ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines a practice of private song-making, one whose existence is often denied, among a small number of amateur Iraqi Jewish singers in Israel. These individuals are among those who abruptly emigrated from Iraq to Israel in the mid-twentieth century, and share formative experiences of cultural displacement and trauma. Their songs are in a mixture of colloquial Iraqi dialects of Arabic, set to Arab melodic modes, and employ poetic and musical strategies of obfuscation. I examine how, within intimate, domestic spheres, Iraqi Jews continually negotiate their personal experiences of trauma, grief, joy, and cultural exile through musical and culinary practices associated with their pasts. Engaging with recent advances in trauma theory, I investigate how these individuals utilize poetic and musical strategies to harness the unstable affect associated with trauma, allowing for its bodily embrace. I argue that, through their similar synaesthetic capability, musical and culinary practices converge to allow for powerful, multi-sensorial evocations of past experiences, places, and emotions that are crucial to singers’ self-conceptions in the present day. Though these private songs are rarely practiced by younger generations of Iraqi Jews, they remain an under-the-radar means through which first- and second-generation Iraqi immigrants participate in affective processes of remembering, self-making, and survival.
For my mother,
Rivka
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Rivka, who has given me the most priceless gift—a lifetime of boundless love.

Everything good in me, I owe to you.
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A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Throughout this text, I have followed the Library of Congress Romanization rules for Hebrew-English transliteration. For Arabic-English transliteration, I have used the system of the *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* as a guideline, with accommodations for the particular sounds and words of colloquial dialects of Iraq, as demonstrated by the following table: the first column represents transliterations that are more typical of Jewish vernacular pronunciations, a dialect often designated by linguists as *qiltu*, and one that is notably similar to the Muslawi dialect of northern Iraq. The second column represents the more mainstream Iraqi Arabic dialect, known as *gilit*. Importantly, the numerous and varied colloquial dialects of Arabic across Iraq intersect and overlap with one another quite significantly, depending largely on the region where they are spoken. Thus, this table represents an attempt to employ as consistent a method of transliteration as possible while still recognizing the variability of vernacular pronunciation, depending on the individual speaker. Throughout this dissertation, all transliteration and translation work has been completed by myself, except where otherwise indicated.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION:
SONGS THAT DO NOT EXIST

It is a rainy October afternoon in 2015 and I am sitting in an apartment in Bnei Brak, a suburb of Tel Aviv. I am with two elderly Iraqi Jewish sisters, Regina and Hana. We are drinking black tea spiced with cardamom and eating handmade ḥalqūm, a sugar-covered jelly candy. Speaking in the Jewish inflected dialect of Iraqi Arabic, Regina recounts the story of their brother Yusuf, and how, as a young child in Iraq, he loved food. He loved to eat, she recalls as she takes a bite of ḥalqūm. It was as if he could never get enough food. “Buṭnahu shibʻāna wa-‘aīno jūʻāna,” people used to say about him: his belly is full but his eyes are still hungry. One day, he had eaten a large amount of kubā aduma, a traditional Iraqi Jewish meat and dumpling soup simmered with beets. When he went to the bathroom the following morning, the beets had turned his stool a bright red color. Convinced he was bleeding from his butt, he ran down the street with his pants at his ankles, yelling in a panic. Hana chuckles quietly at the memory of her brother. She lifts her teacup as Regina describes how, from that moment forward, he became famous among their neighbors for the amazing color of his stool. There is a brief silence, then Regina blurts, “tākl āhmār, yitlāʻa āhmār!” [you eat red, then red comes out!], causing Hana to spit out her tea in a fit of laughter.

As her laughter dies down, Hana wipes tears from the wrinkled corners of her eyes. Our meeting has moved towards its end. Although it is raining lightly outside, the sisters decide to accompany me on the bus. I am headed towards the sāq, or marketplace, and Regina would like to buy some groceries before the Sabbath. These two sisters are
already in their 70s, but both are fairly mobile, and the cool Tel Aviv rain does not seem to bother them as we walk briskly to the bus stop. Our mirthful mood follows us, and we are lucky enough to arrive at the stop just as the bus pulls up. Hana, pleased with having caught the bus in time, raises her eyebrows and playfully addresses the rain in Arabic: “Maṭar, maṭar kathar khaïruk, mā ājlimī wa șalītū ʿalā dāqīqī!” [Rain, rain, thank you for not delaying me, I made it at the right moment!]. Hana and I laugh as we board the bus. It feels as though we are in on a secret joke, that the bounce in our steps is matched by the lightness of the rain, who, amused by our laughter, has decided not to impede our journey.

A few moments later, after I buy my ticket and sit down next to Regina, I notice something in her demeanor has changed. Her gaze shifts uncomfortably as her grasp tightens on the seat handle. I feel a deep sense of discomfort as I look towards the people who surround us: some stare directly at us with suspicion, while others look purposefully away. It is clear we have trespassed. I become suddenly aware of the bus windows surrounding us, plastered with signs warning the public to be vigilant against any perceived threat. I think back to the violence that has occurred on buses recently. Just a few days before, two Palestinian men wielding machetes and guns had killed eight Israeli citizens on a bus in Jerusalem. Two days after that, an Eritrean man, mistaken for a terrorist, was brutally beaten and killed at the hands of a frenzied Jewish mob at a bus station in Be’er Sheva. Waves of tension and relative peace cycle through the Israeli public sphere, and there were certainly times when I heard Arabic being spoken freely in public spaces.¹ But this is a particularly fraught moment, where being mistaken for the

¹ The idea of Arabic as a language variously considered appropriate or inappropriate for use in Israel, depending on the context, has received ample attention from ethnographers in the region (see, for example,
wrong religion or ethnicity at the wrong moment could literally mean the difference between life or death.

I look towards Hana, who gazes downwards, wearing a silent, tense expression on her face. The sense of shame is palpable. The sense of fear even more so. It feels so inappropriate of us, to have been talking and laughing so freely in Arabic, to have so unwittingly brought our circle of intimacy under a suspicious and unforgiving public gaze. And on the bus, of all places! A space heavy with memories of violence that had come to pass during the first and second intifadas.

Regina turns to me, quiet and still, and says in Hebrew, “Better not to talk in Arabic. You don’t know who we could be mistaken for.”

When I get home that evening, I cannot shake the feeling of having misstepped. Was it our blissful mood? Had it caused temporary amnesia? Was it the rain, and our relief at being saved from the downpour by the arrival of the bus at just the right moment? How had we so carelessly brought our intimacy into such a fraught and tense public space? I couldn’t be sure, but it felt like the wrong confluence of factors had conspired against us. Perhaps the rain had not been so forgiving after all.

A few days later I call Regina. We chitchat about the things of daily life—her grandchildren, my daughter. I ask her about that moment on the bus, though I sense a certain reluctance on her part to discuss it. “Al-ʿāṭb bil-jīb,” she says. Keep your embarrassment in your pocket. At that moment, conflicting aspects of herself had been on open display. She felt dismayed that she might have appeared threatening to people she

_Dardashti 2013; Stein and Swedenburg 2005_. Even the designation of Arabic as an official language is hotly debated in the Israeli public sphere. In March 2018, its revocation as an official state language, sponsored by the “Jewish Nation-State Bill,” had been preliminarily approved by the Israeli Knesset (Harkov 2018a, 2018b).
deemed to be rightfully traumatized and terrified. It is clear from our previous interviews that Israel is, to her, a country that has saved her from a life of primitivism, violence, and certain death. It is embarrassing, shameful, and most of all, frightening—to think that she could have been mistaken for an Arab.²

“Al-ʾālīb bil-jīb,” she repeats. Better to keep these aspects of oneself hidden away.

Songs That Do Not Exist

This dissertation focuses on a private musical practice of Arabic song and poetry whose existence is often outwardly denied, one that is sung and recited by a small number of elderly Iraqi Jews in intimate, domestic settings. These individuals hail from the generation of Iraqi Jews who emigrated from Iraq to Israel during the waves of mass immigration in the mid-twentieth century. They share similar, formative experiences of cultural dislocation and transition associated with their abrupt immigration, and often retain geography-based memories of place and song. Most of them have first-hand experience of life in Iraq, and virtually all of them are musical amateurs. A large proportion of them are women. Their musical and singing abilities—which range from eloquent to monotone, depending on the singer—result from foundational cultural knowledge and life-long exposure to similar practices of singing, in both Iraq and Israel.

Their songs are in Arab melodic modes, and their lyrics contain a mix of colloquial Iraqi

² Most Israelis use the term “Arab-Israeli” to refer to Christian and Muslim Palestinian citizens of Israel, as well as Druze and Bedouin Israelis. The word “Palestinian” is almost never used in reference to an Israeli citizen—part of the nationalist strategy of denying this aspect of Arab-Israeli identity (see Belkind 2014: 15, 131). Writing against this trend, Israeli academics of both Jewish and Palestinian descent have begun to use the term “Palestinian citizens of Israel” since the 1990s (see Belkind 2014: 131; Jamal 2008; Rabinowitz 2001; Smooha 1999). Importantly, in Israeli public discourse the term “Arab” is often used negatively: it is deeply associated with notions of “terrorism” vis-à-vis Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and/or Arab-Israeli citizens; this conflation can often extend to variously reference the citizens of any Muslim country, as well as any native Arabic speaker deemed to be a threat.
dialects of Arabic, though words or stanzas in modern Hebrew are occasionally interwoven into song texts. Through song, individuals adopt multiple perspectives in narrating major life events—of both themselves and others—while also recounting intimate subjects and veiled social criticism. Due to the resocialization of Iraqi Jews into Israeli society, younger generations no longer improvise these songs; thus, they are not commonly sung, and remain largely under the public radar. In fact, of the over one hundred and twenty-five Iraqi Jews I interviewed, only fifteen individuals among them shared their practice of private singing with me—sometimes with just the two of us present, sometimes in the company of other family members or close friends. These fifteen singers shared with me approximately one hundred songs, which form the core of this study.

This project has always been intensely personal for me. I come from a family of Iraqi Jews who emigrated from Iraq to Israel in the mid-twentieth century. In pre-1950s Iraq, many Jews were well integrated into mainstream society. Not only substantial in number—comprising about a third of the population of Baghdad by the late 1940s—they also held prominent social and political positions. In just three years, however—from 1948–1951—over 120,000 Jews left Iraq. Known as “Operation Ezra and Nehemiah,” it was the largest population airlift to date and marked the end of a 2,600-year-old Jewish presence in the area.³ My mother and her family were among those who left. For as long as I can remember, my relatives have shared with me the stories of their departure. They have spoken to me in their unique dialect of Arabic, recounting their experiences of Jewish life in Iraq and the rich details of their distinctive traditions, food, and music.

³ A small number of Jews remained in Iraq until the 1970s, at which point almost all of the remaining Jews emigrated, mostly to Israel and parts of North America (Bashkin 2012).
Their memories often surface in the form of song—as intricate, improvised Arab melodies inspired by their personal experiences of grief, joy, and tragedy.

As the daughter of an Iraqi Jew, I was only aware of these songs through my personal exposure to them. Though I suspected that the improvisations of my childhood continued to thrive among surviving Iraqi Jews, I was not sure what I could or would find when I embarked upon my research. I spent thirty months conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Israel, from March 2014 through August 2016, interviewing Iraqi Jews, gathering oral histories, and witnessing the very private process of song creation. My research was complemented by extensive archival study at the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem and the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center of Or-Yehuda, where musical recordings and Hebrew- and Arabic-language scholarship helped me identify Iraqi Jewish song-types and idiomatic expressions upon which many singers base their songs. Guided by a somewhat naïve idea that I might encounter a vibrant underground song tradition, I was dismayed when I started interviewing individuals of this community, only to hear, time and again, that the songs I was searching for “do not exist.”

**Spheres of Intimacy: Encounters with Invisible Song**

As singing is performed, it is public in some regard, just as it is capable of being extremely intimate. Among the Iraqi Jews I came to know, songs are only revealed in particular spaces. A singer’s careful assessment of audience and mood is inextricable from the *presentist* aspect of their creative endeavors—the in-the-moment inspiration that drives them to impromptu performances and invites those of us in the room into spheres of “alternative understanding” (Pilzer 2012: 11). Spheres of intimacy, I argue, are built on
feelings of cultural intimacy and familiarity, where belonging is considered both a “source of external embarrassment” and “the assurance of common sociality” (Herzfeld 1997: 3). They can also be understood as “space[s] of tension, of competing and antagonistic claims,” where participants expand on their ambivalence concerning official ideas of modern Israel, their place within it, and their personal exilic condition (Stokes 2010). These spheres are emotional, vulnerable spaces wherein songs are slowly revealed, shrouded behind layers of self-concealment, embarrassment, and even pride. The songs shared therein often occur within the context of storytelling—never openly, and only within the privacy of the home.

Though informally, these spheres are formed from spaces of inclusion and familiarity among those who bear witness to the act of song creation—an audience whose members almost always share knowledge of Iraqi Jewish food, language, and music. It is not uncommon for singers to evaluate their social environment in considering whether or not to reveal songs that do not exist. Shared cultural knowledge of Iraqi Jewish customs—for example, the various forms of kubā (dumplings), where to find the best sijiq (stuffed sheep’s intestine), or even particular geographical knowledge of neighborhoods in Iraq—are important aspects of community and self pride, and serve to establish and enhance feelings of familiarity and trust. Competitions and friendly debates over such knowledge, including the spices, aromas, and textures of various dumplings and flatbreads, can help determine circles of inclusion and exclusion and variously encourage or dissuade personal and alternative remembrances in song. Humor is particularly important for establishing a sense of intimacy, where the poetic capacity of idiomatic expressions in colloquial dialects of Iraqi Arabic is often utilized to describe
funny and outrageous situations. Among very close family members and friends, individuals might even call one another by their former, Arabic names, a particularly vulnerable and under-the-radar means of establishing intimacy. In this and other contexts, language serves as a measuring stick for distinguishing someone as an Iraqi Jew of a particular generation, with direct experience of Iraq, who shares formative experiences of cultural transition, social tumult, and assimilation.

It is often within this space of shared history, language, and quiet understanding, among small groups of elderly Iraqi Jews, that song creation takes place. In my meeting with Hana and Regina, for example, the two elderly sisters refer to one another in Arabic. They reminisce over the funny sayings of their parents, the music they listened to as children, and the food that graced their dining room in the home. Their bond as sisters, apparent over the hours they spend recalling cherished and painful remembrances, helps create a space of vulnerability and trust, in which they discuss personal experiences and intimate topics not often openly shared.

Intimacy, in such contexts, is extremely fragile: songs are easily silenced by the surrounding environment, including the arrival of an unannounced person, a phone call that disrupts the atmosphere, or even larger socio-political contexts deemed hostile to the intense vulnerability displayed in song. I recall an instance when a singer started to recite a song, only to have her children shush her. On another occasion, a singer challenged me on the importance of her songs: “What do you want with these songs?” she asked.

4 It is important to note that many Iraqi Jews are particularly adept at code-switching between various languages and dialects, depending on the social context in which they find themselves (Shohat 2016: 107). Many Iraqi Jews move fluidly between Hebrew and colloquial Iraqi dialects of Arabic within conversation (usually the qili dialect, but sometimes the gili dialect as well), depending with whom they are speaking. At times they combine both Hebrew and Arabic within the same sentence. For example, one might hear “tānaštī al-makhberet,” which translates as “[Arabic:] bring me the… [Hebrew:] notebook,” or “ḥaṭā al-ḥmār lo ozev oti,” which translates as “[Arabic:] This donkey (referring to a person one finds to be irritating) … [Hebrew:] won’t leave me alone.”
“They’re just nonsense.” Even after singing, a sense of embarrassment might flood back to an informant—for example, when a singer disparaged her singing just as she had, moments earlier, articulated a strong sense of pride in her creations.

Over many months of concerted effort and innumerable interviews, I began to encounter spheres of intimacy through establishing ongoing relationships, and cultivating trust between myself and the individuals who were gracious enough to invite me into their homes, family gatherings, and community celebrations. Over time, a somewhat unconscious, epistemological shift took place on my part as I began to understand the importance of silence, and intense listening, to the creation of spheres of intimacy and song recitation. Somewhat unconsciously, I adopted an approach similar to Joshua Pilzer’s notion of “listening silences,” where ethnography is conducted by listening deeply to the details of life history—not only in its recounting, but in how an individual has come to understand and process both the joys and traumas of tumultuous life experiences. This approach inspires the ethnographer to reflect on “prepared modes of understanding”—both among the fieldworker herself, as well as others present—and how these can impede or eclipse important ethnographic moments, especially when encountering intense human emotions and trauma (Pilzer 2012: 11). It also recognizes the importance of waiting, those “delicious” moments within fieldwork settings that provide opportunities for deeper consideration, reflection, and understanding (Gill 2017: 155). Through this process, I learned what not to ask: an outright question referencing these songs, for example, was sure to be met with a reply of denial. Direct inquiry could, in fact, call uncomfortable attention to a practice that usually remains under the radar, and thus dissuade a singer from revealing any songs at all.
In time, my ethnographic approach developed in tandem with an intrinsic awareness of the importance of silence, in ways that resonated with the respectful, inclusive atmosphere supportive of oral history and song creation of which I had increasingly become a part. I became aware of the comfort of silence that allows singers to embrace the very quiet and reflective space of emotional song creation. My cultivation of “listening silences” meant adopting a sensitive ethnographic approach based in conversation and social rapport. I consciously worked towards creating space for interviewees to dictate the pace and topics of our conversations, wherein they revealed their oral histories and songs in bits and pieces during multiple encounters and over time; indeed, our meetings often took place over the course of hours, days, or even weeks. Moments of listening silence became more prevalent as I became better known to my interlocutors. The more time I spent engaging with the everyday life of singers in intimate, domestic spheres, the more moments of song creation I witnessed. When interlocutors were asked to share their life histories, in the context of a familiar, supportive audience, songs began to reveal themselves. Singers would interweave their melodies through tales of arranged marriage, family deaths, bride theft, and personal experiences of leaving Iraq, allowing themselves to express personal sentiments and a hidden nostalgia for the place and community they had left behind.

In this way, and over time, I gained glimpses into a fragmented and differentiated musical practice that exists among a handful of individuals who form the core of this study. I am certain that my personal background and familiarity with Iraqi Jewish customs and idioms helped establish social rapport and trust, just as my clear American accent and need for repetition or explanation impeded it. It is within this fraught yet
hopeful, contradictory space that this ethnography is situated, between myself and the
people with whom I lived and worked, and the circles of inclusion and exclusion we all
individually navigated. Throughout my fieldwork, I continually struggled with the idea
that my research would “give voice” to individuals’ experiences, trauma, and songs that
are purposefully and comfortably kept silent. Questions involving my role as an
ethnographer, a central concern of anthropologically-oriented disciplines writ large, were
ever present in my mind as I wrestled with the conundrum inherent in “speaking for”
individuals and a musical practice that make no move towards visibility. In fact, the
“invisibility” of these songs can be considered as a kind of defiant strategy among this
particular generation of Iraqi Jews, one that resists the various ways their heritage and
legacy have been depicted in larger public spheres over time, often in targeted and
essentialized ways. At the same time, I was—and continue to be—fully aware that this
ethnography could only be born of the relationship between myself and the singers I
came to know and admire, as I was often their audience, even the sole audience at times,
for their performances. And though I did not wish to “instigate” song creation in ways
that seemed forced, I was also clearly approaching these singers in an attempt to learn
about, and increase the visibility of, their silent songs.

My continual work towards answering these unresolved queries lies at the heart of
this ethnography in hopeful and unresolved ways. My attempt to “make visible” that
which has largely remained silent is done with the careful consideration of my
interlocutors, and through their direct consultation and guidance. Through our dialogues,
I have worked towards representing their songs and personal traumas in a sensitive and
thoughtful manner, while masking individual identities and life histories as requested.\(^5\) Within their songs, singers often employ formalized tropes and composites to disguise their personal identities while simultaneously articulating important aspects of their life experiences. The chapter vignettes throughout this dissertation metaphorically draw upon techniques of obfuscation that my informants use within their songs. I have crafted them from composites of oral history and song-making I encountered during my fieldwork, as a means of concealing singers’ identities while simultaneously illustrating key aspects and themes of individual life history and song. In this vein, my writing style draws from the long history of metaphoric ethnographic writing methods in ethnomusicology (see, for example, Meintjes 2003; Shelemay 1998).

My focus on individual experience resonates with Abu-Lughod’s timely and continually relevant call for “ethnographies of the particular” as a strategy for writing against sweeping generalizations (Abu-Lughod 1991: 473-476). By recognizing the disparate subjectivities of those who identify as Iraqi Jews, I offer a partial corrective to the various ways their legacy has been hijacked for political and nationalist purposes, and its various monolithic, unitary depictions. I do so, in part, by highlighting the individual negotiation of this hijacking, and by reflecting on the contradictory levels of belonging that individual Iraqi Jews navigate on a daily basis. Though this study is situated among a community of Iraqi Jews who have direct experience of Iraq and shared experiences of cultural transition, these individuals nonetheless exhibit considerable internal variability. They each inhabit complex representations of Arab, Jewish, Iraqi, Mizrahi, and gendered belonging in myriad and disparate ways, and variously present aspects of difference.

\(^5\) Throughout this dissertation, I utilize pseudonyms for my interlocutors while also altering and obscuring certain details of their life stories in order to protect their anonymity.
(ranging from secular to religious, and liberal to conservative, for example), depending on the context. Many of the older generation of Iraqi Jews have intermarried among Ashkenazi Jews, as well as other Jews from across the Middle East, and their children might be half-Iraqi, one-quarter Polish, and half-German, among many other examples. Almost all are Jewish, Israeli citizens.

Recognizing the fraught and complex history of ethnography vis-à-vis “discovery” and preservationist ideology (McAllester 1979), I view the fragmentary, and perhaps rightly acknowledged “endangered” status of these songs as part and parcel of the present in which they exist. Drawn from the sometimes foggy memories of song types, idioms, and musical practices prevalent in pre-1950s Iraq, these songs are also influenced by musical genres that Iraqi immigrants encountered in Israel from the 1950s on. They are an entirely presentist phenomenon—part of the ongoing, constitutive work of memory and expressive practice in self-making and survival. Rather than claiming this ethnography to be a definitive account of remembrance and belonging among the surviving generation of Iraqi Jews, I offer it as an encounter with individual memories, experiences, and trauma as revealed through subjective oral history and song. It is an open-ended project, a work in progress, based on a largely ineffable musical practice—a study of the many ways alternative remembrance and subjectivity are voiced through expressive forms, and the creative strategies through which individuals make sense of social violence, self-repression, and exile of the self.⁶

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⁶ The idea of Iraqi Jewish exile of the self, or the “estrangement from one’s own body,” is deeply inspired by the Iraqi Jewish scholar Ella Shohat and her investigations on the psychological impact of the re-socialization of Iraqi Jews into Israeli society (see Shohat 1999: 15, as well as Shohat 1988, 2006, 2016).
Iraqi Jews and Exile

The dislocation and displacement of Iraqi Jews from their communities of origin in the mid-twentieth century was a particularly traumatic phenomenon for reasons unique to their situation: 1) nowhere else in the Arab world were Jews so abruptly given an irrevocable choice between staying and leaving; 2) their repatriation in Israel is officially presented as a “negation of exile,” though many Iraqi Jews often felt more exiled in Israel than in Iraq; 3) Iraqi Jews were among the most well-integrated of all the Jews of Muslim lands, and yet, ironically, eventually became among the most well-integrated of Mizrahi Jews within Israeli society; 4) after their departure, which amounted to almost 100% of the Jewish community in Iraq by the mid-1970s, their remembered homeland, neighborhoods, and community ceased to exist; and 5) their history is officially depicted according to a teleological, religio-political historiography, where the only possible outcome for Iraqi Jewish life is seen as its inevitable end (Ben-Dor 2006; Meir-Glitzenstein 2002, 2015).

Thus, the idea of exile and its various meanings has found a particular resonance among Iraqi Jewish writers and artists, as well as scholars of Iraqi Jewry. Indeed, Iraqi Jews have been described as “champions of exile … obsessed with the theme” (Ben-Dor 2006: 137); their writings are referred to as a “literature of exile” (Berg 1996: 7)—works that detail the disjunction between actual lived experience versus their community’s “miraculous return” to Israel. The idea of “exile” vis-à-vis Jews of the Middle East

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7 In 1950, the Iraqi government passed the “denaturalization law,” allowing Jews to leave Iraq on the condition that they irrevocably relinquish their citizenship, leaving them no possibility of return (Bashkin 2012; Gat 1997).
8 One need only look towards titles of various books and articles, by and about Iraqi Jews, to see evidence of their lengthy literary and scholarly engagement with the idea of “exile.” See, for example, *Exile from*
derives from biblical origins: the notion of the “ingathering of exiles,” or *kibbutz galuyot*, as detailed in the Book of Deuteronomy promises a home for all Jewish people in the land of Israel—a point that has become a fundamental component of modern-day religio-Zionist discourse (Zerubavel 1995). This discourse depicts the 2,600-year presence of Jews in Mesopotamia as an exile that was resolved through their mass emigration to Israel (Ben-Dor 2006). Accordingly, the inevitable and “miraculous homecoming” of Iraqi Jews to the land of Israel echoes a divine fulfillment depicted in Hebrew scripture (Ben-Porat 1998).

The Israeli nationalization project was based upon this ideology, and by all accounts, it was largely successful. Iraqi Jews assimilated into the lower and middle classes of Israeli society, where most of them became devout patriots and conservative Zionists (Abarjel and Lavie 2009). In fact, of all the Jews from Arab countries who emigrated to Israel in the early years of the state, Iraqi Jews fared best (Meir-Glitzenstein 2015). In Iraq, many Jews were middle- and upper-class citizens—cosmopolitan, highly educated, and successful multi-lingual individuals. Prominent owners of extensive merchant trade businesses as well as newspaper and printing presses, many Iraqi Jews were adept at navigating myriad and varied social milieus among differing religious and cultural groups, as well as in international contexts (Bashkin 2008, 2012; Shohat 2016).

These qualities, which helped Jews gain access to upper levels of mainstream Arab Iraqi society in the first half of the twentieth century, were among the same that aided their assimilation into higher echelons of Zionist-Israeli society post-immigration (see Chetrit 2000; Shemer 2011). This stands in contrast to many of the Jewish immigrants from other

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*Exile* (Berg 1996); “Invisible Exile: Iraqi Jews in Israel” (Ben-Dor 2006); “At Home in Exile” (Alcalay 1993); and “the second Babylonian exile” (detailed in Ballas 1964), among many others.
Arab countries (including Yemen, Libya, and Egypt) who often fared worse, economically and socially, within Israel’s borders (Khazzoom 2008; Meir-Glitenstein 2015).

Indeed, by the 1970s and 80s, Iraqi Jews were prominent among those individuals who played key political roles in furthering the social empowerment of Jews of Middle Eastern and African descent. As they began to clamor for their own place within the Zionist narrative, these Iraqi Jews became increasingly affiliated with right-wing political parties such as Shas and Likud (Chetrit 2000). This aided in the consolidation of a kind of social community consciousness among Jews from *edot ha-mizrahit* [Hebrew: communities of the East] which aligned with a conservative, highly nationalist orientation. By the 1980s, the term *Mizrahi* came into use as a pan-ethnic Jewish identifier for this community, whose members had shared seminal experiences in the *ma’abara*, or transit camps and development towns, as well as frequent discrimination and limited professional and economic opportunities (Shemer 2011). Meanwhile, Iraqi Jewish Zionists, particularly those who helped orchestrate Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, began to achieve prominent positions within the Israeli government. They are among the same individuals responsible for establishing the “Babylonian Heritage Jewry Center” (BHJC), an important museum and cultural center that has become the veritable authority on “official” representations of Jewish Iraq (Meir-Glitenstein 2002). The narrative that guides the BHJC’s exhibits and overall organization highlights the persecution of Jews in Iraq. Such narratives are in line with what Marc Cohen refers to as the “neo-lachrymose” conception of Arab-Jewish history, developed over time and in tandem with the rise of the Mizrahim as a political force, which depicts Jewish life in Iraq—and throughout the
Arab Middle East—as wrought with suffering (Cohen 1994). As the state-sanctioned way for Arabic-speaking Jews to “legitimately” remember their former homelands, this dominant narrative recasts Iraqi Jewish heritage according to a universal model of Jewish victimization, highlighting Jewish suffering at the hands of Arab enemies, and “writing out” any Iraqi Jewish history outside the realm of Zionist historiography (Bashkin 2012; Meir-Glitzenstein 2002; Saada-Ophir 2006). This official discourse has become entrenched in Israeli society, and in so doing, effectively masks the cultural proximity between Mizrahim and the Arab countries of their origin (Chetrit 2000). Thus, the social empowerment of Iraqis and Mizrahim within Israel has emerged through a paradoxical process that occurred in direct relation to suppression of their Arabic language, habits, and cultural traits (Alcalay 1993; Shohat 1999).

The Jews with whom I conducted fieldwork are among the first and second generations of Arabic-speaking immigrants in Israel, and many were quite successful in assimilating to Israeli Jewish society. A substantial number were active participants in the political uprising of Likud and other right-wing parties, and are individuals who openly decry the hardships of their final years in Iraq. In speech, they often emphasize the barbarity of the violent attacks they experienced in 1941, during an event known as the farhud. This three-day period of rioting, violence, and looting, provoked by the anti-Semitic leanings of then prime minister Rashid Ali Kaylani and his followers, as well as the chaos of the May 1941 coup d’état and subsequent British invasion, resulted in the murder of several hundred Jews (Bashkin 2008, 2012; Meir-Glitzenstein 2002). Many Iraqi Jews felt betrayed by the Iraqi government and the British troops, who took several days to come to their aid.
During interviews, it is not uncommon for Iraqi Jews to express strongly nationalistic sentiments as Israeli citizens and make disdainful remarks about Arab Iraqi society and culture in speech, especially when discussing the violence of the farhud. Nonetheless, their songs betray an affection for the community and place they left behind—one that many have only recently started to openly admit (Meir-Glitzenstein 2015, 2016). The remembrances offered by their private songs, variously nostalgizing aspects of Iraqi Jewish life while protesting others, suggest a far more complicated picture than that substantiated by official Zionist discourse.

**Visceral Schizophrenia: Cultural Upheaval and Trauma**

In recent decades, a number of authors, artists, and scholars have questioned the inherent assumptions of a miraculous return to Israel, pointing to the multiple levels of disjuncture and displacement experienced by Iraqi Jews upon immigration (see, for example, Bashkin 2012; Ben-Dor 2006; Berg 1996; Chetrit 2000; Khazzoom 2008; Raz-Krakotzkin 2005; Rejwan 1985; Shenhav 2006; Shohat 1988, 1999, 2006; Smooha 1999; Tsur 2007). The personal concessions required for assimilation as dictated by the Israeli immigrant absorption process had a profound and shocking effect on the newly arrived immigrants (Hacohen 2003). The nascent Israeli state was being formulated with discourses of modernity and Eurocentric Zionism, and inherent to its conception was the rejection of Iraqi cultural habits, including “language, literature, poetry, dance, music, leisure, customs, and moral values … as being uncivilized” (Meir-Glitzenstein 2015: 117). In this context, rapid cultural adaptations were required of Iraqi Jews, who were

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9 Interestingly, the majority of these authors are Israeli scholars of Middle Eastern descent, many of whom are driven towards excavating the legacy of their parents and communities from the way they perceive it to have been misappropriated by Zionist discourse.
viewed as embodying these “backwards” traits. They were subjected to a violent, systematic program of “deracination and resocialization,” in which they were forced to change their names, language, and codes of behavior in an effort to assimilate (Levy 2008: 452). In the words of Iraqi Jewish author Samir Naqqash, Iraqi Jews were encouraged to “forget” their country of origin and “become an enemy” of their pasts (see Holden 2003). Though in many ways they were “successful” at doing so, their continued focus on exile and cultural dislocation demonstrates that many are, in fact, “defined” by the memory of their imposed forgetting (Ben-Dor 2006: 136). Indeed, a large number of writers and artists continually focus on the moment of departure from Iraq, or what Iraqi Jewish poet Amira Hass has called the moment “the umbilical cord to the soul” was cut (Ben-Dor 2006: 137; Snir 2005: 406). Thus, in “ingathering” the exiles, the Israeli immigrant absorption process also “made exiles of the many ingathered” (Berg 1996b: 188).

The large-scale social crisis experienced by the Iraqi Jewish immigrants, who faced an impossible choice between anti-Zionist Arabness and pro-Zionist Jewishness, resulted in a “profound and visceral schizophrenia” (Shohat 1999, 2006). In clinging to the past, they embraced an Arab culture that was threatening to the Israeli establishment. But to wholeheartedly accept Israeli national identity, they had to erase their nostalgic memories of Iraq and their cultural traits. For many, this became an exercise in self-annihilation: not only did individuals of the Iraqi Jewish community internally repress aspects of themselves, but they did so willingly. They grew ashamed of their appearances, music, food, and language, and changed their names and ways of speaking; they became, in short, estranged from their own bodies.
This process of “self-deprecation,” according to historian Meir-Glitzenstein, has worked in tandem with strategies for survival and success (Meir-Glitzenstein 2015). Iraqi Jews were able to increase their social mobility and economic status, through careful and often painful decisions regarding which of their qualities and talents to cultivate and highlight, and which to internally censor, depending on the context. Some of my interlocutors, particularly in the early years of their arrival, admit to having felt a great sense of shame about their backgrounds. They adopted processes of self-silencing by avoiding spoken Arabic, changing their last names to sound more Ashkenazi, attempting to mask their Iraqi accents when speaking in Hebrew, and keeping their musical preferences hidden within their insular communities and homes. These processes of silencing were profound and sometimes violent: some of my interviewees even admitted to having broken musical instruments and cherished keepsakes that they had brought with them from Iraq in acts of self-annihilation.

The practice of private singing as a coping mechanism involves similar processes of self-silencing, resulting from personal self-censorship in accordance with internalized notions of discrimination and shame. At the same time, I theorize that its relevance as a means for dealing with the anxieties of social tumult and dislocation was—and continues to be—arguably ever more vital. Ella Shohat has described Iraqi Jewish experiences in Israel as “shuttling back and forth between conflictual cultures, split between the ‘private’ sphere of home and neighborhood and the public sphere of Euro-Israel … [where] the Iraq or Morocco of home was invisible at school, work, in buses or streets” (Shohat 1999: 16). At the same time, Iraqi Jews “continued family traditions, entering a space both collective and private—inaccessible to Euro-Israelis” (ibid.). In this context,
singing itself, practiced in these “inaccessible,” intimate domestic spheres, became—and continues to be—a strategy for self-survival, allowing individuals a space for articulating and negotiating their internal trauma, community displacement, and feelings of visceral schizophrenia. In particularly rare and intimate contexts, several of the singers I came to know admitted: “I sing to survive” [Arabic: āghanī ḥatā āṭamal], as well as “I sing to take it out of my heart” [āghanī ḥatā āṭā ṭā hilā min qalbī]. In this context, expressive practice serves as a means of embodying, processing, and mollifying an individual’s pain and self-estrangement through the medium of song.

The private songs of Iraqi Jews point to the painful concessions they continually make in order to successfully position themselves as Israelis, and how multiplex forms of subjectivity and emotion associated with life in Iraq comingle uneasily within their hearts and minds. As described in my experience with the two Iraqi sisters above, in certain social settings one’s familiarity with Iraqi cultural habits serves as an entry point to spheres of intimacy; in others, this same familiarity is perceived as a threat. These circles of exclusion and inclusion, which Iraqi Jews navigate on a moment-to-moment basis, are deeply influenced by “canons of nationalist historiography” that assert an essentialized, mutually exclusive Palestinian-Israeli, Arab-Jewish binary (Beinin 1998: 5). These discourses construct and position subjectivity through a polarizing lens, one that has led scholars to assume an authentic, originary Jewish identity, and an authentic, circumscribed Muslim Arab identity, and then analyze the way these two interact with one another (Beinin 1998; Kligman 2009). In reality, these communities are far more internally heterogeneous, and the spheres of interaction between them much more relational and permeable.
The “relational model” of historical understanding of Arab and Jewish communities of the region, developed by historian Zachary Lockman, allows for a more nuanced understanding of Jewish and Arab intercommunality, highlighting the porous and fluid nature of spheres of belonging while also demonstrating the discursive basis of often unquestioned, primordial representations of Zionism and Arab nationalism (notably, see Lockman 1996 and Shohat 2006). I build on similar relational models, developed by scholars of cultural expression in the region (Belkind 2014; McDonald 2013; Stein and Swedenburg 2005). I highlight the interactional relationship between Jewish and Arab subjectivities in ways that call into question the dominant, polarizing discourses of nationalism. I examine the special power of expressive practices in destabilizing these discourses and articulating linkages across divides, especially those that stand in perceived internal contradiction to one another, and/or are eclipsed by repressive and internalized silencing. Inspired by Orit Bashkin’s call to “provincialize Zionism,” I highlight the importance of private song in articulating various aspects of gendered, religious, and cultural belonging in ways that “crosscut and destabilize the rigidity of the nation,” and work towards opening “a discursive space for talking about shared communities of practice and interaction beyond and across the Palestinian-Israeli divide” (Bashkin 2012: 6; McDonald 2013: 30).10

Unlike similar regional studies on resistance music in public contexts in Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories, however (see, for example, Belkind 2014; Brinner 2009; Horowitz 2010; McDonald 2013; Regev and Seroussi 2004), my focus is on the

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10 In a similar vein, this work contributes to dismantling the isolation of both Israeli and Jewish music studies from Middle Eastern and Arab studies (for examples of scholars who have voiced such concerns, see Kligman 2009; Shelemay 1998; Seroussi 2008, 2013; and Stein and Swedenburg 2005). In general, the musicological scholarship on Jewish music has tended to focus on its relationship to other Jewish practices, while neglecting its relationship to Arab expressive practices (see also Seroussi 2008: 9, 2013: 279).
intensely personal, musical processing of conflict in spaces purposefully removed from the public realm. I bring an individual focus to studies of cultural intimacy and exile, thereby building on existing regional ethnomusicological studies concerning sentiment and affect in articulations of modernity and nationhood (Abu-Lughod 2005; Hirschkind 2006; Shannon 2006), as well as contestations and ambivalence over these cultural formations (notably, Herzfeld 1997; Stokes 2010).

**Al-ʿāib bil-jīb: Gender, Shame, and Stubborn Self-Pride**

I stare at the broken ʿād hidden in the back closet that Suham is showing me. “Don’t take a picture,” she requests. It belonged to her late husband. He was once a fine professional musician, but Suham says that by the end of his life he could not stand the sight of the instrument. It angered him. I notice someone has broken the strings, and look up towards Suham, questioningly. She hints that it was him. I hesitate, about to ask another question, but she suddenly whisks me out of the room and shuts the door. We go back outside to her balcony, and our conversation shifts to the details of her family dynamics. Her daughter is getting married, and her fiancé’s family will not help pay for the wedding, though they are wealthy. We do not speak of the ʿād again.

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“Al-ʿālīb bil-jīb,” Regina tells me that day on the bus: keep your embarrassment in your pocket. This sentiment is echoed by both the reluctance with which Suham shows me her husband’s old ʿād, as well as by the broken instrument itself. These processes of silencing—such as destroying treasured keepsakes, or asserting the “non-existence” of
song—are associated with internalized discrimination resulting from Israel’s immigrant resocialization process. In this context, feelings of embarrassment among Iraqi immigrants can take multiple, overlapping forms, implicating gender and shame in both historical and contemporary ways. Indeed, a majority of the singers I encountered are women. Yet in pre-1950s Iraq, the expression of female musicality was often deemed socially inappropriate and confined to specific milieus—such as gender-segregated performances, including pre-bridal parties and henna celebrations (where women performed for other women), or in coffee shops where musical performance was associated with sexual promiscuity (Avishur 1987a; Hassan 2010; Manasseh 1991-92; Zubaida 2002). Another layer of shame associated with female musicality can be found in the Jewish prohibition against hearing women’s voices, or *kol isha*, where the sound of a woman’s voice is also associated with a certain level of social impropriety (Manasseh 1999, 2004; Shelemay 1998, 2009). I argue that these multiple levels of shame, tied to the historical marginalization of similar song types in public contexts, combine with contemporary feelings of shame associated with the performance of Arabic songs in the hostile environment of the Israeli public sphere, pushing this already private practice further indoors.11 The continued performance of these private songs maintains an ideological continuity associated with older musical forms that help individuals articulate taboo sentiments—ranging from joyful, to shameful and even traumatic experiences—in socially acceptable ways. I argue that the particular power of this expressive practice

11 It is important to note that Arab cultural and musical expressions are not necessarily discriminated against within Israel; however, these performances are often carefully controlled and presented in particular ways deemed non-threatening to Israeli audiences. This is described at length in Chapter 6 (see also Belkind 2014; Brinner 2009; Dardashti 2007, 2008a, 2008b; Seroussi 2014; Stein & Swedenburg 2005).
arises from its unique ability to promote self-coherence amid disruption, an important aspect of healing articulated by scholars of trauma (Herman 1992).

The various levels of trauma depicted through song are often related to female experiences with domestic and social violence, as well as bride theft and rape; thus, they are often recounted by women. Nonetheless, many of the strict gender boundaries I observed in religious Iraqi gatherings were more fluid in the secular contexts of private song making. These private songs are sung by both men and women in small gatherings that sometimes combine members of different genders. They blend various traditions of historically male and female music making in Iraq, including women’s lullabies, wedding and circumcision celebration songs (daqāqa), and grief-ridden laments (‘addada). They also draw from performances of Iraqi maqām (typically performed by professional male Iraqi Jewish musicians); Jewish liturgy; as well as melodies, modes, and lyrics of popular female and male singers from across the Arab world, particularly Egyptian and Syrian musicians associated with the “Golden Age” of Arab music.12

These private songs share similarities with certain female-dominated regional expressive practices that implicate notions of shame and honor, where musical expression allows for the articulation of incisive social commentary and critique (see, for example, Abu-Lughod 1999; Kligman 1988; Serematakis 1990; Sugarman 1997). My scholarship engages with the long history of ethnomusicological and anthropological scholarship that

12 The “Golden Age” of Arab music typically refers to the musical period of 1930s-1970s, largely centered in Egypt, that saw the stunning rise and success of Arab singers and film stars, including Abd al-Wahhab, Asmahan, Um Kulthum, Farid al-Atrache, Fairouz and the Rahbani Brothers, and Abd al-Halim Hafez, among many others (Danielson 1997; Marcus 2007; Shannon 2006). This era corresponded with the consolidation of media power and pan-Arab entertainment in Egypt, as well as with the formative period of Arab nationalism that cemented the critical role of popular song, and notions turāth [Arabic: heritage], within burgeoning nationalist discourses (Armbrust 2000; Frishkopf 2010). To this day, these musicians are often viewed as embodiments of the kind of “timeless” artistry associated with turāth, though several scholars have convincingly demonstrated the chronocentric, temporal nature of this discursive positioning (El-Shawan Castelo-Branco 1984; Frishkopf 2010).
examines such issues, in particular emotionality, power, and shame vis-à-vis gendered expressive practices in the Mediterranean and Middle East. The honor/shame dyad, recognized and developed by the Oxford school of social anthropology in the 1950s, was an especially influential scholarly paradigm for understanding cultural phenomena across the Mediterranean region (Magrini 2003). This approach promoted a deterministic framework: not only did it assert a kind of regional cultural homogeneity, but it argued for a clear-cut, binary understanding of gender (where honor is unequivocally associated with men, and shame with women). In this formulation, men’s honor can be understood as existing in a dialectical relationship with that of female purity, where male honor is dependent upon, and perpetuated through, women upholding a certain standard of morality. In time, scholars formulated more sophisticated models for understanding these social tendencies, thus countering the determinism of the Oxford school, which overlooked female sources of power and voice. They also began to account for varied and different kinds of power, investigating how regional manifestations of moral codes associated with honor and shame are cross-cut by issues of ethnicity, religion, class, gender, monogamy, and polygamy (Magrini 2003; Racy 1986). This scholarship demonstrates the inherent power in the emotionality expressed through musical forms, often relegated to marginalized, female realms (see, for example, Sugarman 1997; Caraveli-Chaves 1986; Serematakis 1990). Similar studies on expressive social protest and female musicality in Iraqi musical practices and ceremonies (Hassan 2010) as well as Iraqi Jewish female lullabies (Khayyat 1978; Manasseh 1991-92) consider the unique capacity of poetry and song to articulate social criticism in a socially acceptable manner.
A particularly useful model can be found in Lila Abu-Lughod’s *Veiled Sentiments*, which complicates the idea of an honor/shame duality by positing the relationship as a complex of discourses—ones that do not exist in isolation, but coexist with other discourses (Abu-Lughod 1999). She determines two very different and conflicting discourses available for expression in private and public life among members of the Awlad ‘Ali Bedouin clan—a dominant overarching discourse of honor, which values independence and courageousness, as well as a subversive discourse of poetry that involves feelings of attachment, sentiment, loss, and vulnerability. The apparent contradiction between these discourses is negotiated by the manner in which they are expressed. Honor and courage are articulated overtly, embodied most by those higher in the social hierarchy. On the other hand, expressive *ghinnawa*—a type of lyrical poetry common among women members of the ‘Awlad Ali clan—articulate values that conflict with what is socially sanctioned by the discourse of honor. These are voiced covertly through the recitation of *ghinnawa*, through which veiled sentiments are revealed in formalized poetic terms as a means of maintaining the reciter’s anonymity.

I engage with such relational models—Abu Lughod’s, in particular—in my analysis. Among Iraqi Jews, their private songs purportedly “do not exist,” an assertion that detracts from their overt potential to critique, undermine, or even figure in official state narratives, while simultaneously providing individuals with a realm for expressing inappropriate sentiments. Like the case of *ghinnawa* detailed by Abu-Lughod, singers adopt the voices of others through their craft, and utilize idiomatic poetic tropes to disguise personal experiences and feelings. In this way, the often vulnerable side of
emotional and alternative remembrance articulated in song can simultaneously coexist with, and contradict larger, agreed upon social discourses and norms.

I build on this model, however, by adding a more fluid, relational conception within the self: in particular, how multiple and myriad aspects of an individual’s self are embodied and performed, and revealed and/or hidden across various social contexts. This is similar to the model adopted by Joshua Pilzer in his discussion of songs among Korean “comfort women,” where the “opacity” between the singer and her song “serves as an exit strategy” to allow these women to “forget, remember, express their experiences, and form identities … without giving themselves away” (Pilzer 2012: 9).

Throughout my fieldwork, I found that a singer’s articulation of self often occurs through complex and contradictory processes: it is not solely through song that one aspect of the self is given prominence. Rather, different aspects of the self are elaborated within and across contexts, where Iraqi Jews employ strategies of self-representation that resist monolithic, linear narratives and simplistic understandings of their lives. Through both speech and song, individuals demonstrate their “complex personhood” by embracing and/or rejecting multiple levels of sentiment and belonging, ones that can, at times, contradict one another (Daughtry 2015: 21). The topics addressed in song can easily instigate further spoken discussion or narration, and vice versa, in a kind of emergent dialectic between expressive forms of poetry and song and the recounting of life history. This negotiation helps singers navigate ideas of private/public, intimacy/unfamiliarity, and inclusion/exclusion that are constantly in flux and positioned relative to each other, shifting on a moment-to-moment basis in accordance with varying social context.
The negotiation of exiled sentiment often occurs through musical expression in spheres of intimacy, based on shared notions of cultural intimacy, that serve as a defiant context for the private articulation of what is often publicly silenced and disdained. Through their songs, Iraqi Jews reconcile feelings of embarrassment and self-estrangement on the individual, psychological level in ways that remain hidden from the larger public realm. Expressive practices thus form a site for navigating multiple and overlapping levels of internalized shame, where different aspects of the self gain various levels of nuanced visibility. This process demonstrates the interplay of shame and pride, the hallmark of Herzfeld’s notion of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld 1997). Indeed, Shohat has argued that the social crisis of “visceral schizophrenia” among Iraqi Jews resides in its similar dual nature—the mingling of “stubborn self-pride with an imposed self-rejection” (Shohat 1988: 25-26). There is a great sense of defiance that emerges in spheres of intimacy, based not just on shared cultural backgrounds and familiarity, but pride in both repressed and openly articulated histories.

