Yalla! Is Now the Time for Australia's Sephardi/Mizraḥi Journey?

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Abstract

Within the Australian Jewish context, Ashkenazi Jewish culture has traditionally been the dominant form of community identity, particularly in Sydney. However, there is a smaller core of Sephardi/Mizraḥi population and a growing sense of Sephardi/Mizraḥi identity both formally and informally. This paper examines the experience and expression of Sephardi/Mizraḥi identity within the Sydney Jewish community, drawing on a qualitative method involving 17 in-depth interviews combined with archival material. The research uncovered the importance of Sephardi/Mizraḥi identity to participants as part of their Jewish identity, as well as their experiences of discrimination because of it, their desire for community change, and their efforts to foster a growing awareness of that identity both through communal and educational endeavours. The discussion considers how the Australian experience reflects international trends and is important for enriching Jewish identity within multiculturalism.

Keywords: Sephardim and Mizraḥim (Mizrachi), Jews--Australia--identity, Jewish education and remembrance, Jewish diaspora, cultural pluralism

שְׁמַע בְּנִי מוּסַר אָבֶיךָ וְאַל־תִּטֹּשׁ תּוֹרַת אִמֶּךָ:
My son, heed the discipline of your father,
and do not forsake the Torah of your mother (Proverbs 1:8)

Introduction

The Australian Jewish community is a small but visible ethnoreligious minority within the Australian multicultural landscape, particularly in the larger centres of Sydney and Melbourne. Australian Jews comprise 0.4 percent of the Australian population. The community's visibility is dominated by Ashkenazi Jewish identity, a tradition deriving from early modern Eastern Europe and prominent around much of the Jewish Diaspora particularly in the Global North. However, within the Australian Jewish community, particularly in Sydney, there are Jews of Sephardi and Mizraḥi origin, rather than Ashkenazi, whose sub-culture has been largely invisible in the broader Jewish identity and communal space. This qualitative study analyses the experience of being Sephardi/Mizraḥi in an Ashkenazi-dominated Sydney

Jewish community, and creates a clearer understanding of the challenges faced by Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jews as a minority within the Ashkenazi dominance of Australian Jewry.

Some Australian scholarly research was undertaken on this issue (Aaron 1979; Samra 1987; Gale 2005), but in the past twenty years this issue has been largely neglected. In recent years, growing global and local awareness of rich non-Ashkenazi cultures has unfolded, paralleling social forces in Israel that manifested themselves in various arenas prior to 7 October 2023. Australia is the ninth largest Jewish community globally and one of the few Diaspora communities increasing in size due to immigration (Graham and Markus 2018). Understanding recent Australian developments to preserve the rich history and heritage of Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jewry can add to the picture of the emergence of a stronger Sephardi/Mizraḥi identity, together with an acknowledgement of important contributions to Jewish civilisation globally.

Definitions

This article uses the term 'Sephardi/Mizraḥi' to reference Jews originating from Spain, Southern Europe, and the Middle East. This accords with use by local and overseas advocates, such as, 'Sephardi Mizraḥi Voices Sydney' and 'JIMENA' (Jews Indigenous to the Middle East and North Africa), and reflects the diverse origins of the Sydney Sephardi/Mizraḥi community. We refer to both Anglo-Sephardi individuals who were part of, and held prominent positions in, early colonial life as well as those who arrived later (Aaron 1979, 50). Sydney institutions utilise both Sephardi and Mizraḥi terminology, including the term 'Jews from Islamic Lands', which is often used in advocacy for Sephardi/Mizraḥi refugees. The term 'Sephardi' was used as a collective reference in communal communications until 2015, when the term came to be combined in growing frequency into 'Sephardi/Mizraḥi' (Raab 2010).

Further attention has been given to Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) Jewish self-identification (Shohat 1999; Goldberg 2008). Travitz examines the terms 'Sephardim', 'Mizraḥim', 'Jews of Arab Lands', 'Arab Jews', '*Musta'arabi* Jews', and '*Maghrebi* Jews', as well as self-reference in their languages (for example, Ladino and Judeo-Arabic), arguing that 'an analysis needs to go deeper than, and beyond, labels alone for understanding MENA Jewish identity' (Travitz 2022b, 22-29). This reflects the changing meaning of the terms noted by Goldberg—namely, how 'Mizraḥi', as an Ashkenazi neologism, 'stems from shared disadvantaged placement and discrimination within Israeli society rather than reflecting historical cultures and remnants of an immigrant past' (Goldberg 2008, 180). In this way, the term 'Mizraḥi' has found new life in echoing the experience of Mizraḥim in Israel, while being associated with the intellectual, cultural and religious traditions of *Sepharad* [Spain].

This paper makes use of the neologism 'Ashkenormativity', first attested in Katz (Katz 2014). Stanton defines this term as 'the systemic, communal, and/or individual assertion of Ashkenazi as the default Jewish identity (a sort of "hegemony"), the assumptions we make based on that assertion, and the resulting marginalization of non-Ashkenazi Jews in Jewish space' (Stanton 2015). This term spread via social media (such as the Facebook group "Sounds Ashkenormative But OK"). It remains Diaspora-oriented and somewhat removed from Mizraḥi issues in Israel, though intercommunal links have played a role in the rising prominence of Sephardi/Mizraḥi issues (Goldberg 2008, 179-183). There is also a distinction between an Ashkenazi-dominated community and individual acts of Ashkenormative reference—for instance, the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies (NSWJBD) printed Passover kosher lists, excluding *ḳiṭniyoth* (NSWJBD 1969).

Literature review

Research into Sephardi/Mizraḥi history and heritage has hitherto been scant (Bitton 2022). This dearth has particularly manifested in the Antipodes. However, over the last three decades, there has been a growing global awareness of the need to include Sephardi/Mizraḥi contributions—most significantly in Israel, where much has been published in Hebrew. For instance, Sephardi/Mizraḥi contributions to modern Zionism have been neglected in Israel and the United States; Mizraḥi points to ample material to remedy this (Mizraḥi 2019; Faur 1976).

Ashkenazi hegemony

This discussion focuses on English-language articles to allow for a more direct comparison with English-speaking Diasporic experiences. Acosta and Picard trace the journey of Sephardi-Mizraḥi Jewry in Israel from being a historically ignored majority to taking centre stage (Acosta 2011; Picard 2017). Dahan and Levy follow the emergence and educational efforts of Shas and Kedma schools in the 1990s, providing a critique of their relative successes (Dahan and Levy 2000). Halevy describes how Israeli Sephardi leaders such as Rabbis Uziel and Qafiḥ initially looked favourably on a merging of Sephardi/Mizraḥi and Ashkenazi cultures in education, though when they perceived a lack of reciprocity in terms of esteem or equality from their Ashkenazi counterparts, they affirmed the need to champion Sephardi/Mizraḥi traditions as distinct ritual expressions (Halevy 2021).

