# Re-Masculinizing Immigrants in Israel
## The Moroccan Troubadour Sliman El-Maghribi's Social Ballads

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**Abstract**    Below I analyse three 'social ballads' by Sliman El-Maghribi, a key figure in the 'Moroccan troubadours' scene' that emerged in 1950s Israel as Moroccan male immigrants encountered Israel's then-hegemonic *sabra* masculinity milieu. The ballades reflect tactics that these immigrants, facing masculine marginality, adopted as they used the Scene as a platform for negotiation and reshaping of their masculine identity against their marginalization. By performing masculine compromise and adaptations, they developed a hybrid masculine model that coupled identification with Israel with criticism and rejection of its male hegemonic practices.

**Keywords**    Troubadours' scene. Moroccan immigrants. 1950s Israel. Sabra. Male marginalization. Re-masculinization. Ballads.

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## 1    Introduction

Sliman El-Maghribi (Shlomo ben-Hamo) was a key figure in the Moroccan troubadours scene (hereinafter: the Scene), an under-researched musical-culture milieu that emerged and evolved in 1950s Israel to preserve Moroccan musical practices amid the cultural exclusion of Moroccan immigrants.[1] The Scene was a grassroots phenomenon revolving around Moroccan musicians whom I call troubadours because they circulated among immigrant communities, giving immigrants respite from their integration pressures by reconnecting them with their culture of origin from Morocco. In their social ballads, they critiqued the Israeli reality and mediated it for the immigrants in response to their cultural marginality. The Israeli cultural mainstream kept the Scene at arm's length, relegating it to Moroccan communities in the rural and urban periphery. Thus El-Maghribi crisscrossed the country, performed *haflot* (parties) at family festivities and fringe clubs, and preserved for his *mului'in* (fans) a vanishing musical style.

Below I analyze three of El-Maghribi's social ballads that deal with male Moroccan immigrants' confrontation with their immigration crisis and their encounter with the masculine hegemony of the *sabra* (the Israel-born Jew). Thus, I show how El-Maghribi's social ballads reflect the integration hardships of Moroccan-Jewish men and the strategies they developed against the challenge to their masculine identity. Thus the Scene, evolving as an alternative to the Israeli cultural mainstream and set in the socio-geographic periphery, created a platform for re-masculinization by establishing a masculinity community that could challenge the hegemonic sabra masculinity, formulate a new pluralistic male Moroccan model, and alleviate the immigrants' manhood-identity crisis via masculine compromise.

The cultural phenomenon of the Scene and the ballades reflect the formative and still-impactful encounter between Moroccan immigrants and fledgling sabra Israel. To make this argument, below I present the socio-cultural background of the Moroccan-Jewish masculine identity formation and the push factors behind the Moroccan Jews' traumatic immigration. Then I describe the conditions under which sabra masculinity developed its salient features, which serve as the backdrop of the crisis that ensued as the immigrants encountered it and faced stigmatization, cultural hostility, socioeconomic degradation, and weakening of community support networks. Continuing, I argue that Sliman El-Maghribi's

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**1**  Hereinafter, 'Moroccan' as a noun or an adjective denotes a Jewish person of Moroccan origin.

social ballads created a vernacular arena in which Moroccan immigrants renegotiated their masculinity, forging a hybrid establishment-aligned yet counter-hegemonic model that facilitated a workable 'masculine compromise' with Israel's sabra order. I also show how El-Maghribi's ballads supplied these socially marginalized men with agency and challenge the prevalent incompetent image of Moroccan immigrants in the 1950s in the current Israeli academic and public discourse.

## 2 Methodological Remarks

My research methodology surmounts the informal nature of the Scene, reflected in the inaccessibility of the troubadours' lyrics, their unknown dates of publication, and their authors' intentions, by recapturing the texts via listening, transcribing the ballads from their source language (a Jewish dialect of the Moroccan *darija* and French), and translating them first into Hebrew and then into English. I then supplement missing historical information in the lyrics of the ballads by adding historical contextualization of their contents and interviewing members of El-Maghribi's family and participants in the Scene. I analyze the texts only as historical sources that may yield an interpretive narrative and not as objects of linguistic-musicological or cultural research. I avoid the classical meaning of the terms 'troubadour' and 'ballad' in their Medieval European context and do not compare that setting with the Scene discussed here. I borrow the terms in view of some similarities between them and characterize them on the basis of the Oxford Dictionary definitions. Thus, I use 'troubadour' to denote the practice of wandering between communities, and 'ballad' due to its storytelling characteristics.[2] Finally, I call El-Maghribi 'Sliman' in order to differentiate him from others who chose El-Maghribi as their stage name and because Moroccans in Israel and in the diaspora broadly associate him with this name.

## 3 Male Immigrants: Hierarchy, Emotions, and Coping

'Masculinity' denotes roles, behaviours, gestures, and beliefs that a society deems appropriate for males and sets them in social, historical, and political circumstances. Current attention to men's gender experience challenges common stereotypes in research and culture that identify masculinity with unidimensional representations of

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**2** Cambridge Dictionary. https://dictionary.cambridge.org/.

power and an unvarying outcome.[3] The term 'hegemonic masculinity', flowing from the pluralization of the masculinity discourse, abets the gendered re-examination of masculinity and reveals various masculinity models, although focusing on the hegemonic prism may blur nuances in the structuring of masculinity and its relations with hegemony. Hegemonic masculinity means not cultural superiority but rather a balance of forces in the struggle for dominance that favours one masculinity over another under specific circumstances that are open to historical change (Hearn 2004; Howson 2006). As Connell and Messerschmidt explain: "Hegemonic masculinities […] came into existence in specific circumstances and were open to historical change. More precisely, there could be a struggle for hegemony, and older forms of masculinity might be displaced by new means of being a man might become hegemonic" (Connell, Messerschmidt 2005, 832-3).

Migration denotes transition – a liminal process in which identity and cultural fusion create new hybrid or monolithic social entities (Turner 2003; Bhabha 2004). Variations of masculinity evolve in many parameters (ethnicity, nationality, etc.), allowing groups and individuals to change within stereotypic gender roles. Migration promotes struggle with hegemonic masculinity as migrants adopt, reject, and/or preserve masculine patterns and formulate a new male identity (Hibbins, Pease 2009). Socio-gender disorientation and institutional obstacles in the host society may inspire male migrants to strike an ideological 'patriarchal bargain' with the dominant masculinity in behaviour patterns, apportionment of power, and authority – or they may indulge in a diasporic retreat that cripples their assimilation (Pease 2009).

