitik*.²⁹

I have no access to Google Maps’ records and cannot identify precisely when the application first identified this area as a Jewish quarter. It is interesting to note that two important pieces of research,³⁰ both carried out in the 1970s and dealing with the demography and social composition of Milan’s Jewish community, did mention the fact that the Jewish population moved towards the western part of the city, where the Jewish school was built. However, these studies did not use the expression ‘Jewish quarter’ to identify the area.

Interestingly, during my fieldwork in Milan, I was told that it is becoming more and more common to hear Jews in Milan saying, ‘Let us meet at the ghetto’ when referring to this area.³¹ The absence of the elements that would make us ‘recognise’ a Jewish quarter as such, and yet the fact that people refer to it in these terms, demonstrates how ‘the conception of Jewish space’ is ‘a *fluid* process, rather than a fixed, closed, or complete entity [...] an area – and object – of negotiations and controversies, to which the genesis of various discourses and divergent experiences can be traced.’³² I decided to explore with my interviewees this puzzling fact: How did a ‘Jewish quarter’ come to exist where one had never existed before?

When I mentioned the label on the map and the subsequent visibility of a presumed ‘Jewish quarter,’ some interviewees looked rather uneasy about it. Although the label is only on the map, some felt that this distinctiveness clashed with what they considered the true and original story of integration/assimilation – invisibility, in a way – of Milanese Jews in their city. Others interpreted this fact as an expression of antisemitism: the will to confine Jews in an enclosed space. An Egyptian Jewish lady told me that the Jewish presence in this area was made visible, not only by the kosher shops and restaurants – as I

had thought – but more so by the dress code adopted by increasing numbers of Jews living in, or usually coming to, this part of Milan.³³ Based on the respondents' views, their way of dressing and covering the head indicate that they belong to the more orthodox groups of Judaism. According to another testimony, this 'more visible' presence intensified when the school of Merkos, the educational branch of the Jewish Chabad Lubavitch movement, moved in an area close to Primaticcio.³⁴ Visibility then shifted during these conversations from the meso level of urban structures to the micro level of individual performances of religious identity.

But, how and why did this area become a centre of attraction for Milanese Jews? In the following section, I will explore the so-called *Quartiere ebraico* and provide a historical overview of how the Jewish population of Milan changed due to the observed migratory phenomenon.

MENA Jews in Milan

The two more conspicuous groups of Jewish migrants from the MENA region in Milan are Iranian and Egyptian Jews, while Libyan, Syrian, and Lebanese Jews arrived in Milan in small numbers, and following different trajectories.³⁵ The first Jews from Iran arrived at the beginning of the 1950s for commercial reasons,³⁶ and were mainly descendants of the Mashadi Jews.³⁷ Other families joined later, in the mid-1960s, and the community grew to a population of 1,600 in the 1980s, which had declined to approximately 800 in the 2010s.³⁸

Personal recollections by Mashadi Jews and their descendants in Milan assign a prominent space to the forced conversion to Islam of the community in 1839 and their life as crypto Jews, which lasted for decades. However, the migration of Mashadi Jews in Milan in the 1950s did not originate in these events. By the late 1940s, in fact, the majority of the Mashadi Jews had already left Mashad for Teheran. This is rather to be seen as a movement driven by economic reasons, at the initiative of few individuals and in which family networks played a crucial role: when one member of the community had a well-established business, he would call his relatives to join him.³⁹ Iranian Jews initially worked in the carpets trade, and later specialised also in the gemstones business.⁴⁰ The attractiveness of the Jewellery districts in Northern Italy, such as that of Valenza Po in the Milan region,⁴¹ might have played a role in this, but this should be further verified.

Concerning Egyptian Jews, some families were already living in Milan by the 1940s, while the majority arrived as a result of the political tensions that preceded, and the military actions that followed, the Suez crisis between Egypt, France, Great Britain, and Israel in October 1956.⁴² According to archival sources, about 900 Jews from Egypt (stateless or of various nationalities) sought refuge in Italy. It is this arrival – conspicuous and concentrated in a limited time span (1956–1957) that is recalled by most testimonies as a mass exodus. The Milanese Jewish institutions set up a committee with the specific purpose to support those who arrived carrying only few belongings with them. The Jewish community of Genoa was also involved in providing help for the immediate needs of the refugees because many Jews arrived from Egypt by boat and first landed in the Ligurian port city.⁴³

As Egyptian Jewish families began to permanently settle in Milan, the community was confronted with a major issue. To Egyptian families, it was important to provide their children with a modern education, preferably still in a Jewish environment. The increasing number of pupils coming from refugee families made the continued use of the old Jewish school in via Eupili – northwest region of Milan – impossible. It became too small, and the community was obliged to invest in constructing a huge building that, at its peak, would host more than 1,000 pupils, from nursery-school-age to high-school-age. The building was constructed in the area bridging the neighbourhoods of Primaticcio and Lorenteggio and the school was inaugurated in 1963. It included a synagogue and now also hosts the offices of the Jewish community (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Animated view of the construction site of the new Jewish school in via Sally Mayer, Milan, 1960 (inv. 133-s102-007). Fondo fotografico Bollettino della comunità ebraica di Milano (n.133), Archivio storico della Fondazione CDEC, Milan.

As is often mentioned in personal testimonies, the school influenced the housing choices of the newcomers. Born in Cairo in 1954, A.A. arrived in Italy in 1957. Thanks to the professional network of A.A.'s father, the family settled in a small centre in the province of Milan where he had received a job offer. However, as soon as they could, they moved to Milan and looked for a flat close to the Jewish school.

In comparison to Cairo, the weather in Milan was not friendly.⁴⁴ Waking up early in the morning to go to school and finding darkness outside was extremely oppressive. Having a flat close to the Jewish school and no longer being obliged to make exhausting trips by public transportation was vital, particularly in the long, foggy Milanese winter. Thus, refugee families tried to move into apartments near the school, and in this way, the Jewish presence intensified between the Primaticcio and Lorenteggio neighbourhoods.

Another migratory phenomenon also played a major role here. The settlement of Jewish families in this area was made possible by the massive construction of apartment blocks in Lorenteggio,⁴⁵ which began in the 1950s to provide housing for the large numbers of people migrating from southern Italy and many rural areas in north-eastern Italy. In post-World War II Italy, Milan rapidly regained its role as one of the most attractive and vibrant Italian industrial districts.⁴⁶ Between 1951 and 1961, about 300,000 immigrants arrived in Milan, with almost 100,000 coming in 1962 alone.⁴⁷ This is another story of Italian migration – in this case, internal – which stretches beyond the scope of this article.⁴⁸ However, it is important to note this fact to understand that the relocation of Jewish families in Milan's urban spaces was the result of factors internal to the Jewish community, such as demographic changes and the will to belong (even if to varying degrees) to the Jewish community – as well as external factors, such as the city's urban development, which was determined by other waves of (non-Jewish) migrations.

