Spaces of Exclusion, Sounds of Resistance and Radicalization: Emotional Cartographies in the Ballads of Cheikh Mwijo

by *Haim Bitton*

Abstract

Cheikh Mwijo was a central figure in the "Moroccan troubadour scene," a grassroots cultural phenomenon that emerged within Moroccan immigrant communities in Israel's periphery during the 1950s. Like other troubadours, he traveled across the newly established state, singing in the immigrants' language, preserving the cultural heritage of Moroccan Jewry, and documenting their encounters with Israeli society. This article analyzes three "political ballads" he composed and performed, focusing on how they reflect the "mental maps" Moroccan immigrants used to interpret the divisions within Israeli space. By uncovering themes of mental mapping in Cheikh Mwijo's ballads, the article explores how emotional experiences contributed to gradual shifts in consciousness—such as polarization and radicalization—among Moroccan immigrants as a result of social, cultural, and political marginalization in Israel. I argue that these shifts unfolded within the context of two major historical developments: the emergence of radical Mizrahi discourse and the rise of Mizrahi politics in the 1980s and 1990s. The article concludes with insights into the common duality in Moroccan Jews' attitudes toward Israeli society—marked, on one hand, by sharp and even subversive criticism, and on the other, by moderation and forgiveness aimed at overcoming emotional burdens and integrating into society.

Introduction

Moroccan Immigrants' Encounter with the Israeli Space: Trauma, Insult, and Political Radicalization

Emotion and Radicalization: Theories of Trauma, Exclusion, and Confrontation

Mwijo and the Scene

Introduction

Cheikh Mwijo (الشيخ مويسو, Moshe Attiya, hereinafter Mwijo) was a key personality in the "Moroccan Troubadours scene" (hereinafter: "the Scene"): a musical-culture scene that developed in Israel in the context of Moroccan-Jewish immigrants' encounter with the country.[1] Excluded from the general and Mizrahi-Israeli cultural mainstream hegemony, the Scene has been ignored in historical research. Manifested in Moroccan immigrant communities, frontier localities, and urban outskirts, it centered on immigrant singers whom I call troubadours due to their itinerant travels from community to community. In their singing, they described the lives of their reference group of immigrants with attention to the segregative nature of the space that they inhabited in Israel as a determinant of the immigration crisis and social marginality that they endured. As a troubadour, Mwijo, like the other troubadours, migrated among immigrants' family and community *haflot* fests,[2] sang largely in a Judeo-Moroccan dialect, and preserved the musical style in which he specialized.

Below, I present three selected works that I term "political ballads"—colloquial storyline narratives set to music and containing political content—that Mwijo composed. I use them to examine how his oeuvre reflects "mental maps"—partitions and imaginings of space, the Israeli space in this case. In these mental maps, cultural-value boundaries are drawn and distinctions are made between

[1] For brevity and in keeping with the Israeli idiom, hereinafter I will use the term *Moroccans* to denote Jewish-Moroccan immigrants in Israel, most of whom languished on the country's social and cultural fringes.

[2] *Haflot* means "parties" or "festivities." In those events (communal or familial), usually a troubadour and a band were invited.

Moroccan immigrants' spaces and those of Ashkenazi non-immigrants ("veterans" in the Israeli jargon) against the background of mass immigration from Morocco in the 1950s and 1960s and the polarization and political radicalization that the immigrants underwent between the 1970s and the "aughts." Within this frame, I will instancize the reflection of the memory of the trauma and insult that typified this partitioning. As argued elsewhere, Moroccans in Israel experienced collective trauma due to the circumstances that prompted their immigration and their freighted encounter with Israeli society, amplified by the insult of their peripheralization and pejorative stereotyping. Thus, some of those to whom Mwijo's ballads were addressed sat on ripe soil for the radicalization of their immigration narrative, manifested in abandoning the approach favored by the state-establishment—a tolerant analysis of the MENA Jews and Israel, contextualizing the hardships of the newborn state as the explanation for their conflicts. In lieu of that perspective, they adopted the radical Mizrahi discourse approach—a critical analysis of relations between MENA Jews and Israeli society that traces their conflictual relations to deliberate Ashkenazi xenophobia and patronization. The musical scene that developed in the Moroccan immigrant communities, I claim, reflected the immigrants' response to their cultural and spatial exclusion in Israel; for this reason, it is apt to find a spatial dimension and mental mapping in prominent troubadours' works. Analyzing the spatial aspect of the works of Mwijo, I contend that two sociopolitical processes influenced the shaping of his spatial narrative: the radical Mizrahi immigration-to-Israel narrative and the ascendancy of a branch of Mizrahi politics that mobilized this discourse and radicalized it under the prevailing political circumstances.

Continuing, I illuminate the Scene as an alternative cultural phenomenon that emerged in the socio-geographic margins of the Israeli national space. I also offer the spatial dimension of Mwijo's ballads as a reflection of this social marginality, the socio-ethno-geographic partitioning of the Israeli space, and the political radicalization of those whose voices found no resonance in the public sphere.[3]

[3] Methodological remarks about translation, transliteration, and textual analysis: The Scene is a phenomenon of grassroots informal cultural marginality. Consequently, the troubadours who inhabited it neither described what they thought about the texts that they wrote nor stated when their songs were published. To overcome these complexities in compiling Mwijo's corpus, I first brought the text to the surface by listening to the ballads painstakingly. Then I transcribed and transliterated the songs from their source language—a Jewish dialect of the Moroccan *darija*—and

Moroccan Immigrants' Encounter with the Israeli Space: Trauma, Insult, and Political Radicalization

In the first half of the twentieth century, Morocco had a Jewish population of approximately 250,000, most urban; by the 1970s some 80 percent had immigrated to Israel. The push factors behind this move traced to the traumatic deterioration of Moroccan Jews' and livelihood under the influence of post-World War II processes—disillusionment with France due to the anti-Jewish Vichy regime that ran the country during the war, the Moroccan anti-colonial struggle, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as attested in the MENA region.[4] The migration occurred in two waves that differed socioeconomically but shared traumatic circumstances. The immigrants of the first wave (1947-1956, c. 110,000 persons) reached an Israel that faced nation-building challenges. They were religious, ill-inclined to modernity, inhabitants of the rural periphery, and former villagers who settled in the outskirts of the country's major cities.[5] Dependent on the immigrant-integration institutions due to their socioeconomic weakness, they became the main targets of a "population dispersion" policy that included relocation to outlying settlements in *ma'abarot* (transit camps, sing. *ma'abarah*), newly established "development towns" meant to disperse the population, cooperative farming villages, and low-skilled employment. The peripheral settlements, excluded and isolated, became ethnically identified with these immigrants, whose stigma distanced them from the nonimmigrant population

translated them initially into Hebrew (I thank Elad Mordechai's and David Muati's help for uncovering and transliterating the lyrics) and thence into English. Continuing, I contextualized the contents of the ballads by identifying events mentioned in them and mapping them on a historical timeline. Applying choice and discretion, I transliterated the texts only to analyze them as historical sources that may yield narratives. Namely, I do not pursue linguistic-syntactic or musicological objectives in this article.

[4] Emily Gottriech-Benishu, *Jewish Morocco: A History from Pre-Islamic to Post-Colonial Times* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 158-161; Aomar Boum, "Partners Against Anti-Semitism: Muslims and Jews Respond to Nazism in French North-African Colonies, 1936–1940," *Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 4 (2014): 554-570; Maite Ojeda-Mata, "The Sephardim of North Morocco, Zionism and Illegal Emigration to Israel Through the Spanish Cities of Ceuta and Melilla," *Contemporary Jewry* 40 (2020): 519-545.