As Sliman's social ballads demonstrate, absent control over the migration process and in response to their weakness in their ambiguous situation, immigrants may fluctuate between two stereotypical masculinity behaviours: 'marianismo', a quiet, dependent, and transportable perception of masculinity; and 'machismo': confrontational, Spartan, rugged masculinity (Walter, Bourgois, Loinaz 2004; Flores Niemann 2004).

Migration research tends to identify male migrants with oppression and neglect and disregards their vulnerability to stigma, violence, and discrimination. In recent years, however, greater nuance in understanding masculinity in migration has acknowledged men's need to adjust to a host society that inflicts discontent, estrangement, marginality, and invisibility on them. In one such adjustment, men may revise their masculine ideology

**3** Flood 2002; Clatterbaugh 1996; Connell 1987; Connell 2005; Carrigan, Connel, Lee 1985.

and redesign their masculinity (Montes 2013; Charsley, Wray 2015). The redirection of scholarly attention to male migrants' diverse experiences in coping with migration crisis has raised awareness that male migrants – foremost from traditional societies that invoke non-Western male ideologies – may adopt toxic behaviours toward themselves, manifested in depression, hopelessness, and defeatism, and outwardly in violence, substance abuse, social deviation, and crime (McDermott et al. 2022; Mahoney, Stattin 2000; Cerchiaro 2021). More optimistically, they establish a community and a social network that will help them attain cohesiveness, self-worth, and even a sense of supremacy over the hegemonic masculinity. By rewriting their masculinity narratives, male migrants may develop agency that helps them to challenge the hegemonic masculinity and perform a 'masculine compromise' within themselves and with the host culture's masculine ideologies and roles. The compromise may manifest, for example, in maintaining a gender boundary or emphasizing symbolic dominance while relinquishing power and cultural capital – or vice versa (Näre 2010; Choi 2019; Donaldson, Howson 2009). The Moroccan immigrant, negotiating with the masculine hegemony in Israeli society for his place in the hierarchy of masculinities, had to choose between social deviation and reinventing his masculinity. Sliman's ballads challenged the sabra hegemonic masculinity by putting forward a new and accommodative male ideology.

## 4 Jewish Masculinity in Morocco

Between 1947 and 1952, the Jewish population in Morocco approximated 250,000, most in fifteen large urban communities. One-third of males aged 15-60 and several percent of women and children under age fifteen were breadwinners. Only 2-4% held positions in bureaucracy and modern business; 50% made a living from trade, 38% from crafts, and 0.14% from agriculture. Most earned paltry wages. The most common crafts were tailoring among women and shoemaking, tailoring, glassmaking, and smithing among men. Thus, most Jews were socially marginalized, impoverished, and hard-pressed to sustain their families (Tsur 2002; Moreno, Bitton 2023).

Fatima Sadiki, describing Morocco at the outset of its modernization, states that social positioning defined masculinity in Muslim culture, social order rigidly regulated gender roles and stereotypes, and the Jews were a reverse image of the hegemonic model in Moroccan Muslim masculinity. The Moroccan masculine codex, she says, was imparted via education, rituals, and oral tradition, with moral conceptualizations such as 'a man's word' and honour as fundamentals. Muslim masculine hegemony, she

adds, stressed outward manifestations of masculinity, access to resources, and recognition by other men (Sadiki 2011). Although this generalization was somewhat valid for Jews, too, nowhere did Jews enjoy a status equal to that of Muslims. Although enforcement of the *dhimma* terms varied from time to time, most Jewish men inhabited the bottom of the class hierarchy (Benichou 2020; Larhmaid 2011).

The establishment of the French Protectorate (1912) brought about dramatic social, political, religious, legal, and cultural changes. Until then, Jews and Muslims shared a culture and language and practiced similar customs. Although most Jews remained juridically inferior, the penetration of modern education to parts of Jewish society and the legal sectorization of 'natives' as distinct from 'Westerners' challenged the traditional social order and Muslim-Jewish relations (Gilson-Miller 2013; Schroeter 2003; Tsur 2011). From the 1930s on, most Jews gradually abandoned rural villages, migrated to growing cities, and joined the lower middle class, aspiring to embrace modernization and Westernization. Concurrently, Moroccan Muslims responded to the French occupation and the support of the Moroccan *makhzen* (monarchy) for modernization and its liberal policy toward minorities by establishing the Al-Istiklal national movement, which in part opposed any change in the Jews' dhimmi status and their integration into Moroccan nationhood. According to Aomar Boum (2013), the events surrounding the 1940s pro-Nazi Vichy rule, the ascendency of the Arab League in 1945, the Arab-Jewish conflict in Mandate Palestine, and anti-Jewish propaganda restructured Muslim masculinity in Morocco by feminizing and dehumanizing Jews and accusing them of holding Muslims in contempt. In this political context, the Jewish male faced perennial abuse, humiliation, and derision (Wyrtzen 2015; Boum 2013; Gilson-Miller 2013).

In newly independent Morocco, Sultan Muhammad V and his son, Hassan II, introduced pro-Western diplomacy and sought for this reason to give their country a moderate image in its treatment of women and Jews. Radical Muslim religious forces countered by openly urging restoration of traditional male supremacy under Shari'a law and the inferior dhimma status (Chafai 2017; Conway-Long 2006; Wyrtzen 2015). In August 1962, Alal al-Fasi, a senior official in Al-Istiklal and the Minister of Islamic Affairs, stated: "Who says Moroccan, says Muslim. [...] the 'Moroccan' Jew is only a dhimmi" (*L'avant Garde*, August 11, 1962, in Paloma-Elbaz 2021, 191). He said this more than a decade after some Jews, particularly the urban young, schooled in Zionist institutions in Morocco, had undergone a profound transformation of mindset pursuant to World War II, the Holocaust, and Israeli independence. Having internalized the ideas of French liberalism and the Zionist ideology, they were loath to acquiesce in social inferiority (Tsur 2002; Bitton 2020). Contrastingly, most Jews – older heads of household who dwelled in rural areas and

the margins of major cities – emigrated to Israel in 1947-56 under the impetus of religious passion, economic distress, social inferiority, and abusive treatment (Tsur 1994; Boum 2010).