While the presence of Jewish facilities attracted many Jewish families who decided to settle in or move to these neighbourhoods from other parts of Milan, the growing number of Jewish families living in this area sparked commercial activities in the Jewish sub-economy. Over the last 20 to 25 years, kosher shops and restaurants have been opening in the area, mainly due to the initiatives of Iranian and Lebanese Jews.

In the 1980s, less than one kilometre from the school in via Sally Mayer, Iranian Jews inaugurated a cultural and religious centre, which hosts two synagogues and various spaces for religious, cultural, and recreational activities. However, they never opened a separate Jewish school of their own⁴⁹; instead, they sent their children to the Jewish Community School in via Sally Mayer. Lebanese Jews also established a cultural and religious centre, inaugurated in 1988, and later moved (mid-1990s) to a more spacious location. They later chose to create a separate school for pupils from primary to secondary school.⁵⁰ This was the third Jewish educational institution in Milan, alongside the Sally Mayer and the Merkos schools. The result has been a plurality of Jewish identities coexisting in Milan,⁵¹ or, as another interviewee put it, a sort of *de facto* federalism.⁵²

This diachronic excursus has shed some light on the historical process beneath the curious label *Quartiere ebraico* in the city plan of Milan. It has also introduced the varying levels by which we can analyse the production of this Jewish space – from urban transformations to individual performances of cultural and religious belonging.

However, how did communitarian institutions and community members experience these changes? Were they conscious of the sociocultural and religious changes that were taking place? And how did those changes come about? In the next section, I consider the institutional and archival sources of the Milanese Jewish community to understand how visible MENA Jews were perceived in its midst.⁵³

Community papers

14 Bollettino della Comunità Israelitica di Milano

PRODOTTI ORIENTALI

Bellagusta.

ISTANBUL
ATHENES
MILANO

Dolciumi Orientali

Rahat-Locum
Halva
Sugluc
Tahiné

Confettura di Rose
Caramelle Orientali (Alchides)
Croccanti di Sesamo
Pistil Amardin
Sciroppo di Rose
Acqua di Rose
Acqua di Fiori d'Arancio
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Figure 3. Advertisement for oriental sweet specialities by the Bellagusta company (with headquarters in Istanbul, Athens, and Milan) in the Bulletin of the Jewish Community of Milan, Anno VII, N.6, March 1952. Archivio Storico della Fondazione CDEC, Milan.

In 1866, the *Consorzio Israelitico* – the first configuration of what would become Milan's Jewish community – was founded. It consisted mainly of Ashkenazi and Italian Jews who had assimilated and integrated into the life of the city. During World War II, the racial laws and the Nazi persecution hit the community dramatically, but it managed to reconstitute itself in April 1945.⁵⁴ Immediately after the war, thousands of Jewish refugees passed

through Italy in search of a better life.⁵⁵ On this journey, Milan represented an important stopover; refugees were assisted by international organisations, as well as by the local Jewish institutions (Figure 3).

The first issue of the *Bollettino della Comunità Israelitica di Milano* (*The Bulletin of the Jewish Community of Milan*, hereafter *Bollettino*), published in June 1945, recorded 2,576 Jews registered as members of the Milanese Jewish community: 1,774 Italians, 759 foreigners, 43 people without a nationality.⁵⁶ The *Bollettino* issues from the first post-war years described a community striving to rebuild itself, as the proportions of the catastrophe of the Shoah were still unknown. There is little information about the presence of MENA Jews at this time. Equally, very little is known about Sephardi Jews from the former Ottoman Empire, who settled in Italy, and particularly in Milan, in the 1920s–1930s.⁵⁷ Thanks to archival sources from the Jewish community, we do know that, in 1948, as the conflict between Israel and the Arab countries broke out, about 100 Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese, Iraqi, and Greek Jews had turned to the Milanese community for assistance; they needed help with renewing their residence permits in Italy.⁵⁸ The Israeli-Arab conflict had, in fact, put them in the difficult position of being considered potential enemies in their country of origin or residence, and they felt they could not safely return. The cases mentioned in the archival sources concern Jews who were living in Milan for different reasons and had come from Beirut, Jerusalem, Aleppo, Baghdad, and Cairo.

Middle Eastern Jewish businessmen based in Milan, like Mr R. Silvera or Mr S. Darwish – an Egyptian entrepreneur and a Baghdadi merchant, respectively – were instrumental in supporting the case of a group of Egyptians and a group of Iraqis whose documents (residence permits and passports) were on the verge of expiring or had already expired. While the two mediators wrote to the Jewish community of Milan asking for help, its secretary, Mr Alfredo Sarano, managed to involve the *Unione delle Comunità Israelitiche Italiane* (UCII, the Union of the Jewish Communities of Italy) in the issue.

Among the Italian Jewish institutions, there was an awareness of the dangerous situation Jews faced in many Arab countries. On 3 November 1948, the UCII's president, Raffaele Cantoni, wrote to Alfredo Sarano and asked him to get in touch with Mr Gariani. An Egyptian Jew living in Milan, Mr Gariani, was believed to receive regular news from his relatives in Egypt. The UCII was trying to collect updated information to support international actions for protecting Jews living in Arab countries. A handwritten note added to Cantoni's letter indicating that, to find Mr Gariani, Sarano involved another Egyptian Jew in Milan, Mr I. Bempechat.⁵⁹ The research was successful, and Sarano sent, on 15 November 1948, a detailed letter in reply to Cantoni. Unfortunately, the letter, based on the information Mr Gariani had received from his relatives, confirmed that the situation for the Jews in Cairo was, indeed, awful.⁶⁰

This correspondence sheds some light on a small group of MENA Jews who had already settled in Milan before the 1950s. This group, however, was definitely much larger than these sources can indicate, as oral sources reveal. Saul Legziel emigrated from Benghazi to Milan in 1951 and served for decades as a member of the Jewish community board. He referred to this group of MENA Jews in a 1984 interview.⁶¹ Legziel recalled how MENA Jews living in Milan felt the need to preserve their religious rites and traditions, which ultimately led – after some other temporary solutions – to the 1954 inauguration of a

'Sephardic oriental *oratorio*' (small temple, prayer room) in the underground floor of the great Synagogue of Milan.⁶² According to the community's secretary, Alfredo Sarano, in June 1952, there were 4,934 Jews officially registered as members of the community, although, in his estimation, about 7,000 Jews resided in Milan.⁶³ Out of these, Sarano continues, one-third were Italian, one-third Ashkenazi, and one-third Sephardi – MENA Jews, Egyptians in particular – who arrived in Milan as a consequence of the 1948 war between Israel and the Arab countries.