This is a particularly important point, as various scholars have argued against the scholarly neglect of agency and self-pride, particularly in studies of individuals who are marginalized, or often presented as “victims.” This occurs in older anthropological understandings of honor, shame, and gender, as well as in contemporary studies of violence against vulnerable populations, including Iraqi Jews. In this regard, both Abu-Lughod and Shelemay demonstrate how a consideration of internal pride is useful for dismantling determinative frameworks and understanding unique forms of power. For Abu-Lughod, social prestige is tied to the notion of tashasham (having shame or modesty), where the willful submission around social superiors is itself a form of power
(Abu-Lughod 1999). This is similar to Shelemay’s concept of tsniut [Hebrew: modesty] among Syrian Jewish women, as a kind of embodiment of independence through consciously and independently chosen modesty, demonstrating the power of silence as its own kind of agency and active participation (Ginsburg 1987; Shelemay 2009).

My conceptualization of spheres of intimacy incorporates the notion of pride, often articulated in circles of inclusion and familiarity, and expressed in purposefully secret and modest ways. Through this argument, I attempt to answer Galeet Dardashti’s call to move beyond the “discourse of discrimination” that has come to dominate narratives of Iraqi Jewish experiences in Israel (Dardashti 2008a: 313). Dardashti argues that this discourse has developed as a kind of corrective to the depiction of Iraqi Jews’ “miraculous” return to Israel, one that focuses myopically on the suffering and victimization of Iraqi Jews within Israel’s borders. Accordingly, Iraqi Jews are viewed as one-dimensional victims, while their ongoing relevancy, internal pride, and agency remains overlooked. Though I too engage with the damaging psychological ramifications of Israel’s early immigrant absorption process for Iraqi Jews, I attempt to do so in a way that highlights the individual negotiation of these repressive practices. I focus on the interplay of Iraqi Jewish self-pride and agency with processes of cultural silencing. Through this examination, I argue against both the monolithic portrayal of Iraqi Jews, as well as the notion that the Israeli nationalization project was wholly successful (it was not), while also highlighting the Iraqi Jewish contribution to, and innovative participation in, various aspects of Zionist ideology and Israeli nationalism.

Through private, expressive processes of reconciliation, I argue that self-pride is a crucial means of self-preservation: Iraqi Jews are not wholly despondent simply because
they are discriminated against; nor are they victims because they were forced to abandon their homes and communities. Rather, they have implemented creative strategies to maintain an internal sense of pride and continuity in spite of exilic conditions. They continue to retain “spaces of their own,” where the expression of cultural intimacy—as well as dueling aspects of shame and pride—can be articulated, embodied, and embraced. In so doing, they not only sing to reconcile the traumas of their personal and communal histories, but in spite of the way these personal histories have been hijacked by various public sectors. In this sense, a singer’s assessment of familiarity in social settings—where cultural knowledge of pre-1950s Iraq is used as a metric of “insiderness” and intimacy—serves, rather ironically, to create a safe space removed from public identity politics, perception, or coerced/forced presentations of the self, allowing individuals to “play with” conflicting loyalties and alternative remembrances through the medium of song (Collins 1998, 2000).

A Note on Terminology

The terminology associated with expressive practices throughout the Arab world does not often neatly line up with Western distinctions and musical categories. This difficulty in translation exists on micro-levels (for example, on a word-to-word translation basis) as well as on macro-levels that implicate larger-scale cognitive categories and assumptions inherent in the use of certain terms (Danielson 1997; Frischkopf 2010; Hassan 2002, 2008, 2010). The aesthetic principles shared between Muslim-Jewish sacred/spiritual and secular expressive realms are often conceived as somewhat permeable, thereby blurring their distinction from one another in ways that do
not map onto Western conceptions (Nelson 2001; Racy 2003; Seroussi 2008, 213; Shannon 2006). The songs of the amateur singers with whom I conducted fieldwork can be considered “secular” in the sense that they are largely domestic practices performed outside the synagogue or other sacred contexts. Nonetheless, they often share lyrical and melodic convergences with both Jewish and Muslim expressive practices, and include spiritual and other-worldly themes. Additionally, their melodies, in Arab melodic modes, share similarities with both Babylonian Jewry religious customs, Qur’anic recitation, Arab popular music, as well as Mashreqi and Iraqi traditions of magām—demonstrating the permeability between sacred and secular, as well as private and public sonic realms.

Further terminological confusion abounds, especially when considering the English term “music,” which typically translates as mustaqā in Arabic. This term was originally adopted within Arab music treatises to describe aspects of Arab music theory, though after the Cairo Congress of 1932 its usage shifted to depict both instrumental practice as well as theory (Shannon 2006: 71). Though “music” in its English usage often includes vocal expressive practices under its purview, in Arabic such practices are typically referred to as ghināʾ [song] or inshād [chant] (ibid.). Additionally, “music” is a particularly inapplicable term for a number of expressive practices in the Arab world, most notably Qur’anic recitation, which is conceived of as being entirely separate from music (Nelson 2001). The term mustaqā is also not employed when referring to Iraqi women’s domestic song practices; rather, they are more commonly described as qawla [saying, or reciting], taʿādīd [enumerating], or ghināʾ [singing] (Hassan 2010: 26).

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13 The Cairo Congress of Arab Music of 1932 was a large-scale, international conference focused on regional Arab musical forms, where efforts were made by both Western and Arab musicologists to document, systematize, organize and modernize the varied modal traditions from across the Arab world (Racy 1991).
Among my interlocutors, their private songs are almost never referred to in speech. On the rare occasion in which they are mentioned, the term ghināʾ [song] is most often utilized, though the term qawla [recitation] is also employed. Individual singers mostly refer to themselves as mughiniyya [singer] or qawwala [reciter], though they almost always think of themselves as amateurs. Of further note, among my informants the term muṭriba (associated with vocalists who are particularly adept at inducing states of tarab, or musical enchantment) is not used to refer to private singing; rather, it is reserved for professional singers, a distinction also noted by Virginia Danielson (Danielson 1997: 206). Vocalists of the Iraqi maqām tradition, meanwhile, are typically referred to as qāriʿ [one who reads, or recites] (Hassan 2002; Racy 2003: 32).

Throughout this dissertation, I employ the terminology used by my interlocutors, referring to an individual Iraqi Jew who partakes in this private expressive practice as a “singer” [mughiniyy for men, mughiniyya for women] and/or “reciter” [qawwal for men, qawwala for women]. Their songs are also referred to as such, utilizing the terms ghināʾ [song], as well as qawla [recitation] where appropriate.

The use of the term qawla [recitation] is particularly interesting, as it shares large-scale ideological associations with Qur’anic recitation, which is largely held in great esteem by Jews and Muslims alike.14 Such terminology serves to distinguish this practice from the association of female musicality with impropriety and/or sexual promiscuity. Though rarely discussed in the open, it is clear that these private songs are held in high esteem, and revered for their poetic innovation and ability to convey deep emotionality.

As with many female-dominated regional expressive practices, ranging from the southern

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14 Of note, though the term qawla is associated with Qur’anic recitation in Iraq, the terms qirāʿa or tilāwa are more commonly used in most Muslim contexts (see Kojaman 2001; Nelson 2001).
Balkans through the Mediterranean and into parts of the Middle East, these songs share in a similar kind of careful social positioning: they are highly regarded for their poetic ingenuity, while simultaneously relegated to specific contexts in acknowledgement of the precarious/dangerous potential of their articulation (see, for example, Abu-Lughod 1986; Caraveli-Chaves 1986; Danielson 1997; Serematakis 1990).

**Exiled Nostalgia: Emotion and Musical Remembrance**

For the purposes of this study, I examine nostalgia vis-à-vis the particular exilic condition of Iraqi Jews, as a kind of remembrance that is variously contested, defiant, traumatic, and wistful, one that forms a site of negotiation for encountering and processing conflicting subjectivities about cultural exile and its legacy. In this case, not only have Iraqi Jews been exiled, but their emotional remembrances and nostalgic sentiments have been exiled as well. I examine this kind of exiled nostalgia as articulated through poetic and musical expression, sensorial and embodied experience, and the strategies of self-repression and self-representation they implicate. Here nostalgia serves a key role in embodied processes of self-making and belonging, where disparate narratives are encountered, enforced and/or resisted, and sense is made of self-disorientation and cultural collapse. Nostalgia is “recruited in … [the] present” (Seroussi 2014: 36), an important means through which emergent notions of subjectivity and place are contested and negotiated (Buchanan 2009). It can, accordingly, act as a kind of “rebellion” manifest against the discontent of the present (Boym 2007: 16), both as a means of “reflecting” on social disorientation as well as acting as a motivating force for future action (see Boym 2001: 41-50; Buchanan 2009: 128, 148-49; Seroussi 2014: 47-
In this case, I treat exiled nostalgia as a web of resonating sentiments colored by internal defiance and contested remembrance—one whose expression is aided by carving out private spaces (spheres of intimacy) where “shameful” traits are explored and expounded upon, and are simultaneously manifested as a source of pride.

Ethnomusicological literature demonstrates the potential for sonic nostalgia to impact larger social change—in particular, as a means through which the boundaries of national soundscapes and canons are expanded to include marginalized voices and perspectives (Seroussi 2014; Stokes 2010). In “Nostalgic Soundscapes,” for example, Edwin Seroussi examines the role of sonic nostalgia in mediating the “time paradox” inherent to Zionist discourse, where Jewish nationalist history is simultaneously conceived as part of a “unilinear progress-oriented” process while also promoted as a “return to a mythical past” (Seroussi 2014: 35; Zerubavel 2007). He investigates how advances in music and sound technology have allowed for the creative interplay of nostalgic sentiment in popular music, where contemporary Israeli musicians engage with the “pre-Zionist Jewish” sonic past, allowing marginalized voices—particularly those originally from non-Western contexts—to challenge the European Zionist canon (Seroussi 2014: 47). Through the collaboration with soundscapes captured on older ethnographic and commercial recordings, these musicians participate in a mutually affective, musical dialogue with the voices of the dead, where they negotiate notions of continuity and rupture inherent to Zionist ideology and help formulate new conceptions of what constitutes the boundaries of the Israeli national soundscape. Seroussi notes, however, that this is not a one-sided endeavor: rather, through this engagement, the voices of the dead are capable of “acting (or rather sounding) upon the bodies of those
who are still alive” (Seroussi 2014: 38). This argument resonates with scholarship engaged with posthumous musicality that questions fixed scholarly notions of mortality and the limits of the body, and demonstrates the continuity in death (see Gill 2017; Kligman 1988).

I apply a similar analysis to the engagement of Iraqi singers with older musical forms that are effectively no longer in practice (Ben-Mordechai 1992; Manasseh 1999: 193), demonstrating a musical continuity that transcends rupture and continues to exert influence in its own right. I argue that various amalgams of improvised musical forms, idioms, and modes prevalent in the soundscape of 1950s Iraq live on in the imaginations of first- and second-generation Iraqi Israelis, including Iraqi, Syrian, Jordanian, and Egyptian popular music of the time. A loosely based collection of song-types, modes, and associated affective meanings that maintain a continued existence in the bodies and sensory memories of Iraqi Jews—reinforced through private consumption of popular Arabic song as well as continued community performances among Iraqi Jewish musicians—they form the sonic basis upon which these individuals improvise their private songs. These songs, in turn, are at times identifiable as extensions of particular compositions and/or specific genres, and at times modified significantly so as to appear as innovative amalgams of song and genre, or even original compositions. They include particular Arab melodic modes and poetic forms associated with feelings of nostalgic longing and sadness, including songs reminiscent of an affect-laden genre known as ‘atābā practiced throughout the region, as well as domestic improvisatory musical practices associated with Iraqi Jewish women in pre-1950s Iraq (including daqqāqa and ‘addada). Their songs are saturated with nostalgic sentiment on various levels—through
the use of particular song melodies, the incorporation of lyrics in colloquial dialects of Iraqi Arabic (which often hold great sentimental value for many Iraqi Jews), and the affective, sonic evocation of embodied memories associated with life in Iraq. Personal memories are given voice through these musical dialogues with the sonic past, ones that incorporate vivid sensorial descriptions of particular neighborhoods in Baghdad and Basra, as well as the aromas and flavors of favored Iraqi foods.

In this case, exiled nostalgia emerges as emotion and embodied remembrance expressed through sound, as a strategy for coping with, and making sense of, various levels of rupture, trauma, and loss. Through their ambiguous existence in the foggy realm of memory, these various musical practices of the erased communities of Iraqi Jewry continue to have a life of their own, and, as the basis for song inspiration in form and content, continue to interact within those who remain. In this way, the lives of songs manifest in and outside bodies, dialoguing within the human body and the sensory system in embodied processes of music-making, and manifesting in outward iteration; in turn, they can be internalized, transformed and/or reiterated across individuals of a community and aid in processes of self-reconciliation and self-understanding.

In the case of private Iraqi Jewish songs, expressions of exiled nostalgia often have a uniquely musical quality: it is through the internal collaboration with the very musical forms that have been exiled that nostalgic sentiment finds voice. This point resonates with ethnomusicological scholarship that asserts the important role of sound and melody in remembrance (Buchanan 2009; Diehl 2002; Gill 2011; Sugarman 1997), and, in particular, the centrality of maqām in accessing and articulating simultaneous levels of affective, spatial/geographical, and temporal remembrance among communities
of Arabic-speaking Jews (Kligman 2009; Manasseh 2016; Shelemay 1998, 2009). As Shelemay has demonstrated, the *maqāmāt* of Syrian Jewish liturgical music allow for the maintenance of individual and community memory through remembered musical forms and affect expressed through sound.

Various regional ethnomusicological studies of *maqām*, mood, and emotional expression demonstrate the intricate and fundamental relationship between sound, emotion, healing, spirituality, cosmology, and ecstasy implicated in sound practices across Muslim and Judeo-Arab communities (Crow 1984; Poché 1978; Racy 2003; Shiloah 2001).\(^\text{15}\) Inspired by Martin Stokes, I approach these various influences—including musical and modal forms, as well as their affective potential as interpreted by discourses in Islamic theology, Jewish mysticism, Sufi *dhikr* performances, theoretical texts and the like—as “sensory and kinesic frameworks” in which variable notions of self, community, spirituality, and aesthetics are negotiated (Stokes 2002: 183). With the advent of technological innovation, mass media, and pan-Arabist thought, cross-regional “imagined communities” that implicate such sensory frameworks have developed across wide geographic spaces and various forms of national and cultural affiliation, despite continuing to exhibit great internal cultural and linguistic diversity (Frishkopf 2010). This

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\(^{15}\) In recognizing these large-scale, shared regional ideologies linking sound and emotion, however, we are left with a quandary—one that has long faced scholars of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern music. How do we speak of this region in coherent terms without reducing its great internal variability? The legacy and power of Orientalist discourses that effectively reduce the entire region to a single, homogenous and timeless whole, as well as related notions of Eastern “emotionality” in music, can easily promote a sense of anxiety among contemporary scholars attempting to avoid such pitfalls (Armbrust 2000). Certainly, common tendencies across the region have resulted from the shared history of conquest, different rulers and dynasties, as well as the influence of Islamic discourse vis-à-vis emotion and sound in religious contexts. I find Donna Buchanan’s application of Appadurai’s articulation of “ecumene” especially helpful in this regard, as a “large-scale social formation” in which political, religious, and social forces allowed for a regional cross-traffic of people, ideas, and cross-societal bonds (Buchanan 2007). In this sense, we can speak of sonic tendencies in Muslim and Judeo-Arab communities writ large while still acknowledging internal variability, and recognize commonalities in regional history and approach to the understanding of sound, emotion, and power.
extends to Jews of Arab and Muslim countries, who not only actively participated in public music-making in their countries of origin (and in some cases were integral to its development, as in the case of the al-Kuwaiti brothers in Iraq), but also those who continued to be exposed to pan-Arab musical forms within Israel’s borders.

As A.J. Racy describes in *Making Music in the Arab World*, the ability for *maqām* to induce affective mood and shared emotional states is a phenomenon shared across Arab melodic genres (Racy 2003; Shannon 2006; Shiloah 2001). *Maqām* can refer to musical structures and processes, but also embraces a whole body of theory, or songs, performance practice (particularly as associated with specific lineages), as well as the modal basis for musical compositions, melodies, and improvisations, including sequences, patterns, pathways in melodic development and cadences, the mosaic-like stringing together of melodic elements, modulation, and families of tetrachords (Marcus 1992, 2002, 2007).

*Maqām* practice can exhibit significant regional variation. For example, in Iraq, *maqām* specifically refers to a precomposed vocal repertoire that is guided by a unique set of modal conventions (see Hassan 2002, 2008; Kojaman 2001; Manasseh 1999; Simms 2004; Touma 1996). In the Iraqi case, each *maqām* has particular words and vocables that introduce the mode, and, like the Persian *dastgah* system, is focused on a hierarchical organization of repertoire (Tsuge 1972; Simms 2004). Like Turkish and Mashreqi *maqām* practice, however, Iraqi *maqām* shares many of the same foundational modal families—including ʿajam, rast, ḥijāz, nahāwand, and bayyātī, among others (Kojaman 2001; Racy 2003; Simms 2004; Warkov 1986). This is especially true since the 1932 Cairo Congress, when *maqām* practice became more systematized across the region.
(Racy 1991; Hassan 2002). *Maqâm* is also central to Middle Eastern Jewish liturgy, incorporating many of the same modal and performance conventions as those found in sacred and secular Arab sonic practices across the Levant—and displaying a strong Judeo-Arab musical synthesis (Kligman 2009: 54-55; Manasseh 1999; Seroussi 2013; Shelemay 1998: 229).

Throughout this dissertation, I work towards identifying the varying influences and overlap, regionally and over time, of Arab, Jewish, and Islamic modal practices in private Iraqi Jewish song, all of which share one of the most crucial features of *maqâm*—the connection between modal performance and the evocation of affect and mood. I argue that this characteristic is an essential means through which Iraqi Jews musically dialogue with the sonic forms of their former environments, as well as the modes’ implied affective, embodied memories. In singing their private songs, Iraqi Jews embrace and engage with the deep, emotional resonances of their erased pasts. Through this process, the exiled past is rendered relevant in the present once more, forming a creative, defiant expressive strategy that circumvents its “negation” through contemporary sonic and emotional evocation (Shelemay 1998: 228; for similar creative strategies in the realm of Iraqi Jewish literature, see Alcalay 1993).

Previous musicological studies on Arabic-speaking Jews tend to examine public, religious musical practices. In *Let Jasmine Rain Down*, for example, Shelemay describes how Syrian Jews engage with Arab melodic and modal forms in liturgical music, though they purposefully do *not* sing about the “dislocations, migrations, and violence” that have marked their histories in liturgical music (Shelemay 1998: 228; see also Kligman 2009). This study differs in its examination of a silenced musical practice among a regionally-
and historically-similar group of Arabic-speaking Jews that does address community dislocation and displacement. Nonetheless, I believe similar processes are at play in musical articulations of exiled nostalgia, through the interaction between a singer and the musicality associated with a no-longer-extant Jewish community that continues to thrive in the exiled recesses of memory. In this case, the trauma of internalized self-repression has, over decades, led to a kind of internal exile of cultural affiliation; with that, accompanying feelings of yearning and nostalgia have themselves become exiled as well. Through processes of musical remembering, these alternative forms of belonging are embodied and embraced, thus helping individuals make sense of this internal disruption. According to scholars of trauma, recovery is innately tied to the reintegration of memories and experience into coherent self-perception and life narratives (Herman 1992; Pilzer 2012: 75). In this case, the performance of private songs helps individuals maintain the continued relevance of that which is outwardly denied. In so doing, Iraqi Jewish singers counter the bodily estrangement of their repression, and resist against forgetting as a means of therapeutic emotional processing. Pilzer has argued that the sensory nature of expressive practice is particularly suited to therapeutic recovery, due to its innate relationship with the sensory nature of trauma (Pilzer 2012: 75). This resonates with Gila Flam’s work on song and survival, where domestic singing helped normalize everyday experience, providing solace and comfort for Jews living in the Lodz ghetto during the early years of the Holocaust (Flam 1992).

Songs have the capability to maintain a sense of continuity across temporal, spatial, geographical, cultural, ideological, and generational divides (for important examples of this phenomenon, see Buchanan 2007; Kartomi 2004; Stokes 2010). As
such, they are, in some ways, a particularly apt means for making sense of embodied
disruptive: they are continuous—yet fluid and malleable—capable of articulating
multiple levels of sensorial experience and resonating sentiments of nostalgia and cultural
loss. For Iraqi Jews who emigrated to Israel, most brought no tangible items with them,
save for the clothes on their backs; in some cases, individuals were allowed to bring small
keepsakes of their former lives, such as the key to their old homes. These objects, in their
physicality, are easily broken, stolen, or thrown away. (And indeed, this often happened
among Iraqi Jews negotiating the larger social crisis of cultural upheaval.) The ineffable
and continuous lives of song, however, are not so easily erased. They continue to spin out
in iterations by and through the lives of human beings, and form an important means
through which the sensory world of the past is kept alive.

**Emotion and Music**

The connection between sound practices and emotional experiences has been a
concern in ethnomusicological scholarship since the early years of the discipline (Meyer
1956; Keil 1966). Ethnomusicologists have tackled the topic from a range of thematic
approaches, including emotion and music in nationalist sentiment (Buchanan 2006;
Turino 2000; Stokes 2010), vis-à-vis memory (Shelemay 1998, 2009) and in terms of
neurobiology and cognition (Becker 2004). Emotion and expressive practices have been
usefully analyzed from a discursive perspective (Abu-Lughod 1986), though the
“affective turn” in anthropological scholarship of the 1980s and 1990s introduced a more
fundamental consideration of the body (Cowan 1990; Sugarman 1997). This move
challenged the abstraction of post-structuralism towards a consideration of sensorial
experience and embodiment. Judith Becker’s work builds on the centrality of bodily experience in understanding human emotions. She argues that sound practices hold the capacity to arouse the autonomic nervous system, helping release particular endorphins and create intense emotional states (Becker 2004: 52). Her investigation of the link between performance, heightened emotions, and altered states of consciousness successfully complicates assumed binaries between the body and mind, social and psychological understanding, and anthropological and biological study. Since expressive practices guide the focus and intensity of emotion, they can help determine specific neural pathways and the nature of our emotional experiences. In performance contexts, then, these channeled emotions can lead to altered states of consciousness, allowing for extraordinary emotional expression and embodiment.

Anthony Perman’s approach, situated in his understanding of Peircean semiotics and ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino’s explication of Peirce’s theory, contributes to this perspective by emphasizing the appraisal of emotions—as opposed to simple arousal—demonstrating the fundamental connection between expectation or desire and emotional experience (Perman 2010: 438). He usefully shows how emotions may be considered the body’s response to and appraisal of signs. These are linked in semiotic chains to the realm of feeling, where Perman locates social construction and value. Here the interplay between what is known and what is received is assessed, and made sense of, through both available social understandings as well as what people’s “imaginations are reaching towards” (Perman 2010: 438; Daughtry 2015: 21). Musical performances are semiotically dense, and have the potential to elicit strong emotions among those present, implicating
individuals’ conceptualizations of themselves and their social environments in powerful ways.

This approach resonates with other recent ethnomusicological work that considers emotions from a processual standpoint, one that allows for more nuanced definitions of feeling, sentiment, and affect. In *Melancholic Modalities: Affect, Islam, and Turkish Classical Musicians*, Denise Gill demonstrates how emotions are fundamentally implicated in processes of sociality and healing. Her articulation of “modality” as the “dynamic space” of affect, musical structures, and mode is useful for conceptualizing modal performance as a site of emotional articulation and feeling (Gill 2017: 5). She focuses on how the expression of feeling, and learning how to feel, through affective modalities provides Turkish classical musicians with models of emotional socialization. Drawing from Sara Ahmed’s theories on the “sociality of emotions,” she demonstrates how emotions are crucial to the differentiation of social and individual boundaries (ibid.: 16). Through musicking melancholy, “processes of embodiment meld with processes of making meaning,” allowing individuals to differentiate boundaries between themselves, others, and the objects in their world, and providing them with emergent, felt understandings of “the correct way to inhabit the world” (ibid.: 183).

I am deeply inspired by these aforementioned studies because they demonstrate the intricate processual link between musical practice, emotions, and feelings with larger social understandings. Like Perman, I find it useful to differentiate between emotion and feeling by considering feelings as the site where emotions are evaluated vis-à-vis social constructions and cultural expectations. Similarly, following Gill, I understand “affect” as the large-scale way in which emotions are produced, assessed, and used to generate

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knowledge (ibid.: 17). I thus examine the affective work accomplished by Iraqi Jewish songs, including the emotional stimulation evoked by song performance, its impact and appraisal within individuals’ bodies, and the way these processes implicate systems of value and discourse. Using musical practice as a vantage point, I build on recent advancements in trauma theory that argue for the understanding of traumatic experience in terms of affect, as the central mechanism that enables the “unspeakable” aspect of trauma to be “spectrally evoked” (Atkinson and Richardson 2013: 16; Daughtry 2015: 15). In turn, I examine how different forms of affect, evoked by song recitation, can in and of themselves act as a powerful form of healing—a kind of “reparative position to be endured” (Gill 2017: 182).

In the following chapter, “Samira’s Lullaby: A Case Study in The Lives of Songs,” I trace the history of a specific lullaby song-type (dililöl) and its various articulations by singers across time—starting with its evidence in nineteenth-century manuscripts, and following it across different temporal and social contexts to its iteration in the present day. Through this case study, I examine the affective expression of trauma in recitations of dililöl, as well as its individual, cultural, and trans-generational instances. I interweave a socio-musical history of the Iraqi Jewish community into this discussion. My detailed investigation of dialect, vocal timbre, melody, mode, rhythm, and form demonstrates a remarkable Judeo-Arab musical synthesis across performances of this song-type—one that points to a high level of interaction between Jewish and Muslim female communities over time. Through this investigation, I demonstrate the role of this

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16 Atkinson and Richardson demonstrate how certain qualities of trauma elude depiction or encapsulation in straightforward narrative forms; this is particularly true of traumatic bodily experiences that disrupt worldviews and familiar social understandings. In such cases, traumatic impact can be uniquely evoked and confronted through embodied and experiential processes, including varying forms of creative expression, allowing it to resonate across multiple sensorial dimensions.
intensely private and emotionally charged song-type in the particular instance of one singer’s life (Samira), as well as her role, as a song carrier, in the trans-generational life of dililôl.

In chapter three, “Moments of Song Creation: Crafting the Self through Speech and Song,” I discuss the relationship of trauma to self-narrative, testimony, and song-creation. I provide a detailed examination of a particular oral history I collected, and investigate the impact of violence, upheaval, and imprisonment on ongoing understandings of the self. In particular, I address moments of song creation as they occur during autobiographical storytelling, and explore emotional expression and remembrance in relation to musical and lyrical articulation. I identify specific sonic resources of contemporary song expression, and determine their relationship to both spoken and sung articulations in individuals’ narratives of the self—including their innovative use in evoking sensorial remembrances deeply associated with the lived experiences of exile, grief, discrimination, and war.

In chapter four, I shift my focus towards an examination of personal remembrances specific to women’s spheres, as recounted by elderly Iraqi Jewish women. I discuss emotional and physical violence against women, including forced marriage, domestic violence, and spousal betrayal, as well as the larger social silencing of these issues. I examine how the notion of tsniut, or modesty, among Iraqi Jewish women is key to understanding the underground nature of their private musical practice, as well as the silent power it wields (Shelemay 2009). I examine the ways in which these “silenced” experiences are given voice through song, in ways that escape public denouncement. Through spheres of intimacy relegated to female realms, elderly Iraqi Jewish women
build collective, expressive testimonies that evoke multiple levels of embodied remembrance. By employing highly poetic language that allows for the embrace of multiple narrative perspectives, singers are able to express and yet obscure sentiment in creative ways.

In chapter five, “Songs of Celebration: A Contemporary Layl al-ḥinā’,” I examine songs articulated on joyous occasions, particularly in the context of weddings, births, and circumcisions. In such settings, the sensorial overlap between musical and culinary realms evokes multiple levels of synaesthetic remembrance, creating vivid, affective recreations of Iraq in the present day. I investigate how the convergence of different realms of memory—including embodied sensations associated with the sonic environment of 1940s Iraq, the sights and smells of the streets of Baghdad and Basra, the particular spices and flavors of the food, and experiences swimming in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers—is integral to contemporary, ongoing strategies for processing exile and loss.

In the concluding chapter, “Nostalgia, Renewal, and Nationhood: Searching for Roots,” I address public re-imaginings of Iraqi music and Iraqi Jewish identity in the present day, and the ways in which the public commemoration of Iraqi Jewish heritage has transformed over Israel’s seven-decade existence. As the idea of Zionism itself has undergone considerable changes from the mid-twentieth century to the present, so too have perceptions of the particular relevance and contribution of Iraqi Jewish historiography to larger Zionist aims. I investigate these changes over time, and demonstrate how contemporary, popular re-imaginings of Iraqi music of the past are integrally tied to the ongoing reformulation of Iraqi Jewish heritage in the present.
Anthropological literature has demonstrated the entanglement of memory with contemporary consciousness, where reflections on the past are reproduced, refashioned, and manipulated according to present-day concerns (Buchanan 2009; Diehl 2002). My research builds on this scholarship by examining a community’s “exile from exile,” further complicated by the fact that the remembered homeland no longer exists (Berg 1996). Exiled from their own nostalgia, Iraqi Jews maintain continuity in spite of their internal estrangement, and voice their deep attachments to the community and homeland they lost.
CHAPTER 2

SAMIRA’S LULLABY: A CASE STUDY IN THE LIVES OF SONGS

Throughout this dissertation, I trace the lineage of song-types, practices, musical modes, and idioms that form the backbone of the private expressive practice I encountered among Iraqi Jews. I theorize that their songs draw from a well of musical and literary resources associated with the soundscapes of these individuals’ childhoods in Iraq. Singers often interweave “snippets” of melody, musical form, and idioms that appear in other sources, and use contrafacta in adopting pre-existing, whole-scale melodies as a vehicle for setting original, improvised texts—a musical process that has been previously recognized in religious contexts among Jewish communities of the Levant (Kligman 2009; Manasseh 2016; Shelemay 1998: 28-29; Summit 1993). I consider the varied sources of contemporary song-making among Iraqi Jews, and how the historical context and associated meanings of these expressions—including elements of emotional release and articulations of deep joy, grief, and/or sadness—persist in the present day. In other words, I examine the lives of songs from the perspective of their contemporary relevance, and how individuals articulate transgenerational memories and emotions through processes of musical embodiment and remembering.

Previous ethnographic scholarship details how, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, women of the region now known as Iraq have tended to be particularly active in life-cycle ceremonies and rituals, especially those pertaining to birth and death (Hassan 2010; Khayyat 1978; Manasseh 1999). This association has continued through more recent decades. In ethnographic research conducted in Iraq in the 1970s and
80s, for example, Scheherazade Hassan describes the persistence of a private song practice similar to that which I encountered among elderly Iraqi Jews.\(^1\) Typically performed in the context of life-cycle events, Hassan details how Iraqi women (mostly Muslim, often untrained, non-professional reciters and singers) practice “solo personal song performances … [that] accompany moments of intimacy” (Hassan 2010: 26). These songs include “personal poetic content” and are recited privately, as well as for all-female and inter-gender audiences (ibid.). Similarities between Hassan’s description of women’s songs in Iraq, as compared with the private singing practice of Iraqi Jews, are multifold—in particular, the intimate aspect of song expression, and the incorporation of personally relevant lyrics and melodic gestures into known song forms. Furthermore, their contextualization within important life-cycle events is similar to contexts of private singing among Iraqi Jews, who tend to sing in conjunction with events related to births, weddings, and death—an association that extends back through historical records of women’s songs of this region into the nineteenth century (Avishur 1987a).

Of this domestic song repertoire, women’s lullabies—and in particular, the song-type *dililōl*—have received the most attention among scholars of Iraq and the Middle East (Avishur 1987a; Hassan 2010; Khayyat 1978; Manasseh 1991-92; Manasseh 1999; Shohat 2016). This chapter focuses on this single song-type that has endured among Iraqi Jews as a framework for personal expression—one of the only whole-scale, intact song sources that have been adopted. Subsequent chapters will address the legacy of other historical Iraqi and Arab expressive genres which exert a more fragmented influence over contemporary Iraqi Jewish song-making, including ‘*addada*, *daqqaqāt*, and popular

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\(^1\) Unfortunately, the political climate in Iraq has not allowed for much, if any, ethnographic research in the past two decades (Hassan 2010: 26).
music of the Arab world from the 1940s and on. This chapter examines the unique persistence of dililōl, a lullaby song-type—which has been adapted by contemporary singers in unique and personal ways.

**Dililōl: A Lullaby to Heal Your Wounds**

There have been many unique renditions of “dililōl” (also written as dilliloul, depending on the author).² Thus, there is some confusion in scholarly discussions, where it is variously defined as both a genre of lullabies, as well as variations of the same song itself (Avishur 1987a: 68; Hassan 2010; Manasseh 1991-92). Since each performance relies upon certain “stock” characteristics, I prefer to think of dililōl as a song-type—one that provides a modal and conceptual framework for individual extemporizations. The word dililōl itself is of Turkish origin, similar to the Arabic word hadwa, which means to “calm down”—both in the sense of soothing a child, as well as a singers’ internal emotional tumult (Avishur 1987a: 68; Khayyat 1978: 13). Some scholars argue that the word “dililōl” itself has no specific meaning, but serves as a kind of repeated vocable that incites a hypnotic, lulling sonic atmosphere suitable for rest (Manasseh 1991-92: 8). Interestingly, this song-type is occasionally referred to as both hadwa or dililōl, with some scholars positing that they were originally two separate genres of lullaby that eventually merged over time (Avishur 1987a: 68).

As a template with implied performance strategies, dililōl forms the foundation upon which individuals create their unique versions. In this chapter, I present various lyrical and melodic transcriptions of dililōl over time, across a number of different

² Note that dililōl is used as both a singular and collective (plural) noun.
frameworks and contexts. In the first portion of this chapter, I trace iterations of *dilîlôl* as noted in written records of the nineteenth century. I then move towards an examination of its evidence in ethnographic and professional recordings of the twentieth century, as well as discussions of *dilîlôl* in Hebrew, Arabic, and English-language musicological literature. After a consideration of the historical trajectory and legacy of *dilîlôl* performances, and the varied meanings implied therein, I then turn to a particularly poignant, contemporary rendition I encountered during my fieldwork. In this final example, ethnographic data and analysis—largely unavailable in historical sources—provide an understanding of the relationship between *dilîlôl* performance and the intimate portrayal of life history in the present day.

Throughout this discussion, I interweave aspects of Iraqi social history as demonstrated by, and reflected in, the stylistic features and lyrical content of this song-type’s many iterations. I also examine the historical and socio-cultural relevance of *dilîlôl* as an expressive means through which hidden emotion and taboo sentiment are revealed. Though each performance of *dilîlôl* is unmistakably individual, my findings indicate a striking continuity of lyrical content, phrase, mode, and musical style across centuries. These shared commonalities are essential to understanding the continued relevance of this song-type, as well as its affective meanings. I argue that the deep emotionality associated with recitations of *dilîlôl* is enhanced through the consistency of its iterations, forming a kind of trans-generational, trans-religious expression of pain. It is under the veneer of this anonymously shared emotion that the articulation of deeper, more personal sentiment finds voice. Each contemporary rendition of *dilîlôl* involves the interplay of historical song meanings with present-day contexts, where the expression of pain is
enhanced through accumulated significance, just as—via the same process—the identification of person is obscured.

Throughout this investigation, I have relied heavily on my interlocutors’ knowledge as a point of departure for identifying key themes, melodic and modal signifiers, and lyrical interpretations that are particularly relevant. I have brought a large amount of historical information on this and other song practices—gathered from library collections, archives, and literature in Hebrew and Arabic in both Israel and Iraq—into a dialogue with contemporary singers.\(^3\) Throughout my fieldwork, I continually asked singers to comment on historical records and texts where appropriate. In this way, both aspects of my research—present-day fieldwork and archival investigation—have informed one another.

This investigation differs from previous ones on Iraqi Jewish women’s songs, particularly those focused on lullabies, in that I consider these practices to be part of a still extant musical tradition. Arguments posited in musicological scholarship have tended to see these lullabies as ones that, for the most part, are dwindling in practice or nonexistent (Hassan 2010; Khayyat 1978; Manasseh 1999). For example, Sara Manasseh describes the *dilîlôl* repertoire of Iraqi Jews as one that “no longer exist[s]” in its original capacity, though she posits that some of this material has transferred to the popular realm (ibid.). Similarly, Shimon Khayyat argues that this practice has virtually “disappeared” since the mass emigration of Iraqi Jews to Israel (Khayyat 1978: 13). Hassan, too, notes

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\(^3\) Hebrew literature and sources on Iraqi Jewish song were gathered from the sound archives and collections at the National Library of Israel at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, as well as the archival collection housed at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Or-Yehuda. Arabic literature was gathered from sources at the BJHC, as well as through online connections, personal contacts, and friends living and working in Iraq. In particular, I have gained innumerable insights from personal correspondences with Iraqi scholars, contacts, and friends, including Dr. Scheherazade Hassan, as well as Halim al-Malak, Iraqi filmmaker and graduate of the University of Baghdad, and Iman Al-Abdul Wahid, originally from Basra, who is now Deputy Director of the Fulbright Commission in Amman, Jordan.
that “this old genre” is “probably on its way to disappearing” (Hassan 2010: 29).

However, she does hypothesize that lullaby practices among women in Iraq might have undergone a resurgence in the present day as a means of coping with the difficult life experiences—including war, invasion, and embargo—that they have had to endure (Hassan 2010: 26). I, however, argue that performances of dililōl continue to thrive as an important means of emergent emotional expression among Iraqi Jews—one that, I argue, is vital for understanding their lives and experiences on a multifaceted, “rhizomatic” level (Gill 2017).

**Dililōl in the Historical Record**

*Dililōl* recitation can be found among Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Iraqis; thus, this song-type is part of a shared tradition across religious groups. Aspects of *dililōl* can be traced back to the nineteenth century through records and evidence in historical manuscripts, though many argue that these songs have had an even lengthier historical presence. Hassan, for example, posits that this kind of female-dominated, expressive lullaby practice has been known “since ancient Mesopotamia and through the Islamic age,” and has been practiced among women of this region, of various social classes, religions, and levels of literacy, for centuries (Hassan 2010: 26). Similarly, Shimon Khayyat argues that women’s lullabies, in particular *dililōl*, have at least a 200-year history of recitation, and are transmitted orally between and among women, generation after generation (Khayyat 1978: 13).

Historically, the first written record of this song-type can be found in nineteenth-century documents housed at the Sassoon collection in London. Though anonymously
transcribed, the handwritten manuscripts of this collection—which include various transcriptions of women’s songs—were likely compiled by professional Jewish musicians living in India and Iraq in the 1800s (Avishur 1987a; Manasseh 1991-92: 3). The song texts include various lullabies (Avishur 1987a: x-xi, 68-77). The texts are written in the Baghdadi Judeo-Arabic script known as ṣūqī, in which various dialects of Arabic are recorded through the use of cursive Hebrew characters (a common practice among Babylonian Jews, included in both record-keeping as well as religious manuscripts, such as Passover haggadot). A large portion of this material has, quite thankfully, been thoroughly and painstakingly catalogued and analyzed in Hebrew by the Israeli musicologist Yitzhak Avishur, and is available at the library archives of the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Or-Yehuda, Israel (see Avishur 1987a, 1987b). Though Avishur’s transcriptions do not include melodic descriptions or transcriptions, they do provide useful lyrical information as a point of comparison with contemporary iterations of dililōl.

**Figure 2.1:** Sample of verses from a lullaby recorded in handwritten nineteenth-century manuscripts of the Sassoon collection, London, and transcribed into Hebrew characters by Yitzhak Avishur (Avishur 1987a: 69-70). Lyrics translated and transcribed from Hebrew transliterations of Arabic by Liliana Carrizo.

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Wahdīlkum wa-tntum \text{'}ayūnī} & \quad \text{I sing for you and you are my eyes} \\
\text{Wa-ḥis āqayyituk tahiṭ fādī} & \quad \text{The voice of your calling makes my heart alive} \\
\text{Wa-am al-‘alatkum lā tnādī} & \quad \text{And if I call on you, you do not answer} \\
\text{‘Aṭī al-t‘āinkum bil-lāsh} & \quad \text{The eyes that would look at you with wickedness} \\
\text{T‘amā wa-taq ‘ad bil-farāsh} & \quad \text{Will be blind and will sit in bed} \\
\text{Yamūt al-‘ādū wa-āntum tīmun} & \quad \text{Your enemy will die and you will be kept}
\end{align*}
\]
Perhaps due to the fact that these lullabies were often sung in domestic settings and shared between women of various religious groups, one notices significant commonalities with more contemporary iterations of \textit{dililōl}. For example, across centuries, this song-type typically exhibits a three-to-four line verse structure with no consistent rhyme scheme (though occasionally, singers rhyme certain lines of the three-stanza verse with one another, resulting in forms such as AAA, AAB, or ABB). With the exception of the same two, verbatim rhyming lines that typically open \textit{dililōl}, the majority of performances exhibit a three-line stanza format; however, the song-type occasionally includes four-line stanzas—a verse form known as \textit{rub’yat} (Avishur 1987a: viii). According to Iraqi musicologists, these three- and four-line stanza forms fall under the rubric of \textit{wazn al-na’i}, or “lament poetic metres” (Hassan 2010: 28). This general verse structure is common to Iraqi women’s domestic songs, and demonstrates the close association of these lullabies with feelings of sadness and loneliness, as well as occasions of mourning and lament. As Yitzhak Avishur explains, laments and other “songs of suffering and trial” deeply resemble \textit{dililōl}, due to their similar thematic content, and the contexts in which they are sung (Avishur 1987a: xxii).

Jewish musicologists have noted a further melancholic resemblance of this three-line verse structure to texts of the biblical Book of Lamentations, which depict the mournful occasion of the burning of the Temple and the destruction of Jerusalem (Avishur 1987a: 68; Manasseh 1991-92: 11). However, different performances of \textit{dililōl} can exhibit considerable internal rhythmic variability when compared with one another, as they are highly dependent on the particular lyrical and singing style of the individual singer. The rhythmic variability of \textit{dililōl} verses are said to have a historical basis in the
different rhythms and movements of each individual mother when rocking her child as she sings (Hassan 2010: 27). Additionally, \textit{dililöl} is typically recited in a melismatic, rubato manner—which tends to fluidly stretch and contract the internal pulse of each verse.

**Lyrics and Thematic Material of \textit{Dililöl}**

\textit{Dililöl} are often sung in the context of feelings of grief or despair, where singers combine stock and newly improvised poetic lyrics in a piecemeal fashion. In each performance, different aspects of previous iterations of \textit{dililöl} are combined in unique ways in conjunction with self-created poetry appropriate for the particular setting (Hassan 2010: 28). Across versions, the lyrical content of \textit{dililöl} typically addresses aspects of internal tumult and personal hardship experienced by mothers (Avishur 1987a: xxii). Thus, the articulation of this song-type is deeply associated with expressions of sorrow and grief particular to women, regardless of religious orientation (Khayyat 1978). The repeated use of the word \textit{yuma} is typically incorporated, which literally translates as “mother,” though it is also used to refer to a child, or anyone considered as precious as a mother (Avishur 1987a: 68; Manasseh 1991-92: 21). The first two opening phrases of this song-type almost always incorporate the repeated articulation of the word “\textit{dililöl}” as a lulling vocable that serves to create a hypnotic atmosphere suitable for lulling a child to sleep:

\begin{align*}
\textit{Dililöl, dililöl, yuma al-walid, yābnī, dililöl} & \quad \text{Dililol, dililol, mother, the child, oh my son, dililol} \\
\textit{Yuma, 'adī'ak 'altāl wasākin al-chōl} & \quad \text{My precious one, your enemy is sick and lives in the desert}
\end{align*}
These verbatim opening lyrics are also present in historical recordings of *dililōl* of the 1930s, as well as in 1970s and 80s ethnographic recordings encountered in Iraq across varied geographic regions and religious groups (Hassan 2010: 28). Of note, among *dililōl* of Iraqi Muslim women collected in the 1970s and 1980s, these lyrics can contain a very slight variation: “your enemy is far away and *sleeps* in the desert/ʿadūāk ʿālīl wa-yinām *al-chol*” (Hassan 2010: 28). As noted by these opening lyrics, the overall theme of *dililōl* song texts commonly involve supplications for harm to come towards a child’s perceived enemies, as well as spiritual prayers for the child’s health and well-being (Avishur 1987a; Hassan 2010; Khayyat 1978; Manasseh 1991-92).

*Dililōl* lyrics almost always include depictions of intense pain, often addressed towards the figure of a mother, as in the following trope:

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Yuma, ānā min āgūl “yuma”
yamūṭiy iṭhib galbī
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Mother, when I say “mother” my heart is dying/aching

Historical scholarship details how, in the past, mothers would often incorporate verses detailing aspects of her personal life, the uniqueness of her child, as well as various personal complaints against forced marriage, mistreatment, and personal suffering (Avishur 1987a; Khayyat 1978; Manasseh 1991-92).

**Towards a Relational Consideration of Dialects in Iraqi Arabic**

Without accompanying sound recordings, it is not always possible to ascertain the specific Arabic vernaculars transcribed in the songs of the Sassoon collection (as some of this difference lies in subtle vowel pronunciations that are not captured in *sāqī* or other written forms). Nonetheless, it appears that the manuscripts contain a diverse array of
dialects, including articulations of “classical” Arabic, known as *fushā*, which is also the language of the Qur’an, sacred texts, and literary poetry. They also include extensive transcription of records in Jewish and Muslim colloquial vernaculars of different social classes (Avishur 1987a: vii-viii). Thus, it is clear that the authors of the Sassoon manuscripts possessed expansive linguistic knowledge. They were, like most literate Jews of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, fluent in written literary *fushā*, as well as various regional and religious colloquial dialects (Shohat 2016: 105). This knowledge was common among wealthier, educated Jews of this time period, who tended to be somewhat more fluent across dialects due to their ability to code-switch depending on the setting (ibid.: 107). Though they often spoke in Jewish-inflected vernaculars at home and within their communities, among non-Jews they would typically speak the majority dialect (Levy 2014: 264). Nonetheless, it is important to note that Christian and Muslim Iraqis were also familiar with Judeo-inflected dialects, and those who lived near Jewish neighborhoods often communicated in Jewish dialects with ease (Avishur 1987a: vii; Shohat 2016: 106).