## 5 Israeli Masculinity and Moroccan Immigrants in Israel's First Decades

Moroccan immigration to Israel began in 1947 and spanned more than two decades amid traumatic deterioration of security and economic conditions in Morocco. More than 80% of Moroccan Jewry, some 240,000 people, participated in this movement in two socioeconomically, demographically, chronologically, and culturally distinct waves (Schmelz 1988; Schmelz 1989; Laskier 2006; Gottreich Benichou 2020). In the first (1947-60), some 140,000 people emigrated, most from fringe urban strata and the rural periphery. They were religious traditional craftspersons, far from modernity, organized in large families, and culturally connected with the Muslim surroundings (Laskier 2006). In Israel, their socioeconomic weakness made them dependent on make-work and targeted them for settlement in *ma'abarot* (transit camps, sing. *ma'abarah*), new 'development towns' in the periphery, and *moshavim* (cooperative farming villages, sing. *moshav*). Around 60% were men, more than half aged 20-64, and most had minimal schooling. They were steered to blue-collar occupations (Schmelz 1989; Hacohen 2003).

The second wave (1961-71, mostly 1961-64, some 113,000 participants) centred on members of the urban lower-middle class; better educated than their predecessors, they practiced modern occupations and were religiously pragmatic (Laskier 1994, 2006; Tsur 2002). Most were directed to development towns and outskirts of major cities that quickly became breeding grounds of poverty and crime, identified with marginality and backwardness, stigma and social isolation (Efrat 1994; Tzfadia 2007; Shoham, Adad, Rahav 2017).

Early-modern West European nationalism embraced stereotyped masculine symbolism as a political practice that disdained tradition in favour of modernity. Men were educated in physical and mental discipline, quashing of emotion, aggressiveness, and sacrifice for the fatherland (Mosse 1996). The Jew was sub-humanized and portrayed as the inverse of European masculinity and an agent of social deviance and degeneration. Paradoxically, the heads of the Zionist movement, Theodore Herzl and Max Nordau – the latter, author of *Muskeljudentum*, 'muscle Judaism' – internalized the European perspective and considered 're-masculinization' a point of departure for the Jews' national struggle (Biale 1997; Boyarin 1997). Formative national societies, writes David Gilmore (1990), cope with

social and national tasks by conceptualizing masculinity; "Manhood ideals force men to overcome their inherent inertia and fearfulness and 'work' […] and [become] efficient or serviceable" (Gilmore 1990, 227). Therefore, during the pre-state period, masculinity for Jews in Mandate Palestine was identified with European masculinity, secularism, collectivism, military force, courage, mental and physical fortitude, and tilling the soil (Kaplan 2006; Biale 1997).

The sabras, most of Ashkenazi origin, bore national responsibility for the transformation of Jewish masculinity and inculcated cultural patterns that were typified anti-diasporism and adoption Spartan value adoption as a contrast to diasporic Jewish masculinity. Young males raised in socialist environments became mythical figures in the War of Independence. They represented the epitome of sabra masculinity – youth, strength, health, pioneering, rootedness, and manual labour – and were credited with moral supremacy for their solidarity, self-sacrifice for the whole, and sexual puritanism (Almog 2000; Spector-Marzel 2008). The army did much to shape the hierarchy of masculinities in Israel and scripted the hegemonic masculinity as silent, getting-things-done, restrained, concealing emotions, and bodily and mentally controlled, transforming soldiers and commanders into cultural heroes and national leaders who reflected the antithesis of the diasporic Jew (Almog 2000; Kaplan 2006; Sasson-Levy 2001; 2006). Accordingly, sabra society expected immigrants to jettison their diasporic culture and undergo 'Israelization', turning Moroccan (and MENA) immigrants' encounter with the sabras into a 'Kulturkampf' (Almog 2000; Chetrit 2010).

Phillip Hollander broadens this characterization by presenting rivalling masculinities among Jews who adhered at different times to a diasporic Jewish masculinity (Hollander 2012). Rahel Wasserfall, investigating perceptions of masculinity and femininity in a Moroccan immigrants' moshav three decades after their immigration to Israel, found that men developed behavioural practices that reflected both resistance and adjustment to the model of masculinity and the accepted masculinity patterns in Israel in the 'patriarchal bargain' mentioned above (Wasserfall 1987). In making this adjustment, they developed alternative practices to demonstrate the male honour that they had acquired under the influence of Muslim masculinity in Morocco. Wasserfall's interviewees described this struggle as so fundamental in Moroccan masculinity that the collision with the Israeli culture initially manifested in verbal and physical violence that subsequently was channelled into frustration with verbal practices for the attainment of male honour (Wasserfall 1987). A 'good male' conception evolved at this time. Born of the blending of masculinities in Israel (with some generalization), it balanced 'soft' Ashkenazi masculinity with 'rigid' Moroccan masculinity and defined

a worthy male as one who made a living while avoiding violence, gambling, and use of drugs or alcohol (Wasserfall 1987).

A generation gap ensued during these decades between young Moroccans, who had undergone a transformation of mindset in Morocco that inspired many to flout Muslim cultural dictates, and older men, most of whom immigrated to Israel with their families in the country's first decade and were relegated to socioeconomic weakness and sociocultural stigma and marginality. As I show below, Sliman's social ballads reflect the way this socially marginalized Moroccan immigrant fused resistance and adaptability with the patterns of sabra masculinity despite the ideological gap, striking a masculine compromise that combined Israeli hegemonic masculinity patterns with a rivalling Israeli masculinity – a Moroccan one.