Sources delineate a stable presence of Jews from the MENA region who, in the following years, provided help to several hundred Jewish refugees from Egypt in the immediate aftermath of the Suez Canal crisis. In fact, as mentioned in a January 1957 article from the *Bollettino*, many women from the Egyptian group, 'since long residing in Italy,⁶⁴ engaged themselves in the *Comitato di Assistenza ai Profughi* (Refugees Relief Committee, hereafter *Comitato*), led by Vittorio Levi. The *Comitato* was established by the Jewish community of Milan to assist Jewish refugees coming from Egypt with their basic needs: clothing, food, accommodation, and finding employment.

In April 1957, the *Bollettino* provided some figures about the refugees arriving in Milan and launched an appeal to its readers, the Milanese Jews.⁶⁵ Between December 1956 and March 1957, 908 refugees arrived in Milan; as non-Italian citizens, 251 of them were not entitled to receive support from the Italian government⁶⁶; about 300 had already left Italy (120 to Israel), and 50 had managed to find a job 'appropriate to their peculiar skills.'⁶⁷ Yet, the remainder – 600 people, according to the *Bollettino* – were still depending completely on the help of the *Comitato*. As Pesach (Passover) approached, the editors of the *Bollettino* turned to its readers to ensure that all refugees had the possibility to celebrate according to the religious prescriptions. Readers were encouraged to either invite a refugee into their homes for Pesach or to contribute to the costs of buying kosher food for the duration of the celebration (eight days) for a refugee family.

The *Bollettino* did not provide stories of individual refugees or families, which instead remain invisible behind the numbers. We can, however, gain some insights into the trajectories of these refugee families from the personal data sheets of Egyptian students enrolled at the Jewish schools in via Eupili (school year 1956/1957) and living in the *pensionato* – a boarding house run by the community.⁶⁸ It is a small sample (16 male students, aged between 10 and 16), but it lets us glimpse a few different stories: families who had just arrived from Egypt and others who had been settled in Milan for a few years, entire families living in one furnished room, while others were forced to split into separate dwellings.⁶⁹ For instance, the latter was the case for G.C., born in Cairo in 1943, whose parents lived in Milan in one furnished room, while his sister lived in Rome with relatives, and he lived in the *pensionato*.⁷⁰ Some students lived in Milan for only a few months to later move with their families to Israel or other countries, such as the UK; others planned to settle in the city permanently.⁷¹

But who were those who came? What did it mean to live in a crowded single room or a small flat often shared with other relatives or compatriots? What did it mean to live separated from one's family? What was it like to start from scratch in another country – perhaps having its passport but possessing no cultural link to it? We must explore another level of sources, such as personal recollections or memoirs, to unveil what institutional sources fail to record.

A crucial contribution comes from the oral history project *Edoth: Jews of the Mediterranean and the Middle East*⁷² (*Edoth* meaning 'ethnic communities' in Hebrew), which was launched in 2011 by the CDEC Foundation of Milan.⁷³ A digital visualization project based on this collection of interviews has been recently published.⁷⁴ This project represents the first institutional effort to 'make visible' the



Figure 4. Portrait of Enrico and Becky Picciotto with their son Raffaele in Milan's Piazza Duomo, December 1951, inv. 540-album05-035_A. Fondo fotografico Picciotto Enrico (n.540), Archivio storico della Fondazione CDEC, Milan.

different ethnic components of the Jewish population in Milan – thus acknowledging its multicultural composition.⁷⁵ In a way, this project has also endeavoured to preserve the memories of Jewish life in those countries, as it was personally experienced by the witnesses, in addition to the various traditions and beliefs these migrants brought with them to Milan. To the regret of one of the project's initiators – which echoes an irrecoverable cultural loss⁷⁶ – little has survived of the memories of Sephardi Jews who arrived in Milan in the 1920s and 1930s from the territories of the former Ottoman Empire. When the project began, the elderly members of this community had already passed away.⁷⁷

However, this issue is not just a matter of an aging population but also of research projects' aims. Sephardi Jews had been interviewed, but in the framework of other projects. An interview with Enrico Picciotto in 1991 speaks to this effect (Figure 4).⁷⁸

Enrico Picciotto was born in Istanbul to parents originally from Aleppo, Syria. In Istanbul, his father worked for the Ottoman administration until 1924, when the family moved to Milan. However, with the rise of fascism between 1934–1935, the family moved again – this time to Cairo. There, the family enjoyed a comfortable life. In Cairo, Enrico met Rebecca (Becky) Valadj, whom he married in 1948, just before being forced to leave Egypt because he was a Jew.⁷⁹ Enrico and his wife, later joined by other members of his family, returned to Milan, starting their lives again from scratch. Enrico Picciotto and his brother Vittorio are mentioned as individuals who provided help and assistance in numerous testimonies from Egyptian Jewish refugees who arrived in Milan between 1956–1957. However, in Enrico Picciotto's 1991 interview, there are no traces of this story. As the project aimed to collect testimonies about the persecution and discrimination Jews suffered in Italy during the Shoah, we have learned about the destiny of many Picciotto family members in relation to this topic. The role played by the Picciotto brothers in receiving and helping refugees from Egypt remains invisible.

This invisibility reminds us of the researcher's role in the transmission of memory and in the social construction of the past, whose nature 'arises out of the needs and frames of reference of each particular present.'⁸⁰ In this case, the present research project – with its questions and focuses – highlights certain narratives of the past, while leaving others aside.

While the *Edoth* project gave priority to the testimonies of elderly MENA Jews who had moved to Milan, in my own research project, I wanted to add to the viewpoints of younger generations. Before the whole world entered the COVID-19 lockdown and the Italian borders were closed, I tried to acquire testimonies from those who had experienced migration and the process of integration as children or young adults. In the next section, I will use this perspective to explore other variations of invisibility, as they appear on the micro level of personal interactions and recollections.

City lights



Figure 5. Paolo Monti, Night view of the Piazza Duomo, Milan, 1950–1970 C.085.18.03. On the top right is the advertisement for Brill shoe cream. (Servizio fotografico by Paolo Monti. The image comes from the Fondo Paolo Monti, owned by BEIC and located at the Civico Archivio Fotografico of Milan. The BEIC Foundation owns the copyrights of the Archivio Paolo Monti).