[5] Aviad Moreno and Haim Bitton, "The Moroccan 'Yizkor Book': Holocaust Memory, Intra–Jewish Marginalization, and Communal Empowerment in Israel," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 23, no. 2 (2023): 261-283.

and left them neglected and disconnected from general society.[6] Mass immigration from the MENA lands caused cultural anxiety among the nonimmigrant population, which feared the collapse of its vision of modern Israel and the Levantinization of its culture. In response, the authorities applied a melting-pot policy, demanding that the immigrants disengage from their "exilic" culture and adopt Israel's secular-Western statist orientation. The immigrants' cultural-adjustment hardships plastered a collective stigma upon them that included the attribution of antisocial characteristics, and none suffered from this more than did the Moroccans.[7]

The second wave of immigration from Morocco came ashore between 1961 and 1964 (again involving roughly 100,000 individuals) and most Jews who remained in Morocco left afterward (1965-1980). Most urban immigrants, belonging to the lower-middle class and having modern education and occupations, possessed a hybrid cultural connection: to modernity and to the Moroccan Jewish tradition. Few of them, however, like their predecessors, had any option other than immigration to Israel.[8] In the 1960s, too, the Israeli cultural structure rested on a geographic-cultural distinction between immigrants, associated with political-economic inferiority, and the rest. The resulting mental map, gradually embedding itself in the collective consciousness of Israeli society, created a socio-geographic dichotomy of a "First Israel" (identified with Ashkenazim, strong socioeconomic status, and socio-cultural supremacy) and a "Second Israel"

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[6] Dvora Hacohen, *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and its Repercussions in the 1950's and After* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 95-129, 268-271; Erez Tzfadia, "Public Policy and Identity Formation: The Experience of Mizrahim in Israel's Development Towns," *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry* 1, no. 1 (2007): 57-82.

[7] Daniel J. Schroeter, "Moroccan Jewish Studies in Israel," in *Jews of Morocco and the Maghrib: History and Historiography*, eds. Aomar Boum, Jessica Marglin, Khalid Ben-Srhir, and Mohammed Kenbib, *Hespéris-Tamuda* 60, no. 2, Part I (2016): 83-105; Yaron Tsur, "Carnival Fears: Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel," *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture* 18, no. 1 (1997): 73-103; Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews* (London and New York: Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Politics, 2010), 43-58.

[8] Michael M. Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 194-199, 240-253, and 187-197; Tsur, "Carnival Fears," 73-103; Shai Hazkani, "Our Cruel Polish Brothers: Moroccan Jews between Casablanca and Wadi Salib, 1956–59," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society* 28, no. 2 (2023): 41-74.

(identified with Mizrahim, low socioeconomic status, and sociocultural inferiority).[9]

The development towns transformed the periphery into a space where exclusion correlated with ethnicity and marginality. The resulting stigma exacerbated its inhabitants' collision with the receiving society and caused cultural withdrawal, marginality, and radicalization. Immigration from MENA corresponded with a dramatic increase in crime between the 1950s and the 1980s, in which Mizrahi immigrants and their offspring were conspicuous. As evidence, between 1977 and 1985, Moroccan immigrants accounted for 47 percent of the population and 62 percent of lawbreakers.[10] The Moroccan collective's response to its trauma and spatial exclusion gradually became more and more radical. The first event on this upward slope occurred in the summer of 1959 with the "Moroccan riots" in the Wadi Salib quarter of Haifa, which escalated into a violent mass protest that spread to development towns countrywide. Despite its radical potential, most immigrants responded moderately, the protests waned after some time, and the ruling party regained their support. The aftermath of the Six-Day War (June 1967) saw the eruption of a polarized political discourse from the Right and the Left that legitimized radical confrontation by marginal groups against the Israeli establishment.[11]

In the early 1970s, second-generation immigrants led the struggle against the Moroccans' marginality in protests engineered by the left-wing Black Panthers (1971) and Ohalim (1973) movements. It is conventional wisdom to credit the Moroccan immigrants for catapulting the leader of the Likud Party, Menachem Begin, to the premiership in the 1977 election campaign, announcing the advent of a new Israeli politics.[12]

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[9] Elisha Efrat, "New Development Towns in Israel (1948-93): A Reappraisal," *Cities* 4 (1994): 247-252; Tzfadia, "Public Policy"; Moshe Lissak, *The Great Emigration in the Fifties: The Failure of the Crucible* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1999), 107-108 and 119-120 [in Hebrew].

[10] Tzfadia, "Public Policy"; Gyora Shoham, Moshe Adad, and Gyora Rahav, *Criminology*, 6th Edition (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 2017), 321-332 [in Hebrew].

[11] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 62-73; Avi Bareli, "Mapai and the Oriental Jewish Question in the Early Years of the State," *Jewish Social Studies: History, Culture, Society n.s.* 16, no. 1 (2009): 54-84; Hazkani, "Our Cruel Polish Brothers."

[12] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 94-100 and 138-145; Amir Goldstein, "The Creation of the Likud and the Struggle for the Identity of the Alternative Party," *Israel Studies Review* 33, no. 3 (2018):

As the Likud's policy toward the immigrants also stirred disillusionment, a Mizrahi politics that underwent gradual radicalization evolved. At first, the TAMI Party (*Tnu'at Masoret Yisrael,* Jewish Tradition Movement, 1981) preached a moderate populist political line but quickly dissolved. The political potential of radical sentiment was harnessed by the Shas Party (*Sefardim Shomere Torah*, Sephardi Torah Guardians, 1984), established by secessionists from Ashkenazi-Haredi political settings in response to the marginalization of Mizrahim in both the Haredi and the secular societies. As it amassed political power, Shas underwent radicalization that included the promotion of a post-Zionist theological line that proposed to subvert the Israeli social order.[13]

In the early 1990s, the immigrants and their offspring remained marginal notwithstanding their growing electoral strength. Since then, however, growing tension has been in evidence. Shas spearheaded this population's confrontation with the secular Israeli establishment in the form of unprecedented electoral achievements fronted by a large population—most from the Mizrahi fringes of Israeli society. Just the same, delegitimizing the State of Israel long remained an uncommon form of expression in the Moroccan intra-community discourse. This changed when groups of radical-Left Mizrahi intellectuals established the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition (hereinafter: the Rainbow), which crafted a radical and critical narrative concerning the "Zionist Ashkenazi hegemony" injustice toward Mizrahim. The cultural confrontation continues today, Shas leading a radical approach and assimilating it into a broad Mizrahi public that still inhabits the fringes of Israeli society.[14]

61-78; Udi Lebel, Moshe Fuksman-Sha'al, and Eithan Orkibi, "'Mahapach!': the Israeli 1977 Political Upheaval—Implications and Aftermath," *Israel Affairs* 24, no. 6 (2018): 939-943.

[13] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 144-153 and 164-174; David Lehmann and Batia Siebzehner, *Remaking Israeli Judaism: The Challenge of Shas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 185-188.

[14] Moreno and Bitton, "The Moroccan 'Yizkor Book'"; Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 177-178 and 199-224.

Emotion and Radicalization: Theories of Trauma, Exclusion, and Confrontation

In migration studies, it is conventional to argue that the migration process influences migrants' relations with the receiving society and that mishaps in the process prompt the migrants to develop a negative narrative toward society. Since migrants' adjustment depends on the availability of instrumental resources (healthcare, social connections, economic capital) and symbolic resources (music, language, cultural gestures), the effort to mobilize alternative resources exposes them to trauma.[15] Trauma impacts migrants' socio-cultural adjustment and occurs at every stage of the migration process. Manifestations of cultural hostility, racism, prejudice, and discrimination toward immigrants aggravate trauma and inhibit migrants' identification with the receiving society,[16] creating a separatist cultural discourse between those who are in ("we") and those who are out ("they") in the migrants' encounter with their hosts.[17] Toxic emotions such as hate, states Sara Ahmed, are influenced by the histories of their integration, such that the "other" may be perceived as a threat and a dichotomy of "inside" and "outside" ensues.[18]

By extension, migrants' social lives strongly impact the way they draw their mental map. According to Bernard Guelton, the mapping process relies on two main cognitive actions: (1) memorial transcription—documentation and translation of representations of space in cyclical memory or spatial boundaries; and (2) symbolic projection—expression of spatial representations and symbols in textual and behavioral personal narrative. This makes the migration narrative fundamental in

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[15] Tania Zitton, Gerard Duveen, Alex Gillespie, Gabrielle Ivinson, and Charis Psaltis, "The Use of Symbolic Resources in Developmental Transitions," *Culture & Psychology* 9, no. 4 (2003): 415-448.