As a point of distinction, linguists traditionally designate the Iraqi Jewish dialect as *qiltu*, as distinct from the mainstream Iraqi Muslim dialect of *gilit*, though each dialect exhibits further various regional influences and differentiations (Abu Haidar 2002: 289; Blanc 1964). The majority of the lullabies found in the Sassoon collection are in the more dominant *gilit* dialect, but also include words and pronunciations associated with Jewish vernaculars, as well as regional dialects of Baghdad, Basra, ‘Ana, and/or northern Iraq, depending on the singer (Avishur 1987a; Manasseh 1991-92: 2). Both the *gilit* and *qiltu* dialects have important pronunciation differences (detailed in the transliteration table of
Several linguists have noted the great similarity between *qiltu* dialects (spoken by Iraqi Jews) with those spoken widely in the north of the country across religious groups. Interestingly, the Iraqi *qiltu* dialect is far more similar in pronunciation to modern standard Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) than Muslim-Baghdadi and southern Iraqi dialects. It intersects and overlaps with a vast number and variety of identified dialects across Iraq, including uniquely Baghdadi and Baghdadi-Jewish idioms, northern Kurdish-influenced intra-religious dialects, Muslim-Christian-Jewish dialects of Mosul (said to be quite similar to one another), the colloquial Arabic of Jews of ‘Ana (said to be indistinguishable from the speech of Muslims and Christians of ‘Ana), as well as Chaldean-Christian dialects of Iraq. It is particularly similar to the Muslawi dialect of Mosul.

As a result, some scholars argue that the *qiltu* dialect does not warrant its own separate, Jewish designation, but is better conceived as a variant of Muslawi (Abu Haidar 2002: 289; Shohat 2016: 106). This is especially the case considering that languages designated under the rubric of “Judeo-Arabic” include spoken dialects from Jews across the Middle East and north Africa—ones that often bear little resemblance to each other. This fact has led some scholars to question the legitimacy of Judeo-Arabic as a separate linguistic category, or dialect, of Arabic at all (Shohat 2016: 102-3). At stake in this designation is a contemporary backdrop (or “minefield,” as it were) of political discourses that posit Jewishness and Arabness as antonyms (ibid.: 94). Ella Shohat argues

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4 The *gilit* and *qiltu* dialects are often distinguished by several markedly different conventions of pronunciation. In fact, the dialects’ names themselves, coined by the linguist Haim Blanc, are based on the different ways of iterating the phrase “I said”—in reference to how the letter *qaf* is pronounced: as “g” in the *gilit* dialect and “q” in *qiltu* (Blanc 1964).
that the largely unquestioned use of “Judeo-Arabic” as an object of scholarly and linguistic inquiry is striking—especially when compared with the deep anxieties provoked by the term “Arab-Jew.” She demonstrates that while the term “Arab-Jew” links Jews to an Arab cultural genealogy, one that is at odds with the historiography posited by Jewish nationalism, the idea of “Judeo-Arabic,” on the other hand, is widely accepted. This is because it is often considered as a separate, uniquely Jewish language—one that is specifically not Arabic, and only spoken by Jews (ibid.: 101). However, her research shows that many of the words and pronunciations associated with qiltu dialects themselves straddle various ethnic, regional, and religious groups, further complicating efforts at delineating clear linguistic divisions based on religious affiliation, or even region.

As a way to move past this complex situation, Shohat argues for the consideration of Judeo-Arabic from a relational perspective, reminiscent of that of historian Zachary Lockman (Lockman 1996) in his consideration of histories of the Middle East—one that promotes an intersectional understanding of vernacular commonalities and differences that transcend religious or nation-state affiliation. Such a consideration of Arabic dialects allows for a deeper understanding of the Sassoon collection song texts, which demonstrate a unique intermingling of Jewish words and themes within the dominant gilit dialect (Avishur 1987a: vii-viii). It speaks to the permeable boundaries between religious and regional communities of the nineteenth century, where Jews were familiar with a variety of forms of spoken Arabic, differentially employed in multiple and overlapping ways, and across various contexts. It also allows for an understanding of the many ways Jews were embedded in the cross-regional social fabric of the Ottoman Empire and what
eventually became Iraq. Though Jews maintained their distinctiveness in religious observances, they also “shared in the traditions, superstitions, and customs of their non-Jewish neighbors” (Berg 1996:15).

Indeed, in the nineteenth century, Jewish participation in mainstream cultural and civic spheres was not peripheral. For example, Jews served in prominent positions in the Ottoman Empire—many were bankers, governors, and imperial advisors. As creative professionals, they contributed to the literary renaissance of the nineteenth century and were integral to the development of the Iraqi maqām (Beinin 1998: xvii; Dardashti 2008b: 312; Shiblak 2005: 46). With increased urbanization, the opening of the Suez Canal (1869), and the expansion of the port of Basra, many Jews moved south from the mountainous regions to urban centers, demonstrating their mobility and the many areas they frequented. Additionally, the secularizing trends and increased westernization of the mid-nineteenth century created even further intra-religious group contact. Prior to the 1850s, Jews tended to observe strict Jewish law and adhered to traditional notions of religious observance. When the Alliance Israélite Universelle schools began opening their doors in 1864, many once conservative members of the Jewish community began integrating with Muslims and Christians on a much larger scale (Bashkin 2012).

The lullabies of the Sassoon collection reflect these larger social trends. It is certainly remarkable that a Jewish collection of handwritten manuscripts portray lullaby songs articulated in what is considered to be the predominantly Muslim dialect of the region (gilit), even when depicting explicitly Jewish themes (Avishur 1987a: vii-viii). The lullaby detailed above in Figure 2.1, for example, sung by a Jewish woman, exhibits an overall use of gilit, indicating the singer’s familiarity with both Muslim and Jewish
vernaculars. As a Jewish woman, she most certainly would have been familiar with *qiltu*, though she was clearly able to create a uniquely poetic song text in *gilit* with ease. The pronunciation of her lyrics (as transliterated in the *sūqī* text of the collection) is characteristically *gilit*. For example, her articulation of “I sing for you” (*wahdīlkum*), would be more common to *gilit*. In another example of the same song, the singer uses the *gilit* word for bed, *farāsh*, as opposed to the *qiltu* pronunciation, *fārsha*. Remarkably, in the same example, the singer utilizes *gilit* as a means for communicating a reference to the Torah. Her use of the word *āqayyituk* (in *gilit*, meaning “your calling”) refers the Jewish tradition of being “called” to the Torah (ibid.: 69). The third line, “and if I call on you, you do not answer,” has a further association with the Torah, as it is commonly said that there is no need to call children to participate in Torah study because they are already present in the room (ibid.). This contextual association is further amplified by a phrase in *gilit*, common among Muslims: “*was-salam ‘alārkum mā yanādī*” [he greeted you, and you do not answer].

Indeed, in women’s performances of *dililōl* across the region, particular religious influence can be noted, though this does not necessarily correlate with the dialect being used. The most conspicuous examples of this fall within lyrics addressing sacred themes—in particular, when depicting spiritual prayers for protection of the child (Manasseh 1999: 165). For example, Jewish women tend to reference biblical themes in their iterations, including the personae of Jacob and Rachel (Khayyat 1978: 16). They also include references to the twelve lost tribes of Israel, as well as similar themes from the Torah (Avishur 1987a: 68). Shi’a Muslims often incorporate the verse “you sleep in peace and Allah will preserve you, and the twelve Imams will protect you” (ibid.: 71).
Though women tend to evoke the spiritual powers associated with their particular religion, Avishur argues that the use of particular Judeo- or Muslim-associated words or themes within historical song texts does not necessarily mean that a singer was (or is) necessarily Jewish or Muslim. The overlap of different religious groups’ dialects across the region attests to this fact. For example, Jews, Christians, and Muslim Iraqis all colloquially refer to G-d as Allah, a word evoked in almost every rendition of *dililōl*.

It is notable that female Jewish singers of the nineteenth century would avoid utilizing the more personal dialect of home and community in their songs, especially when discussing topics of great intimacy. The historical record does not give us clear reasons for this choice. When I asked Iraqi Jews this question, several interlocutors theorized that the use of the *gilit* dialect formed a means through which Jewish singers could mask their personal identity, especially when reciting these songs within their own, Jewish communities—a practice that continues in the present day. This technique helps to dissociate a singer with the improper lyrical content of her song. It also serves to differentiate this song-type from other male-dominated religious musical practices of Jews (which are largely in Hebrew and Jewish vernaculars).

Another reason for this language choice might be due to the influence of larger trends of secular expressive practices of the time: for example, Muslim vocalists were by and large the dominant vocal performers of popular music, oral poetry, cabaret performances, *zaffa* wedding processions, and *maqām* (Hassan 2002; Zubaida 2002). For the most part, they sang in *gilit*, as well as in literary Arabic and *fushā* depending on the context and genre (Hassan 2002, 2008). Though Jewish musicians comprised an overwhelming majority of professional instrumentalists in pre-1950s Iraq (in part due to
association of instrumental performance with lower social classes), the more highly regarded, professional vocal performers of these genres were typically Muslim (Warkov 1987). In performances of *maqām*, for example, famous religious *muʾadhdhin* often held the most renown. They were considered to have the highest quality Arabic pronunciation, having been trained in Qur’anic recitation (Simms 2004; Warkov 1986; Zubaida 2002). Thus, in general, the *gilit* dialect tended to have greater influence and presence in sung genres.

*Dililōl* in *Ethnographic and Historical Recordings of the Twentieth Century*

The early twentieth century saw the rise of a burgeoning Iraqi nationalism that was, at the time, largely inclusive of religious minorities. By the 1920s, most Jews identified with an emerging sense of Iraqi Arab nationalism influenced by colonial discourse (Bashkin 2012; Shiblak 2005: 56). With the establishment of the Hashemite monarchy, prominent Jewish families actively attended court gatherings and socialized with royalty (Haim 1976: 191). This resulted in a further increase in contact between religious groups and communities across Iraq, particularly in the realm of language.

During the formative years of the Iraqi state, fluent affiliation with mainstream Arabic dialects and culture—as it was being formed and conceived—was a form of political capital (Bashkin 2008). Similarly, the flourishing Iraqi literary scene of the early twentieth century was deeply influenced by both Jewish and Muslim writers, most of whom wrote in the mainstream, modern Iraqi dialect of Arabic (Beinin 1998: xv; Berg 1996: 29; Shohat 2016: 108). Though Iraqi Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women were not always literate, most were affected by the mobility of this socio-historical period, and
were increasingly exposed to these expansive and integrative linguistic trends (Bashkin 2012: 84).

It is in this context that we find one of the first sound recordings of *dililōl*: a 1935 recording by an Iraqi singer named Ashwāq. Transcribed and translated by Sara Manasseh, this recording does not specify Ashwāq’s religious identity, though her name indicates she was likely Muslim. In this case, like the lullabies transcribed in the 1800s, her song is in the *gilit* dialect for the most part, though certain Jewish words and phrases make an appearance. For example, according to Manasseh’s transcription and translation, Ashwāq uses the word ‘*ʿaṭnak* to refer to “your eyes” (plural), which would tend to be in the Jewish-inflected vernacular (see Figure 2.2, below).

As mentioned above, the first two phrases of Ashwāq’s song are shared across performances of *dililōl*, and are sung by women of various religious groups. The same phrase is also present in a second transcription provided by Manasseh, hailing from a 1990 recording of the famous Iraqi Jewish singer, Iman. Like Ashwāq, Iman also uses these lyrics to indicate the intense feelings of protection of a mother towards her child, to the point of wishing harm upon the child’s potential enemies. These thematic references, including an overarching emphasis on mothers, children, isolation/separation, longing, and emotional distress, are found across performances of *dililōl*, including those transcribed in nineteenth-century manuscripts (Avishur 1987a: 68).

That a (likely Muslim) singer’s recording of *dililōl*, in 1935, shares dialect and thematic content with a 1990 fieldwork recording of an Iraqi Jew, and includes shared verbatim lyrics with Iraqi Muslim versions of the song collected in the 1970s and 80s,

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5 Unfortunately, the contextual details of this recording, including the circumstances of its publication as well as details of the singer’s biography and other pertinent details, remain unknown.
attests to the remarkable continuity and consistency in the life of this song-type. However, each rendition is also unmistakably unique, and contains distinct melodic contours and personal lyrics. Often the product of impromptu, in-the-moment inspiration, the lyrical and melodic content of each performance is thus specific to both the singer and the context in which it arises, even when expounding on similar thematic material (see Figures 2.2 and 2.3 below). For example, Ashwāq communicates her longing for her mother through a metaphoric description: “the mountain has come between me and you … your eyes will not see my eyes” (Figure 2.2). Iman, however, expresses a similar sentiment by calling for her mother to care for her headache (Figure 2.3). Additionally, both women incorporate the theme of “strangers,” and having been forced to live among them, into their songs. These lyrics are common across renditions of dililōl, and are typically understood as a criticism of arranged marriage, where women were forced to leave their homes of origin upon marriage to join the households of their in-laws (Manasseh 1991-92).

**Figure 2.2:** Sample lyrics of a 1935 recording of “Dililōl” (Ashwāq) as transcribed by Sara Manasseh (Manasseh 1991-92: 9-10, 21-23):

\[
\begin{align*}
Dililōl, & \quad yuma \text{ al-walid, } yā \text{ ībnī,} \\
\text{dililōl} & \\
Yuma, & \quad ‘ādūak ‘altī wasākin al-chōl
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Dililol, & \quad dililol, \text{ mother, oh child, my son, } dililol \\
& \\
\text{My precious one, your enemy is sick} & \text{and lives in the desert}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Yuma, & \quad yuma, \text{ ōf, ōf, ōf, yuma} \\
Yuma, & \quad šar \text{ al-jībal bāynī } u\text{-baynak,} \\
& \quad yā \text{ yuma}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Mother, mother, of, of, of, mother} & \\
\text{Mother, the mountain has come} & \text{between me and you, oh mother}
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
Tara \text{ ma’ad } ‘ā’inī tshuf ‘ā’inak
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{It seems your eyes will not see my eyes}
\end{align*}
\]

67
These inspired improvisations in the gilit dialect (with occasional qiltu words and phrases) demonstrates the high level of social interaction and intra-community linguistic knowledge possessed by these women (Hassan 2010; Manasseh 1999; Shiblak 2005: 35). Indeed, by the 1930s, Iraqi women began to form their own clubs and reading societies, which included women of different faiths (Bashkin 2012: 84-85). Their shared events included gender-segregated celebrations, domestic parties, circumcisions, and wedding parties such as layl al-ḥinā’, the all-female henna celebration that traditionally occurred the night before a wedding (Zubaida 2002). At such festivities, professional Jewish female musicians, including daqqāqa singers, were often employed to provide musical accompaniment, and Jewish and Muslim attendees and friends were also present. In these contexts, women shared various genres of song, expressive practice, and oral poetry with one another—including performances of dililōl (Hassan 2010; Manasseh 1999: 171). This kind of intra-religious musical sharing among Muslim and Jewish women has been noted in other regional contexts—notably, secular ones—such as in the performance of...

The Sound of Dililōl

Since no musical records or transcriptions exist prior to the 1930s and 40s, we cannot know for certain what performances of dililōl in the nineteenth century sounded like. Sara Manasseh provides some of the first musical transcriptions of dililōl, of the aforementioned 1935 and 1990 recordings. Spanning more than sixty years, Manasseh’s transcriptions exhibit a similar modal quality. Furthermore, Manasseh indicates that both renditions are delivered in a soft, melodious tone of voice, one that incorporates a significant number of melismas into an underlying, fluid rubato phrasing, without any specific pulse. Their melodies are in maqām hijāz, with its characteristic minor second and augmented second interval in the lower tetrachord, a quality shared across Mashreqi and Iraqi maqām traditions. Both performances also possess similar descending contours (Manasseh 1991-92: 9-10). Within each song, the melodic lines display a formulaic, heterophonic relationship from one line to the next. These stylistic features are common across iterations (including professional recordings of the song-type in the 1940s, see Figure 2.4, below), raising the distinct possibility that, at least for most of the twentieth century, performances of dililōl have shared many traits.

Similarities notwithstanding, it is important to note that each rendition of dililōl exhibits many unique characteristics. Melodically, singers typically vary their articulation of the opening phrase. Some, such as Ashwāq, open their song on the fourth scale degree and exhibit little melismatic contour (Manasseh 1991-92: 9-10). Others, such as Iman,
begin on the fifth scale degree and extend the articulation of this opening phrase using far more melisma (ibid.: 10). Typically, singers perform the second phrase of the opening lyrics, “your enemy is sick and lives in the desert” (‘adūak ‘alīl wasākin al-chōl), with a long, melismatic vocal passage on the word “sick” (‘alīl), thereby highlighting this word. In almost all of the performances I encountered (both in the scholarly record, published recordings, as well as during in-person ethnographic study), this song-type’s melody is contained within a five-pitch range based on the lower pitches of maqām ḥiṭāz. Only occasionally will a singer reach the sixth scale degree. Additionally, the song’s descending contour sometimes resolves to the tonic, but can also end on the second scale degree, resulting in a sonic manifestation of internal agitation and unresolved emotional discomfort, according to my interlocutors (for examples of this, see the phrase endings in Figure 2.5 below, lines 1 and 2; see also Manasseh 1999: 164).6 This phrase ending is also associated with the Iraqi mode of madmī, a modal variant of hiṭāz built on the second scale degree. The performance of madmī is associated with the Babylonian Jewish style of synagogue recitation known as minhag babli, and is the melodic mode utilized during liturgical performance of the tragic story of Hannah as recited on the Jewish holy day of tish’a b’ab, which depicts the murder of her seven sons (Manasseh 1999: 153). Manasseh hypothesizes that the mournful association of madmī present in dililol melodies adds an additional, sorrowful level of meaning, particularly for Jewish reciters and listeners. Of note, however, these same Jewish melodic influences are present in dililol versions by Muslim singers as well (for example, see Ashwāq’s melodic phrase ending as depicted in Manasseh 1991-92: 9-10).

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6 My interlocutors described this melodic gesture as evoking unresolved, unsettled feelings. A similar sentiment was echoed by Iraqi Jews interviewed by Sara Manasseh in the 1990s (Manasseh 1999: 164).
The incorporation of specific vocables—in particular, the vocable “ōf”—into 

dililōl texts is also shared. This vocable is also common to the genre ‘ataba, and has 
associations with deep emotion and distress in vocal genres of the Arab world. Originally 
associated with Bedouin poet-singers, ‘ataba has become significantly widespread throughout the Levant. It is also associated with Palestinian weddings, and is widely performed by popular Arab musicians. ‘Ataba songs are often sung in the context of 
lyrics depicting unrequited love and intense internal torment. As in dililōl, the 
incorporation of the vocable “ōf” often serves as a melodic focal point, where it is 
articulated and held for a significant amount of time, and elaborated with an embellished, melismatic, descending contour. Like dililōl, ‘ataba is known for its articulation of 
vulnerable, personal emotion, and includes the abstracted, clever use of language to 
convey individual sentiment (Racy 1996: 411-412). Though its formal structure and rhyme scheme differ from that of dililōl, the particular melodic and vocable associations, as signifiers of deep pain, are shared across these genres. Notably, ‘ataba is also 
performed in Lebanon by professional lamenters and bereaved women as part of a lament genre known as frāqiyyāt (ibid.: 414-15). Like dililōl, these songs incorporate unique context-sensitive song texts. They are known for inducing catharsis on a group level, and are valued as a form of emotional release. Their descending melodic contours incorporate vocal sighs and sobs, thereby embedding the sound of grief within their melodies and creating a “powerful sense of pathos” for those present (ibid.: 416).

7 In popular renditions, performances of ‘ataba are typically juxtaposed with a pre-composed refrain widely known as mijana, usually set in maqām bayyāt, and can include drone, instrumental accompaniment, and chorus.
Dililōl in the Professional Realm

Around the 1920s, urban women gradually began to appear in cabarets, clubs, on the radio, and in national symphony orchestras and dance troupes (Hassan 2010; Zubaida 2002). Before then, performances of dililōl were typically reserved for domestic music making, either privately or in the company of close relations, especially children and other women (Hassan 2010: 25). Previously, the only women who performed publicly were those who worked as professional lamenters and celebration singers (including ʿaddada and daggāqa singers). Even in these cases, these practices were often met with disapproval, and were relegated to specific contexts and audiences.

By the 1930s, however, female singers began to perform dililōl in professional contexts, and, with the advent of recording technology, commercial recordings of the song-type began to appear. This includes performances by the famed Iraqi singers Wahida Khalil and Badriya Anwar. The first published version of a professional performance of dililōl, complete with a musical and lyrical transcription and attributed to Badriya Anwar, can be found in *Inghām min al-Turāth ʿIrāqī* [Songs of Iraqi Heritage], transcribed by Abdel Fattah Hilmi and published by the Iraqi Ministry of Culture in 1984. This version of dililōl, with the same lyrical content, was sung by Wahida Khalil (originally known as Maryam Abdallah Jamah), and likely originates from a 1944 recording of her songs published by Jaqmāqī Company.8 Khalil’s career and fame were

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8 I originally encountered this recording on youtube ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWT49PRoHj8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWT49PRoHj8)), and was amazed to hear Wahida Khalil singing dililōl in a manner almost identical to Fattah Hilmi’s transcription of Badriya Anwar. The details of Khalil’s recording, and its publication, were shared with me by informants still living in Iraq. Though most agree on the record information, other informants have told me that Khalil’s version was originally recorded by the Columbia Graphophone Co. Ltd. (year unknown, but possibly 1945). Since much of the archival evidence of these early sound recordings has been destroyed or lost, they are virtually inaccessible to ethnographers. Thus, I have relied heavily on information provided by local Iraqi interlocutors in order to determine the source of various sound recordings and manuscripts. This has proven to be an exceedingly complicated process due to the ongoing, tragic circumstances that
gaining momentum in the 1940s, around the same time that \textit{dililöl} itself moved into the popular realm, with various performances recorded by professional female singers of the time. Thus, it is not surprising that Khalil and Badriya Anwar would likely have heard each other’s versions, and sung them at different points throughout their careers.

An analysis of these recordings and transcripts (both Fattah Hilmi’s written transcription, as well as Khalil’s sound recording), provides useful stylistic information of \textit{dililöl} from one of its earliest appearances in a professional context. Certain musical features mark Khalil’s recording of \textit{dililöl} as originating from the 1940s, including the sound quality of the phonograph and her declamatory singing style. Notably, her vocal style gradually became more subdued and nuanced over the course of her career, which had only just begun in the 1940s, but extended until her death in the late twentieth century (Al-Adhami 2005). Additionally, the instrumentation present on the recording—in particular, the clear use of the Iraqi \textit{jöza}, similar to the \textit{rebäb}—as an instrumental response to the voice between verses (a stylistic feature known as \textit{lāzima}), dates this recording to the same time period. Though still in use in the 1940s, the \textit{jöza} was beginning to be replaced by the Western violin in urban musical settings in Iraq, as well as in many professional recordings, a process that was almost fully complete by the mid twentieth century (Racy 2003: 46; Manasseh 1999: 134; Warkov 1986: 12). Notably,
Khalil was almost undoubtedly accompanied by Jewish instrumentalists on this recording, who held a dominant position among professional instrumentalists during this time (Warkov 1986).

**Figure 2.4:** “Dililol.” Sample of lyrics transcribed by Abdel Fattah Hilmi in 1984 and attributed to Badriya Anwar. Translated from Arabic by Liliana Carrizo. Musical transcription by Liliana Carrizo from the 1944 Jaqmāqī recording of Waḥida Khalil.

*Dililol, dililol, yāl-walid, yā tbnī, dililol*  
*Dililol, dililol, oh child, my son, dililol*

*Yuma, ‘adūak ‘alīl wasākīn al-chōl*  
*My precious one, your enemy is sick and lives in the desert*

*[Jōza interlude]*

*Yuma, ānā min āgūl “yuma” yamāt galbi wa-Allah yuma*  
*Mother, when I say “mother” my heart is dying, by Allah, mother*

*[Jōza interlude]*

*Yuma, hab al-hawā, hab al-hawā wa-āndakt al-bāb*  
*Mother, the wind moved quickly, the wind moved quickly and shook the door*

*Tara, ḥisbālī, yā yuma, khashit āḥbāb*  
*And so, I thought, oh mother, that friends entered*

*Yuma, athārī al-hawā al-bāb kāṯāb*  
*Mother, in the end, the wind and the door are liars*

*[Jōza interlude]*

*Yuma, āthbāt al-ṭarīf lāṯlahum*  
*Mother, I am a witness to the people and others like them*

*Tara, jayt tsāl ghrāb al-bayit ‘anhum*  
*And so, I came to ask the strangers in the house about them*

*Yuma, ahlana ḥamula āshghara minhum*  
*Mother, we are part of the tribe and I am becoming sick from them*

*[Jōza interlude]*

*Yuma, galbī, āy wa-Allah, yuma galbī*  
*Mother, my heart, oh by Allah, mother, my heart*
Figure 2.4 (cont.)

*Tara, maṭrur ṭar al-waḥ galbī*  And so, my heart was filled will moaning

The use of the *jōza* in this version, combined with Khalil’s sophisticated vocal ability, stylistically marks this as a professional recording. Nonetheless, various aspects of her rendition are consistent with *dililōl*: notably, the melody’s descending contour centered on the lower tetrachord of *maqām ḥijāz*. Lyrically, the overarching themes of motherhood, grief, overwhelming suffering, and prayerful calls for protection against enemies and strangers are also shared. Khalil’s vocal talent is particularly audible in her extensive use of melismas and sophisticated modal command. In the articulation of her second phrase, “*yuma, ‘adāak ‘alīl wasākin al-chōl*,” she artfully narrows the intervallic modal content of the augmented second in a way reminiscent of *sīkāh*, corresponding to a cadential moment (*qāfla*) within the song. This particular modal coloring, when approached from *ḥijāz*, is associated with “an overwhelming sense of *saṭanah*”—a creative ecstatic state linked to modal performance (Racy 2003: 111, 228).
Musicality, *Maqām*, and Affect in *Dililōl*

As Racy describes in his landmark study of *ṭarab*, *sama’* and listening are intrinsically related to emotional state. In this case, the apprehension of musical sound can be considered a truly holistic experience that resonates with spiritual “ways of hearing” implied in *dhikr* ceremonies and Qur’anic recitation (Racy 2003). Many of these principles are shared across secular, spiritual, and religious soundscapes throughout the Arab world (Marcus 2007; Shannon 2006), including Jewish communities of the region (see Feldman 1990; Shiloah 1992, 1995). Indeed, Muslim and Jewish mystics influenced one another over centuries, historically and musically (Seroussi 2001; Sezgin 1994; Shiloah 2001), and openly visited one another’s services to gain religious insight and melodic inspiration (Seroussi 1989: 34, 2013; Shiloah 1983: 82-83). They share a belief that spiritual transcendence may be achieved through sound and modal performance (Shiloah 1983: 137).

I argue that *dililōl* lullabies draw on similar, shared ideological associations of sound and emotion, where part of their expressive power lies in their ability to manifest affective states among listeners and performers (Racy 2003; Tsuge 1972). These lullabies have been noted for their ability to induce *ṭarab* (ecstatic influence and musico-emotional transformation) on the part of performers and listeners alike. They are also capable of producing intense emotions and altered states among those present, and have been likened to “taking hashish” (Manasseh 1999: 164; Racy 2003). In these cases, listening occurs with the heart, soul, and spirit, and is inextricable from a listener’s emotional and physiological state (During 1997). This way of listening is tied to the “spheres of intimacy” I have described, where a listener’s emotional receptiveness and quiet
understanding, established in shared spaces of vulnerability, forms a key component in
the manifestation of song. Through the interaction of performative expression and
intensive listening, songs dialogue within the human body, effecting unique sensorial
experiences.

In this case, the specific affective mood evoked by dililōl is inextricable from the
particular modal and melodic characteristics of the song’s maqām (Racy 2003: 100).
Maqām hijāz, as the melodic mode of dililōl, is uniquely associated with feelings of
sadness, longing, and nostalgia across religious, regional, and secular genres (Kojaman
2001; Racy 2003: 99, 203). Noted for its ability to induce emotional engagement and
eccstasy, it is the mode of choice utilized by Middle Eastern Jews for the melodic
expression of biblical events depicting death and tragedy (Kligman 2009: 170; Shelemay
1998: 124-125). As far back as the late sixteenth century, the rabbi Israel ben Moses
Najara began incorporating maqāmāt into religious Jewish ceremonies, and embarked
upon a large-scale arrangement of religious texts according to the specific affective
potential of individual modes. Notably, he declared maqām hijāz to be “mournful … for
use in funerals and songs mentioning death”—an association shared across iterations of
ḥijāz in both Mashreqi and Iraqi maqām traditions, as well as in secular and sacred
contexts (Shaw 1991: 105).

The melodic development of dililōl songs displays characteristics unique to
maqām hijāz, as well as influences from other closely related modes. Particularly adept
vocalists utilize these to accentuate important lyrical moments of the song. This
 technique involves the incorporation of key musical gestures—including allusions to
other modes, elaborate melismatic passages, and note elongation—at important lyrical
moments as a means of heightening the emotional message of the text (Danielson 1997: 140). For example, in the majority of versions, the opening word “dililōl” tends to linger on the fourth pitch of the maqām, thereby highlighting this scale degree. This melodic focus is common to articulations of hijāz in the Iraqi maqām tradition (Simms 2004: 104). Similarly, when articulating the vocable “ōf,” most singers highlight the third scale degree, reminiscent of the stkāh-gharīb mode (see, for example, line 2 of Samira’s dililōl in Figure 2.5, below). Considering the historical weight of this vocable, the emotional meanings conveyed by the song are further heightened in these moments. Feelings of intense emotionality are also enhanced by the rhythmic play of the singer, where the shrinking and elongating of time acts as an extremely powerful trigger for musical ecstasy (Danielson 1997; Racy 2003).

The multiple levels of historical, affective meanings inherent to this song-type—including similar musical modes, gestures, and lyrical tropes spanning large temporal and geographic divides—infuse present-day dililōl songs, thereby compounding the feelings of sorrow evoked by their exquisitely painful song texts. I argue that these compound stylistic and melodic properties, as well as their ideological and affective associations, form a particularly impactful means through which shared emotional states of sadness and despondency are induced. They work in combination with one another to enhance a singer’s articulation of his or her particular sorrows, in a way that incites group catharsis among those present (Hassan 2010: 28; Manasseh 1999: 165). Like Racy’s depiction of frāqiyyāt, they incorporate sonic markers of grief, including sobs and mournful cries, which help to instigate communal feelings of pain. Indeed, descriptions of individual and

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9 This technique is associated with talented vocal artists, in particular Arab superstars such as Umm Kulthum (Danielson 1997). It also associated with Qur’anic recitation, particularly the elaborate mujawwad style (Nelson 2001).
A Case Study in the Present Day: Samira’s *Dililol*

Samira sits on a balcony in Pardes Katz, an impoverished suburb of Tel Aviv. She has lived here for almost sixty years. She tells me that she likes sitting on her balcony, because it reminds her of the terrace of her old home in Baghdad. It was on that same terrace, she says, that she spent some of the last moments with her little sister, Chahla. Although that day occurred almost seventy years ago, she remembers it clearly. It was a beautiful spring morning—so beautiful, in fact, that Samira and Chahla had spent the previous night sleeping on the roof outside, in the cool air. Their home was located near the waterfront, and the light breeze that blew from the Tigris river often graced the balcony of their home. On that particular morning, Chahla was studying as Samira carefully mixed raw henna powder with ground ginger and lemon juice. She consented to dye Chahla’s hair if her sister agreed to study for a few hours. Chahla was a fast thinker, and Samira laughed at the way she could convince her to do anything. She always bribed Samira in such ways—dying her hair today, preparing her favorite meal tomorrow. But the truth was, Samira was happy to oblige. Besides, it was still late morning, and the evening meal preparation could be accomplished in the afternoon hours.
Chahla was excelling in her studies; although she was only twelve years old, she had already skipped several grades. Samira beamed with pride when she considered that, although she herself might always remain illiterate, this sister of hers—whom she had raised single-handedly—might end up with a great professional career someday. To Samira, Chahla was more like a daughter than a sister. Samira was older by eight years. Their beloved mother had passed away at an early age and as a result, Samira took over all domestic household duties from the time she was a young girl. She had raised Chahla as if the girl were her own. She longed for Chahla to escape the fate that had befallen her; indeed, just a few years previous, at the age of thirteen, Samira had been married to a man ten years her senior. She remembers playing, jumping rope in the playground, when her father tapped her on the shoulder to tell her that she was to be married the following week. And just like that, her life changed. Both families had agreed to the marriage on the condition that Samira’s motherless younger siblings could continue to live with Samira and her new husband until grown, so that Samira could raise them.

That morning, Samira prepared the henna by massaging it through her finger tips, staining them a deep red color, until it formed a thick paste. She called for Chahla, and the two sat together as Samira caked copious amounts of wet clay onto her sister’s thick, black locks. The smell of ginger caused Chahla to sneeze, and they laughed. Samira admitted she had added extra ginger to the mix in order to make Chahla’s hair smell sweet. As Samira combed the clay mixture through Chahla’s hair, the two joked about a mischievous boy in Chahla’s class. He had tried to steal a chicken from his neighbor, but when the neighbor saw him, he began to chase him across rooftops in a fit of rage, threatening to beat him. Luckily, the boy was fast and he got away, as he always seemed
to do. But the image of the angry neighbor chasing clumsily after him in vain was one that always brought the sisters laughter.

When Samira remembers this moment with her sister, she gets an anguished look on her face. It is difficult to explain, she says. She did not know that these were the last moments she would ever spend with Chahla. How could she have known? She tells me that there are times when she wishes she could return to that morning.

Samira stares into the distance as silence surrounds us. I can hear the distant noise of the street a few stories below the balcony: some people are yelling, and a car horn honks. There is a faraway look in Samira’s eyes. I lean forward and hear a soft murmuring emanating from her cracked lips. A low melody begins to emerge from deep within her. She closes her eyes and begins to rock back and forth, her voice rising in soft, melismatic tones.

Samira’s lullaby falls from her lips, punctuated by a soft sobbing quality as she cries while she sings. She addresses the song to her mother (yuma), now passed, as if to tell her of the heartbreak that befell the family after she died. Embedded in her lyrics are the pain she associates with her mother’s early passing: “when I say ‘mother’ my heart is aching … beloved, oh mother, you brought me to suffering.” Through poetic metaphor, Samira speaks of her sister’s kidnapping and subsequent conversion to Islam, a topic considered so shameful that it can only be addressed through song. Samira’s haunting melody evokes sonic remembrances of Iraq, while her lyrics portray the heartbreak she feels for the sister she left behind. When she is done with her song, her cheeks remain streaked by the tracks of her tears. Completely engrossed in her song, I have also not

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10 It was only many months later that I found out from Samira’s son Yusuf that Chahla had become a Muslim, and that he believed his mother’s lyrics, “she lives with strangers/sākina ma’al-ghrūb” to obliquely refer to this conversion.
realized, until that moment, that tears have been falling from my eyes as well. Samira’s son Yusuf is standing at the opening to the balcony. Now an old man, he remembers seeing Chahla from a distance in their youth, long after she had been kidnapped and forced into a life she did not choose. I do not know how long Yusuf has been standing there. He too wipes tears from his eyes. The three of us sit in silence for a time afterwards, the emotional reverberations of Samira’s song hanging in air.

After a time, Samira begins to speak again. She tells me how she never got to wash the henna out of Chahla’s hair. After she had finished combing it through her locks, she covered it with a cloth, hoping to wash it out after a few hours’ time. They both went downstairs and Chahla went back to her studies. Suddenly, Chahla remembered that she had forgotten one of her textbooks at school, and told Samira that she needed it back. She went outside, her hair wet with clay and henna, promising to return shortly. Samira thought she heard a sharp cry from outdoors just a few moments later, but when she looked outside, the street was empty. She went back into the house and started preparing dinner. It was only when a few hours had passed without Chahla’s return that a deep worry took hold of Samira’s heart.

Chahla never returned home. After that day, Samira spent weeks searching for her, wandering the streets, and asking anyone she could for information of her sister. Finally, one day, a local merchant walked a few steps in front of her and whispered, just loud enough for her to hear, that her sister had been kidnapped by a wealthy, powerful neighborhood family. He had seen the kidnapping with his own eyes, but did not interfere for fear of retribution. Before she could ask him anything further, he told her to never speak with him about the matter again, and walked quickly away. After a few weeks,
another neighbor informed Samira that her sister had been taken to a small town in northern Iraq. Over time they found a way to contact Chahla, but it was too late. She had already been married to the teenage son of a local sheikh. The teenager had professed his desperate love for Chahla. Though he had never spoken to her, he had seen her walking through the neighborhood and was struck by her beauty. He had threatened to commit suicide if his family did not allow him to marry her. As a result, they arranged for her to be kidnapped. Chahla remained his spouse for the rest of her life, and Samira never spoke with her again.

Years later, in 1951, Samira and her family fled Iraq as part of the waves of mass Jewish immigration to Israel. Chahla, whose name had been changed to Wafiya, had managed to speak with a distant aunt one last time before her entire family left Iraq. She had told the aunt to send a message to her Jewish family, with one request, that she not be forgotten.

Samira lifts her heavy eyes towards me. She tells me how she used to sing to Chahla when she was young and rock her cradle. Sometimes she still sings her song. She tells me it is the best way she has of remembering her.

**Figure 2.5:** “_Dililöl: Samira’s lullaby._” Recorded August 2015, Pardes Katz, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo. Lyrical and melodic transcription and translation by Liliana Carrizo.
Yuma, yā yuma, yuma yā yā yuma
Of, ōf, ōf, yuma, yā yuma
Dililōl, dililōl, yuma, al-walīd ibnī, dililōl
‘Adūk ‘alīl wasākin al-chōl
Mother, precious one, oh, oh mother
Of, of, of, mother, oh mother
Dililol, dililol, mother, the child my son, dililol
Your enemy is sick and lives in the desert

Yuma, ānā min āgūl “yuma” yīthīb galbī, yā wa-Allāh, yuma
Mother, when I say “mother,” my heart is aching, oh Allah, mother

Sākna, sākna, yā, ma‘ al-ghrūb, yuma, wa-Allāh, sākna
She lives, oh, with the strangers, mother, oh Allah, she lives
It is with an understanding of the multilayered historical, cross-regional, musical, and affective meanings inherent to dililōl that we turn to an analysis of Samira’s lullaby in the present day. In Samira’s dililōl, we see evidence of older iterations of dililōl, where common melodic characteristics, phrases, metaphors, and images are employed, allowing for a nuanced portrayal of her particular pain. Through an analysis of her oral history, as recounted in tandem with her recitation, we gain a unique perspective on the particular, individual resonances hidden within the larger layers of meaning evoked by her song.

Like dililōl versions of the past, Samira’s rendition is largely in the dominant, gilit dialect, as evidenced by her use of specific words and phrases. For example, when Samira says “mush zay,” to mean “not the same,” she is using a phrase common to the gilit dialect. In qiltu, this phrase would be “mā mithil.” In addition, she says “wa-gat al-‘asha” to mean “she comes for dinner.” Were she to use qiltu here, she would say “jit” instead of “gat.” Nonetheless, there are also several song moments where Samira exhibits a distinct Jewish accent. For example, she pronounces the word “head” as “ghāsi,” whereas the dominant gilit pronunciation would be “rāsi.” As previously mentioned,
some Iraqi Jews theorize that the use of this dialect serves to mask personal identifiers, especially when recited in the company of other Jews.

Samira’s melody is, of course, in *maqām hijāz*, with characteristic emphasis on the fourth scale degree in her opening execution of the word “*dilīlōl*,” as well as on the third scale degree when articulating the vocable “*ōf*,” conveying the aforementioned musico-affective sentiment associated with these modes. Within her song, each melodic line displays a heterophonic relationship from one line to the next. Her emotion-laden, melismatic vocal delivery evokes the *dilīlōl* genre, and she extends these techniques when emphasizing particularly important words. This includes “*yuma*” and “*ōf*,” as well as when she says “*ārdā ‘aynā*” (I want her to be with us), articulating her hope for her sister’s return (Figure 2.5, line 7).

Samira’s use of stock idiomatic lyrical tropes include aspects of those depicted in Manasseh’s transcriptions of 1935 and 1990 recordings, as well as Wahida Khalil’s professional recording. These include the repetitive use of the words *dilīlōl* and *yuma*, as well as the following phrase:

\[
\text{Yuma, ānā min āgāl “*yuma*” y’iṭhib galbī}
\]

\[
\text{Mother, when I say “mother” my heart is aching}
\]

Through her articulation of common metaphors and imagery, Samira manages to anonymously communicate the pain specific to her life situation. For example, she describes her agonizing call for her mother, one that causes her heart to die. Just before reciting her song, Samira described her beloved mother’s untimely death, and the impact this event had on her life. Her lyrics take on additional, personal meaning when understood in this context. Notably, her spoken account does not elaborate on the
emotional difficulty of this loss. However, her song evokes an intense yearning for her mother, one that is portrayed through a more obscure, poetic lens. Samira does not reference her mother or herself by name; nor does she incorporate a literal description of her mother’s death within her song. Rather, it is through her description of her headache that she obliquely portrays the absence of her mother and her healing touch:

\[
\begin{align*}
Yuma & \quad ghäṣī \; biyuj\; anī \\
Shadat & \quad al-ghrub \; mush \; zay \\
& \quad shadat \; al-ūm \\
\end{align*}
\]

Mother, my head hurts
The tying of the head by a stranger is not the same as the tying by one’s mother

Through this articulation, Samira draws on similar descriptive tropes shared by \textit{dililöl} versions, as evidenced by Manasseh’s transcription of Iman’s 1990 recording (see Figure 2.3):

\[
\begin{align*}
Äf, \; ëf, \; yuma, \; ghäṣī \; yaj\; anī, \; yuma \\
Ghäsī \; wujānī \; jumī \; shidī \\
Wa \; biydk \; yā \; yuma \; ḥal \; ḍibī \\
\; ëf, \; ëf, \; yuma, \; shad \; al-gharīṭb \; mā \; nifānī \\
\end{align*}
\]

Of, of, mother, my head is hurting, mother
My head is hurting, get up and tie it up
And with your hands, oh mother, tie it tight
Of, of, of, mother, the tying by the stranger did not help me

In another version of \textit{dililöl}, sung by Saleh al-Kuwaiti in 1979, we find an articulation of the same general theme (Avishur 1987a: 75):

\[
\begin{align*}
Yuma, \; ghasī \; yaj\; anī \; gumī \; shidī \\
Wa \; biydk \; yā \; yuma \; ḥabal \; ḍubī \\
\; Gharīṭbāt \; mā \; ḥanān \; 'alayi \\
\end{align*}
\]

My head hurts, come and put a bandaid on it
And your hand, mother, tie the rope
The strangers did not have pity on me
Inherent in these lyrics is a description of the interplay between the familiar and the foreign, where the singer articulates a longing for love and closeness (often tied to the persona of a mother) but is instead surrounded by the cruelty of isolation (as exemplified by strangers). For example, in Khalil’s recording, she sings of the fickleness of those she thought were her friends, as well as the strangers who sicken her (see Figure 2.4):

\[
\begin{align*}
Yuma, \text{āthbāt al-} & \text{tarif lāthlahum} & \text{Mother, I am a witness to the people and others like them} \\
Tara, \text{jayt ṭsāl ghrāb al-} & \text{bayit ‘anhum} & \text{And so, I came to ask the strangers in the house about them} \\
Yuma, \text{ahlana ḥamula āshghara} & \text{minhum} & \text{Mother, we are part of the tribe and I am becoming sick from them}
\end{align*}
\]

In the above case, the singer’s description of the “tribe” is likely a reference to her in-laws—the same “strangers” who make her “sick.” This sentiment finds voice in Samira’s dilitōl as well; she also focuses her lyrics on the idea of strangers. Samira, however, switches from the first person to the third when discussing the issue, a subtle indication that she is no longer talking about herself in this verse. She describes how “she” lives among strangers, thus giving us subtle cues about the circumstances of Chahla’s kidnapping. According to Samira’s son, Yusuf, her lyrics obliquely refer to this event, as well as Chahla’s forced conversion to Islam:

\[
\begin{align*}
Sākna, \text{sākna, yā, ma’ al-} & \text{ghrūb,} \\
& \text{yuma, wa-Allah, sākna} & \text{Mother, she lives, oh, with the strangers, mother, oh Allah, she lives}
\end{align*}
\]

Notably, this phrase ends on the second scale degree of ḥijāz, evoking the particular, unresolved pain associated with the despondent mode of madmī common in performances of Iraqi maqām. In this moment, Samira’s expression of pain at Chahla’s
abduction is highlighted through this particularly poignant melodic gesture. Her lyrics and melody combine in a way that resonates with the songs of women past, who lamented similar fates and the lack of control over their lives. Though this allows her to mask aspects of her story, one also notices the emergence of unique details specific to the day Chahla disappeared. According to Samira’s spoken account, that day was marked by her agonizing hope for Chahla’s return in time for the evening meal. Her song lyrics allude to this point:

\[ \text{Wa-gat al-`asha wal-zād manṣūb} \quad \text{Mother, she comes for dinner and food is served} \]

Samira also describes how her wish to see Chahla eventually transforms into an unbearable hope that plagues her, one that continues to return even after it appears to have extinguished itself:

\[ \text{Yā yuma, tha`at al-farūg, wa-ba`ad al-farūg ārīdā ʿaynā} \quad \text{Oh mother, I lost hope, and after the hope I want her to be with us} \]

It is clear that, seventy years later, Samira still feels the excruciating pain of Chahla’s abduction. Her lullaby is saturated with the emotions inherent to her life-long struggle to reconcile the loss of her sister. The song’s emotion is compounded by its connection to Samira and Chahla’s shared life histories—in particular, when Samira used to sing versions of this lullaby to Chahla as an infant. In lieu of the impossibility of being in Chahla’s physical presence, Samira’s song serves as a means of contesting her sister’s absence and defying her loss. In so doing, she honors her sister’s request, made over six decades ago, to keep her memory alive.
Gendered Expressive Practice in the Mediterranean and the Middle East

That *dīlīlōl* inspire communal, affective moods on the part of singers and listeners alike is critical to their therapeutic capability, where the despondency and emotional isolation of the singer is countered through the sharing of deep pain and sentiment. As such, this song-type has been described as capable of “healing wounds,” undertaken with an explicitly therapeutic purpose to promote inner healing through embodied musical experiences of pain (Avishur 1987a; Khayyat 1978; Manasseh 1991-92). The lulling, calming melodies of *dīlīlōl* recitations are associated with a hypnotic, soothing quality that calms both mother and child. This correlates with verbal descriptions I encountered in the field, such as when Samira informed me that not only does she sing to remember Chahla, but to take the pain of her kidnapping “out of my heart” (*āghānt khāṭr āṭāl ‘a min qalbī*).

