

# The Forgotten Refugees

Starting in the 1940s,  
almost one million  
Jewish people ...

fled from Algeria, Iraq,  
Morocco, Libya, Syria,  
Tunisia, Yemen and other  
Arab countries.

Why?



# Jewish life in Arab countries before 1948



Yemenite Jewish children  
learning Torah, 1925

- Jews were exiled from Israel as slaves to Arab lands starting in 586 BCE when Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians and the Jewish Temple there destroyed
- Jewish scripture recalls this event: “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, Yea we wept, When we remembered Zion.” *Psalms 137:1*
- 2,000-year-old Jewish communities existed in some places, including Iraq and Yemen
- These were thriving communities: established, educated, some very wealthy

# The refugees of 1948

- In 1948 the re-establishment of the state of Israel and the war immediately declared on it by its Arab neighbours created about **1.6 million refugees: almost equal number of Arabs and Jews.**

Arab refugees who fled Palestine/Israel



Jewish refugees who fled Arab countries



# Arab refugees and Jewish refugees



750,000 Arab refugees  
1/3 fled, 1/3 told to leave  
by Arab governments, 1/3  
expelled by Israeli forces



800,000 Jewish refugees  
some fled, most expelled  
by Arab governments

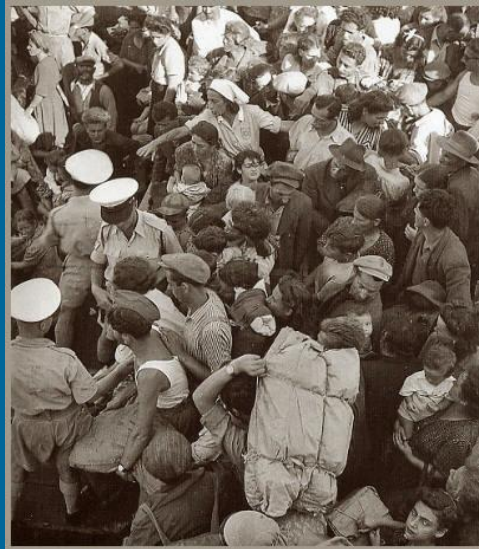
All left behind their  
homes, businesses, money  
and possessions