Bouskila gives an account of his upbringing as a 'French-Moroccan American Sephardic Jew' within a Los Angeles Ashkenazi majority. Standard denominations that feature in Ashkenazi discourse were 'not a part of our vocabulary' (Bouskila 2016, 165); likewise, he recalls Ashkenazim being shocked by *Haggadah* recitation in Judeo-Arabic. Zenner conveys the difficulty of maintaining and transmitting authentic Sephardi/Mizraḥi

traditions in an Ashkenormative environment within the highly developed and diverse community of Chicago (Zenner 1989). Bitton offers a detailed study of the Syrian Jewish community of New York City, revealing the differences between Ashkenazi and Syrian self-understandings that allow the latter community to remain both vibrant and distinct (Bitton 2022).

In the United Kingdom, the Board of Deputies of British Jews commissioned a study of their Sephardi/Mizraḥi community with a focus on racism. The resulting Bush Report (Bush 2021) revealed many issues pertinent to this study.

Matters relating to Sephardi/Mizraḥi identity are relevant to the non-English speaking Diaspora. Sidiropoulou discusses communal attempts to champion specifically Sephardic/Romaniote identity and associated traditions in Greece (Sidiropoulou 2020). The decimation of the Sephardi Jews of Salonica during the Holocaust meant the number of Greek Jews was drastically reduced. While school events, concerts, and synagogues feature a deliberate, educative mixture of cultures, the youth either have not received unique Greco-Jewish traditions from previous generations, do not consciously consider these differences in their daily lives, or avoid efforts toward their perpetuation. This is due in part to the broad secularisation of the community, and the overarching pride as 'Greek Jews', rendering Jewish cultural diversity both 'outdated' and 'not significant as an identifying element' (Sidiropoulou 2020).

Rock traces Bosnian Jewish identity formation through language shifts, and also includes within this formation the impact of the existence of Israel and what it represents (Rock 2019). The youngest generation interviewed, which has also seen a high level of assimilation, expressed 'fear of the lacking Sephardic/Jewish dimension in their lives', in the broader context of state policies that generally ignore Jewish contributions to the history of the country and disadvantage Jewish aspirations toward national participation (Rock 2019, 237). Educationally, while the Sephardi minority group has no political power, they access their culture through their community centre and informal programs such as summer camps for the youth.

Brodsky references Ashkenormativity in all but name, giving publicly available 'Jewish' food as one example of how this phenomenon takes hold (Brodsky 2016). She raises issues regarding identity and acceptance under the Ashkenazi hegemony and within broader Argentinian society, as does Gale (Gale 2005). However, Argentina's Sephardi community approached these issues with greater strength of action as an independent group than Australia's, such as, creating their own Zionist fundraising organisations to support specifically Sephardim in nascent Israel. Brodsky credits 'Zionism [as] an ideological glue that served … to defend Sephardi visibility and the right to maintain their subethnic identities' (Brodsky 2016, 115).

Brodsky makes a convincing case for Sephardic cuisines as intergenerationally educative, the tastes and aromas of which arose time and again for this present study's interviewees as reinforcing identity. As '[t]he religious memory of Jews is grounded in sensations of the palate', Sephardic foods represented 'tradition that was passed orally to the next generation' (Brodsky 2016, 165-168). Of significance, Brodsky discusses the real process of 'diasporisation, de-diasporisation, and re-diasporisation' across generations (Brodsky 2016, 8), alluded to by Gale in the context of acceptance and rejection (Gale 2005). Some people, like Brodsky in Argentina's third generation, are truly interested in this 're-diasporisation', including through food preparation traditions. Although minorities 'may attempt to defend their visibility but end up suffering the seemingly unstoppable advance of the hegemonic group's practices' (Brodsky 2016, 211), Jewish Argentines maintain a plethora of Sephardi educational and cultural organisations and opportunities for all to appreciate.

Australia's most important study of Ashkenazi hegemony was by Gale (Gale 2005). She notes how the Sephardim of Sydney utilise Ashkenazim as their major reference group, and that the Jewish day schools 'play an important part in [the] process of acculturation [to Australian society] and "Ashkenization"' (Gale 2005, 147). She describes a triple rejection forming the basis of Sephardi/Mizraḥi identity: by the broader Australian society, by the Ashkenazi majority, and ultimately of 'themselves as Sephardim and as a Sephardic community'—having no perceived positive value to themselves (Gale 2005, 149).

Travitz personally experienced Ashkenazi hegemony in *halakhically* observant Jewish education and society in Melbourne, Australia (Travitz 2022a). In an online polemic, he writes that 'it is not nice to have the authenticity of one's traditions questioned' (Travitz 2022a, 1). He also writes of condescension, an inability among observant Ashkenazim 'to accept differing practices to [their] own', and Ashkenormativity in *halakha* as the 'default position'.

A casual survey of children's books from PJ Library, a non-profit program, reveals content that is heavily Ashkenazi in substance and style, including dress, appearance of characters, Yiddishisms, titles, and more. Where Sephardi/Mizraḥi elements have been more recently included, these are usually not historical, and typically do not feature accurate Sephardi/Mizraḥi practices, for instance, the breads on the Shabbat table are *ḥallot* instead of *pitot*, the use of wax instead of oil candles, hard *matzot* instead of soft.

Ethnic revitalisation, definitional ceremonies and cultural syncretism
This situation has begun to change. Sharaby raises several issues germane to this study in her article on the revival of *Ruz-e-Bah*, the traditional spring celebration of Iranian immigrants to Israel (Sharaby 2022). She demonstrates

that while the first-generation Iranian Jewish migration of the 1950s sought to adapt to the majority Ashkenazi culture, the second generation experienced an ethnic revitalisation. This phenomenon is also highlighted by Picard, particularly addressing the transition for migrants from assimilation to multiculturalism, stressing that this renewal is a product of modernity and post-modernity (Picard 2017). Sharaby analyses this revitalisation through the concepts of 'definitional ceremonies and cultural syncretism', which she explains as 'a selective growth of ethnic awareness and identity among immigrant communities' (Sharaby 2022, 115-116). The concept of cultural syncretism assists in understanding 'ethnic revival processes and the shaping of a multi-dimensional identity in the postmodern era, where encounters take place within a framework of global immigration' (Sharaby 2022, 117). *Ruz-e-Bah* events serve as match-making opportunities for Iranian youth, conveying traditions distinct to this sub-culture that serve as 'a means for advancing public legitimisation of the immigrants' culture of origin', as well as strengthening the next generation (Sharaby 2022, 125).

In contrast, Gale notes that in stymieing the leadership aspirations of younger members, the elder generation of Sydney's Sephardi Synagogue alienated 'the very group for whom they wish to preserve the tradition' (Gale 2005, 129). In refusing an opportunity to share her heritage in a seminar, one of Gale's respondents said, '[she] did not wish to perpetuate either Sephardic identity or culture … after she married an Ashkenazi' (Gale 2005, 109-110). Another respondent vowed to maintain his Sephardi identity, lamenting that 'it is a pity that so many Sephardim want to shed their beautiful culture and tradition to adopt the Ashkenazi way of life'; his daughters, who married Ashkenazim, 'dismissed their father's desire to preserve the differences … as stubborn and old-fashioned' (Gale 2005, 111).