In this regard, *dīlīlōl* songs share similarities and ideological associations with certain regional women’s expressive practices, including gendered song, oral poetry, and lament in the Balkans, Mediterranean, and Middle East (Abu-Lughod 1998; Caraveli-Chaves 1986; Davis 2009; Doubleday 1999; Dubisch 1986; Hassan 2010; Nieuwkerk 1995; Racy 1996, 2003; Shelemay 2009; Sugarman 1997). For example, Caraveli-Chaves explains how, in lament practices of rural Greece, women perform when “immersed and inspired by pain” (Caraveli-Chaves 1986: 172). Like reciters of *dīlīlōl*, lament practice involves the communal expression of pain and distress (Serematakis 1990: 508). One of the most salient features of lament involves the element of sobbing, a highly emotional, stylistic characteristic shared with both *frāqayyāt* and *dīlīlōl* performances, and indicative of intense physiological engagement and nervous system arousal (Becker 2004: 59;
Serematakiis 1990: 500). In such cases, the participation of other women is extremely important for heightening emotional intensity, where “the ‘help’ of others is an important factor, contributing to a collectively arrived at emotional climax…. Each woman’s recollection of her own grief serves to remind and intensify the grief of others” (Caraveli-Chaves 1986: 173).

I argue that similar processes are at work in performances of dililol, where not only is the emotionality of the song heightened through the shared, induced feelings of grief among those present, but also through its evocation of a kind of historical, trans-generational pain. Contemporary song iterations form a continuous dialogue with iterations of the past—both in lyrical content, mode, melodic gesture, and musical form—thereby embedding and compounding the sentiment historically associated with these songs with that being expressed in the present. This resonates with ethnomusicological theories on the trans-temporality of song performance, where multiple temporal spheres—of the past, present, and even the future—can be evoked within a single performance (Shelemay 1998: 9-10; Buchanan 2006: 387-388). This theory is supported by the lyrics of dililol song texts, which contain indicators of multi-generational iteration and emotion, as noted in the following 1971 ethnographic recording: “I sing to you with everyone who can sing, and with the mother, grandmother who sings, and with the mother who sings for her son” (Avishur 1987a: 70). Through their continued existence, these songs help singers negotiate internal tumult and disruption through cross-temporal continuity, group solidarity, and trans-generational embrace and catharsis.
An important aspect of Samira’s lullaby lies in its particular defiance, and its expressive capability to articulate a profound level of personal discontent and social criticism (Hassan 2010: 28). Her song can be understood as a deeply beleaguered protest against multiple aspects of her fate, including her mother’s untimely death and the bride theft of her sister (an event that was not uncommon for women during her youth). Through both her narrative and her song, Samira protests the particular cruelty of Chahla’s kidnapping in light of her great intelligence and promise, and her hope that Chahla would escape the confines of arranged marriage. Like similar female regional practices (including ghinnawa and lament), Samira’s dililōl serves as a means of critiquing painful situations common to those individuals involved in the performance and reception of these songs (Abu-Lughod 1986; Caraveli-Chaves 1986: 192; Racy 1996). In many cases, these individuals occupy a more liminal social position (Abu-Lughod 1986: 181). Not only do these songs contribute to a feeling of shared solidarity and common, painful experience, they form a means through which the more marginalized members of these communities can openly elaborate on the misfortunes particular to their gender and/or minority status.

As a case study, dililōl adds to scholarship focused on the unique forms of expressive protest that often originate among marginal social groups and individuals in conflict with the dominant social order (McDonald 2009; Seremetakis 1990; Stokes 1994). In the case of contemporary, surviving Iraqi Jews, their liminal social status is especially heightened by what I term their “three-fold marginality”: they were minorities within Iraq, exiled from their country of origin, and marginalized within Israel’s borders. I theorize that their improvisations represent phenomena that Victor Turner would
describe as “liminoid,” where individuals experiment and play with potentially subversive ideas—including ambiguous, marginal, disturbing, and paradoxical notions that hold the potential to confront and challenge prevailing social orders (Turner 1969).

The social criticism depicted in *dililōl* song texts (as illustrated by the transcriptions throughout this chapter) historically centers on particular grievances shared among women—for example, arranged marriages, unsympathetic in-laws, spousal mistreatment, and the painful separation from loved ones. In the present day, these songs have been adopted by women, and sometimes men, to articulate the particular difficulties they face vis-à-vis their personal life histories. They represent a unique musical and poetic medium, utilized by surviving Iraqi Jews for conveying deep, painful emotions that might otherwise not find voice. The persistence of this song-type is tied to the intimate aspect of lullaby singing, a recurrent social context that allows for its continued performance.

Furthermore, each articulation of this song-type manifests multiple layers of meaning over time, forming a kind of trans-generational musical embodiment and embrace of internal pain, one that compounds and resonates across time through each iteration.
CHAPTER 3
MOMENTS OF SONG CREATION:
CRAFTING THE SELF THROUGH SPEECH AND SONG

Nuri’s Testimony

When I first meet Nuri,¹ he begins our conversation by saying: “I have nothing to tell you, Liliana.” We continue to meet over the next several months, and he often articulates a similar sentiment. “You said you are interested in songs, but I don’t know anything like this. My mother never sang. I do not sing. So I really have nothing to tell you.”²

Each time we meet, I reassure Nuri that it is not necessary to discuss songs. “I am interested in hearing about your life experiences,” I tell him. “We can discuss anything that interests you—politics, life in Iraq or Israel, whatever you like.”

Once reassured, I notice that Nuri seems to enjoy our conversations. Over the course of our meetings, he describes many aspects of his life. Sometimes his wife Tikvah, also an Iraqi Jew, is present for our meetings, but my interviews take place predominantly with Nuri.

One Shabbat, on a particularly quiet Saturday afternoon, I walk from my apartment in Jerusalem to visit Nuri and Tikvah at their home. We have prearranged the meeting. There is no public transportation on Shabbat and almost no cars in the streets, so

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¹ This testimony is based almost entirely on an oral history I gathered from a single interviewee in a single setting, though I met with this individual, and his wife, many times over the course of several months.
² Nuri would usually speak with me in a mixture of Hebrew and Arabic, with occasional English words and phrases thrown in. Sometimes his language choice would correlate with others present—for example (at least, in my presence), Nuri almost always spoke with Tikvah in Hebrew. This is an interesting choice, as she is also Iraqi and fluent in Arabic. When Nuri is in the presence of other Israelis, or in the company of his children, he also speaks predominantly in Hebrew. On other occasions, particularly with close Iraqi friends, I hear Nuri conversing mostly in Arabic. When we speak with one another, his language often drifts freely between Hebrew and Arabic, based seemingly on the vagaries of his mood.
I walk the two-mile, hilly path by foot. The cool autumn air feels refreshing on my skin and makes the long walk through the white stone buildings of Jerusalem enjoyable. When I arrive at Nuri and Tikvah’s home, Nuri answers the door. He immediately welcomes me inside. Tikvah comes out of the kitchen a few minutes later, wearing an apron. It is clear that she is in the middle of preparing food. She also greets me warmly before returning to her work.

I notice that a distinct feeling of comfortable silence seems to infuse their apartment on this particularly lovely, cool autumn day. Nuri and I sit down together, and the living room is otherwise quiet. I can hear Tikvah rattle some dishes distantly from the kitchen. A breeze blows from the outdoor terrace, softly rustling the leaves of the tall fern in their living room.

Despite being in his late eighties, Nuri looks healthy. He has bronzed skin, and his thick white hair is brushed back in a distinguished style. His thin-framed glasses sit at the tip of a long, curved nose, and they move ever so slightly as he speaks. Due to our previous meetings, Nuri already knows what I am about to ask. On this occasion, he seems eager to converse, and delves into conversation immediately and without prompting.

“Things were so different in Iraq,” he begins, speaking mainly in Arabic.

There has always been a struggle between older traditions and modern life in Israel, ever since the Iraqis arrived in Israel. It is a struggle between Iraqis and the people who came from Europe. The farhūd led the Iraqi Jews to pull themselves from their roots, roots of many centuries. So, some miss their life in Iraq. The transition from an ancient way of life into a modern one was very difficult. You know, Muslims came to Iraq many centuries after the Jews, but they do not acknowledge that. Sometimes I remember Iraq—the nature, the rivers, the look of Baghdad. I would love to go back there.
He pauses, then says, somewhat more quietly, “But I do not think they would return me alive.”

As he continues to speak, Nuri’s thoughts assume a stream-of-consciousness quality. “Life in Iraq was like that. ‘Yōm ʿasal, yōm baṣal,’” he says, a common Arabic idiom meaning “a day of honey (sweetness), a day of onion (bitterness).”

“I was born in Baghdad, the oldest of 9 children. Did I tell you this?” He has told me this previously, but I encourage him to continue.

My mother had 3 stillborn babies before I was born. She dressed me up as a girl and put earrings on me. She was worried, you know, about jealousy from others. After my first birthday, they removed the dress and the earrings and dressed me like a boy.

I remember being a young child in Baghdad, and seeing a parade with the royal carriage marching through the street. I wanted to touch the carriage so badly, but I was too small! Suddenly, someone lifted me up and I was able to touch it. I followed the parade until it reached the river and then returned home. I remember that my mother was worried about me. She did not know where I had been. I still have the key from my parents’ house in Baghdad. I also have my father’s scissors. He ran a fabric business. It was my mother that brought the key from Iraq. When I was little, I asked her why. She said, “that’s the only memory I could bring with me.”

Nuri pauses again, looks distantly towards the balcony, and then resumes speaking.

There were good relations between Jews and Muslims before the farhūd. That is when everything changed. It was three days of killing. I remember my mother had given birth four days before. My parents blocked the entrance to our house with furniture. I looked out the window and saw Arabs with axes in their hands, marching with Bedouins and yelling, “māl al-yahūd halāl,” which means, “the Jews’ possessions are permitted to be taken by G-d.”

Nuri translates the Arabic expression into Hebrew, before continuing in Arabic once more.
The houses in the neighborhood were big, but the roofs were connected. My mother went to the roof and pleaded with our Arab neighbors to hide my sisters. They were scared that they would be raped. One of my sisters was not yet married and she was 12 years old. A girl who was 12 years old was already considered a young woman at that time.

The neighbor agreed to take all of us. My mother did not know them; she had never spoken with them before. They were good people. My mother went to the roof with us. We jumped from one roof to the other. She had to throw my baby sister from our roof to the neighbors, and they caught her. They kept us in the lower level of their house and asked us to keep quiet.

Then the neighbor came and stood at the entrance of his home. When the mob came and knocked at the door, he shouted for them not to enter the house because it belonged to his family, an Arab family. All of us were in the house. The people in the mob passed by the house and did not enter. They saved our lives. I will never forget that day. I was terrified. We cried and cried and they tried to calm us.

My aunt Tifaha lived across the street. I looked through the window and saw that her home had been looted. She was running across the roofs with her three daughters, escaping with an Arab at her side to protect her. All her belongings were gone. This nightmare continued until the British entered Baghdad and then there was quiet. The king also returned to his palace. After the farhud people tried to pick up what was left and rebuild their lives.

The hostility of the Arabs didn’t change and it became worse for us every day. In 1948, when the United Nations declared statehood for Israel, the anti-Semitism in Iraq increased and even entered the schools, where teachers and students harassed Jewish students and expressed their hatred.

Those who remained in Basra and Baghdad paid a lot of bribes to maintain their existence. Many Jews were hung in public, by people who were once their friends. We learned that Arabs can be so kind and so friendly, but will kill their brother or sister over nothing. I saw once, with my own eyes, a man kill his own brother because he took an apple from him. I saw how they killed one of the Iraqi ministers; he came to a neighbor’s house begging to be saved. Meanwhile an Arab mob was coming to get him. They pulled him out of the house and dragged him, cutting him to tiny little pieces, tiny pieces. Everybody saw it. There was blood everywhere.

It is impossible to live with them. It is the same with the Arabs here. They do not apologize for killings but encourage other Arabs to kill more. And the murderer gets rewarded. Some of the Israeli Arab members of parliament, instead of telling the Arabs not to kill, they go and encourage them to continue and then console them. They are not sorry. We used to go to the old city to buy stuff there, but now there are so many Arabs stabbing Jews. Even the merchants in the old city are losing because there are no people going there to buy things. And there is much less tourism than before.

Tikvah suddenly interrupts us, yelling from the kitchen: “We don’t go there anymore. They just want to kill us!”
“The situation got very bad,” Nuri continues. “Even I was almost killed by Arabs, when I was imprisoned in Iraq. Did I tell you this story?” His manner of speaking has now gained momentum, and before I have a chance to answer, he continues:

After I finished high school I went to help my father in his fabric store. One day a Jewish woman came and bought a lot of fabric. She said that she would pay me later. Some time passed and she did not pay. When I asked her to pay the money, she went to the police and complained that I wanted to fool around with her. To fool around with a woman outside of marriage was unforgivable. So the police came to my house. My family was involved in Jewish organizations and we held a lot of documents in our house. I was afraid that the police would accuse my parents of being Zionists or Communists. We were lucky that they did not search for that, but they took me to prison. At that time it was difficult for the Jews in prison. Many of them were tortured and killed. So they accused me of improper conduct towards a woman. That was never true. But they hated Jews and found any reason to put me in jail. I was judged in a martial court and sentenced to 5 years in prison. One of my uncles had connections with the authorities and was able to reduce my sentence to 22 months. Meanwhile my mother was a very wise woman. She went to the director of the jail and offered food for him and for his entire team every day. That way she knew that I would be taken care of, that I would not be beaten, and that I would be fed. I was not beaten because of that. She did that every day until I was released. But it was torture for my mother when I was in prison. She suffered so much.

Nuri’s emotions overtake him as he says this. His voice cracks, and then he pauses. He then begins to sing. This takes me by surprise, as he has not previously sung in my presence. I sit quietly, afraid to even move for fear of him stopping his song. His voice has a husky quality to it, and I am surprised to hear that he sings quite beautifully. I listen as he recites the following song:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Sintayn ānā bilsīn, min āḥlī ḥarmūnī} & \quad \text{Two years I am in prison, prevented from seeing my family} \\
\text{Tishahid ‘āli l-nijūm bilsamā} & \quad \text{The stars in the sky are my witness} \\
\text{Mā ghamḍat ‘ayūnī} & \quad \text{I could not close my eyes} \\
\text{Sintayn ānā bilsīn, min āḥlī ḥarmūnī} & \quad \text{Two years I am in prison, prevented from seeing my family} \\
\text{ḍalām mā ayindkum rāhim, yālī ḏalāmtūnī} & \quad \text{Cruel, you know no mercy, oh you were cruel to me} \\
\text{Mā ghamḍat ‘ayūnī} & \quad \text{I could not close my eyes}
\end{align*}
\]
As Nuri finishes his song, I notice a pained expression on his face. He pauses for a moment, then continues to speak as he had been previously, almost as if his singing had never occurred.

“But what surprised me was that this Jewish woman accused me,” he says. “It was really unusual since Jews protected Jews. After this incident, our family paid bribes anytime someone was threatened.” He continues,

After I was released from prison my parents immediately contacted a Jewish organization. Now that the authorities were suspicious of me, there was no other choice but for me to leave Iraq. My parents paid a large sum of money in order for me to escape. Within a day, I had to leave my home and family. I was afraid to escape; it was very dangerous.

Nuri’s eyes widen as he recalls the emotions of that day. “I had so many questions,” he tells me: “Will I survive the escape? Will I ever meet my family again?

When I left my mother called out to me—

**Yāl mashiyy biṯṭarīq al-gharūb**

**Yā ḥabīb biṯṭarīq al-gharūb**

**Wayn āṭhwāl al-latīla?**

*bʿāt al-ṭarīq, shū yūṣīlak?*

*bʿāt al-ṭarīq, shū yūṣīlak?*

**Rabbī yasāʿ ad wa-yaḥmik**

**Wayn āṭhwāl al-latīla?**

Oh, one who walks on the strange road

Oh, beloved on the strange road

Where will you stay at night?

The road is far, how will you arrive?

The road is far, how will you arrive?

G-d will help and protect you

Where will you stay the night?

**Yāl mashiyy biṯṭarīq al-gharūb**

**Yā ḥabīb biṯṭarīq al-gharūb**

**Wa hāyā al-masāfa taʾāl**

**Wayn āṭhwāl al-latīla?**

**Rabbī yaḥmik wa-yimishik**

**Khabirīnī ṭbnī min tūṣal**

**Wayn āṭhwāl al-latīla?**

Oh, one who walks on the strange road

Oh, beloved on a strange road

And the distance is so long

Where will you stay at night?

G-d will protect you, and help you to walk

Call me my son when you arrive

Where will you stay the night?
Nuri sings these verses, and I again contain my surprise as I listen intently to his song. He has a faraway look in his eyes as he remembers his mother’s melody. When his song is over, he begins speaking in an emotional manner:

You have to understand, it happened so quickly. It was heartbreaking to separate from my family so suddenly. I was leaving and I did not know what would happen to me. Suddenly I was in a van, being transported with other youths. There were twenty-five other teenagers with me. We were packed like animals. We traveled for three hours, and then they told us about a driver who was assisting Jews escape, but he was caught and killed. All the Jews were imprisoned. Once we heard this, everyone was afraid, and our driver changed his route towards the desert. We hid there for 24 hours, without water or food, and then began to walk for many hours. All of a sudden, we were caught by five soldiers. But the group leader bribed the soldiers. He told all of us to empty our belongings, all the money and gold from our pockets, and we gave it to them. They accepted the bribe and so our chasers became our helpers. They gave us water to drink and guided us to a safe place. The water smelled like gasoline, because it was being held in tanks. But we were so thirsty that we drank it all.

We walked another two hours, and they reached al-Qurnah, where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers meet. From there we were transported by boat to Iran. It was a miracle that the Iraqi patrol didn’t see us.

Once we were in Iran it was easy to get to Israel. In Iran the population was not hostile to Jews, and the authorities had contact with t’nat tziyunit, an organization that assisted Jews who fled Iraq to reach Israel. They were contacted and came and transported us to Tehran, and then we flew to Israel. But the flight was dangerous. Some people were forced to throw the suitcases out through the windows to prevent crashing. Finally we succeeded in landing in Tel Aviv, and we were transported to Sha’ar Ha-aliyah.3 There they sprayed us with DDT. I was so angry. I remember yelling at them: “I didn’t come from the jungle, I came from a civilized community!” At Sha’ar Ha-aliyah they served us salted fish, oranges, and brown bread. Salted fish is unfamiliar to Iraqis, so for days we would eat only oranges and bread. After some time, we were transported to the ma’abara (transit camp) at Talpiot. Eventually the Arabs started bombing synagogues in Baghdad, and so my parents left Iraq with the rest of my siblings. They realized that as much as they loved Iraq, they would never be safe there. We were all reunited in the ma’abara.

At that time the conditions in the ma’abara were very severe. There were neither refrigerators nor stoves. Food was cooked on burning branches. We looked everywhere for food, in many different places. Even if we found dry bread, we would take it home. One day we were searching for food, and we found eight loaves of bread. The bread was dry. We put it in the house knowing that the next morning we would have food to eat. When we woke up, the bread had been stolen, so we had no breakfast. Sometimes, people at the camp were so

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3 Sha’ar Ha-aliyah [Hebrew: The Gate of Immigration] was an immigration camp that opened in 1949 near Haifa. Reminiscent of Ellis Island, it was the location where new immigrants were brought for registration and processing (Hacohen 2003).
angry about what was happening to them, that we had been brought to Israel to live like animals.

When Nuri says the words “angry” and “animals,” he gestures loudly, and his voice takes on an emphatic, frustrated tone. It is clear that he continues to feel anger over the conditions he faced upon arriving in Israel. Suddenly, he begins to sing again:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hāthī al-maṣṭba} & \quad \text{This is the trouble} \\
\text{Naḥna ǧinā} & \quad \text{We came} \\
\text{U ġarena al-kul} & \quad \text{And left everything behind} \\
\text{An-nʿāl al-ṭāʿ yara} & \quad \text{Curse the airplane} \\
\text{Hāthī al-maṣṭba} & \quad \text{This is the trouble} \\
\text{Yaʿriyt mā ǧibitnā} & \quad \text{If only he did not bring us} \\
\text{ḥaṭī la ǧāghkābnā ḥasān} & \quad \text{Better we had ridden a donkey} \\
\text{Mā ǧibitnā} & \quad \text{(He) should not have brought us} \\
\text{Ash sāwiyt Ben-Gurion?} & \quad \text{What have you done, Ben Gurion?} \\
\text{Ḥijajit kul al-qūm} & \quad \text{Put the entire community in chaos} \\
\text{Baṣal ū-ṭamāta} & \quad \text{Onion and tomatoes} \\
\text{Ib-kartis mazon} & \quad \text{With food stamps} \\
\text{Min shārʿaʿaliyyā} & \quad \text{From shaʿar ha-aliya} \\
\text{Ramat al-Shārōn} & \quad \text{Ramat Hasharon} \\
\text{Miyāt wa al-āfāt} & \quad \text{Hundreds and thousands} \\
\text{ʿAliyhum yitqātlūn} & \quad \text{About that they fight} \\
\text{Al-ghaj āl āḥṭāliy} & \quad \text{The men are without jobs} \\
\text{Wal-niswan yishṭaghlūn} & \quad \text{And the women are working} \\
\text{Baṣal ū-ṭamāta} & \quad \text{Onion and tomatoes} \\
\text{Ib-kartis mazon} & \quad \text{With food stamps} \\
\end{align*}
\]

At the last repetition of Nuri’s refrain, I hear Tikvah cough loudly from the kitchen. Nuri shudders quickly, as if to compose himself, and stops his song. I wonder if he would have continued singing, but for that subtle interruption. He pauses for a brief moment before continuing to speak.

The transition from Iraq to Israel was very difficult for me. I had to wait many months until my parents and siblings arrived. I did not know if I would ever see them again. And we had run away from our birthplace, where the Jews had a
history of over thousands of years, because we could not endure the hostility. Meanwhile, they say that some of the Arabs missed us. Some of them were my friends. I miss them. I have a friend, a Jewish man who came to Israel many years after the rest of us. He told me that after all the Jews had left he overheard an Arab woman in the marketplace. She had just been cheated out of some money, and she started complaining loudly about the Arab merchants. She compared them to the Jews who had once been there. “Rāḥū al-āqrāūn ū-thalū al-khayrūn,” she said [the educated have left, and those that remain know only how to defecate].

He laughs slightly as he recalls this saying, then pauses. “But they kicked us out,” he insists. “That is why I do not miss Iraq. I do not want to go back there.” He continues:

It was difficult because in Iraq we were wealthy, we had everything. In Israel the only work I could find was in agriculture, but I had no knowledge and no skills for it. In Iraq, I was a businessman. But in Israel I had no money, I took any job in order to survive. One day I got an interview with a businessman, who asked me if I knew Yiddish. I answered no. I told them about my business achievements in Iraq, but I never heard back from them. After two months, I asked what happened, and they found an excuse not to hire me. After that I worked as a janitor.

I have been listening to Nuri so intently that I do not realize his wife Tikvah has entered the room until she takes a seat on the couch next to him. When she sits he greets her with “ʿAḥlan, Amal!” [Welcome, Amal!] welcoming her warmly in Arabic and calling her by her original Arabic name—“Amal,” meaning hope. She immediately corrects him, and says “Tikvah,” her Hebrew name. Now that she has entered our conversation, the energy in the room has shifted. Tikvah begins to speak, in Hebrew:

I say thank G-d that we are in Israel. We have a good life here. There was so much violence in Iraq. People need to know this story. They need to know why we need to have Israel. Maybe we were poor when we came here, but we always wanted to come to Israel. We never complained about our poverty. We felt ashamed to say that we were poor.
She switches to Arabic: “ṣūt zāngin wa-lā fākir [it is better to voice richness than to advertise poverty],” she says. I see her eye her husband for a brief moment, almost as if in a silent rebuke. Tikvah continues, switching back to Hebrew:

We were raised from childhood as if we were sitting on suitcases, saying “one day, we’re going to Jerusalem, we’re going to see the western wall.” When we finally arrived in Jerusalem there were no buildings—only tents and tin shacks. When I asked where the buildings were, they told me “now, we will construct them.”

There is a strong sense of pride in Tikvah’s voice as she tells me this. She continues:

And thank G-d, that’s what we did. We made it here, we have our children educated, we have doctors, lawyers, and even a judge nominated last week in our family. We succeeded slowly. We did not go to Social Services to ask for help. We came to Israel to help build the country, not to take from the country. That’s why we were not bitter when we had hard times and poverty. Believe me, those difficult days in the ma’abara were the most beautiful time in my life. We had nothing, but we had our freedom.

With that, our interview naturally draws to a close. Nuri goes into the kitchen. Tikvah turns to me and says, quietly, “I hope what Nuri said wasn’t too embarrassing.” She repeats this sentiment a few more times, asking, “Is that really what you wanted to hear?” I assure her that I found his words invaluable.

When Nuri returns to the room, I say goodbye to them both. They are both warm and hospitable, and invite me to return again. And I do return, several more times.

In subsequent interviews, Nuri does not sing.

**Musical Remembrance: Testimony, Affect, and Building Worlds of Meaning**

… [T]he observation of musical performance provides a … unique perspective, one where the ethnomusicologist stands to make a contribution to understanding the moment in which memory is constituted … those social and cultural factors
that shape the psychology of remembering … [T]he study of everyday behavior and oral traditions might even provide a better model than do psychological experiments on memory.

Shelemay 1998: 8, my emphasis

This chapter focuses on spoken and sung testimonies of Iraqi Jews, and the processes of negotiation and meaning construction they implicate. I investigate how remembering can be an uneven and fraught process—often ambiguous and deeply ambivalent—where individuals can differentially straddle diverse historiographies, loyalties, and affections on a temporally shifting basis. Drawing on studies in trauma scholarship, the first part of this chapter focuses on the role of social understanding and Zionist narratives in helping Iraqi Jews process their community upheaval and trauma. I examine anthropological scholarship on exilic communities, and the large-scale discourses and narrative strategies common among individuals who have lived through mass migration and displacement.

Through an examination of the Iraqi Jewish case, I explore how Israeli historiographical understandings of Iraqi Jewry, which came into being during the formative years of the state, continue to be promoted through highly visible public commemorations. I argue that these frameworks of meaning remain a deeply influential means through which Iraqi Jews process and understand their life experiences. I then provide a detailed evaluation of public nationalist discourses in Israel vis-à-vis the way they are contradicted by historical records and individual lived experiences. I argue that Iraqi Jews navigate these fraught discrepancies through complex processes of remembrance and meaning construction, where their traumas are continuously and variously suppressed, acknowledged, and confronted in a variety of ways.
Turning to Nuri’s oral history as an example, the third section of this chapter focuses on how he evokes multiplex forms of belonging through discursive strategy, emotional remembrance, and expressive practice, in ways that both support and contradict public Israeli representations of Iraqi Jewish history. I argue that various musical resources of Nuri’s youth form a fundamental means through which he embraces the traumas of his past while continually constructing new, emergent forms of self. I provide a detailed musical analysis of these resources, focusing on how he variously adapts popular Iraqi melodies for setting original biographical poetry, improvises on known Iraqi Jewish protest songs, and utilizes secular Iraqi musical forms, as well as Jewish melodies and poetic forms of the Babylonian tradition, in crafting his personal songs.

This investigation is fundamentally based on “the bodily and sensory experiences brought about by displacement and trauma” among Iraqi Jews, ones that are re-experienced and channeled into affective belonging through moments of spoken and sung testimony (Wise 2006: 92). It is important to note that the vast majority of Iraqi Jews I encountered either did not sing, or would not in my presence. Nonetheless, my focus is on the somewhat rare oral histories I encountered that did incorporate moments of sung remembrance. Though Nuri’s testimony was recounted in a private interview between him, myself, and his wife Tikvah, throughout my fieldwork I encountered various instances of autobiographical storytelling, much of which occurred outside of “official” interview contexts. Such moments took place almost exclusively within spheres of intimacy—such as during Iraqi Jewish community events, among small groups of women (or even men) in domestic settings that incorporated Iraqi foods and feasts, or simply at
gatherings where Iraqis would meet at one another’s homes. When songs were recited, it was always in the context of highly emotional moments of autobiographical remembrance. Importantly, not all emotional moments of oral history would result in song creation; however, song creation almost always resulted from moments of deep emotionality. More often than not, women were the ones to share songs, though Nuri’s oral history provides an important example of how this practice occurs among both women and men alike. Through his testimony, we see how musical practice forms a key means through which he embraces the unspoken aspects of his personal trauma and pain.

A Closer Consideration of Trauma

The word “trauma” can be employed to describe an enormous range of human experience, involving varying, differentiated levels of individual impact; thus, its implications are entirely dependent upon the individual and the circumstances involved. Nonetheless, certain large-scale commonalities are often noted within and across communities who have experienced exile, displacement, and forced migrations (Wise 2006: 114). Studies of various forms of community trauma vis-à-vis political violence and exile demonstrate the creative strategies survivors employ when rebuilding worlds of meaning from the shattered pieces of their former lives (see, for example, Cole 2004; Daniel 1996; Diehl 2002; Malkki 1995; McDonald 2013; Wise 2006). Traumatic impact can manifest in similar ways among survivors—both in their encounter with the traumatic event, as well as in efforts to process and make sense of it. I draw from these studies in understanding community trauma and its impact on individuals, especially in light of the

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4 Scheherazade Hassan has noted how many private domestic songs historically associated with women in Iraq have also been adopted by men in recent years, in both professional and amateur contexts (see Hassan 2010: 28, for example).
psychological demand placed on survivors for reconstruction of “a world of significance” in the wake of disruption (Neimeyer 1999: 69).

As survivors of community trauma, the Jews of Iraq experienced a series of violent attacks that “pushed” them towards mass emigration during the years of 1948–51. As previously noted, the upheaval associated with these events was rendered further traumatic due to the intense pressure these immigrants faced to relinquish their former identities (Bashkin 2017). In the oral histories I collected, memories of this rupture are expressed through a variety of repetitive narrative tropes. These include the violent events leading up to the Jewish emigration from Iraq, experiences of immigration itself, and the difficulties these individuals faced after arriving in Israel. All of these events bear the hallmark of traumatic impact, exhibiting a kind of “circular temporality” characterized by repeated flashbacks, as well as a continued, intrusive presence in individuals’ self-narratives and understandings of the world (Daughtry 2015: 7).

Following recent work in trauma scholarship (see Atkinson 2017; Atkinson and Richardson 2013; Caruth 2010, 2014; Sutton 2002), I understand “trauma” not as a fixed incident, but rather as a persistent encounter with the “urgency of the event” (Caruth 2014: xiii-xiv). This approach considers the insistent, disrupting nature of traumatic experience vis-à-vis its resistance to integration within human consciousness, where the incomprehensible nature of the situation (or what has been coined in trauma scholarship as “the impossible event”) cannot be explained by the familiar cognitive schema ordinarily afforded to an individual. In this process, the once unquestioned narratives of memory, as well as core structures of individual and community meaning, are often brought into crisis (Wise 2006: 118). Known as the “shattered assumptions theory,” this
theory considers the “shattering” impact of trauma on individuals’ core beliefs. This “shattering” effect often draws survivors into ongoing processes of meaning construction—where they simultaneously seek to suppress the impossible event, just as they are compelled to confront and re-experience it (see Janoff-Bulman 1992; Neimeyer 1999: 67). The ability of trauma to rupture an individual’s conceptions of self and belonging lies in its intensely corrosive potential, where the initial assault can continue to manifest in multiple, overlapping forms long after the event has occurred (Atkinson 2017).

In thinking about trauma as a methodology, the aim is not to uncover some kind of occluded traumatic origin from which to understand individual or community history; rather, it is a recognition of the uncertainty of human narratives. This moves away from a straightforwardly referential consideration of narrative towards one where narratives can simultaneously embrace a multiplicity of coeval historical truths (Atkinson and Richardson 2013: 5; Schreier 2015: 199). Testimony, according to J. Martin Daughtry, is one important means through which such differential articulation occurs (see Daughtry 2015: 14; Neimeyer 1999: 67; Skultans 1998). As a special form of autobiographical narrative set apart from everyday speech, testimony is marked by its seriousness. Often recounted in interview settings (though not necessarily exclusive to these), it forms a means through which survivors can narrate the deeply vulnerable moments of their life experiences. The recounting of testimony involves recognition of traumatic impact, as

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5 Ronnie Janoff-Bulman is the pioneer of the “shattered assumptions” theory (see Janoff-Bulman 1992). Though her model centers on the capacity of trauma to corrode people’s assumption of the overall benevolence of the world, her method is useful for understanding the psychological impact of unpredictable trauma, particularly in cases of social and political violence (Atkinson 2017; Wise 2006).

6 Of note, this move is inherently processual: it counters the previous “constructive solution” approach that considers trauma from the perspective of an “end-goal” of reconciliation and resolution. It also builds on postmodern approaches that highlight the discursive basis of historical “truths” and social narratives.
well as its social validation—both of which are integral components in the re-confrontation of trauma and its therapeutic processing (Atkinson and Richardson 2013: 4; Herman 1992). This is inherently dependent on the presence of a sympathetic listener, or witness(es), who form a key means through which survivors express pain, reconstruct meaning, and counter their social isolation (Daughtry 2105: 14; Slatcher and Pennebaker 2005: 294).

As the social aspect of therapeutic processing relies upon the manifestation of sympathetic states of shared emotionality among testifiers and witnesses alike, I argue that song creation forms one important means through which testimony occurs (Ritter 2014). I build on Daughtry’s consideration of testimony as one that can encompass both autobiographical narrative and expressive practice. In particular, I examine the ways that individuals craft meaning through diverse articulations of belonging in ways that interact, contradict, and build on one another. My approach resonates with recent studies about the sensorial nature of traumatic memory, which is understood as being situated within the body. As “raw emotional nerve endings … vulnerable to ignition in contexts that tap into the extralinguistic realm of sense memory,” traumatic impact is uniquely confronted and recalled through both spoken and sung testimony (Wise 2006: 118).

I bring this approach into dialogue with ethnomusicological scholarship that considers expressive practices in relation to discourse, as nexuses where complex notions of belonging are negotiated (see, for example, Gill 2017, Perman 2010; for earlier pioneers of this approach, see Stokes 1994; Waterman 1991). Jane Sugarman, for example, provides a particularly useful model for musical practices that do not have well-developed discourses surrounding their performances (Sugarman 1997), such as in the
case of Iraqi Jewish private song. Her application of Bourdieu is helpful in attending to non-discursive, experiential realms that allows for a consideration of musical practices beyond simple conceptions—for example, ones that might highlight their reinforcing or reflective potential. On the contrary, she builds towards an understanding of these practices as locations where subjectivity is actively negotiated and embodied. Importantly, both spoken and sung aspects of testimony deeply implicate affective understandings of self and community. The particularly evocative potential of song renders it an important means through which trauma is confronted, remembered, and embraced, forming a key site of remembrance where boundary making and sociality occur (Gill 2017). This understanding resonates with recent literature in music therapy that considers not just how musical practice is used to facilitate healing, but how traumatic occurrences are themselves particularly catalytic for inciting certain kinds of expressivity (Swart 2014).

**Mythico-History and Public Commemoration: Constructing Zionist Meaning**

The early years of the Israeli state were marked by a dramatic influx of Jewish immigrants from all over the world. The difficulty of this transition was compounded by the Israeli economic crisis, as well as the state’s inability to absorb the massive number of Jewish immigrants from the *mashriq* and *maghreb* between 1948 and 1952, which effectively doubled the population with an over 600,000-person increase (Hacohen 2003). Part and parcel of the Israeli nationalization project, then, was to redirect the incoming, hugely diverse population of new immigrants towards a singular teleological narrative—where the purported “decline” of Jewish life pre-Israel (one that reached its nadir with the
horrifying events of the Holocaust) was reversed through a narrative of progress marked by the Zionist return to Israel (Zerubavel 2002: 115). During this time, the “New Hebrew,” epitomized by the figure of the sabra, became—and in many ways continues to be—an ideal type, a kind of “powerful cultural construct” in the image of European pioneers that has historically served as a model for the socialization of new immigrants (ibid.: 117). The new Iraqi immigrants were modeled accordingly, through a process that involved shedding their foreign names, taking on Hebrew names, and adopting a new worldview that positioned their lives outside Israel as galut (exile). This formulation led to an increased focus on the violence experienced by Jews in galut, conceived as an inevitable trauma countered by the strength and safety of Jewish nationhood. This discursive positioning also served to discredit any sense of affection or belonging Jews had for the places they lived prior to emigration.

The Israeli nationalization process thus provided Iraqi Jewish immigrants with an ideological antidote to their exilic experience. Though many aspects of these immigrants’ worldviews had been shattered through the trauma of emigration—a process rendered further impactful by the accelerated nationalization process to which they were subjected—they were simultaneously provided a ready-available narrative through which to understand and process their trauma. Their sudden departure and community erasure were thus seen in light of the “redemptive” act of their repatriation, if also simultaneous indoctrination into the belief systems of the new homeland. Most Iraqi Jews adopted this

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7 Sabra is the Hebrew word for the opuntia cactus, also known as prickly pear. It is a tenacious desert plant, one with a thick, thorny skin that conceals a sweet interior; it is often evoked to metaphorically describe the character of Israeli Jews.

8 This conceptualization is a function of the “neo-lachrymose” understanding of Arab-Jewish history delineated in the introduction, where life in Jewish Iraq is understood according to a universal model of Jewish victimization (Cohen 1994).
kind of meaning reconstruction into their worldviews, thus simultaneously participating in processes of healing and re-traumatization, where their rebirth and new sense of self-coherence were intricately tied to their self-repression and silencing.

This process was reinforced, and worked in tandem with, particular strategies of public commemoration in Israel regarding the Jewish community of Iraq. These have undergone a certain amount of evolution and revision over the course of Israel’s almost seven-decade existence, a topic addressed in detail in Chapter 6. Nonetheless, certain foundational principles hold remarkable staying power, and are repeatedly invoked in the testimonies I encountered among Iraqi Jews. In order to understand this phenomenon, I find James Wertsch’s notion of *schematic narrative templates* particularly useful, where large-scale templates, often nationalist in orientation, help lend individuals a kind of thematic salience to the dominant plot structures of their lives (Wertsch 2002). A related, useful concept can be found in Liisa Malkki’s delineation of *mythico-history* in relation to communities of exile, where the peculiar demands of exilic experience lend themselves to the creation of social meaning through a “subversive recasting and reinterpretation” of the past in “fundamentally moral terms” (Malkki 1995: 55). Mythico-histories, according to Malkki, can be considered fundamental, cosmological conceptualizations of the world that serve to counter the disruption of exile.

The testimonies I gathered are usefully considered in such a light: they tend to depict deeply nationalist sentiments and binary oppositions, many of which bear strong resemblances to oppositional conceptualizations among the Hutu exiles depicted in Malkki’s research. In Nuri’s testimony, for example, he equates the violence of Iraqi Muslims of the past with that of contemporary Palestinians, thus drawing them into a
fundamental, mythico-historical order of self/other and Jew/Arab. “It is impossible to live with them,” he says. “It is the same with the Arabs here. They do not apologize for killings but encourage other Arabs to do more. And the murderer gets rewarded.” His discourse of violence—one he sees as inherent to all Arabs—is atemporal: descriptions of Arab aggression towards Jews in 1940s Iraq flow seamlessly into an explanation of contemporary political strife. The idea of what constitutes an “Arab” in this formulation is also ambiguous: Arabs can be people from Iraq or across the Arab world, but can also variously include those who identify as Christian or Muslim Palestinians, among others. This kind of conceptualization bears the hallmark of “ethnic absolutism”: a “reductive essentialist understanding of ethnic and national difference which operates through an absolute sense of culture so powerful that it is capable of separating people off from each other and diverting them into social and historical locations that are understood to be mutually impermeable and incommensurable” (Gilroy 1990: 115). Furthermore, it draws from discourses of modernity that serve to associate the former lives of Iraqi Jews, in an Arab Iraqi environment, with a kind of “primitivism” countered by the “modernity” offered by Israel.

Mythico-histories, as Malkki defines them, are schematic understandings “relevant and meaningful in confronting both the past … and the pragmatics of everyday life” (Malkki 1995: 55). I argue that public commemorations of trauma, such as at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, are one of the most essential means through which Israeli mythico-histories have become internalized among Iraqi Jews. The BJHC is considered the veritable authority on the historiography of Jewish Iraq, forming one of the main sites for articulating of Iraqi Jewish belonging within the Israeli public sphere.
Importantly, public commemorations at the BJHC regularly enlist “bodily and affective cooptation” through the evocation of trauma in order to intensify communal feelings of national struggle and homeland (Wise 2006: 112). This kind of public commemoration promotes certain kinds of remembrances but it can also serve as “an act of obliteration,” or what Yehuda Shenhav calls “the death of memory,” by virtue of what it obscures (Shenhav 2006: 141).

Consider the following speech by Mordechai Ben-Porat, an Iraqi Jew who was one of the main organizers of Operation Ezra and Nehemiah, given largely to Iraqi Jews who lived through the traumatic emigration from Iraq to Israel. Through his words, Ben-Porat evokes the violent memory of the public hangings of Jews within Iraq, positioning their murder in sacrificial terms as an explanation for the necessity of the Jewish state:

> We are gathered today in the shadow of the souls of those who were hanged and the victims of immigration. Behind us is the memorial to the people who were hanged … We are in the … [transit camp], where … [t]housands of tents and shacks were scattered around this place. The Iraqi Jews were prominent among the sufferers in those days. Those who had known abundance, had a roof over their heads and an education, and had been partners in the government in their country of origin paid a heavy price for their yearning to move to Israel. But you will agree with me that the sacrifice was worthwhile, even if they continued to fight in their own land for their share in the partnership.

> Mordechai Ben-Porat, quoted in Meir-Glitzenstein 2002: 165-166

Ben-Porat’s description evokes violent memories associated with Iraqi Jewish immigration, but repositions these within the frame of a nationalist struggle—where the trauma of violence is countered, and even healed, through the recognition of Iraqi Jewish sacrifice within a Zionist paradigm. Such public commemorations serve to re-inscript traumatic memory into an “affective identification” aligned with the cause of Israeli nationalism (Wise 2006: 112). This kind of public invocation of mythico-history relies on
the assertion of an implicit, timeless Zionist yearning among the Jews of Iraq, portrayed in terms of “an ethos of heroism of individuals vis-à-vis the Arab enemy” (Meir-Glitzenstein 2002: 166). Such narratives are adopted and sustained by individuals, such as when Tikvah says, “There was so much violence in Iraq. People need to know this story. They need to know why we need to have Israel. Maybe we were poor when we came here, but we always wanted to come to Israel…. We were raised from childhood as if we were sitting on suitcases, saying ‘one day, we’re going to Jerusalem.’”

Iraqi strategies for Israeli national inclusion are thus predicated on assertions of pre-immigration Zionist longing, as well as a staunch insistence on an ideological separation between Iraqi Jewry and “anything Arab”—out of fear of being mistaken for the “other-other” (Dardashti 2001: 119). This is particularly evident among my interlocutors in their strongly negative reactions to the term “Arab Jew.” As one interlocutor explained to me, “This term does not fit us in any way. You’re dealing with identity here. The Iraqi Jews never identified themselves as Arabs. They identified as Jews who lived in Arab countries. They distinguished themselves from being Arabs or Muslims as a point of pride.” The accuracy of such portrayals, however, is deeply contradicted by recent historical scholarship that re-evaluates the Jewish participation in Iraqi nationalist movements in the 1920s and beyond.

“Provincializing Zionism”: An Examination of the Historical Record

As part of her project to “provincialize Zionism” (inspired by Chakrabarty’s call to “provincialize Europe,” see Chakrabarty 2000), Orit Bashkin writes of the impressive visible presence of Jews in processes of Arab ethnicization during 1920-50s Iraq, where
Arab identity became a kind of “entry ticket” to the state (Bashkin 2008: 6). At the time, Jewish and Muslim identities in Iraq were actively viewed as complementary. This is evidenced by educational materials and textbooks that stressed “the shared Semitic heritage” of Muslims and Jews (ibid.: 260). Bashkin demonstrates how, far from being peripheral, Iraqi Jews had a significant presence in the construction of Iraqi nationalist discourse. “Nahnu ’arab qabla ’an nahnu yehūdān [Arabic: We are Arabs before we are Jews]” became a common proclamation among prominent Jews, one that they repeatedly published in Iraqi periodicals (Bashkin 2008: 187-88; Berg 1996: 21). Contrary to contemporary Israeli discourse, during this time many Iraqi Jews considered Zionism a threat to their national integration within Iraq. Though many Iraqi Jews took immense pride in their religious history and the ideological importance of Zion, they also made great efforts to counter any conflation of Judaism with Zionism, and regularly contributed to Iraqi war efforts in the British Mandate for Palestine (Bashkin 2008: 258-262; Haim 1976:192; Shiblak 2005:77).

Similar contradictions abound regarding other key aspects of Iraqi Jewish historiography. The farhūd, for example, has become an important Israeli rallying point for understanding Iraqi Jewish victimization, and is often cited as the trigger that eventually led to the mass immigration. When Nuri says, “the farhūd led the Iraqi Jews to pull themselves from their roots, roots of many centuries,” he demonstrates this kind of understanding. However, the “farhudization” of Iraqi Jewish history—or how the farhūd of 1941 is portrayed as a paradigmatic example of the Iraqi Muslim violence towards Jews—has been challenged by recent scholars (see, for example, Bashkin 2012). Often portrayed in light of the Zionist maxim “mi shoah l’tkuma” (literally, “from catastrophe
to revival”), the violence of this event is depicted via a “calculated analogy” to that of the Holocaust (Shenhav 2013: 162). Bashkin, however, has demonstrated that the farhūd was largely an isolated violent event, and one that did not fundamentally alter the mentality of most Iraqi Jews, who continued to believe in a shared Iraqi nationalist project until 1950 (Bashkin 2012: 138-139). Rather than stemming from deep-seated Jewish hatred, this event actually resulted from a combination of foreign invasion, the humiliation suffered by Iraqi troops upon the eve of the Kaylani coup-d’état, suppressed anti-British sentiment, and the influence of recently distributed Nazi propaganda in certain sectors of Iraqi society (Shiblak 2005: 73). Moreover, after the farhūd, Jews continued to participate in Iraqi nationalist activities, particularly in communist parties, which formed a key means through which they could express political critique while still proclaiming their Iraqi patriotism. Interestingly, many Jews were integral to the establishment of the anti-Zionist League (associated with the Iraqi Communist Party) in 1946, where they actively denounced Zionism. In an ironic twist of fate, the league was disbanded by the Iraqi government for being Zionist (demonstrating the “short-sightedness” of the Iraqi government at the time; see Bashkin 2012: 182).

Perhaps due to the disconnect between aspects of Israeli mythico-history vis-a-vis individual lived experiences, many Iraqi Jews are deeply ambiguous in their remembrances of these events. For example, many of my interlocutors invoke contrary depictions of the farhūd within their testimonies, where they simultaneously portray Arab violence and anti-Semitism as innate, while also recounting the goodwill and compassion of specific Muslim friends and neighbors. Nuri, for example, details the way that his Arab neighbors saved his life during the farhūd, just as he understands the same event in
terms of a kind of absolutist, trans-temporal Muslim hatred towards Jews. This kind of contradictory description is common among Iraqi Jews, and has been noted by other scholars of Iraqi Jewry (see, for example, Achcar 2010: 99-100; Bashkin 2008: 188-189, 2012: 126-27; Rejwan 1985: 223-24).