## 6 Sliman and the Scene as a Community for Marginalized Masculinities

Sliman, according to his daughters, was born in 1925 in Meknes, Morocco. He attended a religious elementary school in boyhood and then a school that combined regular studies with music and voice development. His father, a singer and a violinist, managed a musical ensemble that performed in Morocco. The son further specialized in the Algerian style of vocal and instrumental performance while learning with the gifted music teacher David Ben-Haroush. In 1956, Sliman immigrated to Israel with his family under circumstances that ruled out his stay in Morocco. He was placed in a ma'abarah in Ashkelon and then moved to Haifa. Together with his brothers Maurice, Yitzhak, and Shimon, he established a band that performed at parties and nightclubs all over fledgling Israel and even in Europe while trying his hand at other vocations to make a living. In Israel, he began to record his songs in Judeo-Moroccan in the early 1960s. His repertoire, influenced by the musical scene in the Middle East and the Maghreb, was comprised largely of songs on romantic themes.[4] In the political environment of decolonizing 1950s Morocco, songs that made a 'political allusion' subversive to the French protectorate gained popularity (Silver 2022, 162-3). This trend appeared to continue in Israel as Sliman devoted some of his works to social and political matters involving the lives of Moroccan immigrants in Israel. Although his activities were very sympathetically received

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**4**  Interview by the author with Sliman's daughters, Nicole Gueta and Berta Cohen, Haifa, August 21, 2024.

in the Moroccan diaspora by Jews and Muslims alike, he remained anonymous in the mainstream Israeli culture.[5]

The Scene in Israel crested in the 1950s and 1960s, a time when Zionist ideology shaped the popular culture in the service of the Israeli nation-building enterprise. Sabra music was so important in the formation of collective consciousness and immigrant acculturation that the state frowned on cultural entrepreneurs who worked in languages other than Hebrew (Cofman-Simhon 2023; Regev, Seroussi 2004; Helman 2002). To attenuate the crisis of immigration, MENA immigrants established informal musical settings of their own. In Israel's first years, most performers in these settings originated in the Middle East. Indeed, the Egyptian and Iraqi immigrant musicians who established the Voice of Israel Orchestra in Arabic (1948-93) and Café Noah (1951) in the socially peripheral Hatikvah quarter of Tel Aviv established hegemony in 'Oriental' music in Israel (Perlson 2006). The *trobairitz* Esther Alfasi notes that since the Moroccan troubadours came from schools of music (Sha'abi, Andalusi, and Djiri) that were foreign to the hegemony, they were excluded from the Mizrahi mainstream, in effect experiencing double cultural marginality and falling into a cultural vacuum.[6] The entrepreneur Rafael Azulay, who had immigrated to Israel from Morocco in 1948, identified an opportunity to fill the void and in 1957, together with his sons, established Zakiphon, the country's first independent label that recorded and distributed music by immigrant artists of MENA origin. Their activity met with derision from the cultural mainstream, prompting them to turn inward and focus on MENA immigrants' folk music (Verthaim 2017; Litvin 2017; Silver 2022).

According to the musician Haim Uliel and the social activist Reuven Abergel, the potential and reputation of the Scene in Israel was similar among immigrants and society at large. Due to the Scene's peripherality, they say, the state did not consider it a threat and largely spared it from cultural control. The Scene, they add, was a pronouncedly male arena that embodied a paradox: one needed money to participate in it even as most proletarian immigrants, unlike regular partygoers, had none. As a result, the nightclub and café clientele was dominated by hardscrabble men who had withdrawn from the economic rat race and the immigration crisis in despair or

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**5** Interview by the author with Sliman's daughters, Nicole Gueta and Berta Cohen, Haifa, August 21, 2024.

**6** Born in 1940 in Salé, Esther Alfasi immigrated to Israel in 1961 and built an international career for Moroccan and Arab audiences. Interview by the author with Esther Alfasi, Ashkelon, April 16, 2022.

were active in the underworld.[7] Ironically, it was they who fuelled the Scene and preserved and sustained the MENA Jews' musical culture.

Due to livelihood difficulties and cultural marginality, troubadours had to circulate among Moroccan immigrant communities and operate in a climate and invoke masculine practices that burdened them due to their audiences' sociological characteristics. Relying on *ghr'aamah* (tips) for a living, they had to accede to customers' demands such as singing and playing pieces on request and extending their repertoire to classics and hits from the MENA countries. Furthermore, due to their dependence on a crowd composed mainly of men down on their luck and tough-guy criminals, they played for hours on demand and sometimes against their own wishes, their listeners treating them as subordinates and subjected them to humiliation and even violence if they failed to comply.[8]

Music, advises Thomas Solomon, is key in building diasporic communities because it delivers pleasure amid socialization, confirms and validates personal and community identity, helps in dealing with crisis and change, and fosters collective consciousness and a sense of community belonging (Solomon 2015). The Scene, as an autonomous grassroots peripheral subculture, transformed the troubadours into cultural heroes of the Moroccan immigrant communities and, along with Sliman's ballads, reflects an attempt to help them cope with the crises of immigration and cultural marginality. It created a platform for masculine negotiation, struggle, attainment of agency, a sense of self-esteem, and masculine compromise, and a reconstructed male identity in the encounter with Israel's hegemonic masculinity. Thus, Sliman and other troubadours embraced a dialectic masculine model that was concurrently subversive and integrative, one that undermined the cultural mainstream and the sabra masculinity by singing in Judeo-Moroccan and not in Hebrew, devoted many works to non-national themes, celebrated the diasporic culture of origin, lionized mythical rabbinical personalities, performed traditional liturgical poems and classical folksongs, and criticized the host society – while identifying with symbols of Israeli masculinity and the state's national aspirations. Thus, Braham Swirri sang about

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**7**   Interview by the author with the singer and musician Haim Uliel, Sderot, June 15, 2023; interview by the author with Reuven Abergel, a founding member of the Black Panthers movement, Jerusalem, April 20, 2022. Uliel was a founding member of the Sfatayim group. His father, Matityah, established the Petit Bar pour les Amis (The small bar for friends), also known as Le café de Matatiah (Matatiah's café) in Sederot in 1958 and ran it until 1964. Reuven Abergel's father, David, ran L'qahawah di dre'ei (Dere'ei's café) in Jerusalem. See also Aharon Cohen and Sigalit Banai's documentary film *Ha-halutzim* (The pioneers), 2007 (23:14).

**8**   Interviews by the author with Uliel, June 15, 2023, Sderot, and April 20, 2022, Jerusalem; and with Shimon Yifrah, March 25, 2024, Ashdod. Shimon Yifrach is the former stage manager of the Ashdod Andalusian Orchestra.

immigrants' agonies in his ballad *Newcomer* and Cheich Mwijo pined for Morocco in his *Sultan Moulay El-Hasan*. Patriotic Israeli songs, however, were also sung, as in David Albashari's ballad *Yisrael Ya Zin al-Bildan* (Israel the lovely land) and Albert Suissa's ballad *Ya Sidi Dayan* (My master [Moshe] Dayan).