[16] Ido Lurie and Ora Nakash, "Exposure to Trauma and Forced Migration: Mental Health and Acculturation Patterns among Asylum Seekers in Israel," in *Trauma and Migration,* ed. Meryam Schouler-Ocak (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2015), 139-159; Levent Küey, *Trauma and Migration: The Role of Stigma*, in *Trauma and Migration: Cultural Factors in the Diagnostics and Treatments of Traumatized Immigrants,* ed. Meryam Schouler-Ocak (Berlin: Springer, 2015), 57-69.

[17] Bruce Link and Jo Phelan, "Conceptualizing Stigma," *Annual Review of Sociology* 27 (2001): 363-385.

[18] Sara Ahmed, *The Politics of Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 194.

shaping the mental map.[19] It thus stands to reason that toxic interaction is translated into a mental map that distinguishes between "outside" and "inside."

Erez Tzfadia et al. argue that absent a just and anti-hegemonic spatial-planning policy, migrants' marginality may intensify their polarization and estrangement. The collision between migrants and hosts escalates when the migrants' physical space and ethnic identity are strongly correlated.[20] Apart from searing the clash into migrants' personal memories and mental maps, their response to these processes foments opposition to measures of cultural adjustment such as learning a language or letting go of the origin culture. Smart-Richman and Leary list three possible radical responses: assimilation of stigma and self-repression; righteous rage and active resistance; and indifference, withdrawal, and seclusion.[21] A collision between immigrants and nonimmigrants may unleash a permanent cyclical dynamic in which stigma and spatial exclusion cause trauma, in response to which migrants develop radical rage toward the society and resist its culture, prompting society to react by reinforcing the stigma, and round and round—making immigrants' place on the fringes of society and the law permanent.[22] Although Israel has long taken legal and institutional steps ensure immigrants' social integration and does not see Jewish immigrants as foreigners, immigrant integration in Israel has been accompanied by friction. It is against this background that Mizrahi immigrants found themselves mired in social marginality that gradually led to political radicalization.

In the process of their immigration, the Moroccans experienced all the foregoing: trauma, cultural adjustment difficulties, depletion of instrumental and symbolic resources, stigmatization, and spatial exclusion that led to social marginality and collision with Israeli society. The Scene was a response to this cultural

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[19] Bernard Guelton, " 'Mental Maps': Between Memorial Transcription and Symbolic Projection," *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2023): 1-14.

[20] Assefa Mehretu, Bruce Wm. Pigozzi, and Lawrence M. Sommers, "Concepts in Social and Spatial Marginality," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 82, no. 2 (2000): 89-101; Tzfadia, "Public Policy."

[21] Laura Smart-Richman and Mark Leary, "Reactions to Discrimination, Stigmatization, Ostracism, and Other Forms of Interpersonal Rejection: A Multimotive Model," *Psychological Review* 116, no. 2 (2009): 365-383.

[22] Shoham et al., *Criminology*, 316-327; Lauren McLaren and Mark Johnson, "Resources, Group Conflict and Symbols: Explaining Anti-Immigration Hostility in Britain," *Political Studies* 55 (2007): 709-732.

confrontation on the social margins. Thus, in Mwijo's political separatism we find a reflection of more than three decades of radicalization in the Moroccan immigrants' Kulturkampf with Israeli society.

Mwijo and the Scene

Mwijo was born in 1937 in Meknes to a musical family and learned the trade as a boy who joined his father in performances. In his youth in Morocco, he sewed uniforms for the Royal Moroccan Armed Forces and in 1962, at the age of thirty-five, he emigrated to Israel and settled in Kiryat Ata, a working-class town near Haifa. In Israel, he pivoted to music-making and studied with the *ma'alem* (teacher) David Ben-Haroush in nearby Kiryat Haim. At the outset of his career, he specialized in mandolin performance; later on, he pivoted to the "North African" violin and the Algerian "Djiri" musical style. In the first decade of his career, he did most of his playing and writing for others,[23] foremost Sliman al-Maghribi.[24] In 1969, he began to record in the Judeo-Moroccan dialect,[25] a diverse repertoire embedded in the immigrants' culture and daily lives in matters such as admiration of saints, missing Morocco, romantic relations, cultural identity, family life, and daily life in Israel. As his repertoire gradually expanded, he distanced himself from his colleagues by becoming the most salient writer and performer of political ballads, some of them extreme, that included poetic paeans to politicians and descriptions of politics from the immigrants' point of view. His oeuvre has not been received with recognition, let alone success, among the mainstream Israeli public at large. To counter his artistic and political sense of marginality, in recent years Mwijo has efficiently utilized the advantages of the revolution of the new millennium by creating new media channels for free

[23] Chris Silver, "Meeting the Legendary Cheikh Mwijo," in Jewish Morocco blog spot, January 20, 2011, retrieved from https://jewishmorocco.blogspot.com/2011/01/meeting-legendary-cheikh-mwijo.html?m=1 (last access date for all websites is: June 27, 2025).

[24] Sliman al-Maghribi (Shlomo ben-Hamo), born in Meknes in 1925, immigrated to Israel in 1956 together with his family. His band had been successful in Morocco and performed a rich musical repertoire. He died of illness in 1998. Author's interview with Sliman's youngest daughter Nicole Gueta, 21 August 2024, Haifa.

[25] Silver, "Meeting the Legendary Cheikh Mwijo."

distribution of his music. Thus, he distributes his music and political agenda via YouTube and Facebook.

The troubadours' Scene presented here emerged in Israel of the 1950s, a time when East European musical influences surmounted those of MENA in the Israeli culture. The Israeli culture was shaped in accordance with the Zionist ideology and its national aspirations, and the contents of the songs were central in solidifying the collective consciousness. Between the 1940s and the 1960s, amid the struggle for and consolidation of statehood, songs took on a national character and served as mechanisms of immigrant socialization and acculturation. Indeed, the state controlled the contents of art and penalized artmaking in languages other than Hebrew until the late 1960s.[26]

As their socioeconomic adjustment hardships created a psychological need for a cultural resource, Mizrahi immigrants established musical settings of their own that made up the shortfall. In Israel's first years, most Mizrahi immigrants came from Mediterranean countries and the community's important musicians hailed from Egypt and Iraq. Some found positions with the Voice of Israel Orchestra in Arabic (1948-1993); others did so with Café Noah (1951-), located in the socially peripheral Hatikva (Hope) neighborhood of Tel Aviv. One salient exception among the Moroccan artists was Joe Amar, which had a successful acculturation in Israeli culture and did not affiliate with the troubadours currently under discussion.[27] For this reason, their musical establishment developed its own

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[26] These contents dictated the national musical agenda until the 1980s, when a "cassettes revolution" in Mizrahi music ensued. See Inbal Perlson, *Great Joy Tonight: Jewish-Arab Music and Oriental Identity* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2006), 33, 51-52, and 64-75 [in]; Sarit Cofman-Simhon, *Mi-safa le-mofa': Lashonot yehudiyot 'al ha-bama be-Yisrael* [From language to performance: Jewish languages on the stage in Israel] (Tel Aviv: MOFET, 2023), 47-50 and 61-65 [in Hebrew]; Motti Regev and Edwin Seroussi, *Popular Music and National Culture in Israel* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004), 71-75; Motti Regev, "Musica Mizrakhit, Israeli Rock and National Culture," *Popular Music* 15, no. 3 (1996): 275-284.