Similar ambivalence can be seen in descriptions of the 1950s Baghdad synagogue bombings. As one of the main factors that helped push Jews towards immigration, this topic is hotly contested. Historical records show how, between April 8, 1950, and June 5, 1951, a series of bombing attacks targeted various venues—a casino frequently visited by Jews, a Baghdadi synagogue, and afterwards, two Jewish law firms. Though several Jews were injured in these incidents, only two people—both Muslims—were killed (Gat 1988: 316; Haim 1976: 199-200). After a government inquiry into the bombings, Iraqi officials concluded that members of the Zionist underground had propagated the attacks with the purpose of terrorizing the Jews and forcing them to emigrate to Israel (Haim 1976: 200). The authorities reportedly discovered a large number of explosives in various Jewish homes and synagogues. A group of Jews were arrested under the charges, and fifteen of these men were convicted. Two of the Jews found responsible for the bombings were hanged (ibid.). Some argued that because the bombings occurred in places where Jews typically congregated, but caused little substantial harm or loss of life, they could only have been planted by members of the Zionist underground (ibid.). Subsequent to the bombings, the majority of Iraqi Jews, most of whom were initially hesitant to leave, rushed to sign up for emigration (Shiblak 2005: 162-63).

The controversy surrounding the bombings in Baghdad has received a significant amount of public attention, arguing both for and against the supposed Zionist
involvement. Since the bombings were instrumental in instigating the mass exodus of the entire Iraqi Jewish community, many people have a profound ideological stake in determining the parties responsible. Scholar Abbas Shiblak argues that Shlomo Hillel and other Mossad agents, working covertly in the Zionist underground in Iraq, were directly responsible (Shiblak 2005:150-161). Mordechai Ben-Porat, the same individual quoted above at the opening of the BJHC, has expressed outrage in response to such accusations, stating that they are akin to “blood libel” (Ben-Porat 1998: 176). Arguments purporting Zionist involvement is based on the Iraqi government’s accusations and findings, the intense Zionist activities and dissemination of propaganda in Iraq leading up to the bombings, and Ben-Gurion’s communications, which detail his desire to import Iraqi Jews en masse (Shenhav 2002; Shiblak 2005). Arguments against Zionist involvement point to Israel’s lack of capacity to absorb the new immigrants, official papers documenting a preference that Iraqi Jews delay their exodus, and reports that the accused Jewish conspirators were tortured, resulting in their forced confessions (Ben-Porat 1998; Berg 1996; Gat 1988). Many scholars of Iraqi Jewry, including Nancy Berg, Sylvia Haim, Elie Kedourie, Esther Meir-Glitzenstein, and Nissim Rejwan, do not take a definitive stance either way. It appears that—at this point in time—no clear answer to the question can be found.

What is interesting for the purposes of this investigation is the fact that this topic is so heated at all. That it inspires such intense emotion among staunch Iraqi Jewish Zionists demonstrates just how much their worldviews rely on a particular historical understanding. Were Zionists to be found responsible for these bombings, it would undermine the creative historiography involved in public Israeli imaginings of Iraqi
Jewish history, which understands the trauma of their immigration from a teleological perspective asserting an inevitable return of Jews to the land of Israel. It would bring into question the myth of inherent Arab violence towards Jews, as well as whether mass immigration was even necessary. Thus, it makes sense that most of the Iraqi Jews I interviewed proclaim, in no uncertain terms, that Muslim Iraqis were responsible for the bombings. This belief is supported by the actual violence many Iraqi Jews experienced at the hands of Muslim Iraqis, which undoubtedly increased during the late 1940s, especially after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and the declaration of martial law in 1949. One need only look to Nuri’s harrowing eyewitness account of bloodshed to understand this fact, as well as his personal experiences of narrowly escaping death. The mass imprisonment of Jews during this time, which Nuri himself experienced, was extremely influential in compelling Jews to emigrate. Yet despite increasing state surveillance, active persecution by the government, and increased violence, many Jews continued to pronounce Iraqi nationalist sentiments until 1950.9

**Individual Testimony and Lived Experience: The Interplay of Narrative and Song in Processes of Self-Making**

Though aspects of Zionist discourse have proven invaluable in helping Iraqi Jews construct new meanings of self and community in the wake of disruption, it has also required commitment to a single perspective that does not always correlate with the realities of their lived experiences. Building on Joel Beinin’s hypothesis that “ethnonational identities are historically and socially constructed,” I theorize that neither

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9 In fact, Jews and Muslims marched together in the 1948 *wathba* protests, which eventually turned violent when protestors (originally clamoring against police brutality) started proclaiming communist slogans. About 400 people were killed, and Jews and Muslims attended each other’s memorial services (Bashkin 2017).
contemporary articulations of Arab nationalism nor Zionism adequately accommodate the experiences of Iraqi Jews (Beinin 1998: 7). These narratives, however, can somewhat paradoxically act as both therapeutic strategies while also participating in processes of re-traumatization, where “the way in which trauma becomes publicly present” can itself contribute to individuals’ distress, as they find themselves thusly portrayed (O’Loughlin 2013: 194). Nuri’s testimony demonstrates how individuals act as “inveterate meaning makers,” drawing from frameworks of meaning in articulating his own “specific negotiations with intimate others and general systems of cultural discourse” (Neimeyer 1999: 67). Rife with contradiction, his testimony displays various conflicting loyalties, ideologies, and historiographical interpretations vis-à-vis the emotions and embodied sensations of his lived memories.

For example, Nuri misses Iraq and fondly remembers aspects of his former life, including the Arab friends and neighbors who saved him. He argues that the Iraqi Jewish community has very strong roots in Iraq, ones that predate a Muslim presence. On the other hand, he fears his life would be endangered were he ever to return to Iraq, and he expresses a strong sense of betrayal towards the birthplace that expelled him. Within the same interview, he says both that he “would love to go back” to Iraq, as well as “I do not miss Iraq. I would not go back there.” Other tensions abound. On the one hand, Nuri speaks and sings of the cruelty of the Iraqi Muslims who persecuted him and his family. On the other hand, he also speaks and sings of the cruelty he faced within Israel. He is glad that he emigrated; he is a proud Israeli, and feels protective of the Jewish nation in the face of what he sees as continued Arab aggression. On the other hand, he describes how aspects of the Israeli nationalization process deeply injured his pride: for example,
when he was sprayed with DDT upon his arrival. Furthermore, he speaks wistfully of the wealth and success he achieved in Iraq, whose loss was further accentuated by the poverty-ridden, discriminatory conditions he faced in Israel.

Tikvah, for her part, also individually navigates these tensions in her account. In a slight (though not opposing) contrast to Nuri, she expresses a much stronger assertion of Hebrew-Israeli identity. She appears to interrupt Nuri’s song, “Ash Süwiyt Ben Gurion”—a song that fundamentally questions the tenets of Israeli mythico-history by criticizing both the motives of Ben Gurion, as well as the necessity of Operation Ezra and Nehemiah. Tikvah silently reproaches Nuri for his descriptions of the poverty and discrimination he faced in Israel, though she employs an Arabic saying in artfully communicating her rebuke. She counters Nuri’s descriptions through a nationalist understanding of these difficult experiences in light of the freedom that Israel offered. Lastly, she feels a sense of embarrassment over Nuri’s ambivalence, and openly questions the relevance of his entire testimony. Such differential positions, as illustrated by Tikvah and Nuri, are articulated and expressed in various forms and manifestations across this community in fraught and unresolved ways.

This is particularly the case when it comes to sung testimony. Nuri’s musical expressions—whose existence he outwardly denies—form an important component of the way in which he understands his life. Through song performance, he embraces the sensorial aspect of his traumatic past, allowing what “remains unknowable and outside language” to be spectrally evoked (Atkinson and Richardson 2013: 16). Through “the production of affect—[…] the realm of visceral, bodily intensity and excitation,” Nuri innovates culturally available systems of belief by constructing shifting provisional and
permeable meanings (Cole 2004: 89; Neimeyer 1999). This “harnessing” of bodily affect thus forms an integral component in the ongoing process of his self-production (Cole 2004: 89). Nonetheless, these moments of meaning as crafted through song are themselves temporarily achieved—constantly in flux and differentially positioned in relation to moments of spoken testimony (ibid.).

Nuri’s songs evoke sentiments in relation to his remembrance of particularly impactful events, forming a key means through which he accentuates the emotions of his spoken testimony. Through each of his songs, one sees how his expressivity both supports and defies certain tenets of Zionist historiography. For example, his expressive portrayal of his imprisonment emphasizes the cruelty of his Iraqi captors, a sentiment that serves to support his belief in the inherent violence of Arabs. On the other hand, contrary to the common mythico-historical depiction of an implicit yearning among Iraqi Jews to emigrate to Israel, his performance of “Ash Süwiyt Ben Gurion” illustrates his deep ambivalence over his emigration.

In order to understand these moments of song creation in more detail, let us return to that particularly lovely autumn afternoon in 2015, when Nuri shared his songs with me. Of the three songs Nuri sang, one is an example of contrafacta, where original text is set to the melody of a popular 1950s Iraqi tune, one is the recitation (with very slight variation) of a known song, and one is possibly an original composition that draws on both secular Iraqi musical modes and forms, as well as sacred Jewish musical practices associated with the Babylonian tradition. These three different processes serve to highlight the many ways in which Iraqi Jews draw on musical resources in their emotional remembrances.
Walking home from my interview with Tikvah and Nuri that October afternoon, I am deep in thought. I am surprised by Nuri’s songs. I am struck by the fact that, once again among my interlocutors, I have glimpsed a song practice that clearly exists, and yet speaking of its existence seems to be taboo. Most of my interlocutors are willing for me to write about their testimonies and included songs, but often in particular ways that protect their anonymity and conceal their identity and voices. This involves obscuring their names and certain identifying details within my ethnography. Almost universally, my interlocutors ask me not to share the recordings I have made of their testimonies, and ask that I keep my descriptions relegated to written realm. It is clear that most of my interlocutors feel the sound and timbre of their individual voices to be unquestionably identifying characteristics. Interestingly, these discussions regarding confidentiality are often completed in artful ways: where both myself and my interlocutors implicitly acknowledge the existence of their songs while taking care not to use terms that would describe them outright.

From previous interviews I have learned that these issues of confidentiality render my investigation of these songs’ original source material exceedingly difficult. I consider the songs Nuri shared with me. How am I to know what musical and lyrical resources these draw from if I am precluded from sharing these recordings with others? Over time, my strategy thus becomes a multi-pronged effort: as most of my interlocutors permit me to share musical and lyrical transcriptions of their songs (provided that I do not share actual recordings), I am able to show aspects of these to Iraqi Jewish friends, family, and
interlocutors in order to garner their input. My other tactics include memorizing and singing melodies for other Iraqi Jews, to see if they spark any sense of recognition or familiarity among others of the community. I also perform exhaustive digital and paper archival searches, most frequently at the archives at the National Library of Israel and the BJHC, where I utilize transcribed song lyrics as a starting point for finding similar source material. These often include searches of both secular and sacred Jewish music sources, including those housed in digital archives on religious music and Jewish *piyyutim* (such as at the Piyut collections at piyutnorthamerica.org and piyut.org.il, as well as the Milken Archive of Jewish Music; see milkenarchive.org). Another tactic I employ, which at times proved surprisingly fruitful, is to input transcribed Arabic lyrics into a Google search engine, to see if any popular Arab songs, music, or poetry matches emerge.

On the day of my interview with Nuri and Tikvah, I return home and almost immediately transcribe the lyrics to all three of Nuri’s songs. I start with the song he remembers from his mother, which incorporates the repeated phrase “yāl mashiyy.” When I type these Arabic words into my internet search engine, no hits turn up. I input various versions of these lyrics, but to no avail. In the coming weeks, I sing the melody of the song for several interlocutors, but no one seems to recognize the song. In addition to all these efforts, I perform a thorough archival search for similar songs, but do not find anything. Eventually, I put the song away for later analysis, recognizing the possibility that it may be a composite drawn from fragments of melodic and/or lyrical source material that I am unable to discover; I also recognize a possibility that this song may be wholly original.
It is not until many months later, among a small gathering of Iraqi Jews, that someone decides to put on a recording of Lamiya Tawfiq, a professional singer popular in mid twentieth-century Iraq. My ears perk up when I hear her sing a repeated phrase, “yāl mashiyya.” I ask to borrow the recording, which had been burned onto a CD for one of my interlocutors. It is of unknown origin. Upon arriving home, I immediately search back through my fieldwork recordings for Nuri’s song, one that he attributed to his mother. I spend the next few hours alternatively listening to Tawfiq’s song and Nuri’s remembrance of his mother’s song. Although Nuri performs his version at a much slower tempo, the melodic and thematic similarity is undeniable. I begin the process of transcribing the melody and lyrics of Tawfiq’s recording to see how it relates to Nuri’s mother’s song. This is a process I repeat many times throughout the course of my fieldwork and subsequent musical analyses. Thus “yāl mashiyy” provides a good case study in processes of contrafacta inherent to the private song practice that I encountered.

**Figure 3.1.** “Yāl mashiyy.” Sung by Nuri. Recorded October 2015, Jerusalem, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yāl mashiyy bilṭarīq al-gharūb</th>
<th>Oh, one who walks on the strange road</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yā ḥabīb bilṭarīq al-gharūb</td>
<td>Oh, beloved on the strange road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waīn āṯḥawl al-latīla?</td>
<td>Where will you stay at night?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bʿaīd al-ṭarīq, shū yūāṣīlak?</td>
<td>The road is far, how will you arrive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bʿāĪd al-ṭarīq, shū yūāṣīlak?</td>
<td>The road is far, how will you arrive?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rabī yasāʿ ad wa-yāḥmīk</td>
<td>G-d will help and protect you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Waīn āṯḥawl al-latīla?</td>
<td>Where will you stay the night?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yā ḥabīb bilṭarīq al-gharūb</td>
<td>Oh, beloved on a strange road</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa ḥāyā al-masāfa ṭulā</td>
<td>And the distance is so long</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Wayn āṭhawl al-laṭlā?
Rabbī yahmīk wa-yimīshīk
Khabīrīnī ṣbnī min ṭūsāl
Wāīn āṭhawl al-laṭlā?

Where will you stay at night?
G-d will protect you, and help you to walk
Call me my son when you arrive
Where will you stay the night?

Yāl māshīyya bilaṭ līhalak
Yā raṭī ḥābīb al-falīk
hāwliy ṣadna al-laṭlā

Oh, one who walks at night to your parents
Oh, beloved one who goes out to her fate
Stay with us tonight
Lamiya Tawfiq graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts in Iraq and became a popular singer in the 1950s. “Yāl mashiyyā” is an original song of hers, one that was
most likely recorded in 1953 on Radio Baghdad.\footnote{I relied on the information of several informants still living in Iraq, who verified that Tawfiq recorded this song on Radio Baghdad in 1953. The specific details surrounding this recording appear to be unknown outside of Iraq.} In this recording, Tawfiq is accompanied by the traditional \textit{chalghī al-Baghdādī} ensemble, popular in the mid twentieth century, which includes the \textit{sanṭūr} (struck dulcimer), \textit{jōza} (spiked fiddle whose body is constructed from a coconut), \textit{def}, and \textit{dumbek}. From these transcriptions, it is clear that Nuri’s mother’s song adopts Tawfiq’s melody almost verbatim. Tawfiq’s song is in the rhythmic mode (\textit{tqā}) \textit{maqsūm}. Though Nuri sings his mother’s song at a much slower tempo, his rendition displays a similar duple meter feel.\footnote{Due to the slow quality of Nuri’s recitation, his song is transcribed in a slow $4/4$ meter, whereas Tawfiq’s original song, in a fast \textit{tqā} \textit{maqsūm}, is more conducive to a 2/4 meter transcription.} Like Tawfiq’s, Nuri’s mother’s song is in \textit{maqām huzām}, as it is known in both the Mashreqi and Iraqi modal systems (though some scholars refer to this mode as “hozzam” in the Iraqi context; see Simms 2004). \textit{Maqām huzām} is closely associated with \textit{maqām sikāh} due to being part of the same modal family (\textit{fašīla}); indeed, performances in \textit{sikāh} regularly modulate to \textit{huzām} in both Mashreqi and Iraqi contexts (Racy 1996: 422; Simms 2004: 138). It is a mode associated with “extraordinarily potent” emotions, due, in part, to its tonic on a “neutral” pitch (E half-flat), as well as the augmented second interval (Racy 2003: 98). Additionally, it tends to evoke feelings of heroism due to its association with the Bedouin \textit{shrūqī} scale (Racy 1996: 414), an interesting point, as Nuri’s song illustrates a life experience that required great bravery in the face of uncertainty. The melody of “yāl mashīyya,” furthermore, contains some unique melodic characteristics of \textit{maqām huzām} as it exists in the Iraqi tradition, where the singer emphasizes the third pitch of the \textit{maqām} before eventually falling to the tonic on the half-flat at the ends of phrases (Simms 2004).
In terms of melodic and lyrical structure, both versions display a unique, seven-line verse form (AABCCDB). Notably, seven-line poetic verse structures, known as zuhaṭrī, are common in performances of Iraqi maqām, though they typically follow a slightly different line structure of AAABBBA (see Avishur 1987b: xix-xx; Simms 2004). In both Tawfiq’s and Nuri’s mother’s versions, the first two lines are repeated. While Nuri’s mother’s lyrics differ from Tawfiq’s in certain key aspects, they also share heavily in thematic content. Tawfiq’s song depicts an overall concern for a woman, one who is said to have gone out at night alone. The woman wishes to return to her parents, a sentiment Nuri himself felt strongly when he was forced to leave his home. Tawfiq depicts an intense worry over the woman’s safety, and her wish for her to be protected. She details aspects of the road upon which the woman walks, where she describes the length of the road, and her fear that the woman might never arrive at her destination.

The song lyrics of Nuri’s mother’s version also depict a similar anxiety regarding the uncertainty, and potential danger, of him traveling alone at night. Though they share the same lyrical means of addressing the voyager as “one who is walking,” Nuri’s mother’s version displays a notable gender change. Whereas Tawfiq is clearly referencing a woman (mashiyya), Nuri’s mother addresses him, a man (mashiyy). This gender shift occurs throughout the song, such as when Tawfiq says “ḥawliyy” (“stay,” addressed towards a woman), whereas Nuri’s mothers lyrics say āṭhawl (“will stay,” addressed towards a man). Of course, Nuri’s particular situation involved his participation in an underground escape route from Iraq to Israel. At the time, he was embarking upon an uncertain path, one that potentially could have resulted in his death.

12 Iraqi maqām typically incorporate one of two poetic forms, either the qaṣṭda (in classical Arabic poetry), or the zuhaṭrī.
These circumstances lend themselves a certain unmistakable, thematic similarity shared between Tawfiq’s description and Nuri’s mother’s song.

Their versions also convey similar lyrical content at the same melodic moments. In Tawfiq’s song, she says “the path is far” (Figure 3.2, lines 4-5), which correlates with the same melodic moment to which Nuri sings “the road is strange” (Figure 3.1, lines 4-5). This is an impactful lyrical change when compared with the original, as it illustrates the particular uncertainty of Nuri’s journey towards a “strange” and unknown place, one that neither he nor his parents had ever seen. Furthermore, Tawfiq’s articulation of “stay with us tonight” is changed to “where will you stay the night?” by Nuri’s mother. This is another innovative lyrical modification, as it conveys the subtlety of Nuri’s mother’s wish for Nuri to remain with her—a meaning inherent in the original version. Yet she transforms and deepens that meaning to depict the particular uncertainty inherent in her son’s precarious situation.

In both versions, the “heightened” moments of melodic intensity occur where the melody moves upwards to focus on the augmented second interval of huzām. This moment corresponds with lyrical depictions of intense worry, as well as the difficulty of bearing the emotion, where they both articulate: “the road/path is far, how will you arrive?” (Figure 3.1, lines 4-5; Figure 3.2, line 4). In Nuri’s mother’s second verse, this heightened moment corresponds with a prayerful call for spiritual protection for her son (using the Arabic word ṭabbī, or my G-d): “Where will you sleep at night? G-d will help you and protect you” (Figure 3.1, lines 5-6; see also lines 11-12). This same melodic moment also corresponds with lyrics of great emotional intensity in the original version.
(though its specific lyrical content differs), where Tawfiq sings: “Oh, I give my soul and liver; Oh, I give my eyes and liver” (Figure 3.2, lines 11-12).

As this song was not recorded until 1953, “Yāl mashīyya” might not have been known to Nuri’s mother at the time of his underground emigration in 1949, thus raising the distinct possibility that Nuri’s mother heard this song after his emigration and adapted it retrospectively to fit her remembrance of the event. We must also consider the possibility, however, that the song was performed and well-known prior to its 1953 recording (there is no evidence I could find in source material from Iraq to either confirm or deny this), and that perhaps it actually was sung, as Nuri recalls, by his mother at the exact moment of his abrupt departure. It was acutely obvious during our interviews that asking such overt questions would trespass upon the unspoken boundaries between Nuri and myself. Thus, it is impossible to know exactly how or where Nuri’s mother’s version came into existence. A further possibility exists: Nuri’s mother might not have actually sung this song at all, and perhaps it was Nuri himself who adapted this song retrospectively to fit his remembrance of the event.

These considerations notwithstanding, I am less interested in the “accuracy” of Nuri’s portrayal vis-à-vis what actually occurred sixty-five years ago. Rather, what is critical to this investigation is the way in which this song becomes an integral means through which Nuri re-experiences and embodies the emotions of the original traumatic event. Of key importance is how Nuri is able to evoke the emotions of this trauma through musical remembrance, allowing him to relive aspects of it in the present. Immediately preceding his song, Nuri describes the intense sentiment surrounding this event in emotionally-laden terms: “I had so many questions. Will I survive the escape?
Will I ever meet my family again?” After singing his song, he immediately accentuates his intense feelings when he says, “You have to understand, it happened so quickly. It was heartbreaking to separate from my family so suddenly. I was leaving and I did not know what would happen to me.” Through the interaction of spoken and sung testimony, Nuri builds an atmosphere of great emotional intensity, allowing him to, however fleetingly, re-embrace, confront, and relive the deep fear, pain, and uncertainty of his original trauma. I, in turn, as his witness, am drawn into the emotional testimony he recounts, thus participating in his present-day encounter with his remembered past. This kind of participatory sensorial evocation allows the emotions of his trauma to manifest in the present while simultaneously embedding and reframing them in emergent processes of confrontation and understanding.

Contrafacta forms a key means through which this process takes place. Interestingly, contrafacta is common among Jewish communities throughout the world, and has been noted among American Jews (Summit 1993), as well as Tunisian (Davis 2009), Bukharan (Levin 1996; Rapport 2014), Iraqi (Rosenfeld-Hadad 2011), and Syrian Jews (Kligman 2009; Shelemay 1998). In all these cases, contrafacta of known melodies are examined in the context of Jewish liturgy, where existing melodies are adapted in the setting of semi-liturgical and sacred Jewish texts (Manasseh 2016). The present study considers this process vis-à-vis secular contexts of oral history and testimony, where, I argue, a similar process occurs. Though not explicitly sacred in context, these present-day songs allow for the “expression of the cultural specificities of a community at a precise historical moment,” embodied through contemporary performance of melodies past while simultaneously adapted for contemporary purposes (Elbaz 2015: 40). By carrying the
“echo” of the source melody within their iterations, singers artfully manipulate and build upon the sonic qualities of the original song, thus simultaneously evoking and transforming its associated musical meanings in the present day. These meanings can, in turn, accrue further emotional depth over time, through repeated articulation and remembrance (Shelemay 1998: 218).

This process of contrafacta itself has interesting parallels in the “additive approach,” common to popular Arab music of the twentieth century, which incorporates extensive quotations and adaptations of melodies, forms, and styles from a variety of sources (Kligman 2009: 18; Shelemay 1998: 127). It is deeply tied to song recitation in spheres of intimacy, where surviving Iraqi Jews share these personal forms of knowledge—both with the original source material, as well as the emotional and felt experiences they evoke in sound. Through song, sensorial aspects of memory are induced and re-embodied, forming a key means through which the forgotten, traumatic and/or taboo aspects of Nuri’s testimony find voice. This occurs in the presence of witnesses, thus countering their silencing in a way that re-embraces and validates their catastrophic impact. Importantly, this process does not necessarily imply resolution of traumatic impact: rather, it implicates the idea of healing as itself a process—where the articulation, embrace, and transformation of emotion and pain in song-making forms a “position to be inhabited,” rather than resolved (Gill 2017: 181).

“Ash Süwiyt Ben Gurion”: A Protest Song for Iraqi Immigrants

“Ash Süwiyt Ben Gurion” is a famous protest song, one that has been investigated quite extensively among scholars of Iraqi Jewry. It is said to have originated in the early
1950s among Iraqi Jews complaining of the abysmal living conditions in the *ma’abara* (Sawdayee 1977; Shohat 2016: 120). Its lyrics are in the *qiltu* dialect, and contain particular words and pronunciations associated with the Baghdadi-Judeo dialect, indicating that it was probably originally composed by Baghdadi Jews. An extremely popular song at the time of its creation, it has continued to be recited among a small number of amateur Iraqi singers in Israel. It is also occasionally performed in professional contexts. For example, a recording at the sound archives of the National Library of Israel illustrates that the song was performed during a live Iraqi Jewish *hafla* [Arabic: party, though this term is often used to refer to live community performances] by the professional Iraqi Jewish singer Aziz Jalal (Shuli Representations Ltd., Jerusalem, Israel, 2008).

As a song, “Ash Süwiyt Ben Gurion” is composed of several different lyrics and verses, that vary slightly from performer to performer. Nuri’s overall melodic contour is consistent with versions depicted in recordings and historical records, regardless of the professional or private context of the song’s iteration. The verses of the song are in *maqām bayyātī* while the refrain is in *sikāḥ* (with emphasis on the root note of A-half flat, see Figure 3.3, below). Sara Manasseh has also transcribed this song, from a recording found on the double LP *The Musical Heritage of the Iraqi Jews* (Avishur and

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13 For example, words with the letter *qōf* are pronounced with a *q*-sound (common to the *qiltu* dialect, as opposed to a *g*-sound). Similarly, words with the letter *ra* are pronounced “*gha*,” as occurs in the *qiltu* dialect.

14 Unlike *dilīlōl*, which is better conceived as a song-type that offers a template for individual improvisation, “Ash Süwiyt Ben Gurion” is more recognizable as a distinct song. This is because each iteration is set to the same overall melody and repeated refrain, and the internal lyrical and melodic variation is much more consistent than in the case of *dilīlōl*. Furthermore, unlike the recitation of *dilīlōl*, which often occurs in (somewhat repeatable) situations of lullaby singing across varied social and transgenerational contexts, this song is associated with a particular setting and time period, having been composed in the context of the unique circumstances that faced new Iraqi immigrants in Israel in the early 1950s. Thus, the song itself is much less widespread than *dilīlōl*. 

135
Shiloah 1988). She indicates that her transcription is also in bayyāṭī, though based on the more common tonic D, while the refrain is also in sikāḥ (with a tonic of E half-flat). Furthermore, Manasseh indicates a tempo of 120 beats per minute, which is also almost the same tempo as Nuri’s (his was around 110 beats per minute). Notably, Manasseh’s transcribed melody is almost identical to the one Nuri sang, though Nuri’s version was transposed up a fourth to suit his vocal range (see Manasseh 2001). These melodies display characteristics of bayyāṭī common to both the Mashreqi and Iraqi practices—in the Mashreqi system, for example, melodies in bayyāṭī typically begin in the middle of the mode’s central octave before following a descending pattern (Marcus 2002: 39-40). In the Iraqi system, melodies in bayyāṭī often begin on the fourth scale degree (as in this case) before descending to the tonic (Simms 2004: 16, 156).

**Figure 3.3. “Ash Sūwiyt Ben Gurion.”** Recorded October 2014, Jerusalem, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hāṭhi al-maṣība</td>
<td>This is the trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nahna jīnā</td>
<td>We came</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U farena al-kul</td>
<td>And left everything behind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An-n’āl al-ṭā’ yara</td>
<td>Curse the airplane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hāṭhi al-maṣība</td>
<td>This is the trouble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yā rī ṭā jibtnā</td>
<td>If only he did not bring us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḥāṭī lā āghkabnā ḥāsān</td>
<td>Better we had ridden a donkey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mā jibtnā</td>
<td>(He) should not have brought us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash süwiyt Ben-Gurion?</td>
<td>What have you done, Ben Gurion?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hijajit kul al-qōm</td>
<td>Put the entire community in chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baṣal ū-ṭamāṭa</td>
<td>Onion and tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ḏb-kartis mazon</td>
<td>With food stamps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min shār’ā’ aliyyā</td>
<td>From shar ha’aliyya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ramat al-Shārōn</td>
<td>Ramat Hasharon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miyār wa al-āfāt</td>
<td>Hundreds and thousands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Aliyhum yīqāṭlōn</td>
<td>About that they fight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3.3 (cont.)

Al-ghajal ābahliy
Wal-niswan yishtaglōn
Bašal ū-tamāta
Ib-kartis mazon

The men are without jobs
And the women are working
Onion and tomatoes
With food stamps

Ha-thi al-maṣī-ba naḥ-na ji-nā

Ha-thi al-maṣī-ba ya-ri-yt mā jibt-nā

Ha-ti lūāgh-kab-nā hās-ān mā jibt-nā Ash

Refrain: maqām sīkāh

Su-wiyt Ben Gurion Hi-jājīt kul al-qōm

Ba-ṣal ū-tamāta ib-kar-tis ma-zon
In terms of lyrical content, all versions of this song share a kind of ironic, bitterly sarcastic tone, one that expresses resentment towards Ben Gurion for bringing the Iraqi Jewish community to Israel. The lyrics articulate a sense of “self-delusion” for their acceptance of *tasqit*, the official renouncement of Iraqi citizenship (Shohat 2016: 120). Nowhere is this better exemplified than by the following phrase, sung by Nuri and shared across versions: “*ḥaṭi lū āghkabnā ḥasān*” [better we had ridden a donkey], implying that it would have been better to have ridden a donkey than to have emigrated to Israel (ibid.). This theme is further conveyed in Avishur and Shiloah’s 1988 recording of the song, which includes the phrase “*sma Ṉā diʾāya u-jīna u-khiyatna*” [We heard propaganda and we came and dove straight in] (see Avishur and Shiloah 1988; Manasseh 2001), as well as when Nuri sings the common refrain: “What have you done, Ben Gurion? … This is trouble. We came and left everything behind” (Figure 3.3, lines 1, 15). Notably, across versions the refrain coincides with a sing-song melody in *maqām sikāh*, giving the impression that the new immigrants were taunting Ben Gurion when addressing him with this ironic question.

Ella Shohat, who grew up in an Iraqi Jewish community in Israel, has discussed her memory of listening to and singing “Ash Sūwiyt Ben Gurion” during her youth. Shohat’s remembered version includes the phrase “*dakhlat binā dūda,*” which literally translates as “a worm entered us”—a conceptual reference to the state of agitation and uncertainty fueled by the impact of Ben Gurion’s Zionist policies, which ultimately led Iraqi Jews to emigrate. These lyrics cast an implicit shadow on the original instigators of Operation Ezra and Nehemiah. Shohat’s version specifically references the accursed nature of the “black plane” that brought the Jews to Israel—depicting it as one that
“should not” have done so (Shohat 2016: 145). This is similar to the 1988 version recorded by Avishur and Shiloah, which states “Tā’yarāt as-sōda’ wa-lā kān jibītnā” [Black planes, they should not have brought us here]. Though Nuri does not use the word “black” to describe the airplane responsible for his immigration, his version shares in a similar conceptual depiction of accursedness, albeit a literal one, when he defiantly proclaims “An-n’āl al-ṭā’yara” [I curse the airplane].

When this song first came into existence, Iraqi Jews in the ma’abara expressed themselves in Arabic, as most of them had yet to learn Hebrew. Though many of their private songs tend to be in the mainstream gilit dialect, it is interesting that this one is explicitly in qiltu. Shohat argues that this song provided new immigrants with a “Judeo-Iraqi space” that “accentuated the feeling of belonging,” in contrast to the unfamiliar “Hebrew-Israeli space” in which they found themselves (ibid.: 120). It is remarkable that Iraqi Jews such as Nuri would, almost seventy years later, recount the emotional memories of this particularly difficult time utilizing the same expressive song, dialect, and thematic references as did Iraqi immigrants seventy years ago. Through his recitation, Nuri re-inhabits, albeit briefly, the uncertain, shocking embodied experience of his abrupt immigration, the horrid conditions that faced him upon arrival, and the regrets many immigrants felt about having left Iraq behind.

Nuri’s version of this song is made further noteworthy by his incorporation of Hebrew lyrics—which creatively and uniquely rhyme with the Arabic verse. Consider the following text:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ash sāwiyt Ben Gurion?</th>
<th>What have you done, Ben Gurion?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hijajit kul al-qōm</td>
<td>Put the entire community in chaos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baṣal ū-ṭamāṭa</td>
<td>Onion and tomatoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ib-kartis mazon</td>
<td>With food stamps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

139
The first two lines are found in many versions. However, the last two (while possibly present in versions I was not able to access) are, at least to my knowledge, unique to Nuri. The Hebrew words *kartis mazon* refer to food stamps (while the word *ib*—which begins the phrase—is in Arabic). This Hebrew phrase was among the first that many newly immigrated Iraqi Jews learned upon their arrival to the *ma’abarot*, where they relied heavily upon food stamps; thus, it is a phrase they frequently used. This same phrase, which did not have an Arabic equivalent in Iraq at the time, is artfully incorporated in a way that rhymes with the Arabic phrases of preceding lines of the verse (for example, where Nuri says “*kul al-qōm*” [the whole community]—Figure 3.3, line 2).

“*Sintayn ānā bilsijn*”: An Original Composition?

Of the three songs Nuri shared with me, “*Sintayn ānā bilsijn*” is the only one that appears to be an original composition. I did not find any evidence of this particular song, nor its melody or similar lyrics, in any other sources. Nonetheless, the possibility exists that similar material might be found in another source or format, or that this song was sung (or authored) by a different individual. Regardless of its origin, Nuri’s song is articulated at a powerful moment of his testimony, when describing how his mother’s actions help save him from severe violence and physical harm. Though his mother’s suffering was akin to “torture,” as Nuri explains, she was somehow able to muster the courage to protect him. Nuri’s description of gratitude towards his mother vis-à-vis her heartbreak at his imprisonment forms a highly emotional moment of his spoken testimony, accentuated and evoked through his expressive performance.
Figure 3.4. “Sintayn ānā bilsijn.” Sung by Nuri. Recorded October 2014, Jerusalem, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.15

| Sintayn ānā bilsijn, min āhlt ḥarmūnī | Two years I am in prison, prevented from seeing my family |
| Tishahid ʿālī l-nijūm bilsamā | The stars in the sky are my witness |
| Mā ghamdat ʿayūntī | I could not close my eyes |

| Sintayn ānā bilsijn, min āhlt ḥarmūnī | Two years I am in prison, prevented from seeing my family |
| ʿalām mā ayindkum rāhim, yālt ʿalāmāntūnī | Cruel, you know no mercy, oh, you were cruel to me |
| Mā ghamdat ʿayūntī | I could not close my eyes |

“Sintayn ānā bilsijn” is in maqām hijāz, and displays an overall descending melodic contour, sung with a softly falling, melancholic vocal quality. As noted in the previous chapter, this mode is deeply associated with feelings of intense sadness across regional maqām traditions (Kojaman 2001; Racy 2003; Shaw 1991). Thus, it seems intuitive that Nuri would chose this maqām to express the despondency and loneliness he

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15 This transcription was transposed up a major third from the original recording.
felt during the tragic years of his imprisonment, where the only witnesses to his pain, according to his song, were the stars in the sky. The song form consists of two three-line verses (AAB), and is consistent with the three-line stanza form associated with wasn al-na’i (lament poetic meters) of Iraqi women’s musical practices (Hassan 2010: 28). This three-line stanza form is also common to mournful biblical poetry associated with the destruction of Jerusalem in Lamentations (Avishur 1987a: 68).

Nuri’s verse is delivered in a rubato, melismatic manner, with a loose, lilting sense of pulse driven by the lyrical content. This lilting quality is similar to the qinah [Hebrew: dirge] meter associated with funerals, eulogies, and communal lament in Jewish liturgy. Qinah is characterized by particular patterns of similarity and variation between adjacent poetic lines, where the overall length and contour remain consistent between parallel poetic phrases; nonetheless, when compared side by side, these adjacent lines exhibit unique, dissimilar internal accentuation patterns (Berlin 2004: 2). Nuri’s verses display a similar asymmetrical quality, demonstrated by the first and second lines of his verse, though they nonetheless share in melodic contour and length (see Figure 3.4., lines 1 and 2). Qinah is explicitly associated with solemn biblical events, and is said to evoke a particularly mournful quality when recited as compared with more evenly balanced biblical textual rhythms (ibid.). Notably, it is typically utilized to accentuate textual expressions of “both complaint, and sorrow and grief over some perceived calamity, physical or cultural, which had befallen or was about to befall [an individual] … and to appeal to G-d for deliverance” (Ferris 1992: 10). Thus, it is not surprising that Nuri draws upon these liturgical poetic meters and form in communicating his personal tragedy.
Biblical scholars such as Adele Berlin point to the poetry of Lamentations as unique textual portrayals of violence and grief (Berlin 2004: 85), whose meanings are accentuated not only through specific meters and poetic forms, but through the incorporation of unique melodic modes and resources. As previously noted, in the Sephardic and Babylonian traditions, these cantillations are often in maqām ḥijāz, the melodic mode typically employed in Jewish liturgical contexts for depicting biblical events associated with tragedy (Kligman 2009; Shelemay 1998). A further melodic connection to this context can be found in Nuri’s expression of the final line of each three-line stanza. During this particularly evocative musical moment, Nuri employs a descending melismatic passage as a qāfla, or cadence, in emphasizing the pain portrayed by his lyrics: “I could not close my eyes” (Figure 3.4, lines 3 and 6). According to my interlocutors, the implied meaning of this text refers to a person whose pain is so great that they are unable to sleep or rest. This descending, stepwise qāfla is common in performances of maqām ḥijāz, and is often utilized in Babylonian cantillation practices during cadential moments, especially where depicting dirges and funerary laments (for example, see Hazan Moshe Chabusha, Megilat Eichah, The Voice of Israel: Recordings of the Israeli Radio Heritage Network, 2003).

Immediately upon concluding his song, Nuri is careful to explain that the hurtful actions of the Jewish woman who accused him of impropriety, which ultimately led to his imprisonment, were an anomaly among Jews. He describes how her actions were “really unusual … since Jews protected Jews.” This almost stands as a corrective to the emotions evoked by his song, which detail the hardship this particular Jewish woman caused in his life. It is a narrative strategy that draws from the inherent assumptions of certain aspects
of Israeli mythico-history, those that assert a kind of binary differentiation between “Jewishness” and “protection” versus the implied link between “Arabness” and “violence.” This specific moment of Nuri’s testimony forms a kind of micro-illustration of the careful discursive positioning employed by Iraqi Jews in their testimonies vis-à-vis larger notions of Jewish brotherhood and Zionist loyalty, as explained above (Shenhav 2006: 141).

Towards an Understanding of Processes of Healing

Loss can traumatically shake the very foundations of one’s assumptive world. Thus, much of the work of healing lies in interrogating assumptions that are challenged by loss, while groping forward towards new frameworks of meaning (Janoff-Bulman 1992; Neimeier 1999). As is clear from Nuri’s testimony, this is a deeply complex process—one that is neither smooth, nor linear, nor coherent—and fraught with contradiction. The work of healing is integrally related to how an individual harnesses unstable bodily affect through emotional remembrance; thus, “healing is only ever precariously, and temporarily, achieved” (Cole 2004: 89). If we consider healing as a process rather than an end-goal, however, then it is not in the resolution of trauma that healing occurs; rather, it is in its embrace. I argue that expressive practices can form an important means through which this process occurs, where individuals embrace the impact of trauma while simultaneously allowing it to resonate ambivalently, and in unresolved ways. As a “position to be lived in,” the embrace of pain in song performance becomes itself a temporally situated site for tolerating loss, fractured affiliations, and viscerally schizophrenic senses of self (Gill 2017: 181). The emotions evoked through
these performances, then, are evaluated vis-à-vis accepted social understandings as well as individual imaginings that reach towards newer understandings. These “conflicts of signification” allow individuals to negotiate “how the world as received relates to the world as known”—a process that in itself is often emotionally powerful (Perman 2010: 438). The expression of this deep emotionality, furthermore, is often public, and encourages participatory responses among testifiers and witnesses alike (Ritter 2014).

I argue that the trauma experienced by Iraqi Jews highlights these kinds of “conflicts of signification” in particular ways, especially as these individuals negotiate complex, bifurcated visions of themselves and their worlds. This process relies, integrally, upon the particular way in which pain—in its reception, re-embodiment, and appraisal—is transformed through musical expression, especially when negotiating incoherent aspects of lived experience and social understanding. Ethnomusicologist Kay Shelemay maps out the transformation of pain through expressive practice in three important ways (Shelemay 2007: 199-200). In the first case, drawing on Elizabeth Tolbert’s descriptions of Karelian lament, she describes how musical performance can be understood as having a cathartic effect—one that helps discharge pain after the experience of pain and loss is felt. In her second case, she examines Judith Becker’s consideration of Balinese Barong-Rangda trance, where musical practice offers an *apriori* analgesic effect in advance of painful stimulus—thus allowing trancers to access a state of consciousness that protects them from feeling the ritual enactment of bodily pain. In her third case, she discusses the “disturbing potential” for music to produce pain, such as in cases of musical torture, where the sheer decibel levels of sound hold the potential to cause great physical and psychological harm. This final case is considered
from an “acultural” position, one that stands in contrast to the expressive and palliative potential of music shaped by cultural expectations (ibid.: 200; see also Daughtry 2015).

I suggest considering Shelemay’s three processes from a coeval vantage point, one that implicates all three in cultural expectation. Here the cathartic, analgesic, and pain-inducing effects of musical practices are all present, and to some degree induced, in processes of musical remembrance, and re-enactments, of pain and trauma.16 Thus, expressive practices can form locations where deep understandings of pain are considered and reworked in ongoing processes of evaluation. Through the very articulation of pain, and its sensorial re-enactment and remembrance, it is cyclically transformed in myriad ways—simultaneously evoked, anaesthetized, and released. These affective articulations and embodiments of pain involve shaping, reflecting, and challenging individuals’ understandings of themselves (Gill 2017: 190). Private Iraqi Jewish songs, then, hold the potential to confront foundational aspects of Zionist discourse—including the various felt ambiguities it incites vis-à-vis their personal histories, as well as the re-traumatizing potential of its articulation—especially when considered in the wake of remembrances that have been publicly silenced.

This resonates with Sugarman’s idea of expressive practice as a location where deep notions of self are negotiated. It also demonstrates how “foundational myths … said to be representative of the past” are actually challenged, confronted, and changed on an individual level over time (Tambiah 2007: 267; Perman 2010: 438). This process relies,

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16 Importantly, my consideration of Shelemay’s “disturbing potential” diverges slightly from her presentation. Whereas she delineates the potential of sonic resources to incite physiological pain from an acultural perspective (such as in cases of sonic torture involving sounds of high-decibel frequency), I apply her consideration to aspects of musical practice that specifically invoke pain in culturally specific ways. Though my application of her concept does not specifically have to do with the instances of sonic torture she delineates, I nonetheless find her description of the pain-inducing capability of musical practice to be particularly useful for contemplating the various ways that music can act as a catalyst/instigator of pain in specific environments.
integrally, upon affective embodiment, where mythico-histories are “reworked again and again,” in constant re-evaluation vis-à-vis sensorial evocation and emotional remembrance (Tambiah 2007: 267). Individuals’ testimonies, incorporating spoken and sung expressivity, thus form a realm in which the disparate aspects of the lived experiences and understandings from which they derive confront and contradict one another, while still coexisting side by side. This is especially the case where large-scale social agreements and narratives leave little space for alternative remembrances and conflicting feelings.

From this vantage point, one can understand how suffering, in and of itself, is a remedy (Gill 2017: 156). As one interlocutor told me, “if the Iraqis don’t cry, we’re not happy” [Hebrew: im ha-iraqim lo bokhim hem lo smechim], a sentiment I heard on more than one occasion. The quality and expression of these individuals’ suffering, furthermore, is integrally tied to the musical resources upon which they draw, demonstrating the affective work of expressive practice in helping individuals to recognize, inhabit, and interpret emotions. Importantly, Nuri draws upon the soundscape of his youth in pre-1950s Iraq in both his understanding of emotion, as well as its embodiment and sonic expression. His use of known songs and melodies popular during the times of his remembered events, as well as modes and musical forms from a variety of secular and religious sources, serves to add a level of spectral evocation to his sensorial remembrance. As these expressive resources were internalized during formative periods of his social and neurobiological development, they are intricately tied to his learned “ways of feeling and expressing that feeling in sound” (ibid.: 183). Thus, they form a crucial means through which Nuri evokes the unspeakable aspects of his personal
trauma, allowing him to incorporate and embody myriad forms of incongruent belonging in temporally situated and ambivalent ways.
CHAPTER 4
SOUNDING PAIN:
SISTERWORK AND INTIMACY IN DOMESTIC SPHERES

This chapter focuses on the more personal, emotional, and even violent memories recounted by Iraqi Jewish women who left Iraq for Israel in the 1950s. In particular, I examine the experiences of three elderly women, as related through spoken and sung testimony, in response to the changing social expectations they experienced during an era of massive cultural transition. While the previous chapter focused on the individual negotiation of collective and nationalist remembrances, often political in nature, this chapter moves towards an examination of biographical and autobiographical memories situated largely in the female realm. These include childbirth, arranged marriage, domestic abuse, divorce and spousal abandonment, discrimination and ill-fated romances, and the social taboo of an Iraqi woman marrying at a “late” age. Through examining the conversations, narratives, and songs of these women, I investigate the specific gender issues they have navigated in relation to patriarchy and female subjugation, as well as the various forms of power embodied in their expressive remembrances.

Grappling with Gender Divides: Recognizing Alternative Forms of Power

The assumption of an “innate” subjugation of women in the Middle East, as restricted by the veil, for example, or under the all-pervasive power of religion or men, has been problematically and dangerously appropriated in the service of international
politics (Abu-Lughod 2002).\(^1\) The vignettes below describe aspects of female experiences that are often (mistakenly) incorporated into such tropes—including issues related to child marriage, domestic abuse, arranged marriage, and honor killings. As such, I approach them with a great deal of caution, and with a careful eye towards the way in which such discursive understandings, common to Western imaginings of Middle Eastern societies, have been hijacked for political purposes. These tropes are indicative of the larger Orientalist tendency to view Islam as a determinative force in predominantly Muslim countries, particularly in relation to gender (Stokes 2002).

Similar, deterministic understandings pertaining to gender divides and musical practice have been employed in Jewish music scholarship as well (for a detailed discussion and critique of this, see, for example, Lamphere 1993; Seroussi 2003). Though each Jewish community differs in terms of its strictness and application of gender restrictions apropos musical expression, many religious Jewish communities (particularly Orthodox) maintain a distinct seating division between men and women in synagogues, and prohibit public musical performances by women. As several musicologists have noted, there is a strong connection and overlap between Jewish and Muslim dicta against female public performance, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, where the long standing cross-religious exchange of Jewish and Muslim musical ideology and practice has been mutually reinforced over centuries (see Shelemay 2009: 237; Shiloah 1992: 53-59; for similar prohibitions in Muslim societies, see, for example, Doubleday 1988; Nieuwkerk 2006).