## 7 "I Lived with This Worry": Commiseration and Mocking as Reactions to Marginalization

Migration prompted by a threat to security, economic crisis, or extreme social deterioration inflicts trauma and impairs migrants' social integration. For immigrants who lack control over their situation and play the gender role of family breadwinner, the transition from one set of geographic, social, and class positions to another triggers anxiety and mental crisis (Fuller 2001; Pease 2009). The shocks that accompanied Moroccan Jews' encounter with Israeli society scalded their collective consciousness and exacerbated their trauma. In 1948-51, given their anti-diasporic disposition and the immigrants' Mizrahi demographic, sabras fretted over the possibility that Israel's cultural complexion would not endure. Although negligible in numbers, Moroccans suffered from a much greater extent of pejorative labelling than did other immigrants, males seen as the antithesis of Israeli values and tagged as patriarchal, primitive, violent, and foreign (Tsur 1997; Moreno, Bitton 2023).

In this context, in his ballad *Fil'maroc fckkit Yehudi* (In Morocco I met a Jew), probably composed in the late 1950s or the early 1960s,[9] Sliman criticizes Israel's treatment of Moroccan immigrants, challenges the emotional regime of sabra masculinity, and recounts the immigrants' crisis at two levels of intimate detail. At the first level, he traces the crisis to the degradation of the Moroccans' economic status, their helplessness, and their disorientation facing an insensitive establishment that dooms them to social marginalization as bums and criminals:

> I lived in dignity, today I live in a wretched ma'abarah / I began to search for work and didn't find any...I got a letter from Amidar [a public-housing company]; they said I had a year and a month left / pay up or shut up –don't tell and don't talk / and they didn't give me work until I and my future were gone...The city came too and gave me a fine / you have a year to pay it / The inspectors are

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[9]  In Israel, Sliman recorded only on Azulay family's labels; the Azulays established Zakiphon in 1957, about a year after his immigration.

searching for me and everyone's fining me, this came from the police…shouted "You criminal!" at me.

*Wkānat ʻāyishat mkhtaram alyawm sākin fi maʻbara / walāt ḥalti mbrara wla khdama ʻalayya jarat…Jatni brīya mʻAmīdar qāl lik ġādī ʻām wshahr…Khlas wla tkwaytr la taklam wla tahdar / wshī khdama ma ʻṭāwnī ḥattā fāl ḥāli wkhiyālī / alʻīrīya ḥattā hīya wjāt lī ʻalāma fīhā / ʻindak ʻām takhallasah / faqahīn dayrīn bihā wkul wāḥid sāybo brīya…Ma sākh nisāʻ ʻalayya jarīm.*

At the second level, the ballad deals with the silenced and more profound experiencing of mental crisis among immigrant men who struggle for dignity and the ability to discharge their head-of-household duties. In the sabra masculine zeitgeist of Israeli culture, Mizrahi musicians' attentiveness to men's weaknesses and hardships caused them to be labelled 'crybabies' and their musical style to the contemptuous reduction of *dikaon* (weepy) music. The disclosure of weakness and vulnerability, however, allowed listeners to vent their emotions and improve their mental and emotional condition (Fradkin 2009). In what may have been his pioneering role in this lachrymose music, Sliman, I propose, created a community platform where male immigrants could share and identify with the dashing of their naïve expectations of a warm welcome in Israel, the collapse of their family status due to loss of earning ability, humiliation and indignity at the hands of sabra men, and dread of a bleak economic future. By sharing emotions and exhibiting 'weepiness', Sliman expressed resistance to and subversion of the sabra hegemonic masculinity and its emotionally restrained regime. To reinforce intimacy and identification with the immigrant male, he weaves the first-person and third-person singular into his account of the immigrant's experiences:

In Morocco I encountered a Jew and said to him, where you going? / He told me: I'm going to my country to try my luck…I reached my country in faith and they handed me a hoe. They began to laugh at me and the manager stopped me… If he's like this in the transit camp, how will he get along in the tenement quarter?… He thinks first about work and lives for a mortgage… They'd rather keep you poor forever (Darwish)…I don't know who my children are anymore.

*Fal-Murūk faqīt yehūdī qālat law fayn rāyiḥ ġādī / qāl lī rāyiḥ liblādī wtamā njarrib saʻdī…Wasalat li-blādī bil-nihya wqabatuhū liya at-Tūrya / sāru yidhakhkū ʻalayya w-l-munāḥal wa-kaf ʻalayya…Lī fī maʻbara w-ḥāl w-lī f-shīkūn kifāsh yaʻmal…Ykammim f-l-ʻamal liwal wa-ʻal mashkantā mitahūwal… Yḥibbu takūn dīmā darwīsh…Bilkawā ktaʻamru dārī, ma yaʻrfū b-ḥaq darrārī.*

Men in crisis may invoke humour and even invective to attain a sense of supremacy over repressive social forces, bolstering personal and community agency and venting frustration, insult, and self-estrangement (Hernann 2016). The refrain of Sliman's ballad reflects these tactics and the ambivalence of Moroccan masculinity. He reveals male vulnerability and bolsters immigrants' self-image in their collision with hegemonic masculinity and the blow to their dignity by disdaining the Ashkenazim, as in the following acidic line from *Fil'maroc fckkit Yehudi*: 'And we lived with the barbarians who spoke in Yiddish about us' (*Wa'īshtanā ma'a l-hīsh 'alaynā yahdaru b-l-yīdish*) – adding a common Mizrahi epithet for an Ashkenazi, *vuzvuz*. Conversely, Sliman constrains his fury by dismissing the sabras' inability to cope with the challenges of nation-building and equitable treatment of immigrants with "Don't worry, sir". The tenor of the refrain reflects his tendency to avoid skewering Israeli society and send a constructive message of solidarity. Thus, instead of accusing Ashkenazim of deliberate malice and alienation, he stresses the solidarity of the Moroccan and the Ashkenazi, who 'sing together' despite the problems. Thus the refrain concludes:

> And I lived with this worry with the *vuzvuz* I sing (Don't worry, sir) / What's this life with the *vuzvuz* I sing.