Elazar identifies Sephardi/Mizraḥi revival as key to a more general revival of the Jewish tradition as 'living and organic' (Elazar, as quoted in Bouskila 2016, 171). The ingredients for, and efforts toward, this aim are discussed by both Elazar and Bouskila, such as '[reviving] Sephardic *halakhic* interpretation, train[ing] Sephardic rabbinical leadership, and present[ing] the Sephardic way as an equally valid expression of Judaism' (Bouskila 2016, 172).

Emergence of ultra-Orthodox Sephardi/Mizraḥi identity and methodologies
Further to Dahan and Levy, Deshen and Acosta trace the emergence of forces such as the ultra-Orthodox (Ḥaredi), Ashkenazi-styled Shas party and the concomitant rise of Sephardi/Mizraḥi tradition in Israeli society, as does Picard (Dahan and Levy 2000; Deshen 2005; Acosta 2011; Picard 2017). Ringel writes that the efforts of Shas to introduce a *Ḥaredi*, monolithic or unified Israeli Judaism, based primarily on Iraqi tradition and their school system, transformed Shas into a social-religious movement. Thus, Shas re-cast Mizraḥi identity politics as Sephardic, thereby granting the ethnic divide

between Mizraḥi/'Sephardic' Jews and Ashkenazi Jews a religious colouring (Ringel 2016, 183).

Standing in opposition to Shas and its founder, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, Rabbi Eliyahou Zini questions the Sephardi heritage of '[m]any in our generation who pride themselves with this title ['Sepharadi']' (Ringel 2016, 194).

Zini's opposition to both the narrow Ashkenazi *Ḥaredi* approach and supposed Iraqi superiority does not stand alone. Faur offers a scathing view of the politicisation of the formerly educative status of the Sephardi *ḥakham* [spiritual leader, sage] and the myopia encouraged regarding secular studies, which is more typical of *Ḥaredi* Ashkenazi positions and anathema to traditional Sephardi Judaism (Faur 1988). This rejection of modernity has been reinforced by the current Sephardi Chief Rabbi, Ovadia Yosef's son (Sharon 2021). Faur still notes, however, referring to Professor Ben Ascher, that this 'new movement' of Shas 'slowed down secularisation' and attracted many Sephardim who would otherwise have assimilated to 'rediscover their Jewish roots' (Faur 1988, 8-13). Nonetheless, Bouskila was dismayed at the Ashkenazi-style *Ḥaredi* nature of the Sephardi rabbinical studies on offer, incongruous with the culture that inspired him (Bouskila 2016). Thus, with the recent revival of Sephardi/Mizraḥi culture, there have also been challenges. This particularly applies to the Australian context.

Filling in the gap—a beginning
The study of Sephardi/Mizraḥi tradition in Australia has lagged behind recent developments in the rest of the Jewish world. Monash University's extensive Gen17 survey of Australian Jewry lacked questions on Sephardi/Mizraḥi culture or heritage (Graham and Markus 2018). Apart from Barda's detailed Australian study of Egyptian Jews and their integration into Australian society, local research on Sephardi/Mizraḥi communities was undertaken mainly in the 1980s (Barda 2011). Aaron's early study contained a plethora of primary source material, and Samra's *Israel Rhamanna* was an anthropological study of the Sydney Sephardi/Mizraḥi community (Aaron 1979; Samra 1987). While books containing personal testimonies have been written in the interim, such as Benjamin and Bloom, this paper's authors seek to renew Australian scholarly interest in this area with communal support (Benjamin 2012; Bloom 2019).

Historical background

Early migration
The Sephardi/Mizraḥi community of Sydney can trace its origins to European settlement in the nineteenth century (Aaron 1979). Jewish settlement in Australia began with the convict settlement, but the majority of Jewish convicts who were sent to Australia were of Ashkenazi background. With the early free settlers, three members of the Montefiore family, who were of

Sephardic background, played a prominent role in Australian Jewish history, but they did not create Sephardic institutions. The Sydney Synagogue, founded in 1832 by Joseph Barrow Montefiore, operated within Anglo-Ashkenazi tradition. The York Street Synagogue, opened in 1844, came under the umbrella of the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbinate, and the same applied to all the other congregations founded in Australia in the nineteenth century. By the twentieth century, the Anglo-Jewish *minhag* [customs] dominated Jewish life in Australia and Australian Jews sought to be 'more British than the British' (Rutland 2001, 6).

Post-1945 migration
The watershed years in Australian Jewish history encompassed the pre- and post-war Jewish refugee and survivor migration, which led to a diversification of Jewish practice and institutions and ended the Anglo-Jewish monopoly. These key waves consisted of Ashkenazi European Jews, reinforcing the Ashkenazi culture of Australian Jewry. There was a much smaller migration of Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jews, largely from South Asia. Some had found refuge from Malaya, Singapore, and Java during the war years and in 1946 were given permission to stay. In 1948, the Australian representative in India reported that large numbers of Middle Eastern Jews wished to emigrate from India, especially Kolkata, and considered Australia as a possible destination. On the advice that Indian Jews were not desirable migrants and that many were non-European in appearance, it was decided to include this group within the 1901 Immigration Restriction Act (known colloquially as the 'White Australia Policy') and to prohibit the entry of all Jews of Middle Eastern origin (Gouttman 1993; Rutland 2001). However, a group of Egyptian Jews did manage to migrate to Adelaide in 1956-7, reinforcing the small community there, with some playing active roles within both the Jewish and general communities (Barda 2011).

Educational approaches
Until comparatively recently, the Australian education system privileged white colonial history so that Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jewry, as a component of all Jewry, faced discrimination regarding both Australian immigration policies and culture. Charak notes, 'Jews consciously and strategically adopted institutions, cultural practices, and political views which would enable their survival as an accepted minority group in an Australia obsessed with racial boundaries' (Charak 2019, 18), but Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jews faced even greater challenges. Government archives reveal that Indian Jews were discriminated against, both as 'coloured' and also 'because of their faith' (Rutland 2001, 242-243). This complex relationship of Australian Jewry with a racialised society colours any effort to distil a socio-historical record for Sydney Jewry.

The paucity of research about Sephardi/Mizraḥi tradition is also an extension of bias within the Jewish community, which may be an internal

extension of Australian racialised boundaries. As the personal and overt discrimination suffered by community members reveals, prejudice against Sephardi/Mizraḥi individuals was part of the social landscape of Sydney's twentieth-century Jewish community.