[27] *Librarian's Podcast*—National Library podcast, "Zuzu Musa and the revival of Arab music in Israel," May 18, 2022 [in Hebrew], retrieved from: https://blog.nli.org.il/podcast-zuzu-musa/?utm_source=he.wikipedia.org&utm_medium=referral&utm_campaign=%22%D7%AA%D7%96%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%AA+%D7%A7%D7%95%D7%9C+%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C+%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%99%D7%AA%22&utm_content=%D7%94%D7%A1%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%9D; see also *Bemedinat Hayeudim* [In the state of the Jews], television series created by Anat Zeltzer and Modi Bar-On, 2004, Part 4, retrieved from https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0498418/ ; Shaul Mayzlish,

hierarchy and hegemony, with immigrants from Egypt and Iraq at the top. According to the female troubadour Esther El-Fasi, the troubadours, like other Moroccan immigrants, experienced marginality vis-à-vis general society due to lack of resources and estrangement from the cultural mainstream. In the Mizrahi musical scene, too, they were distanced by cultural gaps and artistic disputes with the hegemonic Mizrahi musicians, making theirs a double cultural marginality[28]—which, according to Haim Uliel, persisted until the late 1980s.[29]

In 1957, responding to the Moroccan immigrants' cultural marginality and identifying its economic potential, Rafael Azulay and his sons—Meir, Nissim, Jacky, and David, born in Marrakesh, all of whom immigrated to Israel in 1948—established Zakiphon, the first independent label devoted to artistic, religious, and light music of the MENA Jews. The label was founded under shoestring conditions to meet the immigrants' demand and endured multiple technical mishaps until it gradually professionalized itself. When the cultural mainstream greeted the Azulays' project with contempt and ridicule, the family distanced itself from the mainstream and acted to preserve and disseminate the music of the fringe in the original language of the MENA immigrants, foremost Moroccans. The Azulay family label declined in the 1990s as online recording and diffusion technologies took over. From the "aughts" onward, all that remained was the family's vinyl-record store.[30]

Joe Amar: Ani Veshiri [Joe Amar: Me and my song] (Kiryat Gat: Danny Publications, 2005), 15-22 [in Hebrew].

[28] Eran Litvin, "Lonely Singer Is the Heart," in *Lonely Singer Is the Heart: Mizrahi Music in Israel*, ed. Eran Litvin (Ashdod: Ashdod Museum of Art, 2017), 6-68 [in Hebrew]; Perlson, *Great Joy Tonight*, 80-81; author's interview with the singer Esther Alfasi, Ashkelon, April 16, 2022. Born in 1940 in Salé, Alfasi immigrated to Israel with her family in 1961 and was housed in the ma'abarot of Ashkelon. She built an international career for Moroccan and Arab audiences and retired as she approached the age of seventy.

[29] Author interview with the singer and musician Haim Uliel, a founding member of the Sefatayim group, Sderot, June 15, 2023. His father, Matityah, established the Petit Bar pour les Amis (The Small Bar for friends) known as Matityah's Café (Le café de Matityah) in Sederot- during the 1958-1964. See also the documentary: *The pioneers* (HaHalutzim), Aharon Cohen and Sigalit Banai, 2007, 23:14.

[30] Uri Verthaim, "The Shop on Clock Square," in Litvin, *Lonely Singer is the Heart*, 80-97 [in Hebrew]; Chris Silver, *Recording History: Jews, Muslims and Music across Twentieth-Century North Africa* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2022), 18.

The disinterest of the recording companies and the cultural mainstream, coupled with the psychological need to cope with stigma and loss of cultural resources, created demand among the Moroccan immigrants for music from their country of origin. Thus, a unique alternative cultural scene evolved within the immigrants' marginal habitus, manifested in countrywide family events such as fests in cafés and nightclubs even as most of this population was mired in economic distress. Therefore, paradoxically, the Scene catered to immigrants who had economic resources, on the one hand, and who belonged to the dominant group on the cultural and social fringe, on the other hand. Under these circumstances, the main audience in the Scene was composed of socially marginal types, members of the underworld, criminals, alcoholics, males with their concubines, drug addicts, and the purportedly jobless who inhabited the informal economy. This gave the Scene a dubious reputation. Ironically, however, it was those on the social and legal margins, and not the official state institutions, who founded and then preserved the Moroccan immigrants' musical culture.[31]

The Scene grew and matured under the Israeli cultural radar in its marginal habitat on the periphery. Due to its harsh underlying conditions, the troubadours had to hold jobs in addition to their musical careers and to circulate around the country from one immigrant community to the next, most of them in the periphery. Due to their existential difficulties, cultural marginality, singing in the Mughrabi Jewish language, and the characteristics of their audience, the Scene adopted unique cultural practices that burdened the troubadours' occupational lives. Lacking distribution and marketing technologies, access to transport, and adequate demand, for example, troubadours who were invited by *mulua'in* (Moroccan music devotees) had to be perpetually mobile and willing to be hosted at length in the communities where they performed. Also, their recompense, negotiated with their hosts, was based mainly on tipping (*ghr'aamah*) from the audience for singing and playing not only pieces from their repertoire but also familiar hits and classics from the MENA countries. Due to their dependency on

[31] Author interview with the singer and musician Haim Uliel, Sderot, June 15, 2023; author interview with Reuven Abergil, a founding member of the Black Panthers movement, Jerusalem, April 20, 2022. Reuven's father, David, ran Dere'ei's Café (*L'qahawah di Dere'ei*) in Jerusalem; author interview with Shimon Yifrah, the scene fan and the former stage manager for the Ashdod Andalusian Orchestra, Ashdod, March 25, 2024.

the audience, which was largely comprised of economically hard-depressed individuals and criminals under the influence of alcohol and drugs, the performances were not time-limited. They went on for hours at length even against the wishes of the troubadours, who were susceptible to humiliation and even violence if they failed to satisfy the audience's demands.[32]

As the Scene operated in peripheral localities and was ignored by the cultural establishment, the troubadours' songs escaped state supervision. In addition, unlike the crowds of first-wave immigrants that they encountered in the periphery, the troubadours were second-wavers in terms of their sociological profile. For this reason, they had agency and cultural capital that helped them to hold a dual position toward Israeli culture at a time when cultural uniformity was encouraged and were able to speak out for the 1950s immigrants. Therefore, on the one hand they criticized their socio-spatial exclusion and even subverted the cultural mainstream: they sang in Judeo-Moroccan and not in Hebrew and, unlike the cultural mainstream, which pledged itself to the nation-building effort by promoting the socialist-secular cultural melting pot, they probed romantic relationships at a time of puritanism in the mainstream culture, lauded their exilic cultural heroes, and referenced their culture of origin—mythical rabbinical personalities, traditional liturgical songs, and classical folksongs (*sha'abi*). This was accompanied with protest songs against Israeli society, as in "'Oleh hadash" (New immigrant) by B'rham Essouiri; songs of yearning for Morocco such as "Sidi mulai al Hasan" (My lord king Hasan) by Albert Suissa. On the other hand, they also sang patriotic Israeli numbers such as Sliman al-Maghribi's "Dayan ve-Rabin" ([Moshe] Dayan and [Yitzhak] Rabin" and Albert Suissa's "Eli Cohen" (the famed Israeli spy, executed in Syria in 1965).

Although Mwijo did not come from these settings, his works speak the voice of the first-wave immigrants and critique Israeli society's attitude toward those from Morocco. As I will show, the mental mapping in his works—the way he draws boundaries between the immigrant communities and their hosts and creates categorical diffractions among them—reflects the processes of polarization,

[32] Interview with Haim Uliel, Sderot, June 15, 2023, and Jerusalem, April 20, 2022; author interview with Shimon Yifrah, former stage manager for the Ashdod Andalusian Orchestra, Ashdod, March 25, 2024.

religious radicalization, and sectoralization that Israel experienced between the 1980s and the "aughts."