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\(^1\) For example, this discourse was used as part of the justifying rational for the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan (Abu-Lughod 2002: 783).
Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that scholarship of the Middle East has long grappled with binary understandings conflating notions of public and private, honor and shame, and active and silent with a male-female divide. Self-described “third world feminists,” such as Ella Shohat and Lila Abu-Lughod, have convincingly debunked such conflations, demonstrating that prohibitions of female activity are not all-determinative: rather, they are better understood from a relational perspective, where the shifting expectations inherent in female realms can be conceived as nexuses of belonging that variously inspire deep sentiments of loyalty, conflict, and social critique (Abu-Lughod 2008 [1993]; Shohat 2003). An important part of this discussion lies in the critique of those feminists who advocate for universal standards of gender equality, and in particular, the bolstering of cultural superiority that constructions of the plight of “other” women produce (Collins 1998). I am particularly inspired by those who have written about the danger of imposing Western notions of gender subordination onto non-Western contexts (see, for example, Butler 1990; Shohat 2003), while also acknowledging the peril in promoting cultural “otherness” and distinctiveness to such a degree that it inverts (and therefore substantiates) an Orientalist east/west binary (Abu-Lughod 1991: 145).

This study draws on the work of these scholars, who advocate for nuanced analyses that can accommodate culturally-specific notions of freedom and constraint (see, for example, Abu-Lughod 1986, 1991, 1998, 2002, 2008 [1993]; Collins 1998, 2000; Doubleday 1999; Hassan 2008; Koskoff 2001; Magrini 2003; Moisala and Diamond 2000; Shelemay 1998, 2009). One of the forerunners of this kind of nuanced analysis can be found in Racy’s investigation of the “Bedouin ethos,” which he understands as a large-scale discursive formation associating masculinity with chivalry and bravery, versus the
association of femininity with emotionality, vulnerability, and sentiment (Racy 1996).

Racy considers these social conceptualizations as key to a network of interlinked cultural values and practices that are often nuanced in specific application. Rather than viewing such binaries from a vantage of opposing separation, he understands them as part of a single continuum, where traits from each pole can simultaneously manifest within varying expressive practices, and even across the lives of individual performers (ibid.). His approach allows for an understanding of expressive practices associated with masculine and feminine traits that are nonetheless highly dependent on varying social, religious, and regional contexts, thus transcending simplistic binary understandings of gendered belonging.

Another important study is Abu-Lughod’s self-described “experiment in feminist ethnography,” which provides a self-reflexive methodological approach for portraying women’s lives (Abu-Lughod 2008 [1993]: xii). Abu-Lughod deliberately includes particular details of the everyday lives of women, utilizing techniques of narrative and story telling within her own writing and analyses—an approach from which I have drawn much inspiration.2 Notably, Abu-Lughod does not explicitly argue for particularity versus generality as a way of privileging micro-over macro-processes. Rather, she attends to the particulars of individual lives as a way of exposing larger forces and dynamics. In her work among the ‘Awlad Ali, for example, she considers female agency vis-à-vis economic considerations that accommodate a contextual understanding of joint family

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2 Abu-Lughod draws from the literature of “untrained wives” of anthropologists in this regard. For example, Elizabeth Fernea’s *Guests of the Sheik: Ethnography of an Iraqi Village* is one of the first works to paint a vivid portrait of women’s lives in *al-nahda*, an Iraqi village, from behind the veil (Fernea 1969). Notably, at the time of Fernea’s study, women and men almost never interacted in public spheres. Due to her gender and social position, Fernea is able to access and interact within female, domestic realms, thus providing anthropological literature with one of its first glimpses into the lives of women of this Iraqi village.
enterprises, where all members of the household contribute to the financial standing of the family. She argues that this perspective is not easily understood from the vantage point of capitalist societies, where individualism is often “enshrined” as a dominant ideology (Abu-Lughod 2008 [1993]: xxii). Through this corrective, she demonstrates how women of the ‘Awlad Ali wield considerable power within the home—through female expressive practice, the strategic use of silence, and even marks of violence on the body as a means of defiance. Notably, all three of these forms of power are present among Iraqi Jewish women, and are investigated in this chapter.

Recent work in Jewish studies likewise addresses the pitfalls inherent in binary understandings of gender, particularly in the conflation of modesty and silence with female submission. By re-conceptualizing silence, listening, and literacy in the female realm as *active* forms of participation, scholars have begun to recognize the central role of women in the maintenance and transmission of secular and religious musical repertory. For example, both Edwin Seroussi and Judith Cohen have respectively demonstrated the essential role of female Sephardic collectors in the preservation and transmission of Sephardic song (Cohen 1995; Seroussi 2003). In another example, Faye Ginsburg demonstrates how *tsniut* [Hebrew: modesty] among Jewish women is a source of power characterized by an “internalized devotional attitude that transcends any desire for recognition” (Ginsburg 1987: 542). In a similar vein, Shelemay demonstrates how Syrian Jewish women, though silent during prayers, are nonetheless active “internal carriers” of both the *pizmon* musical tradition, as well as the individual and community memories implied in its performance (Shelemay 2009). Shelemay draws upon James P. Scott’s concept of “transcripts,” where the “public transcript” is an open interaction between
subordinates and those who dominate; the “hidden transcript” exists privately, and is often beyond observation; and a third realm of group politics is located strategically between the two (see Scott 1990: 2; Shelemay 2009: 269). By understanding this “ambiguous middle zone” as the location where gender is continually constructed, contradicted, and remade, Shelemay moves towards an understanding of the female participation in, and authority over, complicated gender dynamics concerning power and oppression/submission (ibid.). In this formulation, silence is a strategic means through which women assert power and personal honor, while also maintaining a sense of Jewish-Arab belonging (Shelemay 2009: 288). This approach resonates deeply with the work of feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins, whose delineation of the concept of “motherwork” forms a major source of inspiration for this chapter’s theoretical orientation. Collins argues that unrecognized forms of social and political consciousness can emerge within the “everyday lived experience” of women in deeply influential ways, thus bringing into question the predictable, and all-too-easy conflation of the public/private binary with a male/female divide (Collins 1998: 372). She illustrates how alternative forms of female expressivity and agency are revealed by re-contextualizing women’s experiences from their own perspective.

Through such methodological approaches, the work of these scholars demonstrates how women often exercise power in unobtrusive ways, thus confronting and intervening in the common stereotypes associated with women of this region (Abu-Lughod 2002). Following these scholars, this chapter is centered on the Iraqi women I came to know in female spheres of intimacy, all of whom embody a great amount of

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3 Her approach draws from a nuanced understanding of secular and religious musical practices in the Arab world, where deep listening is conceived as a form of intense participation, capable of evoking powerful emotional states.
agency, self-determination, and self-pride—through both their critique and substantiation of the constraints and freedoms inherent to their lives. Through their testimonies, they demonstrate how assumptions of submissiveness are at odds with their self-conceptions, and the way they have experienced their lives.

I am aware of the implicit dangers of focusing this chapter on the particular forms of power and expressivity common to Iraqi Jewish female spheres, which runs the danger of reifying the very gender binaries recent scholars have worked so tirelessly to deconstruct. As a means of moving beyond this dilemma, I draw inspiration from Ella Shohat’s consideration of feminism as a polysemic site of contradictory possibilities (Shohat 2003). In this formulation, gender, sexuality, and positions of power are considered in terms of their permeable interwoven relationality. I also draw on Judith Butler’s understanding of gender identity as performative. Though performances of gender can be conditioned by binary understandings of gender, they also hold the potential for “inversion, subversion or displacement” of idealized gender norms (Butler 1990: 42; for excellent ethnomusicological studies that engage with this approach, see, for example, Fast 1999; Sugarman 1997).

It is in this context that I approach the following discussion of Iraqi Jewish women’s lives. Through multi-dimensional sensorial and affective processes of remembrance, my three principal interlocutors employ creative and innovative strategies in individually navigating the inherent tensions between expected community standards and ideals versus on-the-ground lived reality. I examine how embodied and encoded remembrances blur the very boundaries between public and private—where the “silence,” and avowed “non-existence,” of female biographical song practices also suggests a
powerful kind of agency. Although many Iraqi Jewish women shroud sentiments and taboo remembrances behind a kind of self-imposed invisibility, it is in domestic settings that private songs emerge—triggered by the confluence of certain kinds of intimacy (Bauman 1984). In such settings, intimacy manifests from conversation and deep listening among women who are close to one another, and who regularly participate in coordinated group sensory activities such as food preparation—where humorous idioms, deeply personal life stories, and emotional remembrances are shared. These women’s performances are always retrospective, couched in memory and evoked by present-day attempts to make sense of (often traumatic) past experiences. Their songs emerge from the intersection of memory and emotion, helping to cultivate internal resilience in the face of great hardship. In certain ways, these private songs share similarities with more visible, community-based musical genres, such as musiqa mizraḥit, which developed as a product of, response to, and in defiance of social trauma and upheaval. An integral part of this discussion focuses on the role of Iraqi Jewish women in domestic and culinary settings, and the relationship of food preparation to memory and expressive practice (Meir-Gлизтенштейн 2016: 91; Sutton 2001). These realms of human activity, which share in a network of sensorial associations, maintain a particular relevance as an under-the-radar, yet vital means of promoting continuity in the face of disruption (Collins 1998; Shelemay 2009).

The Widow, the Divorcée, and the Cursed Bachelorette: A Tale of Three Women

I first meet Najiya at an Iraqi mo’adon, or social club meeting—an organized group of Iraqis who meet regularly at local community centers across the country, where
they discuss books, news, and cuisine related to Iraqi Jewry, as well as featuring regular
guest speakers and acclaimed authors. I am immediately drawn to Najiya’s warm, joyful
demeanor. I introduce myself and my research, and we begin to speak about Iraqi food.
We bond over our deep love of kubā and sambūsak, two different kinds of Iraqi
dumplings. Kubā dumplings are stuffed with various forms of meat and vegetables, and
are either fried or stewed in different, colorful soups. Sambūsak, on the other hand, is
stuffed with mashed chick peas, vegetables, and spices, and is either baked or fried.

I tell Najiya that I am interested in the different ways and styles of making Iraqi
food, and mention how, some time previous, one of my informants taught me to make
sambūsak. We delve into a detailed discussion of the spices and techniques involved—for
example, the importance of patience while caramelizing the onions to a deep golden color
in order to bring out their sweetness, as well as the appropriate moment for adding cumin
to the mix. “What is key,” Najiya says, “is that when you break the hot sambūsak in half,
the odor of roasted cumin seed is released and hits your nose.” She moves her head back
in an exaggerated gesture, as if the smell were actually hitting her nose. “Then you know
you have made it correctly.” Najiya stops me when I tell her that one of my informants
insists on using pre-ground cumin powder instead of grinding the seed freshly herself.
“What?” She says, in an outraged, comedic manner, insisting that sambūsak should
always be spiced with “cumūn āšīlī yidaqūnū bil-hāwūn” [Arabic: cumin ground with a
copper pan], otherwise it cannot be considered sambūsak. “Do not even speak to me of
this sambūsak,” Najiya retorts, in a joking manner. “Was her dough thick?” It was on the
thick side, and I tell her so. Najiya feigns further outrage and says, in Arabic, “Al-ā’ajīn
liḥkwītn ḫitt laḥmagh mā yakulū!” [The dough is so thick that even the donkey will not
Several Iraqis who have been standing near us overhear her comment and erupt in laughter. Najiya describes the importance of crafting a delicate dough that fries to a light crisp. We end our conversation with her promise to teach me the proper way to make these dishes.

A week later, Najiya phones me up. She tells me she is going to be making kubā and invites me to come to her home. I, of course, respond with an excited yes. She tells me, in Arabic, “Tált ʿalâ baytī wâyâ al-bâtan fârghi” [Come to my home with an empty stomach], which is all the more enticing. This is not the first time that I recognize my distinct good fortune in experiencing excellent food as part of my fieldwork.

I arrive at Najiya’s small apartment in Bnei Brak, on the outskirts of Tel Aviv. There is a long flight of stairs leading to her apartment, and I can smell the delightful odor of cooked foods emanating into the stairwell below—sautéed onions and garlic, as well as the unique aroma of ground meat seasoned with a flavorful mixture of coriander, cassia bark, paprika, and cumin. I am heavily pregnant and take my time going up the stairs, all the while inhaling the enticing aromas that lead up to Najiya’s doorway. As I approach her home, I hear laughter echoing through the hallway. I knock and Najiya opens the door, smiling warmly as she blesses me in Arabic. “Marḥabān! ʿāish al-jāy!” [Welcome! Long live the one who came!] she says, in the boisterous tone of voice with which she customarily speaks. When I step inside, I immediately notice that a jovial atmosphere awaits me. In addition to Najiya, her younger sister Margalit is present, as well as Nurit, her neighbor. All of them are elderly Iraqi Jews.
The women get up and surround me, surveying by large belly. I am currently eight months pregnant, and it shows. “Anfa li-baṭna! [Arabic: Your stomach reaches your nose!],” proclaims Najiya. All the women present burst into laughter, including me.

When I sit down in Najiya’s living room, she immediately delves into the story of the birth of her first son. We are interrupted by a knock at the door. Najiya gets up to answer, and a young, clueless delivery man appears with a package. He has the wrong address, and Najiya tells him in Hebrew, several times, that he has made a mistake. As she shuts the door, she turns to us and says, in Arabic, “Haṭḥā Allah mnaṭn jabū? [Where did Allah bring this guy from?] Tulū ṭūl al-nakhla ʿaqlū qaql al-ṣakhla [He’s tall as a palm tree but his brain is like a sheep].” Everyone again erupts in laughter. Margalit covers her eyes and shakes her head as she laughs.

In this setting, I notice that Najiya seems unbound by the typical sense of tsniut that I have perceived in her behavior in more public settings. Over time, I come to learn that she is almost eighty-five years old and a widow: her husband died almost a decade ago.

Najiya sits back down and continues the story of her first birth, speaking predominantly in Arabic. “I gave birth to my first child at home. I lay on my back on a straw mattress on the floor. When it was over my mother gave me chopped almonds with sugar for energy.” Najiya looks up at Margalit and eyes her comically. “Which was wonderful, until she ate all the almonds!” She gestures towards Margalit. “So I said, ‘Anī kanī hiya waldit! [Look, it’s like she gave birth!]’”

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4 Though our meeting shifts between spoken Hebrew and Arabic, it is predominantly conducted in qiltu.
Everyone laughs, including Margalit. Wiping a tear from the side of her eyes, Margalit says, “it was so tasty, I could not help myself!” Najiya smiles and continues:

My mother was laughing and laughing when this happened. I remember she took my son and washed him with warm water, dressed him, and wrapped him up in a homemade baby blanket. Then they gave him to me to nurse. I was lucky that I had milk. Sometimes a mother did not have milk or had infected nipples and could no longer breastfeed. In that case another woman would nurse the baby, usually one of the mother’s own relatives. Then that woman would call the baby her ‘akh biridā’ [Arabic: brother by nursing].

Najiya pauses, then continues: “I was fifteen years old when I married my husband. At the wedding, the most important thing to everyone was that I was a virgin.” Her voice has a sharp tone as she says this, almost as if with a slight air of annoyance. “Intimate relationships before marriage were forbidden. And of course, you were told who you had to marry.” The other women in the room nod in agreement. She continues:

The wedding was a big celebration, but the most important thing was that the woman was a virgin. After the marriage ceremony the bride and groom went in the home. A lady would stand at the door to check that, afterwards, the sheet was stained with blood. Then they would say “she was a virgin!” And everyone would rejoice and celebrate. I have a family member, I’m not going to tell you her name because she is still alive. Back in Iraq she slept with a man who promised her marriage, but did not keep his promise. Only a few people in the family knew what happened and they kept it secret. Astigh ā alitha [they maintained her honor]. They worried that if people knew, that no one would want to marry her. Well, they found her a suitor but before they took her to a specialized healer, someone who assisted girls in this kind of situation. The healer performed a hymen procedure to make her appear as a virgin. They had the wedding ceremony and afterwards her sheet was stained with blood. Everyone was happy. She ended up with a good marriage and four children.

Margalit interrupts:

A girl was supposed to get married early. People would seek help if she was not married by age 18 or 19: they would find someone, like a fortune teller, to do magic to help her get married. They would also take the soap with which they wash the dead, and ask an unmarried girl to wash with the same soap. In that way
they thought her body would crave intimacy so much that she will be open to the
idea of any suitor.

“Wait,” I ask, “how does the soap used to wash a dead person…?”

Before I finish my question, Najiya interrupts, “They washed her with the soap
and then she was willing to marry any man. *Al-taghsul bil-šābūn māl-mayit titizawj wāyā ghajal ‘aīsh*! [If she would wash with the soap of a dead man, then she would marry a
live one!]” Everyone bursts into laughter once more.

After a while, Najiya moves to the kitchen and we naturally follow her, forming a
circle around her large table. She has pre-prepared the necessary ingredients for making
*kubā* dumplings: the dough and the raw meat mixture have been separated into large
bowls, sitting on her table. Najiya explains how she woke up early in the morning to soak
the cracked wheat in water for a few hours before kneading it into a soft consistency. The
meat has been marinating for several hours, and the unique aroma of coriander mixed
with cassia bark and paprika hits my nose when Najiya removes the covering over the
bowl. I watch her as she cups a golf-ball size amount of wet flour in the palm of her hand,
hollowing out a concave surface whereupon she places a spoonful of raw meat. All four
of us wash our hands and crowd around the table, ready to cook. “It is important that the
meat is raw,” Naijiya remarks. “Many people cook the meat before adding it to the
dumpling, but then you lose all of the natural juices which soak into the dough of the
dumplings and the broth.” I scoop a small spoonful of the raw meat into the wet dough in
my palm. I grew up making *kubā*, and I know that the outside dough is supposed to be as
thin as possible without breaking. I take my time crafting the dumpling, and though
Najiya praises my efforts, I notice how my work looks clumsy in comparison with the women around me.

We continue to work as Nurit expounds on the previous topic:

But that is how it used to be, young girls had to marry men against their will, and if they did not agree they would be tricked. It happened with my neighbor in Iraq. She was twelve years old, and this old man was interested in her, very wealthy. At that time the government wanted to send her brother to the Iraqi army. And everyone knew that when Jews were drafted they never came back. So this older man was interested in her, and he told her parents he would pay a large bribe to save her brother if they allowed him to marry their daughter. They made the agreement, and the girl agreed, too, because she wanted to save her brother’s life. The ransom was paid, and her brother was free. But just two days later her brother was run over by a horse and he died. Meanwhile it was too late to save the girl and she was forced to marry the old man anyway. Sometimes she would come back to our neighborhood and visit us.

Nurit takes a deep breath, then begins to sing in softly rhythmic manner:

Abkī ‘alā ḥālī, ānā libnaya  I cry for my fate, I am a young girl
Abkī ‘alā ḥālī, ānā libnaya  I cry for my fate, I am a young girl
Yuma, ānā ṣabīya  Mother, I am young
Yuma, ānā ṣabīya  Mother, I am young
Ahlī hidaya ‘atōnī  My parents gave me as a gift
Ahlī hidaya ‘atōnī  My parents gave me as a gift
Wal‘-‘ajūz zawjōnī  Married me with an old man
Wal‘-‘ajūz zawjōnī  Married me with an old man
Anā zaghīra, zaghīra, yuma  I am young, young, mother
Anā ṣabīya, ṣabīya  I am young, young
Dam‘ah ‘alā khadā  Tears on my cheeks
Wa-dam‘ah ‘alā yadī  Tears on my hands
Mā lī ānal  I have no hope
Wa-mā ādīrī al-nahāyā  And I do not know how this will end
Abkī ‘alā ḥālī, ānā libnaya  I cry for my fate, I am a young girl
Abkī ‘alā ḥālī, ānā libnaya  I cry for my fate, I am a young girl

The atmosphere feels more somber once Nurit finishes singing. After a brief pause, Margalit continues, as she shapes the kubā in her hands:
Yes, but you see, they cried for death of a boy, but they did not feel sorry for the girl. Her life also ended once they married her. It was like that, and we were not allowed to fall in love. We were supposed to marry who they told us. And G-d forbid if we were intimate before marriage.

There is silence for a few moments.

“Like Samir,” Najiya says, somewhat suddenly, referring to her husband who has passed. “They tricked me.”

“They drugged you!” Margalit exclaims in a hushed tone of voice, as if speaking a secret rarely voiced. “Hanina arranged it.” Najiya pauses briefly to explain that Hanina was their older sister. Though she has now passed, they do not have fond memories of her.

Najiya then continues her story:

Hanina was married to Samir’s brother, and they found out that Samir was having this relationship with another woman. They were in love. Well Hanina did not approve because she said it was improper for Samir to have a girlfriend, especially one who slept with Samir before marriage. And Samir’s mother felt the same way. So they conspired to marry him to someone else, and they chose me. Our parents agreed, and my mother tried very hard to convince me.

Margalit interrupts, and starts to gesture emphatically as she explains what happened:

There was a big room in our house, in Iraq, with a large fireplace. And we went down to the fireplace. Our mother, her sisters, and Hanina sat you there, and they started talking and talking to you, trying to convince you. Then they threw herbs in the fire and continued to talk and talk. The whole room got very smoky, and I felt very dizzy. And by the end of the night you had agreed.
“Yes,” Najiya says, in an angry tone of voice. “They threw something into that fire to make me agree. And it is true that I agreed to marry Samir after that night.” Then, more quietly, she whispers, “But he punished me the rest of my life for it.”

We sit quietly for a moment, and then Najiya then begins chant, in a somewhat monotone fashion:

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{Bidalah yuma,} & Beloved mother, \\
\textit{Bidalah yōm} & Beloved mother \\
\textit{Rah minī} & From me, \\
\textit{āl-nōm} & Sleep escapes \\
\textit{Rajīlī qatalnī} & My husband hit me \\
\textit{Wa-mā rahmanī} & And did not show me mercy \\
\textit{D’mū ’at, yuma} & My tears, mother \\
\textit{D’mū ’āī, yuma} & My tears, mother \\
\textit{‘Ayūnī ħamra} & My eyes are red \\
\textit{‘Ayūnī ḥamra} & My eyes are red \\
\textit{Dāwīnī, yuma} & Heal me, mother \\
\textit{Dāwīnī, yuma} & Heal me, mother \\
\textit{ḥatā lū kān āl-dāwa mara} & Even if the medication is bitter \\
\textit{ḥatā lū kān āl-dāwa mara} & Even if the medication is bitter
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

After Najiya finishes her song, silence fills the room. We have finished making the dumplings, and it is time to drop them into an aromatic, tomato-based broth containing caramelized onions, zucchini, and chard, one that has been slowly simmering on the stovetop this entire time. Najiya picks up the large plate of dumplings with both hands, and silently walks over to the stove. She carefully begins to drop each individual dumpling into the hot soup base. The rest of us surround her and join her in her efforts. Through song, Najiya has just hinted at a terrible, forced marriage involving domestic abuse, and the simple act of joining her in thoughtful cooking and contemplation feels
immensely supportive. When she is done, she covers the large pot, leaving a small opening for steam to escape. No one speaks throughout this entire process.

After we finish, we move slowly back into the living room as we wait for the dumplings to cook. I ask Nurit about her memories of Iraq, and she begins to speak:

My father was a silversmith. He married my mother when she was 13 years old. She was very beautiful. I lived in Baghdad, in Talween, an area where rich people lived. My sister was married at age 16. She and my mother were pregnant at the same time. My family in Iraq was wealthy. They wanted to marry me to my first cousin, but there was a boy Ya‘aqūb that I had become friends with in school. Ya‘aqūb was accomplished and very smart. So when he asked my father for my hand in marriage, my father agreed and paid a large dowry for Ya‘aqūb to start a business. Well, one day Ya‘aqūb went on a business trip, and when he came back, he discovered that his partner had stolen everything. Even the doors to his shop had been closed. So we lost a lot of wealth, and Ya‘aqūb wanted me to ask my father for more money. I disagreed because I felt my father had already done enough for us. So, he divorced me under Jewish law. He was entitled because I had only given him one child, a daughter, and no sons. My heart broke when he divorced me, and I pleaded with him:

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Ya‘aqūb, ḥāchinī Ya‘aqūb, talk to me
Za‘alān nādīnī When I am upset, console me
Min fargtak, yāba Separating from you, oh father
Majrūh, dawīnī I am wounded, heal me
Ya‘aqūb, Ya‘aqūb Ya‘aqūb, Ya‘aqūb
Ya‘aqūb, ḥāchinī Ya‘aqūb, talk to me
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“I was still very young,” Nurit says, upon finishing her song. She appears visibly upset, and her hands are shaking. “And I never had the chance to have more children. I never married after he left me.”

Najiya reaches for Nurit’s hand and says to her, “But in the end, Nūr, he lost you,” she says, referring to Nurit by her Arabic name. “Let me tell you,” Najiya continues, announcing loudly to everyone in the room, “intérêt shet chayil,” she says, mixing Arabic with a biblical Hebrew phrase commonly used to refer to a woman of valor. She continues to emphasize Nurit’s valor in a declarative voice:
This woman not only raised her child, when we came to Israel she took in other children who had lost their parents! She worked for them, day and night, just to make sure they survived. And when they suffered she cried for them, just like their mother would, and prayed for their safety. And when they were hungry, she taught them how to manage.

Nurit appears much calmer after Najiya says this. Asserting her own accomplishments, she says:

It is true. When we came to Israel there were so many hungry children. And I would sit with them, I would tell them, “I know you are hungry. But you can handle it, because you are brave.” And they would go to bed hungry, but they were happy, because they were so proud to be brave.

“She gave them strength!” Najiya exclaims. “But meanwhile this stupid man. He never did anything, he never helped anybody. And he thought it was his right to throw you away. But in the end, he lost you, he lost his money, he even lost his hair!”

Nurit chuckles quietly, and Najiya continues, “You should see him now, completely bald. Hath a sha’aghū tḥjāḥāghū” [He has hair on his butt, instead].”

At this point, we all burst into laughter, and the mood in the room shifts somewhat, towards a more jovial atmosphere.

“So he is still alive?” I ask.

“He is still alive!” Najiya roars. “The bastard. He never married again but he is always running around with women! 'Umghū hīlā ʿalātnū [He still has strength at his age].” Everyone laughs once more at this saying, one that describes Ya’aqūb’s continued sexual appetite in a mocking manner.

As our laughter starts to die down, Margalit says,
Well this is how things have been for us. Women today have a voice, serve in the
army, and have an independent life separate from the old one. Back then they
said a woman should not work. She should be a housewife, obedient to her
husband, and he will be her ruler. She did not dare to defy him or his mother. A
bride’s family paid for her wedding, and if she was poor she married an old or
sick man. A woman was not independent; if she assumed independence, she was
cursed and met with punishment and anger. And if a woman was already married
and divorced, no man would touch her.

“It is true,” Nurit says. “Nobody wanted to marry me after Ya’aqūb divorced me.”

Margalit continues with her own testimony: “I myself did not marry until I was
already considered an old woman. My mother cried and cried over this. When we first
came to Israel, I fell in love with a voos voos named David.” Everyone laughs at
Margalit’s use of the word voos voos, a derogatory term used to refer to Ashkenazi Jews,
who often use the word voos [Yiddish: what] in conversation. She continues,

I was in nursing school at the time. I remember I was the only Iraqi, and all the
other students would call me “shvartsa” [Yiddish: black]. But David didn’t care.
He invited me one day to lunch at his friend’s place, but when we got there they
didn’t offer me food, and I wasn’t invited to sit at the table. Then one day David
took me to meet his mother in Tel Aviv. Although they had empty rooms for
guests, they had me sleep out on the balcony on a wooden bench without linen.
When they served food, they gave me very small amounts. Finally his mother
said to me, “I don’t want a black in my family.” David was my first love, but we
had to separate. The pressure was too much for us. My parents never even knew
about him, but if they had known, they would never have allowed it.

After this statement, Margalit begins to sing in a solemn, wistful manner:

\[
\begin{align*}
Hūa \ mna‘īn \ ū-ānā \ mna‘īn? & \quad \text{Where is he from, and where am I from?} \\
Hāfḥā \ al-balwa \ jānī \ mna‘īn? & \quad \text{Where is this trouble from?} \\
Hūa \ mna‘īn \ ū-ānā \ mna‘īn? & \quad \text{Where is he from, and where am I from?} \\
Hāfḥā \ al-balwa \ jānī \ mna‘īn? & \quad \text{Where is this trouble from?} \\
Mā \ hīšābītū \ āshlōn \ anā & \quad \text{I did not think how I am in poverty and he is in riches} \\
bilfāqūr \ ū-hūyā \ bilghānā & \quad \text{Where am I from, where am I from, and where is he} \\
Anā \ mna‘īn, ānā \ mna‘īn, ū-hūyā \ mna‘īn? \ & \quad \text{I love him like my two eyes} \\
ḥābatītū, ḥābatītū \ bil‘āintāīn & \quad \text{Yiddish: what} \\
\end{align*}
\]
After her song, Margalit remains silent for a while. No one speaks. Eventually, she continues. “My parents had arranged for me to marry an Iraqi man,” she says, repeating a statement she had previously articulated. “But I was never going to marry him.”

“Hārūn,” Najiya says, rolling her eyes.

“Yes, Hārūn,” Margalit continues. A look of disdain crosses her face, and she speaks once more:

My parents were obsessed with marrying me to Hārūn. But I could not stand the sight of him. He was ill-mannered and rude, and he made my skin crawl. My parents pressured me and pressured me and I found any excuse I could not to marry him. I fought them for two years, and finally they realized they could not force me. We were living in Israel, it was a different world, and they did not have so much control over me like they did in Iraq. So eventually they called off the arrangement. But Hārūn’s mother was so angry. She wanted to punish me for refusing her son. So she went to Shami, a woman who was known for practicing subhugh [black magic]. She paid Shami to curse me, to prevent me from ever marrying again. It worked, David and I broke up, and I had a very difficult time finding a husband after that. Meanwhile Hārūn’s mother bragged to everyone that she had punished me through Shami. We all knew what she had done. It was especially difficult for my mother. She was so upset that she sent me to visit an aunt in England, because it was said that crossing a large body of water would help cancel the magic.

Najiya continues Margalit’s story,

While Margalit left, Shami fell ill and she regretted causing Margalit harm. So her daughter came to me one day, and she told me that Shami felt guilty. She wanted to cancel the curse she had put on Margalit. But in order to undo the magic we had to dig up the material that Shami had buried in front of our parents’ home. We did not know that it was buried there, but what happened is that every time Margalit would walk across this material, the curse would again take effect, and no man would pursue her. So we all went to the location and tried to dig up the magic, but we couldn’t. The county had built a sidewalk over it. But once Shami died, the black magic was cancelled anyway.
“Then I returned from England,” Margalit interrupts, “and I met my husband that same day, in the marketplace. I was forty years old. And then we were married. Just two months after Shami’s death.” Everyone pauses as the weight of this realization hangs in the air.

Then Margalit, assuming the voice of her mother, begins to sing:

Awūn, awūn, yuma
Awūn, yuma, awūn
Libnaya kabrit, yuma, libnaya kabrit

I am moaning, I am moaning, mother
I am moaning, mother, I am moaning
The girl grew older, mother, the girl grew older

Wal bʿāid, wal-bʿāid safrīt
Shāmi sihrīt lahā
ū-lisā mā jā bakhta, mā jā bakhta
ū-lamā, lamā Shāmi mātāt
Bakhta jā lamā safrīt

And far and far away she traveled
Shami did magic to her
Still no luck came, no luck came
And when, when Shami died
Her luck began to change on her travel

Allah fāk al-sīhir
Allah yaṭwil lahā al-ʿamūr

Allah cancelled the black magic
And grants her a long life

We sit in silence after Margalit’s song. Eventually, she continues to speak:

Many years after I had gotten married, my old love David searched for me, but it was too late. I was working in Belinson [a hospital in Tel Aviv] and he found me. We agreed to meet in a coffee shop. He had also gotten married, to an Ashkenazi woman, and they had three children. He told me he had an unhappy marriage, and I was sad for him. We let the past be in the past, and never had contact again.

After Margalit concludes her testimony, we remain silent for a few moments. Suddenly, Najiya looks towards a clock hanging on the wall. “The kubā is ready!” she exclaims. The four of us walk into the kitchen. Najiya takes out some large bowls, and fills them with steaming white rice. She begins to ladle the soup on top of the rice and explains the health benefits of the dish we are about to consume, which is full of savory protein and vegetables. We eat heartily and continue to converse late into the evening, with each woman trading stories and songs of her life.
The above vignette details an encounter that was markedly different from many of the other spheres of intimacy I had observed. This is largely due to the all-female composition of those present, as well as the particularly close relationship these women share with one another. While conducting other interviews among groups of men and women, I had often noticed the tendency for women to remain silent, or simply leave the room. Thus, there was at least a superficial level of dominance among male interviewees in mixed-gender contexts. This is in line with some of the comments made by the women in the above vignette, as when Margalit says, “Traditionally, a woman should not work. She should be a housewife, obedient to her husband, and he will be her ruler. She does not dare to defy him.” Here Margalit is referring to how Iraqi women of older generations tend to defer to their male relatives—and especially, their husbands—when speaking openly about familial or community matters.

Nonetheless, even in mixed-gender contexts, I noticed that Iraqi women exert considerable social influence, though this often occurs in less obvious ways. In the vignette detailed in Chapter 3, for example, Tikvah deeply impacts her husband Nuri’s testimony: through subtle gestures, interruptions, and carefully timed interjections, her presence determines much of the content of our interview, though she nonetheless remains silent for most of it (and was, in fact, in another room for most of our discussion). Shulamit appears particularly embarrassed by aspects of Nuri’s spoken and sung testimony, and reprimands him in a quiet yet effective manner through sharp looks and pointed gestures. After our first interview, I am left with the distinct impression that
she has persuaded her husband not to share any further songs with me, as he does not sing again in my presence.

My meeting at Najiya’s apartment, however, stands in contrast. At this gathering, all the women present have varying connections to Iraq; furthermore, we all carry, to some degree, our own experiences traditionally associated with womanhood—including pregnancy, marriage, and birth. Our initial interaction is cued, in part, by my own advanced pregnancy, which seems to prompt Najiya’s remembrance of her first child’s birth. From that moment on, the tone of our meeting is set, and our conversation naturally drifts towards themes related to womanhood. Contrary to the ways in which such conversations are often shrouded by prevailing notions of female modesty in more public settings, in this context their discussion is openly embraced. This is further enhanced by the fact that all the women present are elderly; having outlived spouses and other contemporaries, their advanced age seems to afford them a certain amount of freedom to make outrageous jokes and discuss taboo topics.

“Sisterwork” in the Camaraderie of Women’s Spheres

My presence as both an ethnographer and a visibly pregnant woman inevitably shaped the nature of my meeting with Najiya, Margalit, and Nurit, serving as a kind of catalyst for what information these women decided to share and/or obscure, and in what way. I was, naturally, oriented towards matters related to child-rearing and pregnancy at that time, and though I did not often consciously pursue these topics during interviews, I have no doubt that on some level I was naturally inclined towards discussing and inquiring about them.
Indeed, throughout my fieldwork, my pregnancy impacted many of my interviews—useful for opening certain doors within the Iraqi Jewish community, just as it closed others. Over the course of this particular meeting, I found myself saying very little, though I was continually aware of the impact of my presence. For example, I noticed that the testimonies of these three women were largely geared towards an audience (myself) with no a priori knowledge of their family dynamic. And though these women meet together regularly, the truth is that I will never know what forms their spheres of intimacy take when I am not around.

This point reflects on an essential quality of autobiographical reminiscences, where expressions of memory are highly dependent on the social context of their articulation; they can, in turn, be deeply impacted by the presence of an ethnographer. As Shelemay deftly explains, “the ethnographer’s strong interest in testimony may inflect both the memories brought to the fore and the emotions associated with them” (Shelemay 2006: 30). Though such testimonies are personal, their articulation is nonetheless deeply social—shaped in content and contour by the individuals present when the memory is related in a group setting. Remembrances are thus usefully considered as “momentary occurrences,” ones that can vary greatly in quality and kind (ibid.: 20). nowhere is this more clear to me than in the context of my meeting at Najiya’s apartment, where each individual’s testimony is shaped both my presence and that of the other women at the gathering, as well as by the memories they recount.

Of the three elderly Iraqi women at our meeting, two are sisters, and the third is a life-long friend and neighbor. Najiya, for her part, is a widow, who was physically and

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5 For example, when Najiya begins her discussion of her marriage, both she and Margalit are careful to explain the particular individuals involved in the reminiscence, their relation to one another, and their influence over the course of events that led to Najiya’s forced marriage.
emotionally abused over the course of her decades-long marriage. Nurit, her neighbor, is a divorcée, whose husband abandoned her and continues to, embarrassingly, chase after other women though he is already elderly. Margalit, Najiya’s little sister, had a secret and ill-fated romance with an Ashkenazi man in her earlier years, and eventually married another man at a later age. Through the telling of their different life experiences, each of these women demonstrate the varying ways in which they have individually navigated the intense pressures of womanhood specific to their community and generation. They provide one another a realm of support and camaraderie within which to verbalize and share their emotions and pain.

Throughout the course of our meeting, these women relate biographical and musical reminiscences that seem to cue one another, building a kind of collective storytelling that at once details their unique circumstances while also illustrating their interconnectedness. In this regard, their sphere of intimacy is highly reminiscent of the “safe spaces” among African American women described by Patricia Hill Collins (Collins 1998, 2000). Collins demonstrates how, in varied instances across time, African American women have cultivated safe spaces in their relationships with one another—where shared stories, subversive reminiscences, expressive practices, and resistance often find voice (Collins 2000: 208-209). Focusing on the notion of black women’s participation in “a constellation of mothering activities,” which she calls “motherwork,” Collins demonstrates how African American women have nurtured and maintained a sense of self-definition and power amid the oppressive forces that surround them (Collins 1998: 384; see also Bowers 2000: 159). Though she admits that such processes can vary greatly depending on the particularity of their socio-cultural instance, Collins argues for
the relevance of her approach to understanding the work of marginalized women; indeed, she usefully applies her conception of motherwork in analyses of communities of Native American, Hispanic, and Asian-American women (Collins 1998: 373-386).

My reading of Collins’ argument is not one that equates nurture and care with all mothers and forms of motherhood, or even as qualities exclusive to the female realm. Rather, it is a way of conceptualizing the values, actions, and social relationships associated with the domestic labor of women, and the ways these intersect with larger conceptions of race, class, and gender in unique socio-cultural instances. I find her analysis useful for thinking about the close relationships I observed between elderly Iraqi Jewish women, as a kind of network that encourages safe spaces, wherein women can vocalize their individual pains, disappointments, dreams, and aspirations—ones that are simultaneously unique to each woman, while also reflective of the larger, shared social constraints they have faced.

I propose an approach that broadens Collins’ notion of “motherwork” towards the idea of “sisterwork,” where the unspoken bonds of female camaraderie among certain elderly Iraqi Jewish women form a dynamic, unseen web of support that can both sustain individual lives and support community survival. This formulation allows us to understand the unique forms of intimacy in women’s spheres that prompt the singing of private songs, while also attending to the nuances of individual women’s lives from which these expressions emerge. I argue that, within spheres of intimacy, Iraqi women command powerful forms of authority, navigating issues relegated to the female realm through the strategic and varied implementation of self-determined invisibility, silence, silence, silence.

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6 Indeed, Collins, like Abu-Lughod and Shohat, argues against a universal feminist approach that might eclipse a more nuanced, and comprehensive understanding of women’s lives in specific socio-cultural instances.
and voice. Through expressive testimonies that cultivate cults of secrecy, dual consciousness, and multiple representations of self, these women provide promote individual and community power and pride.

My conceptualization of “sisterwork” involves Collins’ notion of “other-mothering,” where women join forces to help to raise one another’s children, collectively plan and prepare nourishment (especially in conditions of scarce resource), and provide emotional support in the context of shared social tragedy and upheaval (Collins 1998: 381; 2000: 180). Najiya describes her experiences of “other-mothering” throughout her testimony, where Iraqi women would often care for one another’s children, and even wet-nurse one another’s babies, particularly during moments of community difficulty and strife. These descriptions of past female support networks serve as a kind of model for sisterwork in contemporary settings, as evidenced by our meeting—where these three women together lament forced marriages and domestic violence, take on one another’s distress, and allow their individual pains to collectively resonate within and across their shared, intimate space.

*Enacting Sisterwork: Trans-generational Negotiations of Womanhood*

As a constellation of activities associated with womanhood that include particular kinds of expressive and narrative strategy, sisterwork can be enacted, embodied, and sounded—forming a site where the pressures of gender-specific social and community ideals can be negotiated and critiqued. As illustrated by the sphere of intimacy described above, a key aspect of sisterwork lies in its trans-temporal evocation and sounding, where remembrances of sisterwork past are “given voice” through spoken and sung mediums,
just as, via the same process, they are re-enacted and transformed through sisterwork in the present. Thus, sisterwork can be usefully considered from a transgenerational perspective, where it operates in a metaphoric sense on a number of levels.

Indeed, over the course of the evening, individual reminiscences among these women are deepened through their resonance with one another’s stories, and through the collective actions of all present. For example, after Najiya relates the domestic abuse she endured through song, our support is enacted through synchronized culinary activity—shaping dumplings that are at once a form of nourishment in the present day—while also sensorially evoking multiple aspects of female Iraqi Jewish life of the past.⁷ As Esther Meir-Gliztenstein has described Iraqi Jewish women’s culinary efforts in the 1940s:

The kitchen was not merely for cooking. It was also the site of intense socializing, with work being carried out collaboratively. Young women learned culinary secrets and rules of family conduct, by means of which they underwent the process of membership and—sometimes—empowerment.

Meir-Gliztenstein 2016: 95

In this setting, then, testimony involves the embodied re-enactment of activities particular to temporal and spatial contexts associated with these remembrances. This can be understood as a kind of “elaborative encoding,” one that is crucial to the maintenance of memory (Shelemay 2006: 26). It is tied to “food’s memory power,” which “derives in part from synesthesia … the synthesis or crossing of experiences from different sensory registers” (Sutton 2001: 17). In this way, processes of remembering simultaneously occur

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⁷ A number of authors have demonstrated how kāba, as a mainstay of Iraqi Jewish cuisine, holds an almost iconic fascination among Iraqi Jews (see, for example, Meir-Glizenstein 2016). Food author Katherine Martinelli argues that the act of preparing kāba is, in and of itself, “a means of preserving Iraqi Jewish heritage” (Martinelli 2010).
across different sensory modalities, compounding multiple dimensions of affective meaning associated with the memories evoked.

My meeting with Najiya, Margalit, and Nurit thus exhibits a certain ritualistic quality, where sensorial remembrances related to musical and culinary expressivity interweave with narrative forms; these are at once situated within the individual while also forming a kind of social commemoration. In this regard, I find Paul Connerton’s approach to ritual and commemoration particularly useful. Connerton’s notion of “incorporating practices” is key for understanding the centrality of habitual bodily practices in processes of remembering, where individuals re-enact the past in the present (Connerton 1989: 72). Though I diverge from Connerton’s notion of commemorative ceremonies as “distinct areas of social activity” separated along a continuum from both embodied (incorporating practices) and verbal (inscripting practices) forms of memory (ibid.: 7), I nonetheless find his distinctions useful for understanding the simultaneous yet varied presence of bodily practices and verbal remembrances within (and as part of) processes of commemoration. This is evidenced by the convergence of all three in the sphere of intimacy recounted above.

This unique convergence is inherently tied to processes of encoding meaning, where alternative memories are simultaneously revealed and yet concealed. These processes occur on several levels—through their careful articulation in highly exclusive, intimate contexts; recited in a language (Arabic) that is largely indecipherable to large sectors of the Israeli public sphere; which, furthermore, are articulated in highly poetic terms, and involve specialized knowledge of culinary and musical expressivity implied in their enactment. All of these layers of inclusivity work to both heighten the impact of
these remembrances for those within the sphere of intimacy, while simultaneously veiling them from those who are not privy to the embodied knowledge and meaning evoked.

This occurs, for example, via the particular modalities Nurit utilizes in conveying aspects of her painful divorce (which will be examined in detail below, see Figure 4.3). Margalit, then, cued by Nurit’s remembrance, conveys and encodes aspects of her own prohibited and ill-fated premarital romance through similar expressive mediums (see Figure 4.5, below). In another example, Najiya—prompted by Nurit’s musical remembrance of a young neighbor who was tricked into marrying an older man—subsequently offers a sung testimony of her own forced marriage (see Figure 4.2, below). Embedded within her song is a lyrical depiction of domestic abuse, set to rhyming verse: “rajilt qatalnī, wa-mā raḥmantī” [my husband hit me, and did not show me mercy]. Notably, this is not something she reveals in spoken testimony; rather, it is shrouded behind various levels of poiesis.

Another important aspect of sisterwork in the present day involves the strategic use of humor in delineating a particular kind of subversive, female-oriented intimacy. In the above vignette, it is clear that humorous sayings, often driven by Najiya, are a frequent occurrence. Najiya’s particular talent for playing with words in Arabic is evidenced by her creative use of alliteration and rhyme in creating spur-of-the-moment idioms that are simultaneously delivered with incisive comedic timing. On a deeper level, they offer a harsh critique of the perceived idiocy (and buffoonery) of men. For example, when a young Israeli delivery man mistakenly knocks on Najiya’s door, not only does she mock his height and brain, but she purposefully does so with a clever turn of words in Arabic that will only be understood by the women present: tulū ṭūl al-nakhla ʿāqalu ʿaql
al-ṣakhla [he's tall as a palm tree but his brain is like a sheep]. Note her innovative rhyme of the word nakhla [palm tree] with ṣakhla [sheep]. The delivery man was clearly Ashkenazi, and Najiya’s mockery falls in line with other humorous comments that refer to Ashkenazim in derogatory terms, such as later in the evening, when Margalit uses the word “voos voos.” This type of humor forms an important means of resistance through ridicule, one that has been common among Iraqis since their immigration. For example, Orit Bashkin notes how Iraqis in transit camps were often at the mercy of Ashkenazi officials for work assignments and economic opportunities, which were scarce (Bashkin 2017: 47). As a response to their increasing marginalization, Iraqis would often ridicule Ashkenazim through mockery and pranks (ibid.: 154).

In another example, Najiya strategically employs humor to ridicule Nurit’s ex-husband in a manner that demeans him: “ḥaṭha shaʾaghū ṱbjaḥaghū,” she says, emphasizing that the hair on his head is instead found on his behind. Her quick retort employs a clever rhyme between the word shaʾaghū [his hair] and jaḥaghū [his butt]. Through such innovative lyrical phrases, Najiya mocks the man who caused her friend pain, while also emphasizing Nurit’s (female-oriented) valor in comparison.

These moments of humor not only provide lighthearted respites from the deep tension and pain articulated by these women over the course of the evening, they also form a realm of incisive social commentary and critique of men. Furthermore, they push the unspoken boundaries of the tsniut in a way that encourages those present to reveal particularly intimate, even inappropriate, perspectives. In this process, Najiya, Margalit, and Nurit collectively expound upon their support and critique of ideals of womanhood
expected of them, as embodied in the biblical notion of eshet chayil [Hebrew: woman of valor].