# Where did they go?

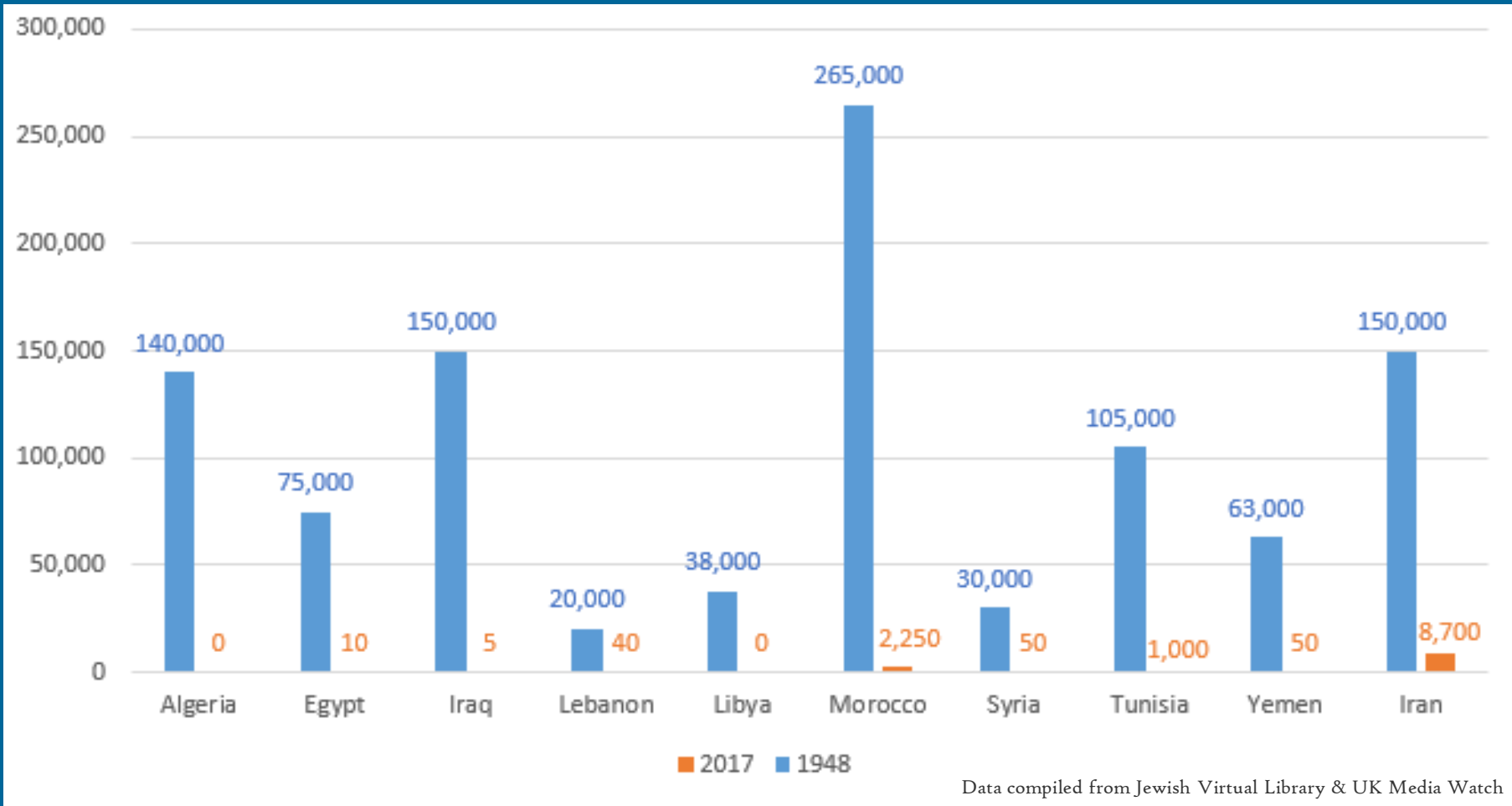


- **Arab refugees** 1/3 went to the West Bank (then Jordan), 1/3 to the Gaza Strip, 1/3 to other countries including neighbouring Lebanon, Egypt, etc. Most were put and have stayed in refugee camps there (above left) . Only Jordan gave them citizenship – no other Arab country did. Some became citizens of other countries including the US and Australia.



- **Jewish refugees** 2/3 went to Israel where they were absorbed into Israeli society. 1/3 went to the US, Canada, France and other countries including Australia, where they built new lives.

# Ethnic cleansing of Middle Eastern Jews 1948-2017



Total decline in Jewish population: 98.8%

# Why did Jews have to leave Arab countries?



- Many Arab governments sided with the Nazis
- Jews were persecuted in Arab countries during the 1930s and WW2: pogroms, murder, arrests, destruction of property
- After WW2 and 1948, Jews were expelled from many Arab countries, allowed to leave with nothing but the clothes on their backs
- Many Arab governments 'sold' their Jews to Israel



# Jews travelling to Israel by “magic carpet” and “on the wings of eagles”





# Jewish refugee camps in Israel – *Ma'abarot*



Beit Lid, 1949







# How were the Jewish refugees welcomed in Israel?

- The size of the Jewish population already in Israel in the 1950s was about the same size as the Jewish refugee population from Arab Lands entering the country at that time.
  - ▣ This would be the equivalent of a refugee population of about 23 million people entering Australia today.
- Extreme austerity measures were put in place by the government to feed the newcomers and they were housed in tents that stretched over large areas in different parts of the country (*Ma'abarot*).
- However, within two generations this changed. Due to aggressive affirmative action measures, the descendants of Jewish refugees from Arab lands are now well integrated within mainstream Israeli society.





# Some successful descendants of Jewish refugees from Arab lands and Iran in Israel

- Dalia Itzik: Knesset Speaker
- Gabi Ashkenazi: IDF Chief of Staff
- Silvan Shalom: Foreign and Finance Minister
- Shaul Mofaz: Minister of Defense
- Gila Gamliel: Member of the Knesset
- Avshalom Elitzur: Physicist and philosopher
- Moshe Bar-Asher: Linguist
- Achinoam Nini: singer and activist (pictured)
- Avigdor Kahalani: general and politician
- Dr. David Harari: Drone inventor
- Yossi BenAyoun: Football star



# Jews from the Middle East and Iran have also made important contributions to Australia

It is estimated that today there are about 8,000 Jews of Mizrahi (Arab and Iranian) background living in Australia. They have made important contributions to the life of the Jewish community in Australia. An incomplete list of members of the Mizrahi Jewish community who have made major contributions to Australian society follows:

- Henry Ninio, Lord Mayor of Adelaide and his brother Albert Ninio, South Australian commissioner for Multicultural Affairs
- Isaac and Susan Wakil, major philanthropists
- Brian Zulaikha, President of the Australian Institute of Architects
- The Harkham family manufacturers, hoteliers and owners of the Harkham Winery. Their maternal family, the Shammash family used to be the traditional guardians of the tomb of Ezra HaSofer in southern Iraq
- Albert Bensimon, founder of the Helpmann Academy

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- Brothers Oren and Gil Ben-Moshe, film and TV actors and writers
  - Max Liberman AO, Chairman of the South Australia Housing Trust
  - Eddy Meyer, news reporter on Channel 9, Baghdadi origin
  - Phillip Hallen, NSW Supreme Court judge
  - Hugh Rassaby, head of the Mapping Authority of NSW
  - Elias Duek-Cohen, professor in Town Planning at UNSW
  - Dr George Samra, patron of the Hypoglycaemia Association.
  - Eddy Lippmann, award-winning architect, having designed the Bay Charlton baths and the Butterfly House in Dover Heights.
  - Dr Ron Elisha, playwright, whose father is from a family of Mashhadi Jews, who were forcibly converted to Islam in Iran in 1839
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