Between 1956 and 1957, we arrived in Genoa[;] I don't remember almost anything about the arrival in Genoa, nor [do] I recall when we arrived in Milan[;] we came [to] Milan by train. I remember only one evening, when my father took us for a tour of the city, the facade opposite to the Dome [was] full of coloured advertisements, neon lights, that for us were something new[;] we hadn't seen something like this in Egypt[,], and I remember one advertisement in particular, it a silly thing perhaps, but ... the man who cleaned his shoes, a little man who showed how his shoes shone.⁸¹

When she arrived in Milan from Cairo in January 1957, C.C. was six years old. She recalled the lights of the neon banners on Carminati Palace on the opposite site of the Dome of Milan as her father took her, her sisters, and her mother on a tour of the city (Figure 5). Photos of the Dome square taken in those years show – among the many neon signs – an advertisement for Brill shoe cream: the little man who is showing off his shining shoes.

While listening to C.C., I could still sense the wonder she, as a little girl, had for something new – something she had never seen in Egypt – a sense of wonder that was, nevertheless, followed by a much sadder note:

Anyway, this impact with the city [would not have been] negative, if [it were not] for the accommodation, because we [found] a place close to the Central Station in a room for five persons[,] and so[,] it was not the best[,] and we didn't have much food[.] I mean, my father had then not yet found a job[;] we [had] left Egypt leaving behind all our belongings, and so . . . I believe that the amount of money each family was allowed to take with [them] was £50, a very modest amount of money to start a whole new life. . . . However, I also remember visually this time, in this guesthouse in the square where the Pirellone Palace is now, more or less, a place of such a misery, and we had only a camp stove to cook for five persons, where my mother cooked a kind of sausages in some water[;] this was our dinner, our lunch . . .⁸²

Supported by the Jewish institutions of Milan, C.C.'s father found a job in the same sector for which he worked in Egypt. Most likely, he was one of the 50 immigrants mentioned in the *Bollettino* who managed to find a job 'appropriate to their peculiar skills.'⁸³ Despite this lucky event, the path towards constructing a new life for his family was still arduous. After meeting another Jewish family from Egypt (a couple with a small child), C.C.'s parents decided to leave the guesthouse and rent a flat with their new friends. However, things did not go well, and sharing the flat did not turn out to be a good choice: 'We were bewildered; we weren't happy,' C.C. recalled. 'I absolutely don't remember any happy moment, at least in this place.'⁸⁴ Little by little, other family members arrived from Egypt in Milan, and the small, shared flat became a meeting point for the large family. C.C. recalls one family meeting with about 40 participants, during which they discussed whether the family should stay in Italy or emigrate to Israel. The walls of this small flat witnessed fiery discussions between those who wanted to leave and those – like C.C.'s father – who wanted to stay.

If the walls of that flat could speak, I wonder, what would they tell us? What did they hear? Listening to C.C.'s recollections, I could imagine the children playing noisily with the dolls made from the cloth of the suitcases used for the trip from Egypt to Italy, while adults argued about whether they should stay or leave.⁸⁵ C.C. mentions letters that her father received from relatives who had already settled in Israel: they lamented the hardships they had to endure, living in tents, in swamps full of mosquitoes.⁸⁶ All this was very discouraging.

As many other migrants have narrated, there were not only ideological aspects at play in the decision to stay or leave, but also more complex factors behind the reasons for making one decision or the other. In some cases, choosing a migration pattern that differed from that chosen by the majority of a family was a way to find independence, as an individual or as a young couple.⁸⁷

Although precarious, these first harbours constituted a privileged, intimate space for building and rebuilding social connections in a new environment. Testimonies point to the fact that Jews from Egypt used to gather in private homes, where they would resume their social habits – playing cards being one of the most popular leisure activities for both men and women. Jews from Egypt did not establish a religious or cultural centre of their own in Milan, but they did meet for major religious festivities to celebrate together as a 'religious community'. For this purpose, they would rent the canteen of the Jewish school in via Sally Mayer. Younger interviewees described their parents, in those days, as having mainly Egyptian Jewish

friends, which made it possible, especially for their mothers, to settle in the new context by resuming the same sort of routine they had known in Egypt.⁸⁸ We can imagine, then, the atmosphere of Saturday evenings – the different languages being spoken, the voices rising as altercations sparked over card games, the smell of Egyptian dishes being served.⁸⁹

All this could not have passed unnoticed by the Italian neighbours. After all, Italy had not yet known immigration, which did not begin until the 1980s with the arrival of Moroccan immigrants. Prior to the 1980s, Italy had mainly been a country of emigration, having little to do with the ethnic ‘other’ – only very marginally as a consequence of Italian colonialism. The ‘other’ was rather the ‘internal other’, the migrant coming from southern Italy or from other disadvantaged, rural areas of northern Italy.⁹⁰

However, the recollections usually described excellent relationships between the Jews and their Italian neighbours. For C.C.’s mother, the lady living next door became one of her closest friends: an Italian lady hailing from Mantua in the Lombardy region. She taught C.C.’s mother how to prepare some typical Italian dishes, like *tagliatelle*, and helped her get by in her daily affairs. As C.C.’s mother could not speak a word of Italian, this solidarity during the small points of her daily routine was a crucial help. As they left their co-housing situation, C.C.’s family began developing a network of acquaintances outside the group of Egyptian Jewish families, which lasted for decades and helped them integrate into their new social environment.

Experiences of exchange and mutual aid are pertinent to this micro level of analysis, as is the articulation of diversity connected to regimes of ethnicization – to looking and sounding different. This articulation of diversity is both a perception and an auto-perception. For instance, in a small town in the province of Milan, in which hers was the only Egyptian Jewish family, A.A.’s mother was called *la francesca*, ‘the French lady’, in the local dialect.⁹¹ The visible/audible marker was that of having a peculiar accent – French, in this instance – rather than belonging to a religious minority. In the recollections of former pupils of the Jewish schools (first in via Eupili and later in via Sally Mayer), the colour line was another form of articulating difference and visibility.⁹² In this respect, young Milanese Jews saw and perceived their MENA classmates as ‘other’, but this was also the auto-perception that young immigrants had of themselves. As an interviewee interestingly put it, she had the impression that her brother – with dark velvet eyes, thick eyebrows, and an Arab-Egyptian appearance – did not go unnoticed as she did, because – as she puts it – she ‘did not look oriental at all.’⁹³

Such recollections and experiences were not peculiar to the Egyptian Jews. They have always been part of the human experience of migration up to the present day. In fact, in the context of migration studies, invisibility has often been associated with racialisation⁹⁴: with regimes of representation,⁹⁵ identity formation processes and integration of minorities vis-à-vis notions of national culture,⁹⁶ and with ethnic absolutism.⁹⁷

This observation conveniently brings us back to the opening section, where I pointed to the main directions this study would have taken and introduced its methodological framework. It is precisely by recalling the trajectory made so far on the map and the methodological reflections that inspired it, that I move to elaborate some concluding remarks.

