

PhD Project by Agnese Tati in History and cultures of Europe (XXXIX cycle):

Eastern Jewish Communities in London (Edot ha-Mizrachi) between the 1950s -'80s. The case study of the Ohel David Ilford Congregation - Eastern Jewry Community.

Definition of the topic and chronological framing:

From 1948 to 2008, European Jewish communities absorbed 7% of Jews from Muslim countries (La Pergola, 2011). Nowadays, France and England are the countries with the highest number of Jewish residents in Europe: in France, 60% of French Jews have Sephardic origins, mainly from North African countries, for obvious colonial reasons. In England, Sephardic communities and Mizrahi constitute only 2.9 %of the total Jewish population (G. Alderman, 2008). In particular, the Jewish migration from Muslim countries in England is a 'marginal' phenomenon of Anglo-Jewry. The highest concentration of synagogues and congregations of Sephardic and Mizrahi rite is in London, where the Spanish and Portuguese Jewish Congregation, the oldest Jewish community in the United Kingdom (1701), dwells as the main Sephardic centre in England nowadays located as Bevis Marks Synagogue.

The first migrations of the Mizrahi Jewish components started in the 1950s. The Spanish and Portuguese congregation, the focal point of the Sephardic rite, also became a referral point. Specifically, the active synagogues affiliated with the Spanish-Portuguese Congregation are four and located geographically in Central London. In contrast, since the 1960s/70s, the Mizrahi presence has formed independent congregations, the Edot ha- Mizrachi (lit. Eastern Communities). The edot ha- mizrachi arise in London's suburbs and are distinguished by ethnic background and ritual specificity, such as the Ohel David Ilford Congregation - Eastern Jewry Community. The Ohel David Ilford Congregation, founded in 1965, gathers mainly Jews from Iraq and officiates the Iraqi ritual. These independent congregations take on a specific cultural value compared to English Judaism, which possesses a centuries-old history of progressive migration and community organizing strategies in a cultural and political context that was first tolerant and then inclusive. A portion of the Mizrahi Jewish communities, from 1950- 80, migrated to England from their countries of origin following political upheavals that often resulted in a climate of mistrust and ethnic/religious hatred toward them.

Research Goals:

The main objective of the research is to reconstruct the cultural and religious dynamics that led to the establishment of the Edot ha - Mizrachi in London, addressing the focus on the case of the Ohel David Ilford Congregation - Eastern Jewry Community. The historical reconstruction will also involve an analysis of the arrival of members of Mizrahi communities, specifically the migration from Iraq and Bahrain, in the London metropolitan context and precisely identifying cultural and social processes related to religious super-diversity (I. Becci, MBurchardt, M. Giorda, 2017). Religious super-diversity should be declined in an intra-religious context, English Jewry, which presents itself as a defined historical reality, heterogeneous from a religious/ritual and also structural/political point of view within which the Mizrahi components have become part. The objective will be to analyze the role of the Bevis Marks Synagogue as an initial point of reference for the Mizrahi reality and its place- keeping's agency. At the same time, it will proceed with the analysis of the religious dimension of the Ohel David Ilford Congregation and its place- making's agency. Implicitly, the research will analyze the Sephardic ritual and the structures community of the Bevis Marks

Synagogue and how these were preserved or modified in relation to external influences. Consequently, how the Ohel Ilford Congregation attempts to reconstruct a religious and ritual dimension in a different and foreign, albeit Jewish, context.

State of the Art and Methodology:

The research will combine the methodology of historical and ethnographic analysis of the communities examined. For the historical framework related to migration and settlement in England, I will consult the historiography that addresses the topic of Jewish migration from the Islamic countries, and I will examine their historical and political reasons. In particular, the works of N. Stillman (1991) reconstruct and analyze the interdependencies of the Jewish communities in the Gulf countries with European Jewry and the causes of migration and of the historian B. Orit (2012), who analyses explicitly the Iraqi migration. For the reconstruction of the post-Mizrachi migration to London, the work of the research study centre "Max Planck Institute for the Study of religious and ethnic diversity", particularly by researcher Susanne Wessendorf (2017), who analyzes the settlement pattern of migrant people who are not part of broad and established migration movements in the London urban context. Following this, we will proceed with a historical analysis of the Sephardic congregation and the Bevis Marks synagogue for the 1950s-1980s, starting with historiographical works that analyze its social and religious structures (Barnett R.D. and Levy A; P. Lindsay, 1993) and simultaneously proceeding with the analysis of the primary sources: archival research of the Bevis Markis synagogue and the Ohel David Ilford Congregation (registration records, marriage records) to trace families of Iraqi origin. Other analysis tools will be semi-structured interviews with community members who moved to London between the 1950s-80s and research on the field: the analysis of the synagogal contexts for their ethnographic description to identifying cultural and ritual specificities at Bevis Marks and Ohel David Ilford Congregation during synagogue rituals and Jewish holidays (participatory observation). The research will be structured around the methodological framework of the definition of religious super-diversity and its application based on the following works of historical/religious analysis, such as *Religious Super-Diversity and Spatial Strategies in Two European Cities* by I. Becci, M. Burchardt, M. Giorda (2017) and *Roma città plurale, le religioni, il territorio e le ricerche* by C. Russo and A. Saggioro (2018).

Primary and/or secondary sources:

Primary sources: documentary (research in synagogue archives); edited narrative (weekly and monthly community and congregational magazines); digital (synagogue websites, blogs of community members, social pages); oral (interviews with community members); material (photos, liturgical books, synagogical items).

Documentaries and texts produced by members of Mizrachi communities in England, Iraq and Bahrain: the documentary *Remember Baghdad*, 2017; the books *From Our beginning to present day*, 2006; *Memories of Eden: a journey through Jewish Baghdad*, 2008.

Possible results:

The research aims to trace the phenomenon of the migration of Iraqis and Bahrainis in London fit into the complex structure of English Jewry, composed of various representative bodies and congregations. The *edot ha-mizrachi* become part of a heterogeneous religious and cultural landscape, conflicting but also dialoguing by claiming their own space and religious practice, cultural and organizational independence following a social and cultural disorientation post-migration. In addition, historical-religious and

ethnographic will serve to collect data and identify specific religious contexts hitherto little studied both within traditional institutional spaces, such as that of the Sephardic congregation (Spanish and Portuguese), as well as in new independent religious contexts, as with the case of the Ohel David Ilford Congregation.