Sounding Sisterwork: Expressive Power and Taboo Remembrance

These women’s powerful testimonies thus draw from a range of expressive modalities and resources that are at once housed in each individual but also elicited on a collective level through their interaction. Of central interest to this study is the integral role of musical expression to such highly evocative, yet concealed moments of remembrance. In this regard, I find it useful to consider Shelemay’s notion of musical resources as a “storehouse for memory”—those sonic materials, conditioned by cultural upbringing, upon which an individual draws in creating emergent forms of expressivity (Shelemay 2006: 22). Bruno Nettl’s notion of “musical idiolect” is also useful in this regard, as a means of describing an individual’s “complete repertory, musical life, and experience,” considered in relation to the social groups of which that individual is a part (Davis 2015: 257; Nettl 2010b: 52-53). As a kind of corpus, or network, of musical knowledge that a person gathers and retains over the course of her life, a person’s musical idiolect is not considered exclusive to her ability to perform certain kinds of music (though it can include this). It also involves familiarity with various musical genres, sources, and associations gleaned from active and repeated listening (see Nettl 2010a: 186). Aspects of a person’s musical idiolect, then, can be variously related to embodied memories and deeply felt notions of self (Gill 2017; Stokes 2010).

Importantly, these musical resources, though originally evocative of a particular time and place, can then be further layered, manipulated, and adapted through their
subsequent involvement in other emotional experiences and remembrances; thus, their meanings can persist and compound over the course of a person’s life (Shelemay 2006). As we shall see in the following musical analyses, sonic resources that are incorporated into a person’s musical idiolect after a remembered event can nonetheless be adapted retrospectively to fit contemporary recollections. An important part of this process, then, lies in the way musical remembrance defies a linear understanding of time. In Shelemay’s words, “memories of and about music carry their own histories and even their own chronologies, but not always in chronological order. Memories of music operate on multiple levels and dimensions simultaneously, constantly circling back on themselves” (ibid.: 32).

*Nurit’s Song: “I Cry for my Fate”*

Nurit is the first woman of the evening to share a song, but, notably, this song is attributed to someone who is not physically present at the meeting—rather, she describes a neighbor who was married off at a young age. It does not seem like a coincidence that Nurit chooses another woman’s story as a foray into a larger discussion that involves social criticism, as the somewhat impersonal nature of the recollection allows her to recall a painful past event while nonetheless obscuring her involvement. Though she describes the girl’s life story in the third person when she speaks, she adopts the girl’s voice in the first person when she recites her song—literally taking on the young girl’s pain from more than seventy years ago as if it were her own. Through shifting her remembrance between first- and third-person perspectives, Nurit cultivates a testimonial strategy that involves multiple narrative selves—simultaneously presenting this girl’s suffering as an individual experience, yet one that is common to women of her
generation. Her testimony thus incorporates different expressive modalities, which converge to communicate multiple levels of individual and social meaning, forming an important, multi-dimensional counterpoint with one another during acts of remembrance.

Figure 4.1 “Abkī ‘alā ḥālī.” Sung by “Nurit.” Recorded February 2016, Bnei Brak, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abkī ‘alā ḥālī, ānā libnaya</td>
<td>I cry for my fate, I am a young girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abkī ‘alā ḥālī, ānā libnaya</td>
<td>I cry for my fate, I am a young girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuma, ānā şabiya</td>
<td>Mother, I am young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuma, ānā şabiya</td>
<td>Mother, I am young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahlī hidaya ‘atōnī</td>
<td>My parents gave me as a gift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahlī hidaya ‘atōnī</td>
<td>My parents gave me as a gift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wal-‘ajūz zawjōnī</td>
<td>Married me with an old man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wal-‘ajūz zawjōnī</td>
<td>Married me with an old man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anā zaghīra, zaghīra, yuma</td>
<td>I am young, young, mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anā şabiya, şabiya</td>
<td>I am young, young</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dam‘ah ‘alā khadī</td>
<td>Tears on my cheeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa-dam‘ah ‘alā yadī</td>
<td>Tears on my hands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mā lī āmal</td>
<td>I have no hope</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa-mā ādrī al-nahāya</td>
<td>And I do not know the end (how this will end)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abkī ‘alā ḥālī, ānā libnaya</td>
<td>I cry for my fate, I am a young girl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abkī ‘alā ḥālī, ānā libnaya</td>
<td>I cry for my fate, I am a young girl</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This song differs from many of the others I collected in that it is less melancholic, and follows a somewhat more lively, rhythmic delivery. Interestingly, the song’s rhythmic flow is entirely textually driven; thus, the meter varies from line to line in order
to accommodate the song’s lyrics. It has an overall ABABBABBA form, where each section follows an underlying melodic skeleton. From her delivery, it is clear that Nurit had a specific melodic formula in mind, one based in *maqām kurd*, which she utilizes to accommodate her text. In this regard, Nurit’s song draws from a lineage of expressive practices common to both Jews and Muslims, where melody and rhythm are utilized in a flexible manner (including melodic expansions and contractions) in the service of communicating a textual message (Shiloah 1995: 37). For example, the same melodic skeleton in line 4 is rhythmically expanded in line 8 to accommodate the lengthier textual passage of this line (Figure 4.1, musical lines 4, 8). Of further note, Nurit’s A section has a percussive rhythmic quality that serves to accentuate the message of her lyrics, which repeatedly emphasize the cruelty of a girl having been “given away” at a young age (Figure 4.1, text lines 1-2, 5-6, 9-10). Her song ends on the third scale degree, which leaves the song feeling incomplete, almost as if Nurit could continue composing further lyrics, indefinitely.

Each of Nurit’s A sections follows a rhythmic melodic utterance focused on the minor third interval of the lower tetrachord, while her B section starts on the fourth note of the *maqām* and explores the upper tetrachord—a common means through which a *maqām*’s path [Arabic: *sayr*] unfolds (Racy 2003: 97, 100). Notably, Nurit’s B section incorporates a descending melismatic melodic contour, a “typical” *sayr* of *maqām kurd* (ibid.: 99). *Maqām kurd* is considered a “contemporary melodic mode” (Faruqi 1981: 150)—one that carries affective resonances within genres such as *musiqa mizraḥit*, as well as contemporary Arab popular music (Regev and Seroussi 2004: 210; Kligman 2009: 66). A large number of *musiqa mizraḥit* songs are set in *maqām kurd*—for
example, the highly sentimental song “Ahavat Chayai” by Chaim Moshe. So too, are many popular Arab songs of Egypt, such as Umm Kulthūm’s “Hagartak”—all of which have been avidly consumed in Iraqi Jewish communities of Israel from the 1960s on. Thus, the sentiment of Nurit’s remembrance is compounded through the emotional association of this mode with more contemporary expressions.

Najiya’s Song: “Beloved Mother”

In response to Nurit’s song, Margalit reacts with deep empathy, as well as sadness and anger on behalf of the young woman. She then applies this girl’s personal tragedy as a kind of micro-illustration of the larger issues facing women of their generation: “Yes, but you see, they cried for the death of a boy, but they did not feel sorry for the girl. Her life also ended once they married her.” Nurit’s sung remembrance of her neighbor, followed by Margalit’s angry critique, both serve to cue Najiya’s testimony of her own forced marriage. Her relatively simple, narrow melodic compass is delivered in a husky singing voice, one that is likely a function of her advanced age, lending an overall recitative quality to the song. This works in conjunction with Najiya’s great facility with words, which demonstrates her poetic and lyrical talent. Her song, which follows an overall AABB, simple verse format, can be understood as a scathing critique of her arranged marriage and subsequent unhappiness, utilizing expressive strategies that shroud meaning behind “veils of opacity” (Pilzer 2012: 9).

Figure 4.2. “Bidalah yuma, bidalah yōm.” Sung by “Najiya.” Recorded February 2016, Bnei Brak, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.

Bidalah yuma,  Beloved mother,
Bidalah yōm  Beloved mother

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In many ways, Najiya’s song draws on the thematic template of the song-type *dililōl* discussed in Chapter 2. As in recitations of *dililōl*, Najiya addresses her song to her mother, using the same word prevalent in *dililōl* recitations (*yuma*), as well as references to her mother as “beloved” (*Bidalah*). Additionally, as in *dililōl*, Najiya describes the physical impact of her suffering (such as insomnia, tears, and red eyes)—both as a means of confiding her pain, but also as an anguished cry to her mother for relief, as when she says, “Heal me, mother, even if the medication is bitter” (Figure 4.2, lines 11-14). In this
case, Najiya is describing her feeling that any alternative, however bitter, would be better than the marriage to which she was subjected—a particularly poignant sentiment, considering the impossibility of reversing her fate. Her appeal to her mother for a cure is itself deeply tied to themes prevalent in dililôl, in which women often metaphorically describe their pain as a headache, and ask their mothers to heal them (see, for example, Avishur 1987a: 75 and Manasseh 1991-2: 9-10, 21-23). A further level of thematic continuity with dililôl recitations occurs in Najiya’s critique of arranged marriage (Khayyat 1978; Manasseh 1991-2). Like dililôl, then, “Bidalah yuma, bidalah yôm” provides a trans-generational emotional model for embodying how to feel, how to suffer, and how to express that suffering through musical and poetic forms. In this sense, not only are mothers seen as both a model for emotional release, they are also a metaphoric source of nourishment and strength. On another level, however, mothers can also be a source of pain—as exemplified by this lament, which Najiya directs towards her mother—her confidant, and yet the very person who was largely responsible for orchestrating her unhappy marriage.

Nurit’s Song: “Ya’aqûb, hâchint”

Najiya’s description of her difficult marriage likely encourages Nurit to musically recount her troubled marriage, one that ultimately ended in divorce. Of all the songs shared over the course of the evening, Nurit’s is the only one that is a clear variant of a known song. The others draw from various sources of inspiration, but nonetheless appear to be original songs. Indeed, for quite some time after our meeting, I was under the impression that Nurit’s song could possibly be original as well. It was only months later, when I hummed this melody for one of my informants who has a particularly strong
knowledge of Arabic music, that I discovered the source. My informant sang the song she was familiar with, and I recorded and transcribed her rendition. I then utilized her transcription as a starting point for uncovering information about the original song that inspired Nurit’s recitation, as well as pertinent information of its recording (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4, below).

**Figure 4.3. “Ya’aqūb, ḥāchīnī.”** Sung by “Nurit.” Recorded February 2016, Bnei Brak, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.⁸

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ya’aqūb, ḥāchīnī</th>
<th>Ya’aqūb, talk to me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Za’alān nādīnī</td>
<td>When I am upset, console me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Min ḥaragta, yāba</td>
<td>Separating from you, oh father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majrūḥ, dawīnī</td>
<td>I am wounded, heal me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya’aqūb, Ya’aqūb</td>
<td>Ya’aqūb, Ya’aqūb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ya’aqūb, ḥāchīnī</td>
<td>Ya’aqūb, talk to me</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Musical notation](image)

**Figure 4.4. “Barhūm ḥāchīnī.”** Sung by Najāh Salām. From the recording “Barhum ḥāchīnī/Shab al-Asmar,” Cairophone 1965. (Re-released by Cairophone on *From Lebanon with Love*, 1977).

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⁸ Nurit’s song was originally in *maqām nahāwand* in F#. It has been transposed down to C for the purposes of clarity.
Nurit’s song is based on “Barhūm ḥāchinī,” a popular Arab song by the Lebanese singer Najāḥ Salām, which was originally released in Egypt in 1965. Salām, originally Najāḥ Muḥīy al-Dīn Salām, was born in 1931 in Beirut. She eventually rose to
considerable fame in the popular music sphere, and began recording in Cairo in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The lyrics of her song, as well as its melody, display a striking continuity with those of Nurit. Both songs adapt a similar structure. Nurit’s song follows a basic AABBCC form, similar to Salām’s AAAABBBCC (whose only difference is that she repeats each A and B section two more times than Nurit). Both versions, furthermore, display the same basic melodic contour. In addition, a large portion of the thematic and lyrical content of Salām’s version is adopted almost verbatim into Nurit’s rendition, though strategically adapted to fit the particulars of her situation—including the use of her husband’s actual name, Yaʿāqūb. Since Nurit’s husband divorced her before moving to Israel in the early 1950s, it is clear that Nurit adapts this song retrospectively to fit the emotional content of her memory.

Nonetheless, some important distinctions between the two versions emerge. Salām’s original song has a lively rhythmic delivery, with a fast percussive accompaniment on the dumbek and riqq in the rhythmic mode (īqā’i) maqsūm. Nurit’s rendition is articulated in a much slower manner, indicative of a more melancholic state. Notably, Salām’s refrain, sung by multiple voices in unison, does exhibit a more “straight” rhythmic delivery from which Nurit’s version draws. Salām was trained within the Mashreqi modal system (Danielson 1997: 243), and her song is maqām nahāwand on C; Nurit’s melody, which is almost verbatim to that of Salām, is in the same melodic mode. Interestingly, in the Mashreqi system, maqām nahāwand is often associated with feelings of “profound elation” and breathtaking beauty (Racy 2003: 99-100); furthermore, in Levantine Jewish liturgical contexts it is associated with the song “Attah El Kabbir,” itself a plea to the divine for compassion and redemption (Shelemay 1998:
Thus, it is possible that, while drawing heavily from Salām’s original song, Nurit’s purposeful adaption of this mode adds a further level of emotional resonance to her plea for her husband’s redemption. Importantly, her song conveys the importance of communication and its breakdown, which she believes ultimately led to the demise of her marriage. Another interesting aspect shared by both versions occurs in the use of the word “yāba,” or father, as the person to whom the singer “calls” to address her suffering and pain. Various expressive genres employ this word in ecstatic performance, including Sufi dhikr rituals (Frishkopf 2013: 42), as well as evocative Arab popular songs, such as Fairouz’s 1967 “Hāla wāl-Mālik,” written by the Rahbani brothers.

Nurit thus adapts Salām’s song as a means of expressing the still present pain of her divorce, which occurred over sixty years ago, and how, as a result, her life diverged from the ideals of womanhood expected of her. A highly illustrative moment of spoken communication follows Nurit’s articulation of this song. Najiya, sensing Nurit’s pain, reaffirms Nurit as a woman of valor [Hebrew: eshet chayil]. She describes how Nurit was crucial in helping instill pride and emotional strength in Iraqi Jewish children in the transit camps who were forced to go hungry. She then metaphorically demonstrates how Nurit’s inspiration of strength in others reflects an essential aspect of her character, thus asserting her qualities as an ideal woman. This moment illustrates a critical quality of sisterwork, where community strength and self-pride is cultivated in an embodied sense through the very actions associated with “other-mothering” (Collins 1998: 381). As Collins describes, such maternal actions help teach marginalized children how to “survive in systems that would oppress them. Moreover, this survival must not come at the

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9 Of note, this particular liturgical song was originally adapted from a classical Arabic muwashshāḥ. It became highly popular in the region at the end of the nineteenth century, when it spread widely from the region of Syria where it was subsequently adopted by Iraqi Jews (Shelemay 1998: 54-56).
expense of self-esteem. Thus, a dialectical relation exists between systems of racial oppression … and the cultures of resistance to that oppression …. Motherwork occurs at this critical juncture” (ibid.). The sense of resilience that Nurit inspires in other children thus metaphorically circles back to her via Najiya’s words as a means of providing her further self-pride and fortitude, and affirming her status as an eshet chayil in spite of her taboo divorce.

An Interlude: The Negotiation of Eshet Chayil vis-à-vis Social Change

Through expressive remembrance, these women participate in ongoing, emergent meaning constructions implied in the interplay of maternal action with sociocultural value and change (Ruddick 1989). In many ways, one can understand this from the perspective of eshet chayil. As a biblical description of the “ideal” woman and wife, eshet chayil can variously be translated as “woman of valor,” and/or “capable wife.” The term itself originates from an alphabetic acrostic poem of Mishlei (Proverbs 31:10-31), which has been adopted as a song of praise that is recited in almost every Iraqi Jewish household on the eve of Shabbat in honor of the mother of the home. When I asked my informants about the meaning of this (highly visible) song, every one of them answered that it is sung in recognition of a mother’s invaluable contributions to the life of the family. Biblical scholar Jacqueline Vayntrub’s “feminist reading” of this verse highlights its depiction of the asymmetrical nature of women’s work in the home, which far overshadows that of men (Vayntrub 2014).

As an ideal, my informants have variously described the characteristics of an eshet chayil as a woman who is chaste before marriage, has a solid marriage and bears
children at an appropriate age, faithfully performs her domestic duties as a wife, avoids divorce, and never engages in illicit activities such as having sexual relations outside marriage. As demonstrated in the above case, eshet chayil is also used to refer to the ultimate caretaker—a woman who takes on other children as her own, and nourishes them on a physical and emotional level. Among almost all elderly Iraqi Jewish women, eshet chayil is a highly valued feminine ideal to which they aspire.

On a certain level, Najiya, Nurit, and Margalit each take great pride in the ways their lives have aligned with the notion of eshet chayil. Through their collective storytelling, they detail the strategies women have employed in helping other women attain these ideals. For instance, their narratives describe how, in the past, women would help one another to find suitors by washing with the soap used to cleanse the body of a dead man, or by seeking out practitioners of black magic. At times, such efforts involve collaborative, clever strategizing among women. At other times, they can involve methods of physical coercion and betrayal, also at the hands of trusted women. This is exemplified in its most extreme case through Najiya’s description of being drugged by her female relatives in order to force her hand in marriage. Notably, such instances demonstrate important aspects of Collins’ notion of “motherwork”—where women variously and strategically prepare their children to both “fit into, yet resist” systems of domination as strategies for personal success (Collins 1998: 382).

On another level, however, the web of collective storytelling woven by these women tells a deeper story, in which they lament the ways in which their lives have diverged from eshet chayil while simultaneously questioning its merits as an ideal. For example, these three women all criticize the social pressure of arranged marriage and the
pain this has occasioned in their own lives, resulting in domestic abuse, divorce, and lost love. Yet perhaps nowhere is the criticism of *eshet chayil* more apparent than in discussions of virginity, which occur frequently over the course of our meeting. Each of these women betray a deep annoyance over the pressure on Iraqi women to maintain their virginity in pre-marital contexts, as when Margalit says, “we were supposed to marry who they told us. And G-d forbid if we were intimate before marriage.” Importantly, instead of endorsing the ideal of virginity, however, these women actively dismantle it through a depiction of the subversive strategies they have employed in navigating this expectation. For instance, though Najiya recognizes the social taboo surrounding her cousin’s premarital relationship (and maintains her honor by refusing to reveal her identity to us), she does not condemn, nor morally judge her. On the contrary, she highlights the clever and innovative means through which her cousin was able to circumvent this social expectation, in conjunction with the help of other women close to her—who are able to orchestrate a successful hymen-reversal procedure that manages to fool the entire community. This moment of Najiya’s testimony forms a powerful instance of social critique: she reveals that it is not the principle of virginity, per se, that is of actual importance to these women—rather, it is the innovative way in which these women maintain the *appearance* of adhering to this ideal that is socially valorized, through covert strategies of self-determination. Importantly, I noticed that in more public gatherings among Iraqi Jews, the topic of pre-marital sex rarely arises; when it does, it is typically considered an “improper” transgression, one that is critiqued and disparaged by both men and women alike (and certainly not revered). This example, then, forms a micro-illustration of the important counterpoint women’s spheres of intimacy provide to
individual and community understandings. It illustrates a key aspect of sisterwork, where multiple representations and values associated with self and community are varying cultivated and/or repressed, and shrouded behind layers of silence and secrecy in intimate, female-oriented spheres.

In many ways, *eshet chayil* can be understood as a benchmark for evaluating the shifting social roles of Iraqi women in Israel. These three women’s life stories are implicated in these changes, through examples of divorce, defying arranged marriage, dating Ashkenazim, and working outside the home—all of which were rare among women in pre-1940s Iraq, but became increasingly more common in Iraq and Israel from the 1940s on (see Bashkin 2017: 51-59). This point is alluded to in Nuri’s song “Ash Sūwiyt Ben Gurion,” discussed in Chapter 3, where he discusses the chaos of immigration in light of the reversal of gender roles: “The men are without jobs … and the women are working” (Figure 3.3, lines 17-18).

The spoken testimonies depicted in this chapter emphasize the way in which immigration marked a turning point for women within the Iraqi Jewish community, as when Margalit says: “Women today have a voice, serve in the army, and have an independent life *separate from the old one*. Back then they said a woman should not work. She should be a housewife, obedient to her husband, and he will be her ruler” (my emphasis). These words demonstrate the impact of modernist discourses on these women, which are prevalent in Israel and are often utilized to depict the pre-immigration lives of Iraqi Jews as “primitive” (Dardashti 2008b: 323; Bashkin 2017: 14; Shohat 1998: 7). Such conceptualizations frame these women’s immigration as a kind of “liberation,” where they escaped gender oppression through their modernization in Israel (Bashkin
Through their testimonies, these women interweave such discursive understandings within their personal life testimonies as a means of navigating and processing the cultural upheaval they experienced during an era of massive social change.

*Margalit’s song: “Where is he from, and where am I from?”*

It is in this context that we can understand Margalit’s song, “Hūa Mnaīn ū-ānā Mnaīn,” which draws from an array of older poetic resources, simultaneously conveying sonic aspects of her past while also utilizing them as a means for conceptualizing intergenerational change. Before her song, she describes how she is able to maintain an illicit relationship with an Ashkenazi man named David, unbeknownst to her parents. Furthermore, she is able to break from an arranged marriage with an Iraqi man—something that would have been unthinkable back in Iraq. In her words, Israel was “a different world,” where her parents did not have the same kind of control over her amorous relationships as they would have had in Iraq.

*Figure 4.5. “Hūa Mnaīn ū-ānā Mnaīn.” Sung by “Margalit.” Recorded February 2016, Bnei Brak, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.*

\[
\begin{align*}
Hūa mnaīn ū-ānā mnaīn? & \quad \text{Where is he from, and where am I from?} \\
Haṭhā al-balwa jānī mnaīn? & \quad \text{Where is this trouble from?} \\
Hūa mnaīn ū-ānā mnaīn? & \quad \text{Where is he from, and where am I from?} \\
Haṭhā al-balwa jānī mnaīn? & \quad \text{Where is this trouble from?} \\
Mā ḥisābtā āshlūn anā bilfaqār ā-hūa bilghāna & \quad \text{I did not think how I am in poverty and he is in riches} \\
Anā mnaīn, ānā mnaīn, ū-hūa mnaīn? & \quad \text{Where am I from, where am I from, and where is he}
\end{align*}
\]

---

10 This discourse is also often utilized in Israel to substantiate polarizing descriptions of Jewish versus Arab women, where Israeli and Jewish women are viewed as free and liberated, while Muslim and Arab women are perceived as oppressed and primitive. It is further used as a justification for Israel’s presence in the region, and its ongoing military occupation, as a modernizing and liberating force vis-à-vis its Arab neighbors.
Margalit’s song is in *maqām kurd*, starting on F#, with an emphasis on the fourth note of the *maqām*. She employs a rich vocal tone. Her slow, nonmetrical delivery is highly evocative of feelings of sadness, and combines poignantly with her lyrics to form an intricate portrayal of love lost. Her song opens with a question, “where is he from, and where am I from?” This illustrates the vastly different cultural worlds from which both she and her lover hail. Margalit then employs this geographic metaphor to question where the trouble between them comes from, subtly pointing to their cultural and socio-
economic differences as its source. In this sense, she provides incisive commentary on the very real ramifications of the larger social inequalities between Ashenkani immigrants and those from Arab lands during Israel’s formative years as a state. These inequalities were embedded into the fabric of everyday life—so pervasive that they affected everything from economic opportunities to access to health care, education, and even basic sanitary living conditions (for a detailed description of this, see Bashkin 2017: 21-66).

It is possible that Margalit was cued into this particular sung remembrance through an utterance by Najiya earlier in the evening. When Najiya opens the door for a hapless delivery man, she humorously poses the question “Haṭhā Allah mnaīn jabū? [Where did Allah bring this guy from?]” knowing full well that his different cultural background would preclude him from being in on the joke. In previous fieldwork settings, I had also noticed that this kind of geographic inquiry is occasionally employed as a metaphor to highlight socio-cultural difference.

Of note, similar metaphors can be found in old Iraqi song collections. Remarkably, Margalit’s opening lyrics are found almost verbatim in a handwritten lyrical transcription of a pasta song of the early nineteenth century, found in the Sassoon collection (Avishur 1987b: 107). Since there are no recordings of this song, we do not know what it actually sounded like. Nonetheless, the first two lines are almost identical to those of Margalit’s song (translated from a ṣūqṭ transcription found in Avishur 1987b: 107):

\begin{align*}
\text{Nahnu mnaīn, mnaīn} & \quad \text{Where are we from, from?} \\
\text{Wal-balwa mnaṭn, mnaṭn?} & \quad \text{Where is this trouble from?}
\end{align*}
Beyond these first two lines, this *pasta* song does not share any other overt lyrical similarities with Margalit’s song. Furthermore, it follows an overall AAAB song form that differs from Margalit’s, which exhibits an overall seven-line form (AAAABAA) reminiscent of the seven-line *zuhaîrî* poetic structure common in performances of Iraqi *maqām* (see Avishur 1987b: xix-xx; Simms 2004). Nonetheless, both versions draw from highly similar thematic content. The song of the Sassoon collection is sung from the perspective of a man who falls in love with a woman at first sight. The singer describes his beloved as a woman who hails from a lower socio-economic class, one who also misbehaves and dresses in an improper manner. The singer uses the opening lyrics, “where are we from?” to illustrate how his community—which he associates with moral, proper behavior—differs greatly from the lower class environment of the woman he loves (Avishur 1987b: 107). Nonetheless, in spite of their differences, he professes his love for her. This is very similar to Margalit’s song—in the use of a metaphorical question to illustrate socio-cultural difference, as an expression of the difficulty such difference can pose in the context of amorous relationships, and in the declamation of the continuance of love nonetheless.

When Margalit repeats the words “*ḥābaîtū, ḥābaîtū*” [I love him, I love him] she powerfully recalls her love for David, evoking its memory in the present tense (Figure 4.5, line 7). She dramatically emphasizes her delivery of these words through a kind of elongated melisma, where she briefly, but emphatically, pauses between the recitation of the two words. In the same line, she says she loves David like her “two eyes,” thus drawing from a rich poetic heritage that metaphorically links a description of “eyes” with love-struck sentiment. The amorous association of “eyes” has a lengthy historical
presence in Arabic poetic forms associated with the beloved, both in a physical as well as a divine sense (see Racy 2003; Shiloah 2001: 129; Touma 1996: 97). Lyrical references to eyes can be found in a range of classical Arabic literature, including medieval Sufi poetry, Perso-Ottoman ghazāl texts, and mūwashshahāt (Andrews 1985; Racy 2003: 148-153). As the location where “love enters the body,” the eyes are considered a powerful lyrical trope for conveying the tormented emotions associated with love lost (Danielson 1997: 73). In lyrical Arabic poetry and song, the eye can also be conceived as a source of power, as when the eye of the beloved is viewed as a kind of “Cupid’s arrow,” capable of “hunting” the lover (Racy 2003: 154). The eye’s power is also noted in the highly prevalent, regional conception of the jealous, evil eye, which has the power to wreak havoc upon an unsuspecting individual’s life (ibid.: 157). This term is further associated with layālī—a highly evocative, solo improvised vocal form—whose text consists of the words “yā laylī yāʿātin” [oh my night, oh my eye] (Marcus 2006: 179; Shiloah 2001: 129; Touma 1996: 97). Though layālī are associated with secular urban maqām performance contexts, they are also performed in Jewish liturgical contexts, for example, on occasions when a ḥazzan begins to recite Shaḥarit, or morning service prayers (Kligman 2009: 229), as well as during evening concerts of pizmonim (Shelemay 1998: 152-153). Of note, Margalit draws upon lyrical and modal associations that are often associated with one another: in Iraq, layālī are often performed in maqām kurd (this is referred to as layālī kurd; see Touma 1996: xxii, 222).

Singing in the Voice of Her Mother: Margalit’s “Awūn, awūn, yuma”

Like Margalit’s first song of the evening, her second song also draws on literary resources with a lengthy historical presence while again utilizing the expressive resources
of maqām kurd. The repeated opening lyric to her song, “awūn” [I moaned, or I sighed], similarly begins other songs that refer to a deep sense of longing and sadness. For example, the song “Twūnaīn” [you moaned/sighed], another nineteenth-century pasta transcribed in the Sassoon collection, begins with this same repeated word. Though the song otherwise bears no other similarities to Margalit’s song, it was nonetheless popularized by the famous Iraqi maqām singer Rashid Al-Qundarchi, and later by Salah al-Kuwaiti as recorded on Shidurei Kol Yisrael B’aravit [Broadcasts of the Voice of Israel], where it was frequently broadcast in Iraqi communities and undoubtedly heard by Margalit (Avishur 1987b: 138).

Figure 4.6. “Awūn, awūn yuma.” Sung by “Margalit.” Recorded February 2016, Bnei Brak, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awūn, awūn, yuma</td>
<td>I am moaning, I am moaning, mother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awūn, yuma, awūn</td>
<td>I am moaning, mother, I am moaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libnaya kabrit, yuma, libnaya kabrit</td>
<td>The girl grew older, mother, the girl grew older</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wal bʿād, wal-bʿād safrit</td>
<td>And far and far away she traveled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shāmī sihrit lahā</td>
<td>Shami did magic to her</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ū-lisā mā jā bakhta, mā jā bakhta</td>
<td>Still no luck came, no luck came</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ū-lamā, lamā Shāmī mātat</td>
<td>And when, when Shami died</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakhta jā lamā safrit</td>
<td>Her luck began to change on her travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allah fak al-sihir</td>
<td>Allah cancelled the black magic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allah yaṭawil lahā al-ʿamār</td>
<td>Allah grants her a long life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Margalit’s song is particularly interesting in the way it interweaves aspects of sung expressivity traditionally associated with different gendered musical practices of the Levant. For example, her use of the word “yuma” to call to her mother, now deceased, draws from similar articulations in female-associated genres, such as dililōl, as well as other lullabies (Avishur 1987a; Manasseh 1991-92). Furthermore, her song shares similarities with themes of love, suffering, and other vulnerable sentiments as articulated in ‘atābā, as does her highly melismatic vocal delivery and overall descending melodic contour, which stays in the range of about a fifth (Racy 1996: 412). Nonetheless, these
traits mix with a kind of narrative lyricism common to masculine-associated genres, such as _shrāqī_. For example, Margalit narrates the chronology of her curse, beginning with her description of being at an old age, her travel abroad, and her eventual redemption upon Shami’s death. Notably, her song is cued by a background description of the event, which includes the particular circumstances of her life. This contextual similarity is shared by _shrāqī_ songs, where narrative context is provided prior to the recitation of song (which can also be sung from another individual’s first-person perspective; ibid.: 410).

Returning for a moment to the “Bedouin ethos,” A. J. Racy describes how musical practices of the Levant are often associated with masculine or feminine qualities. For example, while the _shrāqī_ genre is typically associated with honor and militancy, it can also incorporate elements of sentimentality (ibid.: 410). ʿAtābā, on the other hand, which is typically less narrative and more lyrical in orientation, is associated with vulnerability and individual emotionality; nonetheless, individuals can incorporate both genres within their performance practice (ibid.). Furthermore, ʿatābā can be sung by both men and women (ibid.: 416).

Margalit’s song demonstrates how expressive practices associated with masculinity and femininity can simultaneously find voice within individual performers, and even certain songs. Through her song, she assumes her own mother’s voice, describing her mother’s suffering as a conduit for recognizing and articulating her own suffering. Using her mother’s voice as her narrative perspective, she calls to the mother of her mother, demonstrating the trans-generational power of motherhood. In this sense, the expressive “calling” to mothers and grandmothers past forms a crucial means through which the values associated with sisterwork are sounded and negotiated in the present.
Through this kind of trans-generational evocation, Margalit narrates aspects of her emotional life via expressive models for emotion passed down to her from mothers past.

**Revisiting Remembrances of Mothers Past**

In my second meeting with Najiya, Margalit, and Nurit, which also occurs at Najiya’s apartment, Najiya and Margalit expound on previous descriptions of their mother. They describe the crucial work their mother performed in settings of physical distress and death—demonstrating how aspects of female domesticity are inextricably related to the larger concerns of community survival. Here I am referring to actual physical survival, especially in light of the stark poverty and dismal living conditions that most Iraqis faced when they emigrated to Israel, as well as the survival of memory in spite of large-scale cultural erasure. Importantly, the very act of food preparation in the present day cues remembrances of mothers past, as well as the nourishment, care, and healing practices embodied through their lives and actions (Ginsburg 1987; Meir-Glitzenstein 2016). Like the previous vignette, this one furthers our understanding of the fundamental relationship between culinary activity and sisterwork, especially where food preparation occurs in conjunction with remembrances of sustenance past. Such enacted testimonies demonstrate the centrality of elderly Iraqi Jewish women to the continuity of food traditions of this community, which includes knowledge of homeopathic remedies. In this sense, the healing capacity of mothers—as alluded to in recitations of *dilīlōl*, as well as Najiya’s song (Figure 4.2)—is conceived of as essential in countering situations of great difficulty, including violence and death.
As guardians of this deeply important form of community knowledge, I argue that these Iraqi Jewish women are, like the Syrian Jewish women described by Shelemay, uniquely poised as “memorists”—the very individuals who sustain “the most meaningful memories” of the community, especially those that are not on open display (Kershenovich 2002: 119; Shelemay 2006: 32, 2009: 288). The codes of modesty and secrecy inherent to many aspects of their sisterwork have allowed these individuals to maintain many memories they have been encouraged to forget. Situated on the boundaries between the individual, the family, and the community, the values and actions associated with sisterwork are intricately related to all of these spheres, interweaving them under its purview. As Collins argues, this kind of understanding is particularly useful for scholars of gender, as it “softens the dichotomy” between the presumed separateness of public and private spheres (Collins 1998: 373).

It should be noted that the following testimonies involve some vivid descriptions of death and violence. These are troubling, not least of all because of their content, but also for the inevitable conundrum that I have faced in describing them. This is a dilemma faced by all ethnographers who work with individuals and communities that have experienced violence and trauma. In recent years, several ethnographies have emerged that grapple with this issue directly (see, for example, Daniel 1996; Daughtry 2015; Feldman 1995; Nordstrom and Robben 1995; Pilzer 2012; McDonald 2013; Ritter and Daughtry 2007). These authors describe the multiple responsibilities of the ethnographer in attempting to convey information about violence while avoiding, wherever possible, voyeurism or aestheticized spectacle (Daughtry 2015: 23). This is further underlined by an awareness that ethnographic work may be complicit in the very forms of institutional
or symbolic violence that scholars seek to illustrate, deconstruct, and/or avoid (Daughtry 2015: 23). But these are not the only challenges: the ethnographer is also charged with the dual responsibilities of conveying accuracy while also retaining confidentiality, of detailing the ramifications of trauma without preconception of their impact, of avoiding prescriptive strategies for “solutions” while also analyzing the potential for their existence, and of recognizing sources of violence without preemptively condemning them (Daniel 1996; Daughty 2015; Nordstrom and Robben 1995). The vast disconnect between the extreme nature of violent acts vis-à-vis the distanced forms of writing we employ to describe them, especially “the conventional, often benumbing words of our academic disciplines,” are, in many ways, inevitably doomed to “fall woefully short” (Daughtry 2015: 23).

This is not to say that one should avoid these topics, for doing so would open us to similar criticisms of complicity through avoidance and/or denial. Daughtry, following Feldman and Daniel, usefully deconstructs the false dichotomy between “purportedly clean activist scholarship and … amoral sensationalization,” showing how anthropological studies of the phenomenology of violence can, in their own right, produce valuable—albeit fraught and complicated—dialogues (ibid.: 26). With this in mind, I return to Joshua Pilzer’s notion of “listening silences” as a useful point of methodological departure, one that works towards centering survivors’ experiences within our ethnographies—largely from the perspective of their own voices (Pilzer 2012: 11). In my own approach, I have consciously tried to incorporate the voices of the women I have come to know directly into this text, through the use of direct quotations that retain as much of my informants’ original language and styles of delivery as possible (though
this is still, inevitably, complicated via processes of translation to English). Like Daughtry, I take steps to minimize the vulnerability of my informants through strategies that obscure their identities, often devised in direct consultation with them.

* * *

A couple of weeks after our meeting, Najiya phones me up and tells me that Nurit and Margalit are visiting the following day, and invites me to join them once more. When I arrive at her home, Margalit leads me into the kitchen, where everyone is gathered as Najiya makes *aghūq*—rice and vegetable patties that are mixed with raw egg and fried. She has chopped some yellow onion into tiny pieces, and throws in a large handful of minced fresh parsley to the mixture. She then adds finely diced pieces of raw chicken that have been marinated with ground turmeric, ginger, salt, and black pepper. As she cracks a raw egg into the mixture, she recalls her mother’s healing practices: “I remember how my mother used to treat us when we had diarrhea. She took a raw egg, blended it with cumin, salt, and other spices, and mixed it all together. She fed it to us slowly until it was all eaten. She also gave us water to drink through the day, and then we were cured.” Najiya massages the egg, meat, vegetables, and spices together with her bare hands as she continues:

In those days, people believed that children got sick because they were sensitive to odors. One time, when my daughter Na’ama was young, she was playing with a dog outside and got sick. My mother said it was because she was sensitive to the dog’s odor, so she took egg yolks and oil, then added fresh *za’atar* and nettle weed, and mixed them together. She fed Na’ama the mixture. Then Na’ama had dark stool and she was cured.

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Nurit adds, “No one liked dogs in Iraq. We did not keep them as pets. Some people had cats and birds.”

Najiya continues to speak as she adds flour to her patty mixture:

One time a baby was born with respiratory problems. My mother took him and placed him in the hollow stomach of a slaughtered sheep. So the baby smelled the sheep’s odor and was cured. Another time she taught our neighbor how to use za’atar to help a baby who was teething. The baby had pain and they would mash fresh za’atar together with olive oil and rub it on the baby’s gums, and it would numb her. The pain would go away.

As Najiya finishes saying this, she begins dropping small spoonfuls of her mixed batter into a pan full of hot vegetable oil that lies shimmering on the stovetop. The aghūq patties make a crackling noise as they begin to fry.

Margalit continues:

She was a good woman, our mother, a true eshet chayil. She helped many people. She even helped people to die. It was a huge mitzvah she would perform, to help them pass onto the other life. Mō‘ṭah ḥafīfī. [“An easy way to die,” the connotation being that Fahima helped others to pass easily to the other side.] She had a very good friend, her name was Habiba. Really, she was like my mother’s soul mate. They loved each other more than sisters. Well, when Habiba got very sick she realized she was going to die. “Go get Fahima,” she said. She would not release her soul from her body until she saw my mother one last time. So they hurried to get my mother, and she came running. When she saw Habiba she knelt down beside her and stroked her hair.

At this point, Margalit assumes the voice of her mother and begins to sing:

Anā q’adā ma’kī, q’adā ma’kī
Mākō khōf ’alaykī, mākō khōf
Anā lazmā āydiykī, āydiykī lazmā
Wa-tijī khafiyfī ’alaykī
Ghāḥī tī’āt līsamā, līsamā
Wa-niykī āt’ātsh bīsamā al-nīshāmā
Ghāḥī lā tikhaḥīn, la tikhaḥīn

I am sitting with you, sitting with you
Do not fear, do not fear
I am holding your hand, holding your hand
It will be easier on you
Go to heaven, to heaven
There in heaven the soul lives
Go, do not fear, do not fear
Margalit pauses for a moment after she finishes her song. “After this,” she says, “Habiba died.” She wipes a tear from the side of her eyes. Everyone remains silent. The only noise in the room is the continued crackling of the aghūq as it fries. When the patties are done, Najiya removes them from the hot pan and places them on plates lined with paper towels, in order to soak up the oil. The four of us retire to the living room, where we sit quietly for a time.

Eventually, Margalit continues to speak:

When our mother Fahima died, there was a huge crowd that came to her funeral. They marched to the cemetery, and cried out "pity that you left the world, Um Hayyim." There were soldiers and policemen, and they stopped the traffic lights. The whole procession marched through the streets. People that knew her from the market also came. It was like that, if someone was beloved by the community, everyone would come to mourn their death.

“Especially if it was someone young, or someone who died in a tragic circumstance,” Najiya says. She pauses.

“Like Miryam,” she says.

“Like Miryam.” Margalit agrees, nodding silently.

“At her funeral the whole community marched with her coffin to her grave,” Najiya says.

“Miryam…?” I ask.

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11 Hayyim was Najiya and Margalit’s older brother, who had passed many years before our meeting. Here Margalit is referring to the common Arabic practice of referring to a mother by the name of her first son—in this case, Um Hayyim, or “Mother of Hayyim.”
Najiya takes a deep breath. “You can’t even imagine this now,” she says. She pauses for a moment, almost as if deciding whether or not to continue the story. She takes another deep breath and continues to speak:

These days, girls and boys can have boyfriends. They don’t have to be married; they don’t need to ask their parents. Miryam lived a long time ago. But many people still know about what happened to her. She lived in the Jewish quarter, in Baghdad. We knew her. We all knew her. She was a beautiful girl. I used to walk with her to school when we were little. We were very good friends.

Najiya’s voice cracks, and she takes another deep breath before continuing:

Miryam’s mother died when she was young, and Miryam was an only child. Her father eventually remarried, but his new wife was not kind to her. As I said, Miryam was very beautiful. When she was a teenager, she fell in love with a boy, and she got pregnant. One day she was sitting in her home, sewing, and her back was hurting her. When she stood up, her stepmother saw that her belly was slightly enlarged. Her stepmother realized she was pregnant, and she ran to tell Miryam’s father.

Najiya’s eyes are downcast, and she says, in a low voice, “Her stepmother told him in such a way so as to stoke his rage.”

I look across the room, and notice that Nurit and Margalit are starting to get visibly upset. Najiya continues:

Her stepmother purposefully left the home, so that Miryam and her father would be alone. When Miryam’s father entered, he confronted her in a complete rage. Miryam said to him, “if you want to kill me, kill me, but he’s coming to marry me.” Her father was so angry that he grabbed her and slit her throat.

Najiya pauses, taking a deep breath before continuing:

Afterwards, he went to the police, who honored him, tapped him on the shoulder, and gave him a cigarette. They were proud of him for punishing her for her improper behavior. Meanwhile everyone in the Jewish community condemned his act. His daughter was loved by all, even more so after her death.
Najiya pauses, then says, “Abūha mā satagh āʿlīha [her father didn’t maintain her honor]. Mahlal [pity],” underneath her breath. The repetition of the word mahlal is taken up by all three women, who begin whispering it over and over again as they rock back and forth.

Najiya begins to speak again, her voice now shaking:

None of us could ever forget what happened. And on the same day of her murder, it happened that her fiancé came to ask for her hand in marriage. Instead, he attended her funeral. After that, wherever her father went, he saw accusing looks on peoples’ faces. He died five years later of guilt and a broken heart.

I look up and see Nurit starting to cry.

Margalit looks visibly angry and says, “He did not have to do that.” Her shoulders are shaking, and she buries her head in her hands as she continues to rock back and forth, tears brimming at the sides of her eyes. Then, somewhat abruptly, she begins to beat her chest with her right fist in a rhythmic and forceful manner, and recites the following impassioned poem in a grief-stricken tone of voice:

\[
\begin{align*}
Lā lā yā būya lā & \quad \text{No, no, my father, no} \\
Lā tiqīlīnī yā būya & \quad \text{Do not kill me, my father} \\
Lʿānī ḥubt & \quad \text{Because I fell in love} \\
Khaṭībī jāyy, yā būya & \quad \text{My fiancé is coming, oh father} \\
Khaṭībī yitṣāwajīnī, būya & \quad \text{My fiancé will marry me, father} \\
Arḥamnī, būya & \quad \text{Have pity on me, father} \\
ḥāmlā ānā, būya & \quad \text{I am pregnant, father} \\
Al-sakīn ʿala ḥalqī & \quad \text{The knife was on my throat} \\
Wa-shaft al-najūm biṭnī & \quad \text{And I saw stars in my eyes} \\
Al-najūm biṣʾāh jāyy jāyyā & \quad \text{The stars moved fast, fast} \\
ḍāmit aiyīnīyā ʿā-rāḥat ʿalayā & \quad \text{I closed my eyes and was gone}
\end{align*}
\]
When Margalit’s recitation is over, there is a profound silence. Both Margalit and Nurit are crying, and everyone continues to repeatedly mutter the same word underneath their breaths, “mahlat, mahlat.”

Eventually, everyone falls silent. The silence continues for a few minutes.

After a while, Najiya begins to speak once more. “This should never happen to any girl,” she says.

Margalit, still shaking from emotion, but in a much quieter voice, says, “He followed the Muslim custom. Jews would never do such a thing.”

Najiya takes a deep breath. “You know, I saw her fiancé once again, in Israel. It was many years later.”

“You saw him?” Nurit asks.

“Yes, he looked so bad,” Najiya replies, quietly. “His teeth were falling out, and his hair was unkempt. I asked him if he ever got married, and he looked at me with such sadness in his eyes. He told me, ‘how can I get married after that?’”

There is another moment of silence before Margalit adds, “Eventually her stepmother ended up in a mental institution.”

Suddenly, Najiya’s eyes shoot up and she says, “Kul wāḥid yuḫīnū yōm” [To each his day will come]. Everyone nods in silent agreement, and with that, the conversation comes to a close.

* * *

In my second meeting with Najiya, Margalit, and Nurit, Najiya’s act of cracking an egg into her aghūq mixture sensorially evokes her mother’s homeopathic remedies
involving raw eggs. She then relates the cultural belief of an intricate relationship between the olfactory system and illnesses—where odors have the capacity to both cause and cure physical maladies. The aroma of freshly chopped parsley lingers in the air as Najiya describes the various healing qualities of certain herbs and spices: for example, which ones are used for a teething baby, and which ones are used for curing stomach ailments. These descriptions of Fahima as a healer are intricately related to how she is portrayed as a “true eshet chayil,” as Margalit refers to her, with generosity of spirit and a great talent for helping nourish others in the community. Her daughters describe how Fahima assisted a great many people, even performing one of the highest mitzvot possible—by helping a person on the precipice of death to pass from this life to the next.

As these sisters reminisce about their mother Fahima, a sentimental, melancholic atmosphere infuses the room. It is in this context that Margalit shares a powerful memory of her mother’s song at the death bed of her best friend. Interestingly, of the three informants present, Margalit is initially the most reluctant to sing. This is evidenced in our first meeting, where she only shares her story towards the end of the evening, and only after the other two woman have offered their own personal songs. Nonetheless, Margalit ends up being the informant who not only shares the most songs throughout our meetings, but who also displays significant innovation and expressive creativity, particularly in her ability to assume the first-person voice of others in her lyrics. As in our first meeting, Margalit again adopts the voice of her mother in “Anā qʿadā maʾktī” to portray a highly emotional event of the past.
Figure 4.7 “Anā q’adā ma’kī.” Sung by “Margalit.” Recorded March 2016, Bnei Brak, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.