Concluding remarks

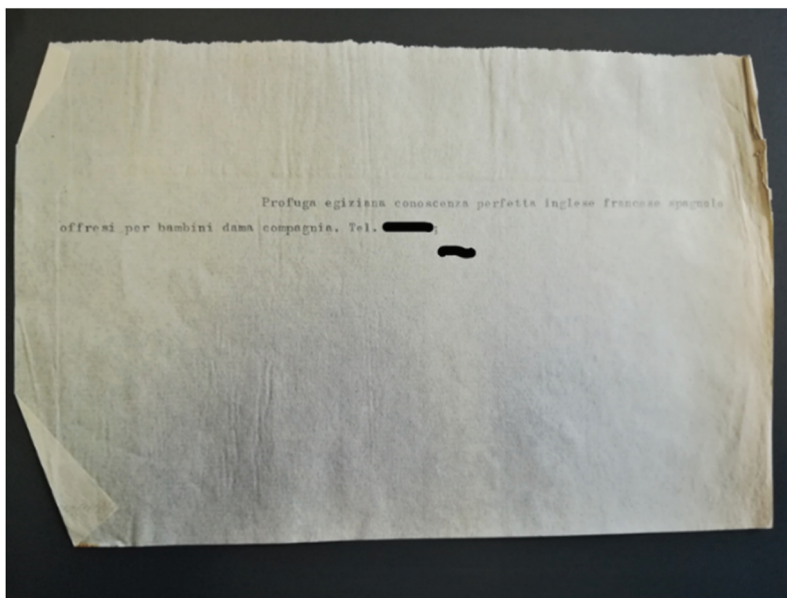


Figure 6. Note with telephone number by Ms C., Egyptian refugee, fluent in English, French, and Spanish: looking for a job as a babysitter or chaperone. Fondo Comunità ORT, Profughi Egitto 1956–1962, Archivio storico della Fondazione CDEC, Milan.

Less than two lines on a half sheet of paper: It was probably a note to be published in the small announcements section of the *Bollettino*, the main publication within the Jewish community of Milan. An Egyptian lady, fluent in English, French, and Spanish, was looking for a job as a babysitter or a chaperone. A phone number and a surname, that was all that was included: less than two lines that both show and hide, make visible and invisible – her hidden past, her precarious present, her uncertain future (Figure 6).

According to Brighenti, ‘When it comes to enumerating “basic” sociological categories, there is no basic agreement. But there is at least a bunch of words [that] most sociologists will admit it is hard to do without – or for some, to escape from.’⁹⁸ Visibility, Brighenti affirms, is one of them: ‘an open field in which the social occurs.’⁹⁹

Being understood in this sense, the sociological category of visibility, or more precisely in-visibility as I used it throughout this article, helped me delve deeper into a curious label that – in addition to geolocating a quarter that does not actually exist – identifies processes of belonging, recognition, and identification at the intersection of multiple scales.

Indeed, in-visibility resonates with other categories of analysis employed in migration studies, such as the ideas of ‘presence’ and ‘absence’. In their anthropological works about Jewish migrations from Morocco, Trevisan Semi and Hatimi¹⁰⁰ and Boum¹⁰¹ investigated the paradox of the physical absence of Jews in Morocco while still

continuing to be present in the country in the recollections of ‘the others’, namely Muslim Moroccans. In the context of Algerian migrations to France, Abdelmalek Sayad¹⁰² speaks of a ‘double absence’ referring to the ‘physical absence’ in the country of emigration (departure) and the ‘moral absence’ in the country of immigration (arrival) of the individual migrant.¹⁰³ Sayad’s aim was to bring under the same analysis the two national frameworks (Algeria and France) to highlight the inextricably bounded nature of the migratory phenomenon between the country of departure and the country of destination.

The present study, however, started from a different set of observations and questions. It did not consider the spaces and relations that Jews from MENA left behind in their (forced) migrations, as Trevisan Semi, Hatimi, and Boum do. Instead, it concentrated on the country of arrival and on the traces left by these migrations at various levels. In this respect, in-visibility helped me combine macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of analysis to unveil the processes of ‘enactment and creativity’¹⁰⁴ at the core of the production of this peculiar ‘Jewish space’ in Milan. As a result, in-visibility appears to be determined – the article highlights – by the interaction between different subjects, at different levels and in different periods, encompassing the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels of social interaction and analysis¹⁰⁵: not in a mutually exclusive way but in an interconnected manner.¹⁰⁶

Moreover, the main peculiarity of MENA Jewish migrations in Milan I tackled in this article is not that they are ‘double absent’ (in Sayad’s sense) in the two distinct contexts of departure and of arrival. What sparked my curiosity was the fact that they were (and are) both present and absent in the same context, i.e., their destination. In this sense, this study highlighted how Jewish migrations from the MENA region to Italy were experienced and seen – concealed or unveiled – thus reflecting how migrants reacted to their new environments and vice versa. These migrations were, and are, both visible and invisible, depending on the temporality in which they are considered and the plurality of the actors who form the systems in which they unfold.

In this study, I ventured into some uncharted territory. I hope that others will follow, bringing stimulating questions in hopes of tackling aspects that are not addressed here, such as the heterogeneous paths of migration of individuals and families, the multiple identities embraced and invested by the migrants, and the colonial and postcolonial legacies these migrations unveil. To all these questions, in-visibility could indeed serve as a fruitful category of analysis.

Notes

1. Henry Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).
2. Anna Lipphardt, Julia Brauch and Alexandra Nocke, “Exploring Jewish Space: An Approach,” in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Tradition of Place*, ed. Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt and Alexandra Nocke (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 1-23; and Aviad Moreno, “Remapping “Tradition”: Community Formation and Spatiocultural Imagination Among Jews in Colonial Northern Morocco,” *Jewish Culture and History* 22, no. 4 (2021): 378-400.