> *Wa 'ayisht al-taqlīqa al-hādī ma' al-wazwaz rānī nūwadī.*

## 8 "Jews, Work Your Land": Protest and Re-Masculinization

Shortly after mass immigration began, the Israeli leadership wished to fortify borders and sovereignty in the periphery. Many Israelis, however, remained indifferent to this mission, leaving the frontier areas desperately underpopulated. This, in 1954, made Moroccan Jews the prime targets of a 'ship-to-countryside' campaign that proposed to send them straight from Haifa port to moshavim and development towns. The problem was that most of the immigrants were urban, unaccustomed to farming, and lacking prior training for the job. Thus, those recruited, mainly men, had to undergo personal and collective 'productivization' before settling the frontier (Picard 2013).

The ballad *Ya zinu Haifa* (Haifa the beautiful), probably composed between 1957 and 1964, centres on the acclimatization hardships of immigrants who were sent to the periphery and faced discrimination

relative to sabras.[10] In 1959, after immigrants' displeasure erupted into violence in the Wadi Salib neighbourhood of Haifa, a public discourse about general society's hostility toward Moroccan immigrants deepened, prominent critics including the likes of the poet Nathan Alterman. That year, the popular Mizrahi singer Jo Amar released a protest song that became a hit: *Lishkat ha-'avodah* (Labor exchange), which deals with the marginalization and high-handed treatment of Moroccan immigrants relative to sabras. Sliman may have preceded Amar in disseminating protest songs, though evidence for this remains elusive.[11]

The male immigrants' story that unfolds in Sliman's ballad describes the passage from Morocco to Israel, the routing of the immigrants to peripheral settlements, the blow to their socioeconomic status, and their estranged encounter with the sabras. The ballad begins by recounting the religious immigrants' passivity vis-à-vis Israeli institutions that obtusely failed to ensure gender separation during the voyage to Israel. The immigrants' disappointment with Israel when they are sent from the pier to the ma'abarot is described afterwards. Then, in a passage that corresponds to Amar's hit, Sliman criticizes the indifference of the labour exchange to the offended male dignity and the impoverishment of the immigrant who cannot support his family:

> Aboard the *Kutubia*, they led us up and on the fourth floor they sat us down / women and men they mingled us / to Palestine we arrived, I was annexed to Pardes Hannah and Bayt Lid, come and see my homeland…We went to a labour bureau / Go away today and come back tomorrow / and the manager's reply: there's no work.

> *Fi l-Kutubiyah rakbunā fi Quatrième glassunā / nisā' wa-rijāl khallaṭunā / yā jāyyīn li-Filastīn / Pardes Ḥannah wa-Bayt Līd ajyu tashūfū l-Filastīn…mashīnā li-shikāt 'amala / shīr lyowm wa-tjī ġadā / wa-qūlī: mā 'andīsh khidma.*

A common response among Moroccan immigrants to fledgling Israel against their impotence and the degradation of their self-worth was romantic recollection of their bygone comfortable lives in Morocco

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**10** I cannot estimate with precision when this ballad was disseminated but I believe it fell in the 1957-64 range because in Ephraim Kishon's film *Salah Shabati* (1964), the actor Chaim Topol hummed the song in the scene at 2:25-2:31. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ekQdGIkAxQ&t=14s. The activist Reuven Abergel offers a similar estimation. See also Ben Shalev 2018.

**11** In his film *Az'i Iyima* (Come, mother), 2009, Sami Shalom Chetrit claims that the song circulated in Israel before the Wadi Salib incidents. See min. 8:35-11:05. See also Alterman 2015; Chetrit 2010; Amar, Meislish 2024.

and criticism – albeit moderate – of Israel for excluding them from its pioneering ethos (Bitton 2020; Moreno, Bitton 2023). Sliman expresses this in the ballad with tongue-in-cheek sarcasm as a patriarchal bargaining tactic in the male immigrants' struggle with their social marginality. Thus, he describes the urban immigrants' expectations of Israel that were dashed by the drastic degradation of the status they had enjoyed in Morocco and their loss of comfortable lives and respectable jobs – replaced by discrimination and forcible placement in low-skilled, poorly paying work:

> For a week at sea did I sail, I reached Haifa and sighed / men once wealthy pick cucumbers / One is a policeman and another a porter and a third goes home jobless / Where did those times go when they had been polished white-collar professionals? / Today they are haulers, living on dairy only.

> *Sabʿa ayam fal-baḥar mshit / waṣalt l-Ḥayfa wa-t-hannit / dayir rjlin kanu f-sar, l-yawm rjʿu ykhadmu fi l-khiyar / shi shurṭi w-shi sabbal w-shi yirjʿa b-salamto mubtal / ya ḥasrah ʿala li ktatbiha li kanat ṣanʿathum naqiyya / l-yawm wlaw portiyya ḥatta maʿishathum bāl-lubaniyya.*

Boldly and with bristling sarcasm, Sliman critiques Israel's defense and settlement policies and defies its secular culture – no laughing matters in Israeli society at the time. He remarks on the absurdity of an Israeli defense policy that sends unskilled male immigrants to guard settlements in the wilderness against threats of terrorism by Palestinian *fedayun* (Drori 2006) and an employment policy that busies them in inexplicable make-believe jobs or digging holes for afforestation (Amir, Rechtman 2006). He writes about Israel's broken promise of comfortable lives in rural settlements and accuses the country of oppressing them on account of their religiosity. Then he asks God to forgive him by rescinding the 'punishment' of the hard lives to which they are doomed in Israel:

> Happy is the man who works on the moshav, "doesn't strain at all, at all" / By day he extracts sand from the pit and by night he fends off the wolves / Because of my prayer to God, I was fired after two weeks / God, why do I deserve this? Only You can forgive me.