Some prominent Ashkenazi leaders championed Sephardi/Mizraḥi culture as early as the 1950s. In 1951, when the United Israel Appeal organised a fundraising meeting for the first organised group of Sephardi/Mizraḥi Australians, Rabbi Dr. Israel Porush, a community stalwart, gave an address in which he praised Sephardi Jewry as a whole, saying Sephardim would:

> '…play an increasingly important part in our community in the tradition of the great Sephardi heritage, which has produced so many great Jewish poets and thinkers, like Jehudah HaLevy, Ibn Gabirol and Maimonides…'. The Rabbi continued by referencing the achievements of Sephardi/Mizraḥi *olim* in Israel's founding and highlighted the 'plight of Iraqi and other Oriental Jewry, who are facing an abyss' ("Sephardic meeting", 1951).

He assisted in founding the NSW Association of Sephardim (The Association), Sydney's most prominent representative body for Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jewry (Aaron 1979, 50). Porush's positive references cover three of the four themes of reference for Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jews in the years to come: their esteemed history, their role in the founding of Israel, and the ongoing plight of Mizraḥim remaining in Arab lands.

Jewish community records of the NSWJBD at the state level and Executive Council of Australian Jewry (ECAJ) at the federal level also highlight the roof bodies' tense relationship with the Sephardi/Mizraḥi community. In 1958, Aaron Aaron was elected chairman of The Association, which was affiliated with both bodies. While the ECAJ assisted Sephardi/Mizraḥi migration through representations to the federal government, though successful, these efforts were later described as 'reluctant' (Raab 2010, 20) with claims that the roof bodies required pressure from the Sephardi/Mizraḥi community ("Upset In Sephardi Elections", 1958; "Board Meets Sephardis", 1969). Later, the community enjoyed some positive relations with the Ashkenazi leadership, conveyed by a full-page dedication to the Sephardi community published in 1970 (Einfeld 1970, 12), and a well-attended retirement tribute to Porush hosted at the Sephardi Synagogue ("Sephardi Tributes", 1973).

Simultaneously, tensions shaped communal dynamics. Sephardi/Mizraḥi leadership believed that the plight of Jews in Arab Lands was being marginalised in favour of Soviet Jewry ("Don't forget Jews in Arab countries", 1971). This was exacerbated by a serious dispute, when Sephardi/Mizraḥi representatives were not invited to attend a conference of the Federation of Jewish Communities in South-East Asia and the Far East ("Board Head Refutes Sephardi Claim", 1972). After four months, this issue

was resolved with a general agreement to increase co-operation ("Board Head Refutes Sephardi Claim", 1972; NSWJBD 1972).

After this, The Association representative, Ellis Jacobs, chaired the Overseas Jewry Committee, resulting in a greater focus on the plight of Jews in Arab Lands (NSWJBD 1977). Under Jacobs, the Committee organised awareness campaigns for both Soviet and Syrian Jewry (NSWJBD 1977-1978). Despite this, there were ongoing tensions about Sephardi/Mizraḥi representation in the Overseas Jewry Committee ("Sephardim on Board", 1984; NSWJBD 1984). Ultimately, the damage had been done; a lack of Sephardi/Mizraḥi representation in the upper echelons of communal decision-making, and a lack of faith that this could change, exacerbated the tensions.

Another key issue was that the Jewish day schools marginalised Sephardi/Mizraḥi traditions. Until recently, all Jewish students were educated as Ashkenazim, apart from the generalised Sephardi pronunciation, which became normative in the 1960s ("All change to Sephardi", 1968). This approach fostered a sense of otherness within Sephardi/Mizraḥi students, as reflected by Moses-Ziegler and Kadoury: 'For my entire school life, I did not see my cultural heritage reflected'; 'The last we heard of Iraqi Jews [in history class] was probably the Babylonian Exile, after the destruction of the First Temple. That was it' (Davis 2021).

The Sephardi/Mizraḥi community recognised this issue and raised it with the roof bodies, the Jewish press, and the schools (Gubbay, as quoted in "Sephardi education centre 'essential'", 1988). The schools historically rebuffed criticism with statements echoing the NSWJBD: 'We don't want to create a separation between Sephardim and Ashkenazim' (Davis 2021). There was a wider concern that where Sephardi/Mizraḥi perspectives were included, they were tokenistic: 'I want to see Sephardic traditions taught in our day schools—not as a curiosity, but as a part of our Jewish heritage' (Toltz 1990, 10). Schools that made marginal changes were praised for doing so: 'General Jewish education … is sufficiently covered, but it leads to a situation where customs of our heritage are overlooked and not given the prominence they merit. This is being combated by Yeshiva's co-operation in setting up a Sephardi prayer program and Moriah's plans to have barmitzvahs read in the Sephardi way' (Waingarten 1990, 8).

The Sephardi/Mizraḥi community created educational offerings, including an independent youth movement ('Yavneh'), community Sunday school, seminars/events, and their own Jewish day school but, against other offerings, lack of interest and some significant backlash, these efforts were discontinued ("Yavneh Club for over-18's", 1972; "For Sephardi children", 1978, "Sephardi Education Program", 1979, "Sephardi school suggestion", 1979; Ben-Simon 1988). A push followed to preserve traditions at home (Toltz 1990, 10).

The Sephardi/Mizraḥi community was not completely isolated from the mainstream Jewish community, and shared meaningful educational

activities ("Morning – Like Counterpoint", 1979; "King David pupils at Sephardi shule", 1985; Waingarten 1990). From the 1990s, communal commemorations, such as that of the *Farhud*, the massacre of Iraq's Mizraḥi Jews on 1-2 June 1941, and Expulsion from Spain, saw a more public profile as well as some collaboration with communal organisations ("Sephardi Jewry", 1992; Ende 1990). These tensions paralleled the struggle of Israeli Mizraḥim: 'The Ashkenazi majority ruled the decision-making process.… Traditions were played down in schools, causing a void in the continuance of Jewish education' (Ben-Simon 1988). Sydney's Sephardi/Mizraḥi community, feeling excluded from communal institutions and lacking resources for independent institutions, felt pressure to 'educate or perish' (Toltz 1990, 10). Thus, within the general Australian community as well as the Jewish community, Jews coming from a Sephardi/Mizraḥi background felt marginalised until recently. This paper seeks to understand this sense of marginalisation and the more recent changes that have taken place.

Methods

This is a qualitative-interpretivist study based on a mixed methods study drawing on combined deductive-inductive thematic analysis of interviews and archival research.

The approach taken to recruitment was an 'opt-in' approach based on the requirements of the University of Sydney's Human Ethics procedure. The study proceeded with Ethics Committee approval [2022/727]. The NSWJBD sent out an invitation through its membership email list asking for participants to volunteer for the study. A total of 17 people responded and were sent an information sheet and consent form set out in accordance with ethics requirements. All were accepted into the study since they met the inclusion criterion of Sephardi/Mizraḥi heritage.

Data collection
Interview data was collected through 17 in-depth, semi-structured, individual interviews of between 22 and 40 minutes duration with video recording and were transcribed using Trint (Trint Ltd., London, United Kingdom). The interviews were conducted in English, with the occasional use of Hebrew terms. An open-ended questionnaire was developed as a guide for the interviews and included in the ethics submission. It consisted of three main sections. The first focused on essential background and youth experiences. The second dealt with the importance of Sephardi/Mizraḥi traditions and inclusion, as well as key traditions participants felt should be preserved. The third focused on recent changes, reasons for these changes, and additional changes they might like to see.