3. Frédéric Abécassis and Jean-François Faü, "Le monde musulman: effacement des communautés juives et nouvelles diasporas depuis 1945," in *Les Juifs dans l'histoire*, ed. A. German et al. (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2011), 815-840; and Dario Miccoli, "The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa: A Historiographic Debate," *Middle Eastern Studies* 56 (2020): 511-520.
4. Arjun Appadurai, "Theory in Anthropology: Center and Periphery," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 28, no. 2 (1986): 356-361.
5. Piera Rossetto and Barbara Spadaro, "Across Europe and the Mediterranean: Exploring Jewish Memories from Libya," *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 50 (2014): 37-52; and Piera Rossetto, *Mémoires de diaspora, diaspora de mémoires. Juifs de Libye entre Israël et l'Italie, de 1948 à nos jours*. PhD Dissertation (Venice and Toulouse: Ca' Foscari University of Venice and EHESS, 2015).
6. Piera Rossetto, "Juifs de Libye. Notes pour une cartographie des lieux migratoires," *Archivio Antropologico Mediterraneo* 16, no. 1 (2014): 87-99; and Piera Rossetto, "Composer les mémoires et recomposer les identités: "être juif de Libye" à Rome," *Communications* 100 (2017): 41-55.
7. Piera Rossetto, "'We Were all Italian!': The Construction of a "sense of Italianness" among Jews from Libya (1920s-1960s)," *History and Anthropology* (2021). DOI: 10.1080/02757206.2020.1848821; Giordano Bottecchia, "Jewish Mobility from and towards Libya at the Eve of Libyan Independence (1949-1951): Attitude and Policies of the Italian Authorities," paper presented at the conference *Across Borders and Boundaries: Jewish Be-Longings in the Mediterranean Space and Beyond*, Venice 6-7 October 2021.
8. Andrea L. Smith (ed.), *Europe's Invisible Migrants* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003); Caroline Elkins and Susan Pedersen (eds.), *Settler Colonialism in the Twentieth Century: Projects, Practices, Legacies* (Routledge, 2006); Manuel Borutta and Jan C. Jansen (eds.), *Vertriebene and Pieds-Noirs in Postwar Germany and France: Comparative Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and Choi Sung-Eun, *Decolonization and the French of Algeria: Bringing the Settler Colony Home* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
9. Daniel Fishman, *Il Grande Nascondimento* (Firenze: La Giuntina, 2015); and Rony Hamaui, *Ebrei a Milano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016).
10. Piera Rossetto, *Mapping Roots, Charting Routes* (2022). <https://www.cdcc.it/mapping-roots-charting-routes/>; and <https://memories.hypotheses.org/creative-mapping>.
11. Maud Mandel, *Muslim and Jews in France: History of a Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); Kimberley Arkin, *Rhinestones, Religion, and the Republic: Fashioning Jewishness in France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014); Nathan Katz, *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015); Dario Miccoli, "Introduction," in *Contemporary Sephardic and Mizrahi Literature*, Miccoli D. (ed.) (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 1-9; and Aviad Moreno and Noah Greber, Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, Ofer Schiff (eds), *The Long History of the Mizrahim: New Directions in the Study of The Jews of Islamic Lands* (Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University of the Negev, 2021).
12. Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, "Turning Points in the Historiography of Jewish Immigration from Arab Countries to Israel," *Israel Studies* 23, no. 3 (2018): 114-122; Aviad Moreno, "Beyond the Nation-State: A Network Analysis of Jewish Emigration from Northern Morocco to Israel," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 1 (2020): 1-21.
13. Moreno, "Beyond the Nation-State: A Network Analysis of Jewish Emigration from Northern Morocco to Israel"; Ariane Sadjed, "Belonging from afar. Diasporic religiosity among the Jews of Mashhad," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (2021). DOI: 10.1080/01419870.2021.1986630
14. Adriana Brodsky, *Sephardi, Jewish Argentine: Creating Community and National Identity, 1880-1960* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016).
15. Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Approach* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012); Saba Soomekh, *Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews in America* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2016); and Yolande Cohen, *Les Sépharades du Québec: Parcours d'exils nord-africains* (Montréal: Del Busso Éditeur, 2017).

16. Brodksy, *Sephardi, Jewish Argentine*, 2.
17. For a similar understanding of visibility see Colette Zytnicki, *Les Juifs à Toulouse Entre 1945 et 1970: Une Communauté Toujours Recommencée* (Toulouse: Presse Universitaire du Mirail, 1998).
18. Kristine Juul, "From Danish Yugoslavs to Danish Serbs: National Affiliation Caught Between Visibility and Invisibility," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 237–255.
19. Juul, "From Danish Yugoslavs to Danish Serbs," 239–240.
20. Johanna Leinonen and Mari Toivanen, "Researching In/visibility in the Nordic Context: Theoretical and Empirical Views," *Nordic Journal of Migration and Research* 4, no. 4 (2014): 161–167: 162.
21. My understanding of in-visibility owes much to the concept of 'displaceability' advanced by political geographer Oren Yiftachel, "From Displacement to Displaceability," *City* 24, no. 1–2 (2020): 151–165. Discussing the place that the topic of displacement has gained in urban studies in recent years, Yiftachel notes that academic literature seems to concentrate 'on the various acts of displacement, rather than an expanding condition of displaceability' (Yiftachel 2020: 152). While displacement is defined as the 'involuntary distancing of residents,' which can take many concrete forms (eviction, cultural erasure, denial of services), displaceability is conceived as the 'state of being susceptible to involuntary distancing' (Yiftachel 2020: 154–155). Displacement might not have actually happened yet, but it is a potential threat looming against the people's existence.
22. Charlotte Elisheva Fonrobert and Vered Shemtov (eds.), "Jewish Conceptions and Practices of Space" (Special Issue), *Jewish Social Studies* 11, no. 3 (2005); Anna Lipphardt, Julia Brauch and Nocke Alexandra, "Exploring Jewish Space: An Approach," in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Tradition of Place*, ed. Julia Brauch, Anna Lipphardt and Alexandra Nocke (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 1–23; and Eszter B. Gantner and Jay (Kobi) Oppenheim, "Jewish Space Reloaded: An Introduction," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 23, no. 2 (2014): 1–10.
23. Antoine Fleury et al., *Le Petit Commerce dans la Ville-Monde* (Paris: Éditions L'œil D'or, 2020).
24. Consider for instance the names of food markets in Milan "Kosher Paradise," or "Eretz."
25. Lipphardt et al., "Exploring Jewish Space," 4.
26. Eszter B. Gantner, "Interpreting the Jewish Quarter," *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* 23, no. 2 (2014): 26–42.
27. Gantner, "Interpreting the Jewish Quarter," 38.
28. *Ibid.*, 36.
29. 'Erinnerungskultur and Erinnerungspolitik represent a complex of political, social and cultural – particularly, of course, historical – factors that relate to the memory and memorialization of the Holocaust. The former emphasizes their political dimensions and the latter focuses on their cultural ones,' Eszter B. Gantner, "Jewish Quarters as Urban Tableaux," in *Jewish and Non-Jewish Spaces in the Urban Context*, ed. Gromova Alina et al. (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2015), 197–212: 201.
30. Sergio Della Pergola, *Anatomia dell'Ebraismo Italiano* (Assisi/Rome: Benedetto Carucci Editore, 1976); and Emanuela Trevisan Semi, "A Note on the Lubavitch Hassidim in Milan," *The Jewish Journal of Sociology* 20, no. 1 (1978): 39–47.
31. Interview by the author with G.G., Milan, 2018. In quotations of interview, letters indicate pseudonym. All translations from the original language of the interview into English are mine.
32. Alina Gromova et al., "Introduction," in *Jewish and Non-Jewish Spaces in the Urban Context*, eds. Gromova Alina et al. (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2015), 13–25: 13.
33. Interview by the author with A.A., Milan, 2018.
34. <https://www.scuoladelperkos.it/chi-siamo>, accessed 20 October 2021. Interview by the author with C.C., Milan, 2018.
35. According to estimations based on Della Pergola (Della Pergola, *Anatomia dell'Ebraismo Italiano*; Sergio Della Pergola, "La Comunità Ebraica di Milano: Tendenze Socio-Demografiche Passate, Presenti e Future," in *Per Ricostruire e Ricostruirsi: Astorre Mayer e la Rinascita Ebraica tra Italia e Israele*, ed. Marco Paganoni (Milan: Franco Angeli, 2010), 59–73;