"May God Forgive them"—Spatial Separation and National Solidarity

In its first decades, Israel enjoyed relatively strong social cohesion and broad support of its authorities, such that no meaningful opposition by Moroccan immigrants to the establishment is recorded. The Israeli victory in the Six-Day War (1967) elevated this strong cohesion to national cultural euphoria—manifested in the mainstream in a profusion of victory photo albums and musical paeans to the Israel Defense Forces and its commanders, and on the fringes in Sliman al-Maghribi's song "Yerushalayim ha-'atiqah" (Jerusalem the ancient), in praise of the architects of the military achievement and the liberation of Jerusalem. In the 1973 War, too, the Azulay brothers' label Koliphon (1973) produced a vinyl record packed with national morale-boosting songs for Moroccan immigrants.[33] The national consensus gradually fell apart from the 1970s on, as did the political power of Mapai, the secular-Ashkenazi-majority party that ruled the country since independence. This paved the way to the political upheaval led by Menachem Begin, heightened the Moroccan immigrants' awareness of their social status, and stimulated their demand for reform in the public and academic discourse. Here again, the intellectual trends and social struggles among these immigrants were essentially moderate and centered on efforts to attain social integration and identification with the national idea.[34]

Mwijo carved out a role for himself in commemorating the immigration trauma and sharing it with posterity. Thus, appealing to the immigrants or their offspring—"Sit down, my son, and I will tell you," or "Listen, you who understands me"— is a recurrent motif in his political ballads. In his ballad

[33] Retrieved from https://stereo-ve-mono.com/2135. Sarah Ozacky-Lazar, "'The Seven Good Years?' Israel, 1967–1973: The Critical Change," *Israel Studies* 23, no. 3 (2018): 18-24.

[34] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*; Yaron Tsur, "Israeli Historiography and the Ethnic Problem," in *Making Israel*, ed. Benny Morris (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 177-231; Arie Kizel, *The New Mizrahi Narrative* (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2014), 53-56 [in Hebrew].

"Menachem Begin,"[35] about the leader of the Likud Party after the latter resigned the premiership in 1982,[36] Mwijo expresses the admiration that many Moroccan immigrants felt toward him. The lyrics tell an immigration story that is critical but concurrently establishmentarian and moderate, in keeping with the zeitgeist. Even though the ballad focuses on the Moroccans' experience of insult due to their stigmatization and spatial exclusion and expresses mordant criticism of their reception in Israel's first decades, Mwijo chooses mild language in addressing their discrimination at the hands of the Ashkenazim and drawing categorical distinctions between the ethnies. In the following excerpt from the ballad, he describes the immigrants' socioeconomic weakness and hints that it is this that made them dependent on the state and helpless against the population-dispersion policy. Criticizing the host society, he notes the trauma, discrimination, and insult that the Moroccans endured. Thus, in effect, the artist links these problems to the Israeli policy that steered them to the ma'abarot and the development towns—those lonely places of exclusion on the periphery—separating the immigrants from their families and communities of origin in favor of the Ashkenazim. Thus he writes:

> I began in the name of God Supreme to tell what happened to me / I arrived as a stranger who had nothing / a wretched new immigrant / would understand the story well. / Listen, you who understands me / Let me tell what I went through / in the days of the immigration in the 1960s / in the ma'abara, clutching the shovel / and the Sephardi was miserable.... / They called us "Moroccan knife-men" / We went through suffering and humiliation / They stuffed us away for no reason [an allusion to the population-dispersion policy—H.B.] / They separated us from our loved ones / and left us in our misery / They took no account of us... / they called

[35] Mwijo, "Menachem Begin," *YouTube*, May 21, 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7sEaf8rgj8Y.

[36] As stated, the troubadours and the Azulay family label were not careful about noting the publication dates of their records. One may, however, infer this information from the texts themselves. In "Menachem Begin," Mwijo states that Begin is missed in the political arena and refers to his health woes; therefore, in my estimation, the ballad was written between Begin's retirement from politics and his death—1982-1993.

> us Blacks, the Iraqis, the Moroccans, and our brethren the authentically Jewish Yemenites / and gave jobs and housing to the Poles.
>
> bdyt b`ysm l›ali n›awd ma jra ly / jyt ghryb ma la waly / ›oleh ḥadash mskyn
> w`l`sefarady fḥaly yfhm l`ḳsyda b`zyn / sm› ya lfhemnya n›awd ma daz ›lya / f`ayam l`›lya f`›amat l`stin / f`l`m›abara w l`ṭwria w l`Sefarad kanw mghbwnin.../ w`smuna maroḳo sakin / duzna l`mḥna w l`›dab khbuna mn ghir l`sbab / feḳuna mn l`ḥbab w`bḳina mghbunin / ḳarw lanw shḥorim l›yrak w`lamaroḳaim u`l`akhwanna latemanim l`yehoud l`aslyin / l`khdma w l`shikunym ›ṭawhm l`polanim

Although emphasizing the unjust treatment of the Moroccans and criticizing the Israeli establishment, the ballad reflects the establishmentarian and moderate approach and the national responsibility that were widely upheld in 1980s Israeli society and that dictated the discourse among Moroccan immigrants. Accordingly, their pro-solidarity and forgiving attitude toward the nonimmigrants' hostility is presented in the ballad in one breath with criticism of discrimination against, and marginality imposed on, the Moroccans in favor of the Ashkenazim. Mwijo explicitly urges his listeners to forgive the Ashkenazim for this and considers them his brethren:

> We reached the Land of Holiness / in the days of protektsia [use of familial, political, ethnic, or other "pull" to obtain favors]. They ruined our lives / immiserated us / our Jewish co-religionists / may God forgive them from our hearts / How they sent us to Kiryat Shemona, in the shelter do we hide / in Yeroham and Dimona [three faraway disadvantaged development towns], seared by the sun.
>
> Jina laareẓ haḳdosha / F`ayam l`Protekẓia Tkrfsona tkrfisa / L`yehwd / khwanna f`din / ḥarw ›lina lma›ysha ysmḥlhum allah mn ḳolobina / kif mshituna f`ḳiryat Shemona f`l`miḳlat mkhbyn / Be-Yeruḥam ve Dimona Ba-shemesh niẓravim.

Until the 1980s, Mwijo's poetic ballads reflected, by means of spatial narrative, a categorical binary of Moroccan immigrants and Ashkenazi hosts. This narrative presents the dire effects on the Moroccans of their stigmatization and their referral to settlements in marginal areas in the periphery. Despite this criticism, the ballad reflects the nation-minded and moderate mindset that the Moroccans adopted at this time to avoid undermining Israel's national stability.

"They're Liars"—Spatial Differentiation and Double Alienation

Key processes in Israeli politics and academia gradually changed the state of mind among activists of Moroccan origin in the late 1970s and through the 1980s. In academia, neo-Marxist theories and "post" philosophies (-modernism, -colonialism) ascended dramatically, subverting the veteran elites and challenging the morality of the Western world in its attitude toward the Third World. In politics, rival Mizrahi movements—the religious Shas and the secular Rainbow—came into being. They acted to reshape the collective memory and the Mizrahi collective memory and identity and translated the social tension between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim into political power by disseminating polarized radical narratives, among other tactics.[37] These moves gradually weakened the grip of Israeli national establishmentarianism and set two critical intellectual currents in motion: Post-Zionism and a radical Mizrahi discourse. These streams rewrote Israeli history selectively and tendentiously—stepping up the critical tone, accusing the "Ashkenazi elite" of deliberately marginalizing the Mizrahim, and even challenging the legitimacy of Israel as a state.[38] Since then, Arie Kizel finds, the radical Mizrahi narrative has become the dominant force that dictates the patterns of Mizrahi discourse and historical consciousness. This discourse, Kizel continues, rests on three main narrative foundations: confrontation and historical reckoning with Zionism and the Israeli establishment, rewriting and cleansing

[37] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 193, 202-203; Uri Ram, *Israeli Sociology: A Conceptual History 1882–2018* (Sde Boker: Ben-Gurion Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2021), 113-119, 183-189, and 192 [in Hebrew].

