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Arab Jews: The Debate on Identity and Belonging — The Historian Avi Shlaim as A Case Study

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Abstract

The term "Arab Jews" constitutes an existential debate and a scholarly research problem, deeply rooted in historical content and contemporary meaning. There is an overlap of knowledge regarding the Jewish-Arab content: intellectually and culturally, embodied in religious doctrine; linguistically and subjectively, framed by a sense of belonging; and historically and politically, with varying analytical readings of the essence of identity and the origin of belonging, its formation, description, and affirmation of self. Specialized historical studies have grappled with the Jewish-Arab dichotomy, either through bias stemming from a singular view of the Zionist narrative or through a detached, non-Zionist Jewish perspective, acknowledging a reality of shared coexistence. The concept of integration, of Jews and Arabs, highlights a deep-rooted historical and cultural foundation, a distinctive sociology of culture, and an interwoven intellectual heritage. It deepens collective memory, reproduces a shared existential history, affirms the positive aspects of diversity as a civilization, acceptance of the other as a human experience, rejection of exclusion as a culture, renunciation of violence as a method, and an enriching vision of the future.

The study is structured as follows: the introduction, a concise overview, addresses the historical significance of the Jewish-Arab duality, the rationale behind the research choice, and the ultimate goals of the study. The first section explores the historical origins of Arab Jews, examining their chronological existence and deep-seated roots. The second section focuses on the central and distinctive role of Arab Jews in Arab-Islamic civilization. Thirdly, it focused on studying the significant contributions of the Arab Jewish historian Avi Shlaim in highlighting the distinctiveness of Arab Jewish identity. He is considered the most prominent figure to have articulated the character of the Arab Jew across three distinct worlds: Iraqi, Israeli, and English, encompassing memory and identity, history and society,

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culture and belief, vision and politics.

Keywords: Anti-Semitism; Hebrew language; Historical memoirs; Political vision ; Religious culture ; Shared history; Social diversity; Zionist narrative.