Maurice Roumani, *The Jews of Libya. Coexistence, Persecution, Resettlement* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008); Hamaui, *Ebrei a Milano*; and Fiona Diwan, "Da Mashad, la Forza della Tradizione," *Il Bollettino della Comunità Ebraica di Milano* 5 (2014): 12–15, about 900 Egyptians arrived in Milan, mainly after 1956; about 100 Jews from Syria after 1948 (they inaugurated in 1954 the Sephardic temple in the underground floor of the main temple in Milan) and subsequently in the 1960s–1970s; about 200 Lebanese Jews settled in Milan during the 1970s; in the early 1950s, Iranian Jews started to arrive, reaching 1,600 individuals in the 1980s; about 400 Libyan Jews settled in Milan, in the 1950s and on the aftermath of the Six day war in 1967, while approximately 1,800 Libyan Jews settled in Rome, again mainly in 1967. As the case of Milan is concerned, Della Pergola (1976) provides the following figures: in 1948, there were 4,500 Jews living in Milan, while 26,000 in Italy; in 1965, Milan had a Jewish population of 8,500 individuals, of which only 30% born in Milan, in contrast with Rome where almost 93% of its Jewish population was born in Rome; 1975, 9,500 Jews were living in Milan (35,000 in Italy), of which 48% born in Italy, 15% in EU, 37% in the MENA region.

36. Interview by the author with E.E. and F.F., Milan, 2018. Hamaui, *Ebrei a Mila*
37. Fishman, *Il Grande Nascondimento*; and Sadjed, "Belonging from afar. Diasporic religiosity among the Jews of Mashhad."
38. Diwan, "Da Mashad, la Forza della Tradizione."
39. Interview by the author with E.E. and F.F., Milan, 2018.
40. Interview by the author with E.E. and F.F., Milan, 2018.
41. Dario Gaggio, *In gold we trust. social capital and economic change in the Italian jewelry towns* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).
42. A detailed account of this complex turning point in Egyptian contemporary history, and the consequences it had for Jews and foreign minorities, is offered by Joel Beinin (Joel Beinin, *The Dispersal of Egyptian Jewry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998)) from which the following quotation is taken: 'The security of the Egyptian Jewish community was irretrievably damaged by the outbreak of the Suez/Sinai War. In response to the British-French-Israeli attack on Egypt on 29 October 1956, Egypt took harsh measures against its Jewish community. About 1,000 Jews were detained, more than half of them Egyptian citizens. Thirteen thousand French and British citizens were expelled from Egypt in retaliation for the tripartite attack, among them many Jews. In addition, 500 Jews not holding French or British citizenship were expelled. Some 460 Jewish-owned businesses were sequestered. Many Jews lost their jobs. The government nationalized the assets of all British and French citizens, and Jews holding those nationalities were affected in that capacity. In November 1956, a presidential decree amended the Egyptian nationality law by imposing more stringent residence requirements and depriving Zionists of the right to claim citizenship. When the hostilities were over, Jews were subjected to unofficial pressures to leave Egypt and renounce their citizenship. According to the World Jewish Congress, between 22 November 1956, and 15 March 1957, 14,102 Jews left Egypt, just under one-third of those residing in the country on the eve of the Suez/Sinai War. Most of them abandoned the great bulk of their assets in Egypt and came to Israel as impoverished refugees' (Beinin 1998, 87).
43. Bollettino della Comunità Israelitica di Milano, Anno XII, N.2, (October 1956).
44. Interview by Adriana Goldstaub with A.H., Milan, 2011, Edoth Project; Interview by Jeanette Saguès with F.F., Varese, 2014, Edoth Project.
45. Francesco Brambilla, "Caratteri dell'Economia Milanese," *Urbanistica* 18–19 (1956): 175–180.
46. Giacomo Becattini and Fulvio Coltorti, "Areas of Large Enterprise and Industrial Districts in the Development of Post-War Italy: A Preliminary Survey," *European Planning Studies* 14, no. 8 (2006): 1105–1138.
47. Giorgio Bigatti, "Milano e i migranti dall'Unità a oggi," accessed 20 October 2021, <https://www.milanoattraverso.it/migrazione/>.
48. Stefano Gallo, *Senza Attraversare le Frontiere: Le Migrazioni Interne dall'Unità a Oggi* (Bari: Laterza, 2012); Nazareno Panichella, *Meridionali al Nord: Migrazioni Interne e Società Italiana dal Dopoguerra ad Oggi* (Bologna: Studi E Ricerche, 2014); and Michele Colucci, *Storia dell'Immigrazione Straniera in Italia: Dal 1945 ai Giorni Nostri* (Rome: Carocci, 2018).