[38] Tsur, "Israeli Historiography," 7-56.

Mizrahi history, and confrontational and separatist emphasis on the Mizrahi-Arab identity over the Ashkenazi-Jewish one.[39]

The Rainbow was the organizing player in the radical Mizrahi discourse, its intellectuals revolutionizing the field of knowledge about Mizrahim and its dissemination among the Israeli public. They diffused a polar and confrontational historical narrative that influenced the Mizrahi collective consciousness and sketched the image of the Mizrahi as the victim of deliberate discrimination, economic exploitation, cultural dispossession, and Euro-centric Orientalist condescension. Sami Shalom Chetrit credits Shas with identifying the electoral potential of this narrative among socially marginalized Mizrahim and using it to undermine the ruling hegemony of which it had been part.[40] According to Kizel, populistic forces dominated the radical-secular Mizrahi narrative from then on, assimilating a toxic depiction of Ashkenazi-Mizrahi relations into the public discourse and seeking a historical reckoning with Israel for the way the Ashkenazim had treated the Mizrahim in the first decades. This tendency grew in radicality from the 1990s onward.[41]

This leaning is reflected in Mwijo's political ballad "Im lo Aryeh Deri"[42] [If not Aryeh Deri], about the leader of Shas, recorded in 2001 and sung mostly in Hebrew. Disseminated on YouTube, it went viral and triggered a public debate due to what the journalist Avishai Ben-Haim called its "pungent lyrics."[43] In this ballad, Mwijo embellishes his migration narrative with an allusion to the Haredi ("ultra-Orthodox") Mizrahi and presents the trauma of the Mizrahi immigrant encounter with Israel in accordance with the logic of the radical Mizrahi narrative. Thus he creates a value differentiation, sharpens spatio-cultural boundaries, and invokes metaphors that describe the Mizrahi exclusion from spaces that he identifies with two "Ashkenazi hegemonies": the secular kibbutz and court of law,

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[39] Kizel, The *New Mizrahi Narrative*, 71-81.

[40] Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict*, 33-34 and 195.

[41] Kizel, *The New Mizrahi Narrative*, 81-109.

[42] Mwijo, "Im lo Aryeh Deri," *YouTube*, June 1, 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T81e3OxpuhY.

[43] Avishai Ben-Haim, "Lahit hadash be-qerev tomkhei Aryeh Deri: Shir meha'a harif shel zamar Marokai" [A new hit among supporters of Aryeh Deri: A pungent protest song by a Moroccan singer], *Ynet*, June 19, 2001. The song has attracted some 70,000 views to date. Retrieved from https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-832808,00.html

and the Haredi yeshiva (men's religious academy). The populistic narrative that Shas developed, claims Nissim Leon, managed to attract many lower-class Mizrahim because it expressed a dual challenge: to the dominance of wealthy secular Ashkenazi "Israeliness" and to the Ashkenazi Haredi hegemony in Israel's religious society.[44]

Thus, in one part of the narrative in this ballad, Mwijo compares the secular kibbutz as a space where the Mizrahim experienced exclusion with their geo-cultural dispossession and presents their being sent to the ma'abara— a place of marginality—as a deliberate measure of exclusion and cultural and economic deprivation. As a troubadour who memorializes the trauma of the immigration, Mwijo expresses in this ballad the influence of the radical Mizrahi intellectuals on the Mizrahi collective consciousness. Accordingly, he presents their radical critical interpretation of controversial historical episodes and social sensitivity that were discussed intensively in the public discourse, such as the alleged abduction of immigrant children from Yemen by establishmentarian Ashkenazi elements in the early 1950s and the forced secularization of children from Morocco by Zionist secular youth movements in Israel and by schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Morocco.[45] His choice of adopting the radical post-Zionist historical narrative in reference to the trauma, the insult, and the spatial exclusion that the Mizrahim experienced shows initial signs of the political radicalization that he, like other immigrants from Morocco, underwent at that time. This notwithstanding, even in this ballad Mwijo allows some moderation in explaining the discrepancy between the Moroccans' expectations of Jewish solidarity and fraternity and the offense that stigmatization and spatial exclusion did to them. Thus he wrote:

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[44] Nissim Leon, "The Haredic Unrest among Oriental Jews: Ethnographic Pictures from the Communal Synagogue Hatch," in *Shas: Cultural and Ideological Perspectives,* ed. Aviezer Ravitsky (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2006), 165-193 [in Hebrew].

[45] Shlomo Deshen, "The State of Religious Rift among Jewish Israelis," in *The Jewishness of Israelis: Responses to the Guttman Report,* eds. Charles S. Liebman and Elihu Katz (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 130-137; Motti Inbari, "Uzi Meshulam and the 'Mishkan Ohalim' Affair: The Influence of Radical Ultra-Orthodoxy," *Israel Studies Review* 32, no. 2, (2017): 21-42 and 64-90.

> Sit my son next to me sit tilt an ear and listen / Back in the lands of the enemy, the Dror movement [a Zionist-Socialist youth movement] struck us / and at the crazy Alliance [schools] they confused the Torah for us / They named Zionists, educated on kibbutzim / a factory for secularism, into the Diaspora they sent them / We thought they had brought redeemers of Israel to us / Alas, the anguish from the ship to the ma'abara / without tefillin and without Torah / The secular took control of us / Respect fled, what a shame … / We mingled with them / studied their actions / read their newspapers / in which they laughed at us / They deserve no forgiveness for having stolen the Torah from us / We were ashamed of our ritual fringes, they sheared our forelocks / they stole our babies.
>
> Shev b'ni 'al yadi, shev hat ozen v'haqshiv / 'Od b'artzot ha-'oyeiv tenu'at dror, darbata bina / Ufal-'Aliyans al-Mazarub 'ala Torah telfuna / Qar'u lahem tziyonim, ḥun'khu b'ḳibutzim / Beit ḥaroshet l'ḥilonim, l'l'galut taba'una… / Oy l'otah ẓara, m'l'onia l'ma'abara / ḥashavnu moshy'im l`Israel jabuna / B'li tefilin u'bli Torah / Haḥilonim ḥakamu bina Mas'at alhiba ya ḥasra / it'aravnu beinahen / Lamadnu ma'aseihen / ḳara'nu 'itonoteihen / fihom yidḥaku 'alina Ein lahem meḥilah min b'dob haTorah w'd'nobna / Hitbayashnu b'ẓiẓiyot, gazzu lanu ha-pe'ot / Ganvu lanu tinokot.

In the second part, unlike the approach taken by the Moroccan immigrant Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli, who sees integration into the Musar (Novardok-ethicist) movement in Haredi society as a process of personal cleansing and reconnection with Judaism,[46] Mwijo criticizes the Haredi establishment trenchantly and accuses it of monopolizing the Jewish religion to the exclusion of the Mizrahim. In his immigration narrative, he presents the Haredi yeshiva, like the secular kibbutz, as a venue of exclusion and religious-cultural patronization of Mizrahim and draws a comparison that pairs the Ashkenazi Haredi leadership with the

[46] Aviad Moreno, "Mapping Moral Paths: The Spiritual Geography of Moroccan Rabbi Gabriel Elgrabli" [published in this issue].

secular hegemony as those responsible for the exclusion of the immigrants from Morocco. In addition, Mwijo implicates the Mizrahi immigrants' spatial exclusion and patronizing treatment in their descent into crime and their exclusion from courts of law—another vector of disillusion and breaching of the promise of Jewish solidarity in Israel:

> Oh, what happened to us / how we shed tears for the Torah and the Divine presence / Their grand rabbis, too, pleaded / We kissed their feet / Their yeshivas did not admit us / We were thrown into crime / The court abused us… / My son, do not believe them, they're liars / who persecute their brethren.
>
> Ah ma' jrā bina / Kama horednu dma'ot 'al ha-Torah v'ha-Shekhina / Gam Admorayhem, hitḥnanu lahem / Nishaḳnu raglehem, / f'lishivot ma kibeluna /
> Nizraḳnu le-pesha, / beit ha-mishpat ta'amar bina… / B'ni al ta'amin lahem, shaḳranim shekamohem / Ha-rodefim aḥihem, Sefardim K'wanā

This political ballad reflects the disappointment and the first flickers of political radicalization among the Moroccans in Israel as Mwijo acquired his radical Mizrahi persona in the 1990s. The spatial narrative that he sketches melds the Haredi and the secular Ashkenazim into one group on his mental map and sorts the Mizrahim into separate places elsewhere. Gradually abandoning the moderation that typified the previous decade and adopting the radical Mizrahi historical narrative, he describes the spaces that the Mizrahim inhabited as avenues that usher the Mizrahim into poverty, marginality, and crime.