Professor Emerita Rutland conducted all the interviews due to her non-aligned status regarding the Jewish schools, given that the other two authors teach at Moriah War Memorial College, a Modern Orthodox Sydney

Jewish day school, and are actively involved in promoting Sephardi/Mizraḥi education. All interviewees were promised full anonymity, and embedded references have been pseudonymised. In place of arbitrary pseudonyms, names were selected at random from the Schwarzvald list of Sephardi first names (Schwarzvald 2016).

Analysis

In keeping with constant-comparative methodology, the interviews were compiled, transcribed and coded to derive semiotic clusters and trends using NVivo (Lumivero LLC, Denver, CO, United States, 2022). These were compared with our evolving research question. Open coding was first used to establish conceptual categories correlated to semiotic clusters. This process was guided by a diagram (see Figure 1). The categories included references to specific words such as 'awareness', 'inclusion', and 'expression'. Theoretical coding followed, mapping out relationships between primary clusters, including analysis of interrelating values and ideological subcategories. Finally, selective coding isolated key elements indicating difference or similarity between participants' perspectives and producing meaningful quotations. In terms of the participant numbers, this was the initial response to the request for volunteers and it was felt that the initial number provided rich enough data without the need for further recruitment. The analysis examines three causally prominent features: Ashkenormativity, otherness, and alienation.
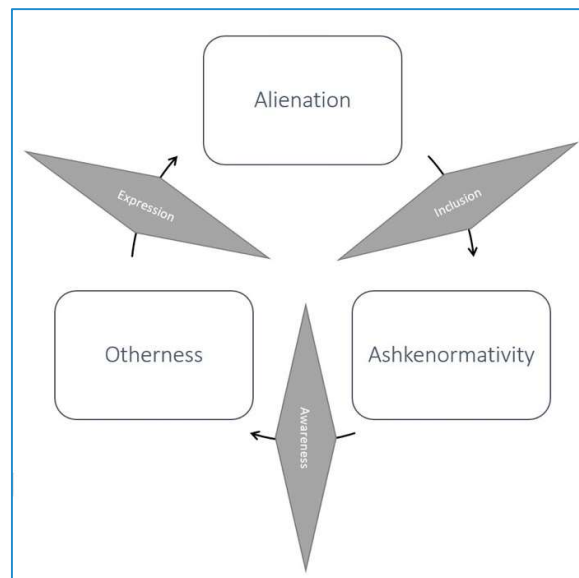

Figure 1: Diagram setting out key terms and concepts used in data analysis for this study.

Findings

Our primary findings can be divided according to the following categories: Sephardi/Mizraḥi experience of discrimination in Sydney, the importance of learning about Sephardi/Mizraḥi perspectives, what changes have occurred, barriers to change, and a path forward.

Population
The 17 participants were of diverse Sephardi/Mizraḥi backgrounds. Their ages ranged from 23 to 88, with participants representing the first (n=4), second (n=11), and third (n=2) generations from migrating to Australia. Some participants could trace their history back to the Expulsion from Spain in 1492, representing migration to Italy, the Balkans, and the Netherlands; North African communities of Morocco, Tunisia, and Libya; the Middle East, including Yemen, Iraq, and Iran; and finally, those who migrated to Asian countries such as India and Indonesia. Additionally, the group was reasonably religiously diverse, featuring participants from many streams of Judaism with different levels of observance. For unknown reasons, the group was weighted heavily towards female respondents, with only three male participants. Eight participants were in relationships with or came from a family featuring Ashkenazim—three of the participants referred to this as '*Ashkephardi*'. The majority of participants were educated exclusively in Jewish day schools (n=8), followed by exclusively public schools (n=5), and then a mix of both (n=4).

Discrimination
Almost all respondents spoke of marginalisation within the Jewish community, while others had experienced overt racism against Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jews. This included racial bullying, pejorative use of the Yiddish term *shvartse* [Blacks], offensive stereotyping in communal settings, and denial of communal spaces for Sephardi expression. Where compared with the minority who experienced antisemitism, this corroborates Kadoury's statement: 'I suffered more discrimination for being Sephardi [from other Jews] than from antisemitism from non-Jews' (Benjamin 2022).

Most participants referenced this issue as current. Le'ah reflects, 'There are still pockets in the community where there are people who feel like "we Ashkenazim are better than the Sephardim…. The Sephardi way is kind of primitive, second class, not as good"'. Tamar maintained that while racism or ostracism were no longer considered acceptable, misconceptions and a lack of understanding still abound. Participants felt incidents were rarely addressed, much less resolved.

Ashkenormativity was readily observed by all participants across the public and private spheres of Jewish communal life. Ya'el explains, 'There was a definite hierarchy of "proper Judaism and then the other stuff".…

Sephardi Judaism often got put in the "other stuff"'. Most participants encountered Ashkenormativity in an educational or communal setting:

> A rabbi came and did the [funeral] service—but no one asked me whether [my father] was Sephardi or Ashkenazi at that point.… And I went to [another] service and realised that I had had an Ashkenazi service for my dad. (Neḥamah)

> It dawned on me [when] my children were having our Seder table … and I know that I felt embarrassed that my parents had 'got it wrong'. (Batsheva)

A clear majority highlighted the need for a more diverse offering within Jewish day schools, including in family history projects when directed to adopt a Holocaust narrative.

Ashkenazim were regarded as oblivious to this permeable, normative barrier through which Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jewry frequently had to move. Three participants referenced a Moriah War Memorial College assembly where students laughed at a video of Yemenite prayer. Esther reflected, '[T]his should be seen as an opportunity to educate the kids. They've never been exposed to it, so no wonder they're laughing. It's not their fault'.

Strong causal links were established between Ashkenormativity and otherness, echoing Benjamin's 'deep chasm' between her home and school life (Benjamin 2020):

> When you're in a society where there are dominating cultural norms, they tend to just ... push aside anything 'other', anything that is different. (Ṣiporah)

> I was very conscious of being in a minority. It wasn't that I was ashamed of my traditions and customs, but I didn't feel seen in any way. (Le'ah)

While Moses-Ziegler was embraced by her community in shared otherness (Davis 2021), several participants attested to otherness escalating to alienation from Sephardi/Mizraḥi tradition or the Jewish community. Ṣiporah relates she was made to feel like 'the outcast in the pool of Jews'— no longer evocative of Aaron's 'minority within a minority', but instead a minority outside of a minority (Aaron 1979). Joseph attests to the danger of this alienation (as quoted in Tsor 2018):

> For the Sephardic child navigating their Jewish heritage and identity, including only Ashkenazi culture and narratives provides two main options: confusion and alienation. Their confusion may lead them to view their existence … as an irreconcilable contradiction, perhaps even a betrayal.