> *Abyaḍ li yḵhdm f'lmoshav, hadak ma ʿandu ʿadhab / Fi nahar kiyjmaʿ fi ṭrab wfi-lil yaʿashsh ʿ diyab / Ila nṣalli lRab sma, ymḥini l'mnahal mn l'khdma / Ya Rabbi wash had l'blma, Anti li tismaḥ liya.*

Addressing the discriminatory treatment and the emasculation of the Moroccans, Sliman then invokes a common Moroccan cultural

practice (Ennaji 2009) by inserting French words into his critique. His does this in order to link the immigrants to the advanced culture that French implies, bolster the immigrants' self-confidence and symbolic capital against the offense they experienced in their encounter with sabra masculinity, and promote pride of belonging to the Moroccan community in Israel and its significant symbolic capital. Next, he further challenges Israel and its male hegemony by mixing *darija* into his refrain and calling Israel 'Palestine' – a lexeme that would become strictly taboo in the Israeli culture (Amara 2016):

> Ya zinu Haifa ya zin [O beautiful Haifa] / Beautiful Haifa beautiful Haifa rendezvous in Palestine […] If you speak Yiddish they'll give you a clerking or an engineering [job] / and if you speak François so you'll build roads.

> *Ya Zinu Ḥayfa ya Zin / Rendezvous fi Falastin /Ila kunti thadr b-l'idish, ya'ṭuk ḳuntab wla muhandis / W'ila kunti thadr l-faransi / ya'ṭuk l'ṭurya w'l'ḳvīsh.*

In his documentary film *Az'i Iyima* (Come, mother, 2009),[12] the intellectual and cinema artist Sami Shalom Chetrit shows his mother singing an anti-Arab Jewish nationalist song based on the lyrics of the ballad *Az'i Ayima* (Come, mother) (8:35-11:05):

> How beautiful is Haifa, may we meet in Palestine / Oh Muslims, get lost, Israel is not yours / Even if you waste your wealth on it, Israel will take it from you / How beautiful is Haifa, may we meet in Palestine / The Jew will build a bomb, will build it wisely / and the boat will load it, will load it onto the airplane.

In the film, Chetrit remarks, Zionist youth counsellors who operated in early-1960s Morocco put to verbal manipulation Sliman's valid lyrical protest and the adversarial criticism of Israel that was common among the immigrants. This, he argues, was intended to draw attention away from criticism of Israel by elevating nationalistic hatred of the rival Palestinian national project. Although research does not support this insinuation, the ambiguity of values here is a conspicuous pattern in the social psychology of Moroccans in Israel and is reflected in an authentic tendency to criticize the country, sometimes fiercely, while expressing profound identification with the idea of Israeli-Jewish fraternity or Zionism (Bitton 2020). Sliman leverages this ambivalence to encourage the immigrants to make

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**12**  *Az'i Iyima* (Come, mother), 2009, directed by Sami Shalom Chetrit, produced by Haim Buzaglo [in Hebrew and *darija*].

a masculine compromise in their negotiation with themselves and the host society over social integration and their sense of self-worth. Accordingly, Sliman accompanies his overtly critical tenor, divisiveness, and challenge to the sabra hegemony in Israeli masculinity by urging listeners to identify with and become part of the Zionist mission, in contrast to the radical critical tendency in Sami Shalom Chetrit's argumentation. Sliman advises Moroccans to adjust their masculine ideology to sabra norms without sacrificing the underpinnings of their cultural identity. In his dialectic approach toward the binary zeitgeist of the period, reflecting the immigrants' masculine compromise with sabra masculinity, Sliman assimilates and imparts the Zionist ideal of working the soil and urges the immigrants to adjust to it. Concurrently, however, he calls for faith that God will spare the immigrants from failure and danger; thus challenging one ideal of socialist Zionism, secularism, while promoting another Zionist value, rural settlement:

> Jews, work your soil, no harm will befall you / God will be at your side, and thus you will surmount your enemies.

> *Ya l'Yehud khdmu bladkum ḥta si ma yijralkum / Allah hu li y'awankum w'ala a'dyankum yaghlibkum.*

## 9 'Dayan and Rabin': Liminal Masculinity, Machismo and Marianismo in Moroccan Manhood

After Israel's military victory in 1967, the traumatic anxiety that preceded the war yielded to national exhilaration. Culture, key in creating the buoyant and militaristic climate that evolved, centred on the invincible Israeli masculinity embodied in the personae of the architects of the grand outcome: Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan and Chief of General Staff Yitzhak Rabin. The national collective consciousness of the triumph, writes Anita Shapira, was reflected in two different patterns of response that the generals-cum-cultural heroes represented. One pattern, arrogant and condescending, manifested in the production of victory albums and military parades and was epitomized by the arrogant Moshe Dayan. The second, moderate and even-handed, was reflected in the popular book *The Seventh Day* and captured in the restrained persona of Yitzhak Rabin and his anti-war speech on Mount Scopus several weeks after the war (Shapira 2012). Socially marginal and relatively unrepresented in the military achievement, Moroccan immigrants were secondary players in the cultural euphoria and its accompanying economic growth. This very marginality spurred a social ferment that erupted countrywide

under the leadership of the Israeli Black Panthers movement in 1971 (Chetrit 2010).

In the interaction between masculine ideologies – the immigrant's and the host society's – the immigrant found himself in a liminal process that forced him to choose between the different masculinities in his surroundings and then to formulate his male identity. Generally speaking, the associated gender patterns spanned a stereotypical behavioural spectrum between 'marianismo', characterized by femininity, weakness, dependency, and passivity, and 'machismo', typified by aggression, assertiveness, and agency (Flores Niemann 2004).

Judging by its contents, the ballad *Dayan wa Rabin* was written after the 1967 victory and expresses the tension attending to the Moroccan men's liminality on the masculine spectrum of Israeli society. In this ballad, Sliman praises the architects of the victory and reflects the immigrants' wish to embrace the Israeli mainstream's militaristic masculine ethos. However, it also expresses, unconsciously in my judgment, the ambivalence and the ideological tension that permeated the public discourse and split Israel's hegemonic masculinity after the war between machismo 'Dayanism' and marianistic 'Rabinism'. Notably, Dayan enjoys top billing in the ballad, as he did in the contemporary public discourse, but ambivalence and polarization surface in the different characteristics of masculinity – marianismo and machismo – that Sliman attributes to Dayan and Rabin – aggression, intimidation, courage, and glory in Dayan, as against flaccidity, purity, and sentimentality in Rabin:

Dayan! Oh Dayan! Dayan, my precious one / the best of them all… May God watch over you…How you surprised the enemies / Oh son of the brave…you're famous everywhere…You act as do the leopard and the lion / Your name alone stirs fear…The enemy fears you.

