Snir, Reuven (2015) *Who Needs Arab-Jewish Identity? Interpellation, Exclusion, and Inessential Solidarities*. Leiden and Boston: Brill

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In *Who Needs Arab-Jewish Identity?* Professor Reuven Snir brings out an important contribution to studies of the history, literature and identity of Arabized Jews, showing the significant shifts these communities have undergone in the ways their identities have been defined and constructed in the modern period. His conclusion, that Arab-Jewish identity has become ultimately so fragmented that individuals have turned to “inessential solidarities” rather than a sense of collective identity, sheds new light on this particular community but also opens up possibilities for new avenues of investigation in the study of “identity” more generally.

The book is presented in five main chapters, each of them containing rich historical detail from the author’s extensive research on the topic. The overall argument is tied together well in a concluding chapter that presents a clear answer to the book’s title question.

Chapter 1 provides a very useful overview of recent theoretical work on the study of identity, moving from Stuart Hall (from whose essay “Who Needs Identity?” the book draws its title) through more recent discussions about the fragmentation of identities. In Chapter 2 the author presents the historical context of different communities of Arabized Jews from the medieval period until the early nineteenth century, describing “a past in which being an Arab and a Jew was not paradoxical” (34), with a focus on the literary outputs of Jewish authors writing in Arabic and other languages.

In the extended third chapter, the author presents an account of the shifts in identity formation of Arabized Jews in modern times, with a focus on Iraqi Jewish intellectuals. The author argues that Jews within Iraq in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century saw themselves, and were seen by the wider community, as an integral part of Iraqi society, and as “Iraqi” and “Arab” without question. The author then traces the double processes of exclusion that ultimately ruptured this sense of a solid identity; the first being their framing as ‘Zionists’ and their erasure from the Iraqi national memory (123) and the second in their exclusion (as “Arabs”) from the “new national Jewish vision” (125) on emigration to Israel. In the final section of chapter 3, the author discusses the work of several Iraqi Jewish writers in order to show how they each forged their own path in negotiating new identities within Israel (174).

This section leads up to the ultimate argument about the formation of “inessential solidarities” and individual subjectivities rather than a sense of collective identity. The argument is consolidated in Chapter 4 where the author emphasises that of the 120 Iraqi Jewish intellectuals whose works he has studied, each emphasises the components of his (they are mainly men) identity differently (187).

As the author himself describes it, the final chapter is something of an extended book review of Sami Shalom Chetrit’s *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews* (Routledge 2010). This chapter allows Professor Snir to re-state his arguments about the formation of “inessential solidarities” and individual subjectivities while arguing against the relevance of a collective “Mizrahi” identity.

Overall the book provides the reader with insights into the shifting identities of Arab Jews, particularly those originating in Iraq. This focus on Iraqi Jews is based on the author’s extensive scholarship in this area, but it does raise the question of whether a parallel process of identity formation applies equally to “Arab Jews” from other regions. These limitations are noted in several places but further examples from other communities (e.g. in the Maghreb, Egypt, or Yemen) would have helped to clarify the generalizability of the argument. The emphasis on individuality and fragmentation rather than a solid collective identity could be used to reflect on identity formation in other communities, especially as, as the author successfully argues, collective identities may be more useful for the state or political action than for describing individual subjectivities.