As one interviewee recalled:

> I felt isolated.… I didn't feel I belonged in any grouping. I mean, school kids themselves are hard enough, but I didn't feel part [of] anything—I wished I had a different background. (Avraham)

Alienation from the Jewish community was not clearly validated because those who were disconnected from the community were unlikely to have been respondents. Yet, several respondents expressed alienation from Sephardi religious practice—for instance, at the Sephardi Synagogue—and instead observed privately or in Ashkenazi congregations.

Sephardi/Mizraḥi identity
Sephardi/Mizraḥi heritage, culture and observance were important to all participants. Nearly all participants clarified that diversity made Judaism strong. Many felt that Ashkenazi and Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jews should embrace their cultures within a collective Jewish identity. Individuals referenced different factors as key to their engagement in Sephardi/Mizraḥi advocacy and observance, including the desire for traditions to be maintained and to instil pride in the next generation.

The desire to preserve something at risk of being lost or forgotten was a strong commonality among participants, as expressed by Yiṣḥaḳ: '[T]housands of years and—G-d knows—generations, tens, 20, 30 generations of people are coming through me.… And it's certainly not going to be me that breaks that chain'. This aligns with a desire for transmission of heritage within the Jewish community, which is reflected by Batsheva: '[T]he primary [generation of Sephardim] are all dying, and we have not captured a single story. And I think that's an indictment, that makes me really upset'. These factors motivated participants to reclaim their heritage as part of the diverse fabric of Sydney Jewry.

Process of change
In examining the causality of the prospective shift in attitude, four main changes eventuated: a temporary exhibit at the Sydney Jewish Museum (SJM), a yearly commemoration, youth involvement, and a process of curricular reform. All participants trace the beginning of significant change to 2014-6, and eight participants associate this change with the 2014 Knesset [Israeli parliament] law enshrining 30 November as the 'Day to Mark the Departure and Expulsion of Jews from the Arab Countries and Iran' (Aderet 2014). Yehudit noted a commemoration was organised for this occasion as a partnership between the SJM and the Israeli Embassy.

More observable change began in 2015, when the NSWJBD held a community-wide commemoration for 30 November at the SJM, organised by Lynda Ben-Menashe with assistance from Dane Stern and Joshua Moses:
> [We] engaged with a whole new group of people in our community.…
> One man said that he feels like he is coming home. (NSWJBD
> Executive Minutes 2015).

This commemoration was prominent in the narrative of participants and has become an annual event, with increasing attendance from Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds (NSWJBD 2017). At the 2017 commemoration, with

380 attendees, Hila Tsor, representing the younger generation, stated, 'In NSW, we are no longer the forgotten Jews. I'm thrilled to the point of emotion that the Sydney Jewish Museum has included a display [on Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jewry] in its permanent exhibition, [plus planning a temporary exhibition]' (Desiatnik 2017). Tsor and Moses later founded Yallah, a group focused on engaging Sephardi/Mizraḥi youth with their heritage and culture, as well as joining the NSWJBD to work alongside Ben-Menashe (NSWJBD 2020). This fostered youth engagement, with AUJS electing an executive prioritising 'inclusion of Sephardim and Mizraḥim'.

In 2020, aided by generous donors, the SJM opened the "Jews from Islamic Lands" exhibition in a temporary space, offering a range of artefacts telling 'a tapestry of stories from across these regions, of flourishing, tolerance, expulsion and displacement' (SJM, 2020). Despite these developments, the continued role of the SJM in the 30 November event, and its recent hiring of a dedicated staff member in this area, participants criticised the SJM for not telling the whole community's story:

> [The exhibition] was timed with COVID, which is a real shame, but it was this tiny little section in this tiny little room on the top floor, and it was a temporary exhibit. And that infuriates me because it's not the Sydney Jewish Museum, it's the … Sydney Ashkenaz Museum. (Batsheva)

Fluctuating attendance at communal commemorations, alongside continued media coverage, indicate that the process of change is ongoing (Davis 2021; Susskind 2022; Benjamin 2022). Nearly all agreed change had occurred, but only a minority were clear on the changes and the majority were unsure:

> I get people congratulating me on the street or sending me a text, 'Oh, my son just got *sfenj* [Moroccan Chanukah doughnuts] at school. My son just learnt about that at school'. I get random texts from people saying, 'Oh, we can see that what you're doing is making an impact'. That means more to me than I can even begin to explain in words. (Esther)
>
> It's a few people waving the banner very hard. And now the last year or so, I feel like it's—for the first time—being picked up by more [of] the structural organisations of the community. (Ya'el)

Those participants who had little engagement with the schools were unsure about the increased engagement, but readily identified barriers to change. While lack of resources and advocacy among community leadership were mentioned as prominent operational challenges, disinterest and discrimination were causative of these, echoing past communal travails. Change was driven by key advocates who were referenced interchangeably with their organisations, but not necessarily their organisational heads. Similar trends exist for day schools with individual staff being drivers for change, and community groups and organisers; the majority of advocacy

appears to be occurring at the intermediate level. Several participants felt that Sephardi/Mizraḥi representation at the executive level was key:

> I would like to see greater representation in the Jewish community from Mizraḥi and Sephardi leaders.… I think that [our major institutions are] not as diverse, as I would like [them] to … say, 'Look at us, we're all so different, but we all happen to be Jewish'. (Sarah)

Likewise, several participants spoke of the change as inconsistent and lacking in grassroots support, despite 'awareness and apparent goodwill' (Batsheva):

> Kids that would have had the privilege of having a Sephardi teacher would hear something [related to Sephardi/Mizraḥi culture], but then it wouldn't be something across the whole year. It was only **if** you had a Sephardi teacher, **then** you were exposed to Sephardi content. (Esther, emphasis added)

Thus, while there have been improvements, a strong feeling was conveyed that a concerted effort needs to take place within the Jewish day schools to bring about real change.

Further change needed

Participants identified three key goals: to increase awareness among Sephardi/Mizraḥi individuals and the general community, to increase expression of Sephardi/Mizraḥi traditions, and to foster inclusion of Sephardi/Mizraḥi individuals within the community.

Expression was unanimously cited as key to reducing otherness. Participants had a range of preferred methods of expression which can be roughly grouped into: a) sharing of traditions and religious observances, b) celebration and commemoration of historical events, and c) sharing of foods, clothing, language, and cultural aspects. In general, separating culture from traditional observances would be incorrect in the Sephardi context, but five participants did not refer to any Jewish festivals in their discussion of culture. In contrast, ten made reference to *minhagim* around the *Seder* table. Where seven regarded combining Ashkenazi and Sephardi/Mizraḥi customs positively, six thought it 'diluted' (Le'ah) their practice:

> [W]e don't have [what Ashkenazim consider] *ḥaroset* [dip representing mortar] on Passover, but we have what's called *ḥaleq*.… And I was always taught it's *ḥaroset*, and my parents always had *ḥaleq*—I thought they were stupid. And Emanuel [School] now puts *ḥaleq* on their *Seder* tables. (Batsheva)
>
> We gave [these customs] to our children so that they would have the richness of their full heritage because living in Australia … they were going to get the Ashkenazi part of the heritage just by breathing the air here, but they weren't going to get the [Sephardi/Mizraḥi] part unless we insisted on it. (Ḥannah)

Active expression of Sephardi/Mizraḥi customs and cultures, participants believed, would lead to a normalising and ultimately broadly embraced celebration of Jewish life.