*Dāyān yā Dāyān / yā sayyid al-rijāl / yuḥḍīk al-ʿālī / kayfas ghafaltī al-ʿadyān / yā walad al-shujʿān / dāyirīn bīk al-khawān / fīk al-nimr wa-al-sabʿ / ghayr ismīk yikhlaʿ / Dāyān yā Dāyān / al-ʿadū mink fazaʿ.*

Rabin, oh my healer / Ya, son of *halal* [you redeemed] the land of our parents and grandparents / There we drive a stake / Bad people, there are lots of that kind / we fear no one.

*Rabin yā ṭabībī yā walad al-ḥalāl / bilād al-bu wal-jadd / fīhā nadkū l-watad / ḥubūth rābā bījihad / mā nḥfū min ḥadd.*

The ballad reflects the Moroccan's liminality in the Israeli masculinity discourse by switching from assimilating values from the two contradictory approaches to a response worthy of the military

victory. Accordingly, Sliman shuttles between marianismo, expressed in helplessness and fear as the war looms and the anti-war jubilation that ensued when it ended – and machismo, which gloats over the Arabs' loss as if compensating for generations of male inferiority under Muslim masculinity:

> You soothed my sorrow / and my mind / days and nights…with [God's] mercies…Ultimately there is nothing to rely on / neither a kit nor a cannon / neither soldiers nor home / for months and years…we are trying peacefully…the heart is wounded…Now I feel relief…

> *Sakant lī hawālī / wikhāṭirī w-bālī / nahār w-layālī / wa-'alayk kanbārī…ḵalāṣ rāh mā bāqā nafa' / lā 'iddah lā madfa' / lā 'askar lā maḥāl / li-'āmāt w-ash-shuhūr… w-ḥannā fīk naḥtāl / w-al-qalb kān maḍrūr / raḥīt wallāh.*

> The enemy is interested only in a pillow / he's interested only in the evening…He's like a lunatic / from morning to noon / you've left him helpless…The enemy has lost; he's exhausted / he fantasizes and threatens / He has no one for support / His head has sunk and is bent / Together with the heads of the other impure ones [*di haram*].

> *Ghayr al-mikhaddah w-al-jam' / wa-'aṭāh li-qaṣār / min ṣubḥiyā li-ẓuhr ḵallaytū ma'ḥūr / al-'adū ḵasar wa-ithadd / yakhammam wa-yuhaddid / wa-lā 'ālāmīn yusud / rāsu ṭāḥ wa-dall / ma' rūyūs di haram.*

Sliman's dialectic approach to the late-1960s paradigm of Israeli masculinity, which correlate with Wasserfall's findings, is instructive, I suggest, of the Moroccans' response to the crisis of migration and the encounter with the hegemonic sabra masculinity and their place in the realm of liminal masculinity. In his inner masculine compromise between machismo and marianismo as he negotiates with the dominant sabra masculinity, the Moroccan, aware of his marginality, appears to choose to reach out to sabra ideas while continuing to keep them at arm's length. Accordingly, paradoxically and sophisticatedly, Sliman's ballad expresses agency in the Moroccan immigrant's male resistance in neither an aggressive response nor in defiance of the machismo of sabra secularism but in demonstrating vulnerability and emphasizing the religious tenet of fate beyond one's control. Thus, Sliman challenges the sabra mindset and invites immigrants to define their male identity and invest it with meaning and value.

## 10      Conclusions

The concept of competing hegemonic masculinities challenges cultural constructions of manhood as male migrants confront hegemony, build a community and social network, and reshape their masculinity by rewriting a masculine narrative and performing masculine compromise. Moroccans who faced social marginalization, dehumanization and feminization, French modernization, Zionist ideology, and deteriorating relations between Muslims and Jews powered a dramatic shift of masculine consciousness toward national auto-emancipation and assertiveness in resisting socio-political marginalization.

The Moroccan Jews who flocked to Israel became identified with marginality and social deviance soon after arrival. Thus they had to re-masculinize themselves in the Zionist melting pot and join the nation-building project while adopting the values of emotional restraint, physical strength, secularism, anti-diasporism, and patriotism that characterized the sabras who enjoyed hegemony in Israeli masculinity. The setting of the Scene and Sliman's ballads on the social and cultural fringes of 1950s Israel offered a platform for a change in this construct, and the dialectic and hybrid Moroccan masculinity took up the challenge.

Sliman, a key figure in the Scene, avoided both the toxic atmosphere in the fringe clubs where he performed and the sabra masculinity. Consequently, his ballads promoted collective agency, ways to cope with the immigration crisis, a sense of self-worth, and ideological re-masculinization. The ballads and their popularity reflected the duality of Moroccan masculinity by simultaneously criticizing and empathizing with sabra masculinity in several ways. First, they challenged the sabra regime of restraint of emotions and public display of weakness and pain. Using humour and ridicule, they provided emotional ventilation, emotional buoyancy, agency, and a sense of self-worth. Second, they criticized the host society's integration policies and attitudes towards Moroccans by romanticizing Morocco, using sarcasm, and emphasizing French symbolic capital to challenge taboo issues in Israeli society and encourage feelings of superiority as compensation for the blows the Moroccans had sustained – while also identifying with Israel and urging listeners to integrate into its society and identify with the Zionist idea. Sliman's constructive attitude also gave immigrants a platform on which they could accomplish this by making a masculine compromise in negotiations with the hegemonic sabra masculinity and revising their masculinity in a way that combined seemingly contradictory masculine ideals.

The liminal masculinity model that the Moroccan immigrants developed, reflected in Sliman's ballads, rested in the centre of

the behavioural-ideological spectrum between marianismo and machismo. Thus, in negotiating with hegemonic masculinity, it offered a selective choice between outreach to the popular secular sabra idea and the unpopular religious-marianistic idea that attributed Israeli success to God. The hybrid masculine ideology that the Moroccans developed was unique mainly in two senses: its avoidance of forceful and defiant resistance to the hegemonic masculinity along with candid disclosure of vulnerability and weakness, and its selective choice of hegemonic and non-hegemonic masculinity patterns in formulating their masculine ideology. The model highlighted here offers a new way to analyze Israel's encounter with MENA immigrants and the adjustment strategies that the latter adopted. Belying those who see them as helpless victims of Israeli policy, the immigrants showed resilience and developed practices that helped them to create communal symbolic capital and integrate into Israeli society.

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