49. Interview by the author with E.E., Milan, 2018.
50. <https://www.josef-tehillot.it/la-scuola/>; Laura Giacomini, "Sinagoga Josef Tehillot," in *Tra Cultura Diritto e Religioni: Sinagoghe e Cimiteri Ebraici in Lombardia*, ed. Stefania T. Salvi (Milan: Corberi Saponi Editori, 2013b), 75–79.
51. Della Pergola, "La Comunità Ebraica di Milano."
52. Interview by the author with D.D., Milan, 2020.
53. Indeed, the archives of the Milanese Jewish community hold very few folders explicitly referring to Jewish migrations from the MENA region. They are quoted throughout the whole article. A more in-depth exploration of the archives is necessary. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic made that impossible.
54. Luisa Levi D'Ancona, "Filantropi Ebrei Italiani nella Ricostruzione: Il Caso di Milano," in *Per Ricostruire e Ricostruirsi: Astorre Mayer e la Rinascita Ebraica tra Italia e Israele*, ed. Marco Paganoni (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2010), 39–57.
55. Chiara Renzo, "'Our Hopes Are Not Lost Yet': The Jewish Displaced Persons in Italy: Relief, Rehabilitation and Self-understanding (1943–1948)," *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 12 (December 2017): 89–111; and Arturo Marzano, "Jewish DPs in Post-War Italy: The Role of Italian Jewry in a Multilateral Encounter (1945–1948)," in *Italian Jewish Networks from the Seventeenth to the Twentieth Century: Bridging Europe and the Mediterranean*, ed. Francesca Bregoli, Carlotta Ferrara Degli Uberti and Guri Schwarz (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 151–171.
56. Bollettino della Comunità Israelitica di Milano, 1, no. 1 (22 June 1945): 11.
57. Isacco Papo, "L'immigrazione Ebraica in Italia dalla Turchia, dai Balcani e dal Mediterraneo Orientale nella Prima Metà del XX Secolo," *La Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 69, no. 1 (2003): 93–126; and Isacco Papo, *Al Tramonto di Una Civiltà: Un Ebreo Sefardita tra Oriente e Occidente* (Livorno: Salomone Belforte & C., 2013).
58. Archivio CEM, Fondo Comunità Fascicoli 51–52 B.32, "Pratica Egiziani, Siriani e Iracheni p. soggiorno 1948–1949."
59. I. Bempechat appears in the 'Elenco Egiziani, Siriani, ecc.' (List of Egyptians, Syrians, etc.), dated 13/12/1948, including 34 individuals and five families, in Archivio CEM, Fondo Comunità Fascicoli 51–52 B.32, 'Pratica Egiziani, Siriani e Iracheni p. soggiorno 1948–1949'. According to the same sources, at Bempechat's place lived another Egyptian couple, Mr T. S., born in Alexandria in 1912, and his wife, E. T. V., born in Istanbul in 1912.
60. Archivio CEM, Fondo Comunità Fascicoli 51–52 B.32, "Pratica Egiziani, Siriani e Iracheni p. soggiorno 1948–1949."
61. Interview with Saul Legziel by Gigliola Colombo, Milano, 1984, Digital Library CDEC Foundation. Legziel identifies Mr Silvera as a point of reference for Egyptians living in Milan.
62. Laura Giacomini, "Milano: Oratorio Sefardita-Orientale," in *Tra Cultura Diritto e Religioni: Sinagoghe e Cimiteri Ebraici in Lombardia*, ed. Stefania T. Salvi (Milan: Corberi Saponi Editori, 2013a), 23–36.
63. Sarano Alfredo, Demografia di Milano ebraica negli ultimi cent'anni, Fondo comunità (Secondo versamento), Fasc.29, B.22.
64. "L'assistenza ai profughi egiziani," Bollettino della Comunità ebraica di Milano XII, no. 5 (January 1957).
65. "Favorite il Pesach dei profughi," Bollettino della Comunità Israelitica di Milano XII, no. 8 (April 1957).
66. Joseph John Viscomi, "Un'integrazione Fallita? La Partenza degli Italiani dall'Egitto nel Secondo Dopoguerra," *Archivio Storico dell'Emigrazione Italiana* 14 (2018): 83–95.
67. See note 65 above.
68. Fondo comunità (II versamento), Fascicolo 12, B.12, Fascicolo Alunni egiziani – Comitato profughi 1956–1957, schede anagrafiche ORT e schede anagrafiche via Eupili.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.

72. <https://www.cdec.it/ricerca-storica-e-progetti/aree-di-ricerca/edoth-ebrei-del-mediterraneo-del-medio-oriente/>
73. <https://www.cdec.it/>, accessed 20 October 2021.
74. Rossetto Piera, *Mapping Roots, Charting Routes*: <https://www.cdec.it/mapping-roots-charting-routes/>; and <https://memories.hypotheses.org/creative-mapping>
75. Initiated by Adriana Goldstaub, Micky Sciana and Regina Hayon with the help of many volunteers, now coordinated by Manuela Buaron under the scientific supervision of Liliana Picciotto, the Edoth project is an ongoing oral history effort, which, to date, has managed to collect approximately 120 video-recorded interviews with Jews who arrived in Milan from MENA countries.
76. David Berliner, *Perdre sa Culture* (Bruxelles: Zones Sensibles, 2018).
77. Interview by the author with Liliana Picciotto, Milan, 2020.
78. Interview by Liliana Picciotto with Elia Enrico Picciotto, Milan, 2 May 1991, Digital Library CDEC.
79. See note n.13 in this article.
80. Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
81. Interview by the author with C.C., Milan, 2018.
82. Ibid.
83. See note 65 above.
84. See note 81 above.
85. Ibid.
86. The letters sent from Israel to relatives in other countries are a recurring topic in the recollections. In them, family members who had already settled in Israel discouraged their relatives from coming to the country, which was struggling to provide all its citizens with decent accommodation and work opportunities. Similar letters were sent also from Moroccan new immigrants to their relatives in Morocco (Brian K. Roby 2015). On the condition of transit camps in Israel, how it affected MENA Jews and caused a long-lasting, social and economic rift in Israeli society see Hacothen (Dvora Hacothen, *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and Its Repercussions in the 1950s and After* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003))E.
87. See note 33 above.
88. Interview by Adriana Goldstaub with N.N., Milan, 2012, Edoth Project.
89. See note 81 above.
90. <https://www.milanoattraverso.it/migrazione/>; and Luigi Comencini, documentary 'I bambini e noi', <https://www.raiplay.it/programmi/ibambinieno>, accessed 20 October 2021.
91. See note 33 above.
92. See note 52 above.
93. See note 33 above.
94. Leinonen and Toivanen, "Researching In/visibility in the Nordic Context: Theoretical and Empirical Views"; Elena Calvo-Gonzales, "On the (In)visibility of Whiteness and Galician Immigration in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil," *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* 27, no. 4 (2019): 594–608; and Miri Song, "Rethinking Minority Status and "Visibility"," *Comparative Migration Studies* 8 (2020): 1–17.
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99. Andrea Brighenti, *Visibility in Social Theory and Social Research* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 37.
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101. Aomar Boum, *Memories of Absence. How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).
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103. Sayad, *La double absence. Des illusions de l'émigré aux souffrances de l'immigré*, 516.
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106. Lucia Carminati, "Alexandria, 1898: Nodes, Networks, and Scales in Nineteenth-Century Egypt and the Mediterranean," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, no. 1 (2017): 127–153.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all interviewees for accepting to share their story, the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and the CDEC Foundation (Milan) for the archival material.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was funded by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), Hertha Firnberg Grant T1024-G28.

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