Awareness was the second most common aspiration of respondents and featured strong causal links towards reducing Ashkenormativity. Raising awareness of Sephardi/Mizraḥi history and culture has been successful; in a community survey, 47 per cent had learned about the *Farhud* in the last ten years (NSWJBD 2022).

The recommended process of raising awareness had a generational factor. Older participants recommended autodidactic methods, whereas younger participants were likely to recommend a collective method shaped by community and commonality:

> [M]ost of my Jewish friends are Ashkenazi and we've had discussions about how we didn't learn anything other than that history in school.… I mean, all of these things that we're trying to do are essentially just to start conversations. (Ṣiporah)

A primary concern for participants was inclusion in education, the final and most complex goal of respondents. It was perceived as a key change vector—challenging, but crucial to identity formation. Eight noted this as the key to achieving significant change with five respondents stating this as their core goal, with little mention of awareness or expression. Participants were interested in seeing Sephardi/Mizraḥi perspectives integrated throughout curricula in a 'holistic manner' (Ḥannah).

Thus, inclusion was multi-faceted, involving parallel forms of expression (such as separate prayer groups), 'diversity and inclusion' (Le'ah), and a rejection of tokenism such as '[You Sephardim are] lucky you get to eat rice on *Pesaḥ*' (Ya'el):

> [T]rue inclusion, I believe, [requires us] to separate and unpack our understanding of what 'Jewish' is, because there is a multiplicity of Jews and Jewishness, not simply an Ashkenazi singularity or … a Sephardic and Ashkenazi binary. (Joseph, as quoted in Tsor 2018)

Some support progress that has been made in this regard, with material being provided to Australian Jewish educators, including the release of a curated resource pack and the Zionist Federation of Australia (ZFA) hosting a session on Sephardi/Mizraḥi inclusion at its 2022 conference (NSWJBD 2022). Participants noted changes without articulating specifics:

> I get the feedback that Moriah is looking at the revision of the Jewish Studies curriculum, which is wonderful. That in itself is exciting. There's a new [Head of Jewish Life] at Emanuel [School].… She's now revising the curriculum. (Esther)

The Holocaust shaped the dynamics of inclusion. Respondents did not wish to 'diminish the Holocaust in any way' (Ya'el), but wanted their heritage remembered. This topic contained the most requests for confidentiality, implying sensitivity:

> It's a very hard conversation to have in the Jewish community because … most people are traumatised, whether they're Ashkenazi or Mizraḥi or Sephardi. (Tamar)

Several participants felt that true inclusion required a more holistic identity. They viewed communal tensions in Sydney as analogous to the early construction of Israeli identity, an endeavour to 'integrate everybody from all over the world' (Esther). One participant commented:

> I think there also has to be more respect [for] those people who came from what would be considered backward backgrounds, but that still have a rich history. (Yehudit)

Despite this, experiences of Sephardi/Mizraḥi life abroad, particularly in Israel, enriched the respondents and their feelings of inclusion, with most exhibiting a strong and ongoing connection to Israel. Several participants referenced Israel as part of their autodidactic journey, as Sarah notes, 'It was a very exciting time for me because I really felt like I slotted in very well there'. Travel to Israel broadened the understanding of Jewish identity for Ashkenazim, too (n=4). Raḥel reflects on her friends visiting Israel: 'They said to me: "Oh my God, the whole thing was Mizraḥi.… I just, I couldn't follow it at all". And my response was: "Welcome to my whole life". And we just laugh'.

Discussion

Our findings reflect many phenomena identified in the Bush Report (Bush 2021). These include a lack of representation by central bodies of the full breadth of Jewish experiences and history in schools and beyond. Similarly, 'almost all expressed a strong connection with Israel', and a concern over tokenism, Ashkenormativity, lack of awareness, inclusion, and expression throughout Jewish schools' formal curricula and extracurricular activities (Bush 2021, 78-79, 101-109).

From Ashkenormativity, otherness, and alienation to awareness, expression, and inclusion

This research found that members of the Sephardi/Mizraḥi community experienced alienation and otherness due to Ashkenormativity, as in other Jewish communities (Zenner 1989; Acosta 2011; Brodsky 2016; Bouskila 2016; Picard 2017; Halevy 2021; Bitton 2022; Sharaby 2022). In Australia, Jewish cultural practice is predominantly formed within a traditional Ashkenazi framework (Creese 2020, 1290). This is explained as being an outcome of the 'White Australia' immigration policies, which significantly restricted the number of Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jews permitted to migrate to Australia. Ashkenormativity was stressed by the participants, including the failure of Jewish day schools to recognise and teach the rich heritage of Sephardi/Mizraḥi traditions. Those who attended Jewish schools in the 1980s recounted strong experiences of alienation and expressed bitterness about

their sense of exclusion (Benjamin 2022). These data reinforce the findings of earlier Australian studies on Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jews (Aaron 1979; Samra 1987; Gale 2005).

Although there are significant differences with the Israeli and US experiences demographically, sociologically and politically, there are some parallels. Many in the first generation sought to fit into the Ashkenazi majority of Australian Jewry (Bouskila 2016; Picard 2017; Sharaby 2022). Resulting from the second and third generations' reawakening and the impact of the broader, current zeitgeist regarding diversity and inclusion, there have been early signs of revival over the last decade in Sydney. Second- and third-generation participants described how, in their twenties, they became more aware of their heritage and described the autodidacticism they undertook to reclaim their family's heritage, desiring the same for their children.

The annual 30 November commemoration has become an established feature of the Sydney Jewish calendar, with some elements of the community extending this to a larger period of awareness. This event resonates locally alongside the annual *Yom HaShoah* ceremonies, an example of a 'definitional ceremony' (Sharaby 2022) which is a key element of cultural syncretism, especially in a community where Holocaust memory forms a significant ingredient of Jewish identity (Graham and Markus 2018). Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jews have felt this focus on the Holocaust to be a purely European experience, excluding their own traumas such as the *Farhud*, and Greek and North African Nazi occupation. Holocaust survivors and Sephardi/Mizraḥi migrants both endured displacement, but the latter felt the need to conform to the Holocaust mega-narrative—participants felt as if the two unique traumas infringed upon each other. For this minority ethnic community, the inclusion of 30 November on the community calendar has given long-awaited, educational expression to their own ethnic memory. This development is important for enriching Jewish identity within multiculturalism.