"May their Innards Burn"—Space, Status and Political Radicalization

The spatial-history narrative in Mwijo's political ballad "Im haya hai Begin"[47] (If Begin had lived) which, I believe, the artist recorded after 2005,[48] reflects the intensification of right-wing political polarization and radicalization in Israel from the late 1990s to the present. Focal in this tension, ostensibly, is an ideological struggle between parties of Left and Right, but it is accompanied by the common Israeli separatist binary based on the correlation of political ideology and ethnic identity—"them," the Ashkenazim, on the Left, and "us," the Mizrahim, on the Right.[49] In this ballad, Mwijo presents a spatial narrative that divides the Israeli space along lines of economic status and political affiliation that identifies the Ashkenazi space with values such as political Leftism and wealth and the Mizrahi space with marginality and Rightism. Paradoxically, the post-Zionist narrative on the encounter of Mizrahi immigrants and Ashkenazi hosts was adopted by political forces on both sides of the Israeli political map, allowing the political rhetoric of the Right on the Mizrahi issue to rest its case on the radical Mizrahi narrative that originated in the political Left.[50] Influenced by this phenomenon and reflecting the processes of polarization in Israeli society, the narrative that Mwijo presents in this ballad reflects radicalization by accusing the "Ashkenazi Left" of forsaking national solidarity and wronging the Mizrahim by discriminating against them in allocating resources, relegating them to the periphery, and creating Mizrahi marginal spaces. The spatial emphasis in this ballad is placed on a value-centric and moral distinction between the wealthy Ashkenazi space, corrupt and sated, and the Mizrahi space, disempowered and exploited in economic life, housing, and forced settlement in dangerous frontier

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47 Mwijo, "Im haya hai Begin," *YouTube*, February 24, 2013: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vf2raQ7bONY&t=582s.

48 I base my estimate on his reference to the latest historical event mentioned in the song, the disengagement from the Gaza Strip engineered by the Prime Minister of the State of Israel, Ariel Sharon, in 2005.

49 Daphna Canetti, Howard L. Frant, and Ami Pedahzur, "The Triumph of Polarization," in *The Elections in Israel 1999*, eds. Asher Arian and Michal Shamir (New York: Israel Democracy Institute and SUNY Press, 2002), 165-179.

50 Kizel, *The New Mizrahi Narrative,* 9-16; Daniel Gutwein, "Left and Right Post-Zionism and the Privatization of Israeli Collective Memory," *Journal of Israeli History* 20, no. 2-3 (2001): 9-42.

zones. In this ballad, as before, Mwijo eternalizes the immigration-trauma narrative by turning to the immigrants' offspring:

> Shame on the Ashkenazim for what they did to us / May God hound them as we were hounded / They in Savyon in villas, banks, and thievery; the Sephardim fight on the borders living on welfare, Amigour [public housing] apartments, and discrimination since the 1950s.... / [my son, H.B.] Tell and do not forget about the rule of the Ma'arakh [the Ashkenazi-dominated Labor Alignment], taking us by force and threatening us, whomever does not vote Ma'arakh gets fired from their jobs / tell about the [Labor-administered] Health Fund [HMO] and the stamp-booklets,[51] how we were unemployed and kicked out of the hospitals.
>
> L'ḥashuma di 'amalu le-na l'ashkenazim / Sir allah ittlihum kif khlawna mtlyin / Hem b'savyon b'villot, wolbankim wulgnivut, wosfardim f'legvulot b'la'katsba' ot'ayishin Dirot Amigor; wulafliyot min 'am al-ḥamsin / Saper V'al tashkach sheltuon dal'ma'arakh, lokhim otanu b'ko'aḥ u-me'ayimim alina Mi she-lo yibḥar ma'arakh mal'kedma ka'anu yiftruna / Saper al kopat ḥolim, wol'penkas wol'bulim hayinu muf'talim, mibayit ḥolim yidḥayuna.

Radicalization is expressed in this ballad in the escalation of Mwijo's critical tenor and his use of crude language—cursing the Ashkenazim and brutally dividing the space. In this narrative, he levels accusations and insults at prominent Israeli cultural and political personalities who publicly clashed with the Moroccan immigrants. He accuses them of stigmatizing and besmirching them, ridiculing their culture and heritage, and exploiting them economically in the past and the

[51] Here Mwijo is referring to the "red booklet" carried by members of the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor), established by the Zionist Labor Movement in 1920 to provide members with a range of services from education to recreation. The Histadrut was identified with Mapai (Labor) rule, and those on the Right considered the booklet a symbol of elitism due to the Histadrut's alleged discrimination against Right-leaning workers in the labor market. See Mordechai Naor (2007), "Pinkas haver" [Membership booklet], retrieved from https://naormor.co.il/m/history_item.asp?id=13.

present. Continuing, he associates these phenomena with the Moroccans' spatial exclusion and economic exploitation. He emphasizes the poverty traps to which the Mizrahim were directed in their spaces of marginality and the perpetuation of their situation due to their impoverishment as part of a deliberate racist policy. The ballad reflects the insult that the Moroccan immigrants felt due to their treatment when received in Israel and its blunt language shows that time has not attenuated the trauma. On the contrary: the agony has only increased and serves as fertile soil for radicalization. Nevertheless, importantly, Mwijo does not totally abandon his national-establishmentarian approach. In this respect, he reflects a dual stance that was common among Moroccan Jews in regard to their reception in Israel—fierce criticism along with profound identification. Therefore, he concludes the ballad with a tolerant message that offers the possibility of forgiving the Ashkenazim, his brethren, via economic compensation for the collective emotional damage done:

> My son, tell your sons how your brethren the Ashkenazim made your parents suffer, they did not pity us / they called us "Moroccan knife-men" and diddled us / Tell it all, and Golda with the big nose, may their innards burn for having repressed us / for no reason and with no excuse, they never loved us / Tell about Dudu Topaz [an ethnically insensitive comedian], who called us chahchahim / Tell about Haim Hefer, the stupid poet who spoke about the mofletta [a thin crêpe traditionally eaten at the Mimouna] and began to ridicule us / for [our] solidarity desires , our Torah, and our culture .... / Tell about the tenement apartments, one room and bath and charging rent to those wretches / We paid for fifty years and they still brutalize us / They sell us the same flat / You need a law in this country: they should give us the flat as compensation for our suffering and their abuse / Maybe we'll forgive them; when all's said and done, they are our brethren Israel.
>
> B'ni Saper lebanayikha, kama savlu horeikha me-ha'ashkenazim aḥayikh ma ḥananu alina,/ Li z'aw me-Moroko s'akin ka'anu yitfalelu alina./ Saper al kol devar u-Golda mula'at al-m'naḵer yanod lehom nar p'lḳbar, li ka'anu yikarrhonna / Saper al Dudu Topaz l'ẓaḥaẓaḥim sh'munā / Saper al

> Ḥayim Ḥefer, al'meshorer l'ḥamar 'alā muflata ka yehader, / u-b'dara ye'ir beinah,Wl` kiruv levavot u-Torah ul`tarbut di'alnā / Saper al ha-shikhunim, ḥeder u-sherutim / u-s'khar dira mis'kanim ḥamishim 'am khllsnā
> Ve-'od met'akhzrim, ota ha-dira yabi'wah lina / Tzarikh ḥoq b'medinah; yitnu ha-dirot fi l'matnah, k'pitzu'i al maḥnana u-wali duzo alina, / Ulay neslaḥ lahem sof sof Yisra'el kh'wanā.

The spatial narratives in Mwijo's political ballads reflect a sociopolitical process that played out between the 1980s and the "aughts," centering on the erosion of the Israeli national-establishmentarian ethos and the emergence of problematic social phenomena such as ethnic separatism, radicalism, and political polarization. Mwijo, as an informal representative of the Moroccan immigrants, expresses in his ballads the radicalization that the newly landed were undergoing due to the ascendancy of post-Zionist and critical political and intellectual currents that challenged Israel's moral legitimacy. In addition to the traumatic memory of the immigration process and the cultural clash with the old-timers, the sense of insult reflected in Mwijo's political ballads impacted the Moroccan Jews' spatial immigration narrative. For all that, Mwijo leaves room in his political ballads for messages of solidarity that urge listeners to heal the ethnic rift between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim.

Conclusion

The first group of Moroccan Jews who immigrated to Israel, from the late 1940s to the early 1950s, emanated largely from weak populations. Its immigration process began with a traumatic experience precipitated by push factors that included religio-political persecution and existential threat. The immigrants' reception in Israel triggered harsh disillusionment due to loss of material and symbolic resources that allowed the mainstream establishment to steer them to the country's geographic and social periphery. Their encounter with their hosts evolved into a Kulturkampf due to an integration policy that urged them to disengage from their culture, coupled with stigmatization by the receiving society.

The result was an injurious cycle in immigrant-host interaction: alienation that exacerbated the trauma of immigration, trauma that induced immigrants to secede from the local culture, secession that intensified their socio-spatial marginality, and marginality that impeded their cultural adjustment. In response, the troubadours' scene and the Azulay family's cultural entrepreneurship through its recording labels preserved the immigrants' musical and linguistic culture. Thus they amplified their listeners' alienation and disconnection from the Israeli cultural mainstream, and round and round.

The foregoing analysis of Mwijo's political separatism between the 1980s and the "aughts" reflects the processes that gradually reshaped the Israeli political arena and the Moroccan immigrants' movement within it. The troubadours' scene crystallized upon the reception of the first wave of migrants, concurrent with the eruption of cultural angst among their hosts and escalation of the immigrants' stigmatization. These trends gathered strength because the Scene helped to reclaim their loss of symbolic resources and fashioned Moroccan immigrant communities as culturally autonomous ones on the Israeli periphery. Despite this, and in view of the power of the national-establishmentarian ethic and tendency to solidarity of thought that Mapai (Labor) dictated in Israeli's first decades—even though the troubadours composed critical political ballads about Israel—the cultural scene that formed on society's margins did not give rise to radical voices.

The second wave of immigration in the early 1960s heralded a change in the consciousness of Moroccan immigrants in Israel. In view of the socioeconomic and cultural differences between them and the different extent of their dependency on the state, these immigrants saw the cultural confrontation with Israel differently. Namely, while the first-wave immigrants tended more to conformism, those who followed were more critical. About a decade after Mwijo reached Israel in the second wave, relations between Moroccan immigrants and the Israeli establishment crossed another dramatic inflection point amid the social turmoil of the 1970s that upended Israeli politics. On the basis of the offense and frustration that the immigrants felt due to their spatial relegation to the periphery, their marginalization, and their social distress, the politicization and radicalization of the Kulturkampf with the fledgling Israel that received them escalated. In the course of the 1980s and 1990s, Mizrahi-oriented political parties and movements that saw traumatic Kulturkampf as their main electoral resource began to form.

Although each had different political aspirations, political parties and movements like Likud, Shas, Tami, and the Rainbow put the trauma of the Mizrahi immigration to political use.

In the four decades that followed the political dramas of the 1970s, the Mizrahi immigrants have gone through a revolution of self-awareness and accumulation of socio-historical knowledge about their experiences in the Islamic lands and in Israel. During these years, radical Mizrahi intellectuals who identified with the Israeli political Left established infrastructures of research knowledge about Israel's encounter with the Mizrahi immigrants and took command of the public discourse related to it. Influenced by postcolonial thinking, they developed radical critical post-Zionist narratives that accused Israel of deliberately relegating the Mizrahi immigrants to the socioeconomic fringe and dispossessing them of their original culture. On the basis of criticism that originated in Mizrahi politics and, more intensively, in the radical Mizrahi discourse, a sentiment emerged atop which a significant electoral resource among the Mizrahi immigrants was constructed. Populistic use of this sentiment by parties on the political Right such as Shas and Likud, coupled with historical emotions of insult and frustration, expedited the radicalization of the immigrants on the Israeli social fringe.

Mwijo's political ballads reflect the processes that Israeli society has undergone in the field of ethnic struggle from its inception to recent years. Considering himself an agent of the Moroccan Jewish memory, Mwijo memorialized the trauma of immigration and bequeathed it to posterity. The patterns of memory and the spatial narratives that he sketched and revealed in his ballads, however, are also instructive of changes in the Israeli public discourse and the radicalization of processes among the Moroccan immigrants. The spatial partitioning and the cultural profiling that he presents in his ballads reflect a transition from a national-establishmentarian approach and an inclusive and pro-solidarity orientation in reference to the immigrants' insult and spatial exclusion to a radical approach that reflected political polarization trends in Israel at large. This radical stance, predicated on the logic of the radical Mizrahi discourse, was typified by a dichotomous and separatist spatial differentiation, on ethnic grounds, between "us" (Mizrahi, "Second Israel," periphery) and "them" (Ashkenazi, "First Israel," center). Farther on, Mwijo gave direct expression in his ballads to his affinity for the Israeli political Right, reflecting the impact of its leaders' populism and

polarization in blunt language and mirroring his hostility to the Ashkenazim and the parties of the political Left.

Mwijo was active in Israel for more than five decades as a troubadour who ferried around the country among Moroccan immigrant communities and disseminated narratives before audiences who identified their socioeconomic position on the Israeli periphery in his songs. As time passed, he branched out to digital media for this purpose and thus broadened his community of listeners dramatically. It is hard to estimate the impact of Mwijo's ballads on the Moroccan immigrants in Israel. However, the abandonment of the national-establishmentarian paradigm and the transition to populistic and polarized models, reflected in his ballads, took place concurrently and may indicate regression in the acculturation of the immigrants who participated in the troubadours' scene. These immigrants, like Mwijo, experienced years of cultural and economic marginality and frustration in a hostile society. As a result, they identified Israeli society as a threat and tended to withdraw from it, for example, by preserving their original language and partitioning the geographical sphere in status and economic contexts. This made them easy prey for the influence of mutually opposed self-serving forces: the political Right, which invoked the immigrants' frustration populistically in order to infect them with radical ethnoreligious outlooks, and post-Zionist actors who instilled perceptions born in the political Left.

The assimilation of these mutually exclusive ideas among the Moroccan immigrants created an emotional dualism toward Israeli society in this population group: critical and radical alongside national-establishmentarian and moderate. This approach is reflected in Mwijo's ballads which, despite crude and separatist lyrics and hurling of ethnic accusations at the ("Ashkenazi") Israeli establishment, attest to a recurrent motif of forgiveness that leaves room to bridge the tensions and heal the emotional wounds of the Moroccan immigrants' reception in Israel. Mwijo's oeuvre offers a multidimensional and dual perspective for study of the freighted cultural encounter between Israel and the Moroccan immigrants and stresses the dualism of the latter, which allows ostensibly clashing values to share a common habitat.

Fig. 1. Illustration by Zohar Gannot, 2025.

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