An important feature of Holocaust memory has been the collection of survivor testimony, whereas stories of persecution and suffering in MENA were excluded. Whereas Israel's Kedma initiative tackled the issue of Sephardi/Mizraḥi heritage projects in the 1990s (Dahan and Levy 2000, 69), Sydney's Jewish day schools have been slower to encourage exploration of students' Sephardi/Mizraḥi heritage. Local female advocates for Sephardi/Mizraḥi inclusion created the 'Sephardi Mizraḥi Voices Sydney' group, believing it is vital to capture the stories of ageing members of their community before it is too late. Funding remains a significant issue, particularly in comparison to the resources and attention currently invested in Holocaust testimony. Given the sentiment that the SJM should represent the entire fabric of Sydney Jewry, participants wanted their heritage included as a permanent, rather than temporary, exhibition.

Another key factor which is a microcosm of the Israeli experience is the complexity of Jewish identity (Sharaby 2022). Some of our participants

stressed that they are Jews first, yet they also have their own customs which, as symbols, contribute to their sense of belonging. This mirrors Bitton's findings of different layers of belonging among Syrian Jews in New York (Bitton 2022, 3).

Few participants saw themselves as strictly religious. Ḥaredim constitute a small minority in Sydney, and Sephardi/Mizraḥi Ḥaredi individuals are a smaller subset of this, compared to higher numbers in Israel and the United States (Faur 1988; Dahan and Levy 2000; Deshen 2005; Acosta 2011; Bouskila 2016; Ringel 2016). Despite their secular identification, these participants' understanding of their Jewishness paralleled Bitton's description of Sephardi Jews emerging from a communal consciousness of tradition, rather than the American concept of Jewish identity being 'something an individual enacts or performs' (Bitton 2022, 7) based on the voluntariness of being 'Jews by choice'. Creese stresses the context of community for her interviewees' Jewish identity (Creese 2022). Her concept of 'creolisation' is relevant to three interviewees who referred to '*Ashkephardi*', that is combining of the two sub-cultures, but most interviewees wished to keep their separate ethnic Sephardi identity.

Developments in expression: Jewish education

This research supports the concept of 'communities as educational ecosystems' (Cremin, as quoted in Bitton 2022). This encompasses a spectrum of formal and informal Jewish education, the latter comprising extra-curricular and co-curricular activities (Gross and Rutland 2017). As revealed in the interviews, initial developments in terms of awareness and expression were in informal settings.

In their overview of informal education, Romi and Schmida stress its educational advantages: that its basis in free choice and individual decision-making is more relevant to education in the post-modern era (Romi and Schmida 2009; Gross and Rutland 2017). The ability for the 30 November ceremony—as non-formal education—to attract a large audience, representing a wide spectrum of the Sydney community, indicates the potency of non-formal education. This was demonstrated by the results of the NSWJBD survey, where 64 per cent had not heard of the *Farhud* prior to these ceremonies. This educative process was further strengthened with the temporary exhibition at the SJM. Co-curricular activities accompanied this exhibition, including talks, a catalogue, and an online tour.

Sephardi Mizraḥi Voices Sydney, together with similar projects worldwide, can be understood as another informal education process, seeking to raise the profile of the difficult history and rich cultural heritage of those communities. This endeavour has been highlighted in the local Jewish press (Davis 2021), adding to the outreach.

Efforts are being made to incorporate Sephardi/Mizraḥi history and tradition into the curricula of Sydney's Jewish day schools. The lack thereof

until very recently and the importance of their inclusion were stressed by respondents. The 2021 matriculation textbook used to teach Studies of Religion includes two small paragraphs about Sephardim, with extension surrounding Sephardi/Mizraḥi contributions only available online. Neither 'Sephardi' nor 'Mizraḥi' is in the glossary (Morrissey et al. 2021). The connotation is that Sephardim are a quaint cultural footnote; this can be compared to Kedma's efforts in the 1990s to balance Israeli textbooks that 'minimize[d] the contribution of Mizraḥi Jews' (Dahan and Levy 2000, 431). More recently, the newest iteration of the NSW public school History 7-10 syllabus includes reference to the *Farhud*, as a body of testimony for student exploration.

In meeting this challenge, schools face a lack of institutional knowledge, although this can be overcome through professional development. A starting point has been the NSWJBD resource pack, as well as a professional development session held at the 2022 ZFA Educators' Conference and 2024 Sydney Limmud Oz Conference.[1] Educators need ongoing exposure to scholarship dealing with Sephardi/Mizraḥi traditions and history, as well as examples of effective pedagogy integrating Ashkenazi and Sephardi/Mizraḥi traditions. Student materials and assessments need to include Sephardi/Mizraḥi *halakhic* and historical sources, alongside personalities such as Doña Gracia Mendes, Chief Rabbi Uziel, the Ben Ish Ḥai, and Rabbi Yosef Qafiḥ. Additionally, an informal approach entails teaching Sephardi/Mizraḥi songs and customs, touring students through Sephardi/Mizraḥi synagogues, and preparing Sephardi/Mizraḥi cuisine.

One's awareness of the issues discussed here can no longer be constrained to a particular country or the educational efforts of individual communities. In recent years, social media has permeated many aspects of lived experience, as evidenced by one participant's advocacy on TikTok. Younger Australian Sephardi/Mizraḥi Jews—who were previously geographically isolated—now receive new knowledge about their heritage from family abroad, as well as online sources, such as forums, bolstering interest and providing opportunities for engagement and contribution. In an era of content creation, the drive to differentiate the self by way of an Australian Sephardi/Mizraḥi identity and sub-identities represents fertile ground for future research. This autodidactic process can be accentuated by the availability online to study Judeo-Arabic, Judeo-Persian, Spaniol, and other heritage-specific languages, leading to a more holistic self-understanding (Travitz 2022b).

Gale places the onus of presenting aspects of Sephardi/Mizraḥi culture that 'might appeal to non-Sephardim and gain them a more attractive identity' solely on the shoulders of the Sephardi community (Gale 2005, 149). She questions the viability of the Sephardi/Mizraḥi community, sounding its death knell within one generation of her findings—a prediction that has not been realised (Gale 2005).

Conclusion

Over the last decade, changes have been introduced to address the discrimination experienced by the Sydney Sephardi/Mizraḥi community, and the restructuring of curricula within Sydney Jewish day schools is ongoing. These changes have resulted from both the efforts of a small group of advocates and the broader community's focus on diversity and inclusion. They mirror international developments but, especially when compared with Israel, have taken longer to coalesce. As our interviewees stressed, while there has been progress, much more still needs to be achieved.

Predictions that Sephardi/Mizraḥi traditions and heritage will disappear from Sydney, however, have not eventuated. Positive cultural changes in Sydney's Jewish educational sphere, and the now commonplace interplay between Sydney's community and an online, multi-faceted, global Jewish culture, have revitalised this important aspect of Jewish life and introduced it into the communal consciousness. Australia's Sephardi/Mizraḥi journey is now well underway.

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Endnotes

[1] The [NSWJBD resources](#) are also available online.