Anā q’adā ma’kī, q’adā ma’kī
I am sitting with you, sitting with you
Mākō khōf ’alaykī, mākō khōf
Do not fear, do not fear
Anā lazmā āydiykī, āydiykī lazmā
I am holding your hand, holding your hand
Wa-tijī khafiyfī ’alaykī
It will be easier on you
Ghūḥī tī’ī lilsamā, lilsamā
Go to heaven, to heaven
Wa-niykī āt’īsh bilsamā al-nishāma
There in heaven the soul lives
Ghūḥī lā tikhaftīn, la tikhaftīn
Go, do not fear, do not fear
Mā biyha shiyīn, mā biyha
Nothing to it, nothing to it
Ghūḥī lā tikhaftīn
Go, do not fear
Al-zam āiydik lilākhīr, āiydik lilākhīr
I will hold your hand until the end, your hand until the end

muqam ẖīaj:

A-nā q’adā ma’kī q’adā ma’kī

Mā-kō khōf ’alaykī mā-kō khō-f

Anā lazmā āydiykī āydiykī lazmā

Wa-tijī khafiyfī ālaykī

Ghūḥī tī’ī lilsamā lilsamā

Wa-niykī āt’īsh bilsamā al-nishāma

Ghūḥī lā tikhaftīn la tikhaftīn

Mā biyha shiyīn mā biyha

Ghūḥī lā tikhaftīn

Al-zam āiydik lilākhīr āiydik lilākhīr
Figure 4.7 (cont.)

This song overtly deals with the theme of death. Thus, it is not surprising that it is based in the lower tetrachord of *maqām hijāz*—the musical mode commonly associated with tragedy and death in both Jewish and Muslim contexts. Margalit’s song, whose melody and lyrics she attributes to her mother, follows an overall ten-line AABABABABA form, and has a heavy, melancholic feel—one that incorporates extensive elaborate melismas. Almost every line of her song incorporates a certain amount of repetition, where the lulling lyrics are repeated in an almost echo-like fashion as the melodic contour descends. Throughout, Margalit focuses on the minor and augmented seconds of the lower tetrachord—a common musical characteristic of this *maqām* across regional and religious traditions. Though almost every line resolves to the tonic on A, the penultimate line ends on the second scale degree, reminiscent of melodic gestures common to *maqām madmī* of the Iraqi tradition, a modal variant of *hijāz* built on the second scale degree (see Figure 4.7, line 9). As established earlier, this mode is associated with deep feelings of sadness in recitations of *dililōl*, as well as liturgical performances on the mournful Jewish holy day of *tish’a b’ab* (see Manasseh 1999: 153).
That she draws upon the modality of Iraqi women’s lullabies is perhaps not surprising, considering how this song allows her to recall how her mother helped lull her best friend into a final, immortal sleep.

It is unclear whether Fahima was indeed the author of this song, as Margalit attests, or if it was created by Margalit herself in memory of her mother’s work. As in Nuri’s mother’s song of the previous chapter, where he also adopts his mother’s voice in remembering a past event, I am less interested in determining the actual author of the song than in understanding how this song is utilized as an expressive vehicle through which the original incident, and the emotions surrounding it, are embodied, embraced, and evoked. Margalit’s song is particularly impactful by portraying the immense bravery this occasion must have required on Fahima’s part—who manages to summon her own inner strength and impart it to her friend in helping her take leave of her mortal life. The courage embodied in this song demonstrate the ways in which such sisterwork is considered “one of the highest mitzvot” of which an individual is capable. Similar to how Nurit’s embodiment of eshet chayil serves as a source of female power, Fahima’s sisterwork infuses herself and others with a powerful sense of strength that reverberates across the community.

**Margalit’s Lament: Protest of an Honor Killing**

After Margalit’s mournful song, Najiya and Margalit build on the theme of death by recounting their own mother’s funeral. This then leads to a discussion of the untimely death of another beloved woman of the community, their young friend Miryam. Najiya begins her spoken testimony of Miryam’s death hesitantly, almost reluctantly. Amid
sighs and exclamations of the terrible nature of the crime, as well as frequent pauses, she offers an account of the young girl’s murder at her father’s hands. Her narrative rebukes the people who helped orchestrate the event—namely, the girl’s stepmother and her father—though she also harshly criticizes the Iraqi Muslim authorities who praised his actions. At this moment, Nurit argues that his behavior was an anomaly among Jewish men, and more in line with Muslim behavior. This statement draws on the aforementioned discourses of modernity and mythico-history prevalent in Israeli society that demarcate a Jewish (“civilized”) versus Arab (“primitive”) approach to gender equality.

Najiya’s description of Miryam’s untimely demise stands as a sharp critique of the ideals associated with female propriety, especially where these overshadow the importance of a human life. As she finishes her story, the other women around her begin to repeatedly whisper the word “mahlal” [pity], creating an almost ritual-like atmosphere. It is in this context that Margalit, picking up where Najiya left off, begins to recite her highly impassioned poem. She adopts the young girl’s voice, pleading for her father’s mercy as she and her unborn child stand on the precipice of death. As Margalit chants her words, she strikes her chest with the fist of her right hand, in a violent and emphatic manner. Her grief stricken delivery, replete with sobbing and emotion-laden tones, are accompanied by signs of physical distress among the other women present, who shed tears as they rock back and forth in agitation. These physical manifestations of pain are all intricately linked to a genre of sung lament known as 'addada, one that was common among women in pre-1950s Iraq (Avishur 1987a: xviii-xxii; Manasseh 1999: 138).
Figure 4.8. “Lā lā yā būya lā.” Sung by “Margalit.” Recorded March 2016, Bnei Brak, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.

Lā lā yā būya lā  
Lā lā lā tiqīlnī yā būya  
Lā tiqīlnī yā būya  
Lʾānt ḥabaitī yā būya  
Lʾānt ḥabaitī yā būya  
Khāṭībī jāyy, yā būya  
Khāṭībī yīzāwajīnī, būya  
Arḥamnī, yā būya  
ḥāmlā ānā, būya  
Al-sakīn ʾala ḥalqī  
Al-sakīn ʾala ḥalqī  
Wa-shaft al-najūm biʿātinī  
Al-najūm bisrʿah jāyy jāyyā  
ḍāmiit ʿātnīya u-rāḥat ʿalayā12

No, no, my father, no  
No, no, no not kill me, oh father  
No, no, no not kill me, oh father  
Because I fell in love, oh father  
Because I fell in love, oh father  
My fiancé is coming, oh father  
My fiancé will marry me, father  
Have pity on me, father  
I am pregnant, father  
The knife was on my throat  
The knife was on my throat  
And I saw stars in my eyes  
The stars moved fast, fast  
I closed my eyes and was gone

12 Rāḥat ʿalayā is a common way of saying that someone has passed, though it literally translates as “losing” something, or of that thing “going away” from the person—i.e. if someone loses money, they will often say rāḥat ʿalayf [it went away from me].
Since there are no recordings of 'addada in existence, nor any musical transcriptions, we must rely upon scholarly descriptions of this practice in contextualizing Margalit’s lament. From these descriptions, it is clear that Margalit’s recitation shares many similarities with ‘addada of the past. Margalit recites her lament in sobbing tones, assuming the voice of a woman wronged in a particularly violent manner, as well as the suffering, terror, and hopelessness she experienced during the event. This is similar to descriptions of ‘addada among Iraqi women in 1940s and 50s Iraq, of various faiths, where professional lamenters would attend the home of grieving parties in order to encourage expressions of sorrow among the bereaved (Avishur 1987a: xviii-xxii; Sassoon
1949: 186; Shiloah 2001: 158-59). Their laments include similar outward expressions of
grief—such as weeping, anguished cries, and sobbing—where, like Margalit, they would
often beat their chests in agitation (Manasseh 1999: 169). This practice also extends to
Christian Iraqis, and, according to Scheherazade Hassan, can still be found among
Bedouins of the upper Euphrates and al-Djazira (Hassan 2010: 32). Expressive
performances that include crying, moaning, and striking chests and faces are also
associated with various mourning rituals among Muslim women of Iraq, including the
Shi’a tradition of lamenting the Hussein passion (ibid.: 33). The name ‘addada (also
written as “addadda,” meaning “she who enumerates”) has to do with the notion of
quantifying, or enumerating, the distinctions and qualities of the dead (ibid.: 32).
Professional reciters are often referred to as qawwala (she who says) or nayyaya (she
who laments), whose improvisations are considered particularly impactful when
employing highly lyrical poetic creativity (ibid.).

‘Addada is said to have arisen from even older practices of lamentation where
mourners of various faiths would, interestingly, follow a mourning period of seven days
(as is also common in Jewish custom). Scheherazade Hassan recounts how in “old
Mesopotamia, priests, princesses and goddesses mourned a dead person in a loud,
passionate, and dramatic way for seven days by reciting elegies that initiate wailing” (see
Hassan 2010: 31; also Bahrani 2001; Hallo 1995). She argues that this “tradition of loud
lamenting … continues to be deeply rooted in Iraqi society,” though the impossibility of
doing any fieldwork in Iraq at the current moment leaves this somewhat to conjecture
(ibid.: 31). Nonetheless, Hassan theorizes that professional lamenters, particularly
women, continue to be in high demand in Iraq, especially considering the continued
violence in the region. Based on Margalit’s recitation, I can confirm at least one contemporary performance of lament among Iraqi Jewish women that draws heavily on ‘addada, though I suspect there may be others—however, this is not openly discussed or admitted among my informants. Nonetheless, Margalit’s lament stands in contrast to the claims of scholars such as Avishur and Manasseh, both of whom argue that by the 1970s and 80s performances of ‘addada had “died out completely” among Iraqi Jews (Manasseh 1999: 169; Avishur 1987a). Notably, though Manasseh encountered a small number of informants in the 1990s who had memories of ‘addada, almost all were reluctant to even discuss the matter.

Margalit’s lament has a driving rhythm, and exhibits an overall duple-meter feel (with the exception of one 9/8 measure), though it includes quite a bit of syncopation in the form of dotted eighth-note rhythms. Her meter and form are almost entirely dictated by the text. There is no real melodic element to her song, though at moments there seems to be an overall melodic curvature, or at least implied melodic pitches within her sung-spoken delivery. As she recites, Margalit strikes her chest rhythmically, on every other beat, which adds to the overall driving percussive quality of the song. At the same time, her striking also enacts and embodies a certain kind of physical violence in a very tangible sense. Her text, spoken from the point of view of the murdered girl, addresses the girl’s father, where she proclaims her love for her fiancé, and pleads with her father not to kill her. As Margalit describes the moment Miryam’s throat is cut, she increases the intensity of her tone and the ferocity with which she strikes her chest, all the while employing evocative imagery of fast-moving stars in an embodied description of death.
Margalit’s lament draws from poetic and musical resources associated with ways of grieving common at the time of Miryam’s death, as a way of commemorating the tragic event while also conveying her still-present grief over its occurrence. Her situation-specific, improvised recitative text, which follows certain formulaic poetic structures, is set within a narrow melodic range—a feature common to regional lament genres including frāqiyyāt and moiroloi (Racy 1996: 414-15; Seremetakis 1990: 482). Her heavy breathing and anguished delivery are reminiscent of laments in Greece, Romania, Iraq, and Lebanon, as is the violence she directs towards her own body as she performs (see, for example, Caraveli-Chaves 1986; Hassan 2010; Kligman 1988; Racy 1996; Seremetakis 1990). Additionally, her lyrics follow certain formulaic poetic devices that are similarly found in other regional genres, including ‘addada (Avishur 1987a: 208-17). For example, most of Margalit’s verses end in the syllable “-ya,” following an end rhyme scheme common to various mournful song genres: frāqiyyāt, for example, often incorporate end rhymes on the syllable “-yyi” (see Racy 1985: 5-7). Interestingly, Margalit’s repeated use of the syllable “-ya,” shares a further commonality with abuṭhiyya, another song genre common to Iraq, and one that is explicitly associated with tragedy and lament. Typically performed by men, abuṭhiyya is considered to be an “old” music genre, with some scholars asserting that it came into being approximately 140 years ago (Avishur 1987b: xxvi; al-ʿAmari 1981: 13-19). In fact, “Abu al-thiyya” literally translates as “the tormented man,” and is associated with a person who sings of his extraordinary sadness (Manasseh: 142, 248). These songs are typically composed on the spot upon hearing the news of the unexpected death of a loved one; they incorporate end rhymes on the same specific syllable utilized in Margalit’s lament (“ya”), which is also
tied to the genre’s name (ibid.: 142). Like ʿatābā, abūthīyya typically consist of a four-line, AAAB format, three of which have the same end rhyme (Avishur 1987b: xxv; Manasseh 1999: 174).13

Margalit’s recitation inspires a kind of participatory, communal emotionality—a quality that is common to many different lament practices, including ones found as far away as Finland. In these contexts, emotion is externalized by performers and participants alike through bodily gestures such as moaning, swaying, sobbing, and stylized cries (see, for example, Caraveli-Chaves 1986: 173; Kligman 1988: 196; Racy 1985: 7, 1996: 414; Seremetakis 1990: 500; Tolbert 2007: 153). Such expressions of deep sadness and pain are embraced in an atmosphere of shared sympathy and sentiment, among “conscientious and committed” listeners who are familiar with the musical resources upon which the lamenters draws, and who help to build the emotional intensity of the recitation through their own intense listening and physical signs of agitation (Daughtry 2015: 15). Through her lament, Margalit employs great creativity in her affective portrayal of Miryam’s death, channeling the communal grief in the room into a beleaguered protest against those who stripped Miryam of her agency, as well as the larger social forces that determined her fate.

**Spheres of Interaction: Understanding Arab-Jewish Musical Idiolect**

Nationalist historiographies in the Middle East have had an enduring influence on regional scholarship, often precluding a nuanced understanding of Arab-Jewish interdependence across different temporal, regional, and religious settings (Beinin 1998; 

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13 *Abūthīyya* songs share certain qualities with those of ʿatābā, and indeed, Avishur argues that the two genres began to intermix in the early twentieth century (Avishur 1987b: xxvi).
Stein and Swedenburg 2005). Israeli and Jewish studies are thus often isolated from other bodies of scholarship, a process that is promoted by a kind of self-selecting focus among Jewish scholars, while resulting from anti-Zionist scholarly critique (Seroussi 2008). The result of both these processes is, ironically, a substantiation of the Zionist insistence on isolation/separation from anything Arab. Rebecca Stein and Ted Swedenburg, building on Zachary Lockman’s notion of a “relational history” between Jews and Arabs, propose a perspective focused on both intranational relationality (where considerations of gender, religion, and ethnicity interact with and crosscut national affiliations) as well as transnational relationality (where shared histories and community interactions can transcend contemporary political enmities; see Stein and Swedenburg 2005: 10). Rather than solely focusing on the distinctiveness of Jewish communities, recent historical and literary studies have begun to consider Jewish participation in, and separation from, the larger Muslim societies within which they lived, moved, and worked—thereby obtaining a more well-rounded picture of Jewish life in each of these historical and sociocultural instances (see, for example, Alcalay 1993; Beinin 1998; Berg 1996; Cohen 1994; Levy 2008; Meri 2017).

Recent musicological studies have also “written against” the isolation of Jewish studies in music scholarship, arguing that such an approach conceals as much as it conveys (see Kligman 2009; Shelemay 1998, 2009). In reformulating their investigations, these scholars have uncovered integral aspects of Jewish musical meaning and ritual that have deeply influenced, and have been deeply influenced by, Muslim expressive practices and secular Arab music forms. For example, Mark Kligman notes that previous musicological studies have compared Sephardic and Mizrahi liturgical music in relation
to other Jewish traditions, thereby neglecting the influence of regional musical practices, both sacred and secular, on the development of repertoire, theory, pedagogy, and extra-musical associations within the synagogue (Kligman 2009: 18-22). I find Kligman’s notion of “spheres of interaction” to be particularly useful—where he considers sacred and secular, popular and private, and Jewish and Muslim sonic realms in terms of their overlapping relation to one another, as well as their mutual influence (ibid.: 18).

In this formulation, Kligman discards hermetically sealed notions of “Jewish” versus “Muslim” practices in favor of a more fluid approach that understands the nuances of the centuries-long, interconnected history of these groups. Since the Arab conquest of the seventh century, Jews within Muslim lands were known as āhl al-dhimma, or “people of protection.” According to the Pact of ‘Umar, generally attributed to the second caliph of Islam, Jews and Christians were said to have received divine revelations in their religious texts. As a result, they were to be protected, and were allowed a considerable amount of religious freedom. Jews were free to worship and govern their communities autonomously under Jewish law, or halakhah. However, they also had various restrictions imposed upon them, including having to pay tributes, known as jizya, to their Muslim sovereigns; they were also, at times, required to wear a specific dress code, and were prohibited from mounting horses taller than Muslims, or building houses higher than those of Muslims (Cohen 1994). Muslim rulers governed according to Islamic law, and their legitimacy as rulers often came from their adherence to shari’a. Thus, the general relationship between Muslims and Jews was one of dominance and subordination, but also of interdependence. Jews were thus uniquely embedded into systems of social
governance, and were ruled according to a certain amount of theoretical uniformity (Schroeter 2008).

By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, both Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews began immigrating in large numbers to the Ottoman lands. Over one hundred thousand Jews are estimated to have arrived in the Ottoman Empire during this time, many of whom were fleeing various waves of persecution, including the Spanish Inquisition of the late fifteenth century (Shaw 1991: 37-40). During this time, Ottoman Jewry began to flourish within the bounds of the empire. Ottoman officials quickly realized that the incoming Jewish population, full of merchants and traders, would serve their commercial interests as successful businessmen loyal to the empire. As such, many Jewish immigrants were offered incentives by the government, encouraging them to establish themselves and their businesses in port cities such as Smyrna and Salonika. As population records of the early sixteenth century indicate, the incoming Jews were so drawn to these two coastal cities that they actually became the dominant ethnic group of Salonika by the middle of the sixteenth century (ibid.: 51). The Salonikan Jews included prominent philosophers such as Moshe ben Baruh Almosnino, and poets such as Saloman ben Mazal-Tov and Israel ben Moses Najara.

As the Jewish population flourished, it became a favored minority of the Ottoman Empire, providing sultans and other important officials with economic and political advice (Levy 2002: xix). Though the Jewish population always kept its distinctiveness as a separate ethnic minority, Jews often enjoyed relatively favorable positions, which led to a certain degree of assimilation to mainstream Ottoman Turkish society (Shaw 1991: 45, 126). A strong sense of loyalty developed on the part of Jews towards their Ottoman
rulers, and a corresponding increase in incorporation of Turkish elements into Jewish custom could be discerned.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the adoption of Ottoman sonic resources within both liturgical and non-liturgical Jewish musical practices—a development that is directly related to the societal position of Jews within the Empire. Jewish leaders consciously incorporated Ottoman musical style: it was a response to a certain demand for a more culturally appropriate religious musical tradition for the then Ottoman Jews, many of whom felt a sense of alliance with their rulers. Responding to the demand for Turkish elements in worship, many of the prominent Jewish figures of Salonika’s history, especially poets like Ben Moses Najara, took upon themselves the responsibility for incorporating Ottoman art music elements into Jewish life and worship.

Thus, Jewish ceremonies began incorporating many of the sonic resources of secular Ottoman court music, where Hebrew texts were set to existing peşrev melodies, and new compositions were created within the Turkish makam system and associated rhythmic cycles (see Feldman 1990; Seroussi 1991, 2001; Sezgin 1994; Shaw 1991). Furthermore, the mujawwad style of Qur’anic recitation deeply influenced the elaborate vocal stylings of famous Jewish ḥazzanut, which draw from similar sonic resources (Kligman 2009). Judaism, much like Islam, places an emphasis on the text being transmitted during religious service (Shiloah 1995: 35). The music is seen as a secondary element, mainly as a vehicle for enhancing the impact of the text’s message. Amnon Shiloah, on discussing the importance of music in communicating with the Divine, writes:

A Talmudic legend … recounts that David’s kinnor [the ancient string instrument
of the Bible, often translated as “harp”) suspended over his bed plays of its own accord when the north wind blows through it … And just as with the kinnor, the divine spirit blows through the orifices of the body, making it resound and sing. Almost the same concept is to be found in certain Muslim mystical writings. In his work … Abu Hamid al-Gazzali (d. 1121) describes the mystical meaning of the instruments used in the ceremony of Dhikr.

(Shiloah 2001: 137)

Not only was incorporating foreign musical elements into the Jewish liturgy a common practice, but many rabbis proclaimed it a mitzvah, as the adapted melodies would serve to enhance the meaning of the sacred text to the congregation: “[Jews] looked on the borrowing of alien tunes … as performing a holy mission” (ibid.: 32). Indeed, from the sixteenth century onward, rabbis of Ottoman lands, especially of the kabbalah (mystical) school, would go to services of other faiths to learn melodies and incorporate them into Jewish religious services (Seroussi 1989: 34; Shiloah 1992: 82-83). In addition to Muslim expressive influence on Jewish liturgy, many influences from Arab art and popular music also abound: consider, for example, how Iraqi and Syrian Jewish religious ceremonies often begin with vocal improvisation, or mawwal, also known as petihah, based on Hebrew religious texts (Shelemay 1998); these are also utilized in introductions of sbhahoth, or songs of praise, in the Babylonian tradition (see Manasseh 2004, 2012). Furthermore, pizmonim are often sung in cycles similar to secular wasla (suite) maqām performances (Kligman 2009; Shelemay 1998), and the contrafacta principle in setting pizmonim texts and baqqashot was commonplace across Jewish communities under Ottoman rule (Davis 2009; Hadad 2010; Kligman 2009; Seroussi and Weich-Shahak 1990-91; Shelemay 1998).

An important aspect of Kligman’s approach to “spheres of interaction” lies in the fact that these influences were multi-directional. For example, Jewish musicians across
the region often composed melodies and songs that were incorporated into popular Arab musical practices (see, for example, Loeb 1972; Warkov 1986). This is largely due to the Jewish orientation towards musical performance, which differs from that of Islam: in Islam, musical performance is often considered problematic, capable of instigating passions that hold the potential to turn a person away from Allah (Schimmel 2001). Instruments, such as drums comprised of animal hide, are considered particularly profane. Jews are not typically bound by such religious prohibitions, and thus many of them became the dominant musicians and instrumentalists of Ottoman art music over time.

By the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many Jewish musicians regularly performed at the Ottoman court, including Ishak Fresco Romano and Ishak Varon Efendi (see Sezgin 1994: 597; Signell 2002: 57-58). After the fall of the Ottoman Empire, many Jews continued to maintain their musical dominance. In Iraq, specifically, Jews comprised the majority of the instrumentalists who were experts in maqām performance. The Iraqi Jewish al-Kuwaiti brothers are famous for having composed a plethora of musical material, much of which now forms the backbone of repertory in contemporary performances of Iraqi maqām (Warkov 1986). Iraqi Jewish influence is noted, for example, at the beginning of maqām al-tahir, which typically begins with the Hebrew word “Hallelujah” (ibid.: 16). Indeed, many Jewish hazzan in Iraq, like Muslim Iraqi mu’adhhdhin, were known as great chanters of maqām (Zubaida 2002). In another example, the songs associated with female Iraqi Jewish performers of the daqāqa tradition have crossed over into mainstream Iraq: the song “Afākī,” for example, is now
frequently performed at Iraqi Muslim celebrations and weddings (Kojaman 2001; Simms 2004).

My application of Kligman’s “spheres of interaction” is thus centered within a historical understanding of these communities—where the multi-dimensional influential quality of many of these regional expressive practices can be seen as an inherent part of their development. This draws on Shelemay’s description of maqām as an “ever-flexible” sonic framework, where, across time, many performative traditions based on the maqām system have exhibited an “interactive relationship” with the materials of other musical traditions (Shelemay 1998: 127). Thus, the development of certain musical genres, for example, popular Arab music of the twentieth century, exhibit this kind of interactive and additive approach, as exemplified in the work of Abd al-Wahhab (ibid.). This phenomenon is also found among Jewish communities whose liturgy is fundamentally rooted in the maqām system, where the adaptation and “recycling” of musical material from outside the synagogue and Jewish community are commonplace (see, for example, Kligman 2009: 17-18; Hadad 2010; Manasseh 1999; Shelemay 1998). Edwin Seroussi refers to this phenomenon as the “maqamization” of eastern Sephardic Jewish liturgy, which he describes as “a crucial component of the Jewish soundscape under Islam” (Seroussi 2013: 279). The persistent centrality of maqām cycles within liturgical performance is especially remarkable, considering how removed Jewish and Muslim realms often are from one another in a physical, political, and discursive sense.

I argue that the flexibility of sonic resources associated with maqām performance have allowed for its adoption and adaptation in private Iraqi Jewish song. In this way, elderly Iraqi Jews have at once forged their own tradition of private song making, just as
they draw from the syncretic nature of musical practices associated with their pasts. Indeed, the songs shared by Najiya, Nurit, and Margalit incorporate musical modes, genres, rhythmic forms, and melodies from varying historical eras and social settings. Nurit’s song “Abkī ‘alā ḥālī,” draws on modal associations common to popular musiqa mizrahit songs in Israel in the 1960s and beyond (Figure 4.1). Similarly, Margalit’s use of maqām kurd in “Hūa mnaīn ū-ānā mnaīn” (Figure 4.5) simultaneously draws on lyrical and thematic inspirations from genres such as layālt, nineteenth-century men’s pasta songs, centuries-old secular Arabic poetic forms (muwashshaḥat), as well as Jewish liturgical performance (shaḥarit). In another example, Margalit draws on lyrics associated with the pasta tradition of the Iraqi Muslim maqām vocalist Rashid Al-Qundarchi, while also sharing certain thematic and lyrical similarities with the ʿatābā and shrūqī genres common to communities across the Levant (see “Awūn, awūn, yuma,” Figure 4.6). In “Yaʿaqūb, ḥāchinī,” Nurit sets new words to a popular Lebanese song of the 1960s, whose melodic mode is associated with Jewish liturgy of specific thematic relevance to her song (Figures 4.3 and 4.4). Finally, Margalit adapts sonic elements of regional and historical mourning genres in expressing her grief, such as those found in frāqiyyāt, abūṭhiyya and ʿaddada (Figure 4.8), as well as a melodic mode (ḥijāz) associated with tragedy and death in Judeo-Islamic religious contexts (Figure 4.7).

These examples all demonstrate the intricate and convoluted web of relationships between sacred and secular, Jewish and Muslim, popular and expressive genres within these women’s songs—which overlap, converge, and diverge in unique ways. Though much of their material draws from sonic resources prevalent in 1950s Iraq, they are also greatly influenced by those practices encountered after immigration—in radio broadcasts,
community performances, and the synagogue. After arriving in Israel, for example, most Iraqis regularly listened to *Shidurei Kol Yisrael B’aravit* [Broadcasts of the Voice of Israel in Arabic], a radio program geared towards Arabic-speaking Jews, which frequently broadcasted popular Iraqi and Egyptian songs (Chetrit 2004; Dardashti 2008b; Elazar 1992; Horowitz 2010). Bootleg tapes of popular Arab music were widely popular and commonly traded among members of this community from the 1970s on (Horowitz 2010). Furthermore, Iraqi musicians such as Daud and Saleh al-Kuwaiti continued to enjoy popularity and fame within Iraqi Israeli communities, where they regularly performed precomposed songs associated with the Iraqi *maqām* tradition at venues such as Café Noah and all-night community celebrations and weddings (Dardashti 2008b).

In the sacred realm, Arab *maqāmāt* have continued to remain central to Iraqi Jewish liturgy, where religious texts set to these melodic modes are performed almost daily (Manasseh 1999, 2004, 2012). Indeed, since their immigration in the 1950s, a majority of Iraqi Jews frequent synagogues on a weekly basis, usually for Shabbat, where these melodies and songs are continually consumed and reproduced (Rebhu and Waxman 2004: 269). These musical influences have all impacted the development of private Iraqi Jewish song in the present-day, thus demonstrating the inherently syncretic nature of this practice.

Musical “Building” and Acculturation in *Musîqa Mizraḥît* and Private Song

The private songs of Iraqi Jews have likely influenced, and been influenced by, the development of subsequent musical genres in Israel, such as *musîqa mizraḥît*—which

14 One of my informants, for example, excitedly recounted how her parents arranged for the Al-Kuwaiti brothers to perform at her wedding in 1965, where their all-night performance included popular Iraqi and Egyptian songs, as well as Iraqi *maqām*.
at times exhibit similar processes of musical acculturation when compared with one another. As a genre that came into being as the children of Middle Eastern and north African immigrants reached adulthood, *musiqa mizrahit* emerged from dislocation and relocation—composed from the “the disparate musical elements” that coexisted within “transit camps, development towns, and poor neighborhoods beginning in the 1950s and 1960s” (Horowitz 2010: 2-3). The continued consumption and production of Arabic music within Mizrahi communities collided and melded with the new sonic landscape associated with the notion of Hebrewism, or ‘Ivriut, as it was being formulated in Israel’s early years. ‘Ivriut was consciously manufactured in the form of cultural nationalist production, perhaps most exemplified by the genre known as “shirei Eretz Yisrael” [Hebrew: songs of the Land of Israel] (Regev and Seroussi 2004). Typically sung in a communal fashion (known as shira be-tzibbur), *shirei Eretz Yisrael* have their roots in the Histadrut and Zionist cultural reforms of the 1920s Yishuv period. Influenced by American and European models, these popular songs were consciously cultivated as an Israeli national music. Largely from secular sources (although sacred melodies could be included as well), these songs incorporate Hebrew texts with eastern European and Russian melodies, and focus on the praise and defense of the Land of Israel. In later years, they also incorporated songs from the army entertainment units, known as *lehaqot tzvayiot*, as well as rock and pop ballads (ibid.).

*Musiqa mizrahit* emerged from these soundscapes (Halper, Seroussi, and Squires-Kidron 1989). As a genre, it has usefully been described from the perspective of *livnot* [Hebrew: building], due to the various musical inspirations from which it draws. Many *musiqa mizrahit* songs are set to popular Turkish melodies, though they can include
stylistic influences from across the Middle East, Italy, Spain, northern Africa, and India (Horowitz 2010). They also draw from Arab musical stylings common to older Iraqi Jewish performers, such as the use of heterophony, distinctive cyclic rhythmic patterns or ṭqāʾ (usually maṣmūdi or maqsūm), modes (usually maqām kurd or bayyāṭi), melismatic melodic delivery and ornamentation (called silsulim, or waves/spirals in Hebrew), instrumental introductions and interludes (lāzima), and Arab instruments such as the ‘ūd and qānūn—while also incorporating western chord progressions (such as I–V–I), and orchestral or rock instrumentation, including bass, guitar, and synthesizer. Musiqa mizraḥit developed in tandem with the consolidation of Mizrahi belonging as a kind of “consciousness-based movement” (Shohat 1999). These social developments were key to the empowerment of Mizrahim within Israeli society, and coincided with the rise of the Black Panthers in Israel, as well as the Likud party upset of 1977 (largely the result of Mizrahi voters). Though musiqa mizraḥit has typically been dominated by Yemenite Jews, there are certainly many famous musicians of Iraqi origin (Regev and Seroussi 2004: 198).

To my knowledge, many of the second- and third-generation Iraqi Israelis I encountered do not practice the kind of private improvisational Arabic-language singing I encountered among surviving elderly Iraqi Jews; and indeed, many of them do not even know how to speak Arabic. Yet subsequent generations of Iraqi Jews do occasionally perform private songs within the home, although these continue to be met with a certain amount of denial. The popular Mizrahi musicians I interviewed tended to deny the existence of private song-making within their homes. While one informant did recall his parents singing original, private songs, he was not entirely sure to what level they had
influenced him: “Sure, I remember my mother singing, and my grandmother. I am sure it influenced my music, just like the old tapes of famous Iraqi Jewish musicians. But you know, we did not sing much in the house. If you were to ask my mother to sing for you now, she would refuse. She would say ‘āṭḥ’ [Arabic: shame].”

My exceedingly rare encounters with private song-making among younger generations of Iraqi Jews, numbering less than a handful, nonetheless tend to display a number of musical similarities with processes of livnot inherent in musiqa mizraḥit. On a social level, both these genres have emerged from within more intimate community spheres. Musically, both fundamentally rely on a western harmonic vocabulary while still employing important characteristics common to Arab musicianship, such as the incorporation of melodies that share certain modal similarities with maqāmāt like kurd and nahāwand.

Consider the following lullaby, shared with me by an Iraqi Israeli woman named Shafiqa, who recounted this song in the context of remembering how her mother, now deceased, used to sing to her as a child. Her lullaby alternates verses in Hebrew and Arabic, and was inspired by her mother’s lullabies.

Figure 4.9. “Lishon Yeled.” Sung by Shafiqa. Recorded June 2016, Tel Aviv, Israel, by Liliana Carrizo.

[Hebrew:]
*Lishon yeled, lishon* 
Sleep child, sleep

[Arabic:]
*Nūma nūma ni* 
Sleep, sleep
*Nūma nūma ni* 
Sleep, sleep
*Nūma nūma ni* 
Sleep, sleep
*Nūma nūma ni* 
Sleep, sleep

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Figure 4.9 (cont.)

[Hebrew:]
Shamayim behirim
The skies are clear
V’yareah meah
And the moon above
Kochavim zruim larov
Stars are scattered all over
V’ruah aviv
And the spring breeze
Mavtiha, mahar zoher
Promises a bright tomorrow
V’rak hayanshuf
And only the owl
V’rak hayanshuf
And only the owl
Koreh “leyl”
Says “leyl”

[Arabic:]
Nām tbnī, nām
Sleep, my son, sleep
Numit al-‘iyfi
Sleep in health
Nām tbnī, nām
Sleep, my son, sleep
Nām tbnī, nām
Sleep my son, sleep
Sung in a slow, melancholic manner, this lullaby clearly draws from song traditions associated with sisterwork of Iraqi Jewish women of the past, including the recitation of lullabies such as *dililōl*. The song’s lyrics are representative of the dual linguistic worlds that many Iraqi Jews straddled within Israel. The rhythmic feel of the song falls into a steady 3/4 feel, and has a waltz-like, lilting quality common to certain songs associated with the genre of *shirei Eretz Yisrael*, such as “Yerushalayim shel zahav” (written by Naomi Shemer).

The melody of Shafiqa’s lullaby is in a western minor scale, which overlaps with the mode of *maqām nahāwand*. Amy Horowitz has argued that, in some ways, the minor scales prevalent in *shirei Eretz Yisrael* were conducive to a kind of musical dialogue and syncretism prevalent in *musiqa mizraḥīt*, due to their similarity with certain Arab *maqāmāt* (Horowitz 2010: 3). Nonetheless, Shafiqa’s melody displays an unmistakable western European feel—particularly in the melodic use of the seventh scale degree, which resolves back to the tonic (see, for example, measures 11, 19, 55, and 61), as well
as when she utilizes the fifth scale degree to resolve up to the tonic (see measures 43-44). Furthermore, though her song is solidly in A minor, Shafiqa occasionally hints at a tonic in C major, as she outlines the C major chord within her melodic statements (see, for example, measures 1-5, measures 29-30, measures 45-48).

Thus, Shafiqa is clearly drawing from Western harmonic language in the construction of her lullaby. Nonetheless, a subtle influence of Arab vocal stylings can be detected, such as in the frequent use of melismas, as well as her Arabic lyrics. This same kind of musical acculturation is found in processes of livnot inherent in musiqa mizrāḥit. Similarities on the social level also abound: indeed, both private Iraqi Jewish songs and musiqa mizrāḥit have encouraged, modeled, and promoted individual and social empowerment from within private spheres, via more intimate musical practices that have nonetheless formed a vital site for negotiating emergent individual and community understandings. As we have seen among elderly Iraqi Jewish women, this process can be conceptualized from the perspective of sisterwork, where violence and disruption are processed and understood through their articulation and embrace within the safety of female-oriented, domestic spheres. An interesting parallel exists in musiqa mizrāḥit, which originally developed from an “underground music distribution network” within Mizrahi neighborhoods. Eventually, musiqa mizrāḥit gained visibility within public spheres, both as a form of Mizrahi defiance, as well as an emblem of community resilience (Horowitz 2010: 2). This resulted in an expansion of the boundaries of the Israeli canon to include Mizrahi artistry, just as, in a social sense, it helped Mizrahim in their efforts to attain more equal recognition within the Israeli nation (ibid.: 3; Regev and Seroussi 2004).
My friend Merav and I are talking over coffee, at a café near the trendy clothes shop where she works in downtown Tel Aviv. Merav’s wedding will take place in two week’s time, and she has been telling me, excitedly, about the details involved. At thirty-four years old, she has been engaged to her fiancé Noam, who owns an electronics shop near shuk ha-Carmel [Carmel Market], for over a year. Merav tells me that after their wedding, she plans to quit her job to help Noam expand his business. As she discusses her wedding preparations, she mentions that she and Noam will be putting henna on their hands the night before their wedding.

“Those henna designs, they are so beautiful,” she says. Merav is of half-Iraqi, half-Yemenite descent. Her fiancée also hails from a family of Iraqi Jews.

“You know,” I say, “they used to put henna on brides and grooms back in Iraq.”

“I know!” she laughs. “My savta [Hebrew: grandmother] is so excited.”

“Is that why you’re interested in it?” I ask.

“No, it’s not that.” She says. “It’s just so beautiful. It’s a cool thing, you know, this henna. And I love the way it looks with formal wedding clothes. It makes everything so elegant.” She pauses, taking a sip of her coffee.

“You know what,” she continues. “You should come to my home the day before the wedding, when we put on the henna. Our families will be there and my mom will make a ton of food.”

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1 Merav is fluent in both Hebrew and English, and we speak in a mixture of the two languages.
“Of course!” I say, laughing. Merav’s mother is Iraqi, and I have no doubt that she will have a feast prepared, even if a small gathering is planned.

A couple of weeks later, I arrive at Merav’s mother’s apartment, in north Tel Aviv. As I walk through the door, I hear *musiqqa mizraḥit* playing over the living room speaker—I recognize Eyal Golan’s distinctive voice. There are approximately twenty-five people gathered for the informal party, almost all of whom are either family members or close friends of Merav and Noam. We have all collected in the conjoined space that comprises the open kitchen and living room area; most people are talking together, and some hold drinks in their hands. A few small children run around. At the back corner of the kitchen stands a young woman named Tova in her late twenties; she has platinum blond dyed hair and tattoos on her upper shoulders. Tova is a friend of Merav’s who learned how to paint henna while backpacking in India, and she is in charge of applying the henna designs to the bride and groom.

Standing near the henna table is Merav, surrounded by girlfriends, sisters, and cousins. She wears an informal flowery dress and looks radiant. When she sees me, she grabs me by the hand and introduces me to her fiancé Noam, a tall man with green eyes, who I had not yet met.

Suddenly, Merav’s mother Shula enters the room, shushing everyone with an exaggerated gesture of her arm as she holds a telephone to her other ear. Somebody turns down the music playing over the speaker.

“*Maaahhh?*” [Hebrew: Whaaat?] Shula yells into the phone, covering her other ear with a pressed finger in order to hear. “*Aval mah at omeret? Hu kvar nolad?*” [But what are you saying? He’s already born?] Shula lets out a yelp of joy.
“Merav!” She yells. “A boy! Tamar gave birth! She has a boy!”

“He’s born?!” Merav exclaims, excitedly. They are referring to Merav’s cousin Tamar, someone dear to Merav, who cannot attend the wedding festivities due to her advanced pregnancy.

“He’s born, he’s perfect!” Shula drops the phone and grabs Merav by the hands. Suddenly, Shula begins to belt out a song in Arabic, in a loud and beautiful voice. Shula’s light grey dress flows around her as she begins to dance with Merav in a kind of impromptu, spirited manner. As she sings, many of the people at the gathering, of different ages, surround them and start dancing and clapping along. Shula’s song is met with shouts of joy and ululations.

Rūḥ, yā nasīm, gūl lahum
Ja’ walid ‘andahum
Mithil al-ward ‘ala al-ghaṣān
Mithil nisma hīmā bil-bustān
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho
Go, oh breeze, tell them
A boy came to them
Like a flower on the branch
Like a breeze whispering in the garden
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho

Rūḥ, yā nasīm, gūl lahum
Ja’ walid ‘andahum
Mithil al-gumur yinwar al-layl
Wal-najām tishfī al-‘ālī
dhō, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho
Go, oh breeze, tell them
A boy came to them
Like the moon lights up the night
And the stars heal the ill
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho

Rūḥ, yā nasīm, gūl lahum
Ja’ walid ‘andahum
Hua qisma wa-naṣṭb
Wa ʾākhalī biqalbī al-ḥabīb
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho
Go, oh breeze, tell them
A boy came to them
He is fated and destined
And I put the beloved in my heart
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho
O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho
When Shula is done singing, she laughs and stops dancing. Bending over slightly, she catches her breath while everyone continues to talk excitedly around her. Meanwhile, Shula’s elderly father Moshe, who picked up the phone when she dropped it, has been holding the phone above the crowd on speaker so that the new parents can hear the entire family’s celebration of their news. Shula runs back over to the phone. “Are they still there?”

“They’re here!” yells Moshe. Everyone yells words of congratulations into the phone, including Merav and Noam. Shula resumes talking to them and everyone breaks into smaller groups, continuing to converse. Someone turns on the music over the living room speakers once more, and the sounds of Mizrahi pop again fill the room, this time a song by Eden Ben-Zaken. A few people move towards the center of the room and begin to dance.

Shula approaches me warmly and tells me how excited she is by the evening’s festivities. “Not just a wedding, but a birth!” She exclaims.

“Zeh b’emet layl al-ḥinā!’” adds Carmela, one of Noam’s older Iraqi aunts. She mixes Hebrew and Arabic words as she says this [Hebrew: This is truly…; Arabic: …the night of henna], referring by name to a traditional celebration that was once common among Iraqi Jews, where the bride and groom’s hands were painted with henna the night before their wedding.

“This is informal, though,” adds Shula, interrupting in Hebrew. “In Iraq it was a huge, formal celebration.”
“Yes of course,” Carmela agrees. “This is just family. But, you know… it reminds me of how we used to celebrate in Iraq. Now the young people, they are starting to do this again.”

“Well, Noam and Merav wanted henna before their wedding, so here we are!” Shula says, laughing.

A few minutes later, Noam and Merav are led to two empty chairs in front of the henna station. The music is again turned off, and everyone grows quiet, muttering excitedly as Tova begins to paint henna on Noam’s hands, crafting a delicate design of lines, circles, and flowers. Suddenly, an older woman named Shoshana (who I later find out is Moshe’s sister, one of Merav’s great aunts), begins to sing in a loud voice from the back of the room in honor of Noam, who she refers to as “ābu al-ḥināʾ,” [Arabic: father of henna]—a term of honor traditionally used to refer to the groom at layl al-ḥināʾ celebrations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā</td>
<td>Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā</td>
<td>Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noam basiṣ ḏakān</td>
<td>Noam got a store</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa-Merav abḥibahu ’āqla ṭār</td>
<td>And Merav’s head spins with love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā</td>
<td>Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā</td>
<td>Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noam ’ayūnū khaḍar’ maḥalha</td>
<td>Noam has beautiful green eyes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wa ib-Merav šabah yitmanāhā</td>
<td>And wishes to marry Merav</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sara Manasseh translates “mā najāz minā” as “we won’t give it up” (Manasseh 1999: 269). A similar notion underlies both her translation and my own—the idea that the groom is being addressed by a festive crowd that plans to celebrate both him and his bride throughout the evening and into the night.
Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Yā nās qūmū bārkālu
People come and bless him

Wa bʿarṣū hīlū hīlālu
And at his wedding cheer him

Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Noam labis ʿars al-fustān
Noam is wearing a wedding outfit

Wa mahīḍ mahīṭhalu mā kān
And nobody looks as handsome as him

Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Noam al-ḥināʾ biyādu
Noam has henna on his hands

Wa Merav sart naṣību
And Merav becomes his destiny

Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Noam shaklu maḥalha
Noam handsome with good looks

Arqṣu wa-ghanālu wa-hīlū hīlālu
Dance, sing and cheer for him

Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

As she repeats her refrain, “Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najāz minā,” many of the people present sing and clap along. A couple of the older women start ululating. After the song is over, everyone yells and claps some more before breaking into different directions.

Musīqa mizraḥīt is turned on over the speaker again. Meanwhile, Noam has finished

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3 As Shoshana sings these words, she gestures to the crowd that has gathered. Some of the elderly relatives ululate when she says this.
having his hands and forearms painted, and Tova has begun painting Merav’s hands. Noam continues to sit with Merav as his henna dries, while a few more of their close friends pull up some chairs, surrounding them in conversation.

Soon after, Shula begins to bring out large plates of food to the banquet table in the living room, which has already been beautifully decorated with bowls of olives, ḥumuş, tahīna, roast vegetables, and various chopped salads flavored with parsley, cilantro, and lemon. Some of her relatives follow her to the table, carrying large plates of hot, fresh pita, and bowls of ʿamba, a favored Iraqi delicacy made of tart, pickled mangoes, turmeric, and crushed fenugreek.

The star of Shula’s culinary show is her tbit, a large, whole chicken that has been roasting for almost twenty-four hours. As she carefully carries out the bird, Shula explains how she removed the skin of the chicken in one entire piece, then stuffed it with ground beef, rice, chicken, onion, sliced tomatoes, lemon, parsley, and cardamom, before sewing it closed by hand with needle and thread. She then tells us how she placed the stuffed skin next to the chicken in a large pan that has layers of onion, spiced tomato sauce, and more rice, and cooked it overnight over a low flame.

“We always make tbit on Shabbat, but also on special occasions,” Shula says.

“There can be no celebration without tbit!” yells Moshe, who is standing behind us. I serve some tbit onto my plate, and notice that the chicken is so tender that it falls

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4 As noted by Eli Amir in his novel, The Dove Flyer, it is common among Iraqi Jews to “whet the appetite” of guests by serving a spread of salads, breads, and dips as appetizers in preparation for a large main course (Amir 1992: 124-126).
5 ʿAmba originated among southern Iraqis and is strikingly similar in flavor to lime pickles from India known as achaar. In fact, the word ʿamba has its roots in the Hindi word aam—meaning mango.
6 Another similar Iraqi Jewish main dish, known as patcha, consists of sheep’s stomach that has been carefully cleaned, then is stuffed with similar ingredients as tbit and prepared in the same manner—cooked overnight over a low flame.
apart the instant my fork touches it. Bits of chicken sink into the spiced tomato rice in a

glorious way.

“We typically cook tbit overnight before Shabbat,” says Shira, another of Noam’s
aunts, who picks up the conversation where Shula left off. “But Shula is from the south,
so she does not put in potato or beans. My tbit is made in the central Iraqi style, where I
add potatoes and beans. We also like to make brown eggs boiled in black tea the night
before Shabbat,” she adds, describing a dish called ithārij mal-Shubat [qiltu: eggs for
Shabbat] a favored Iraqi Jewish dish—one that has infused Israeli culture in the form of a
popular roadside pita sandwich known as sabīḥ. Shira and I both lament that while most
Israelis love to eat sabīḥ, those who are not of Iraqi descent do not realize the importance
of boiling the eggs overnight in tea, which infuses them with a subtle yet delectable
earthy flavor.

“This is an Iraqi thing,” she says. “We know this secret. You must cook the eggs
all night with many bags of black tea, over a low flame. The tea soaks through the shell
and to the eggs, and gives them a strong brown color and a delicious flavor. Then you eat
them in pita on Saturday morning, adding ’amba, slices of fresh green onion, fried
eggplant, and butternut squash.”

Moshe steps into our conversation, praising Shula’s cooking once more. “These
bowls of ’amba, they are so fresh. Shula makes them by hand, you know, with her own
spice mixture. They remind me of the ’amba we would get from the markets in Basra.
They would bake hot bread and stuff it with ’amba. When you would bite into it the
ʿamba would pour all over your hands. There was nothing like it. We would eat so much of it that our skin smelled sweet,” Moshe laughs.7

Shula joins our conversation. “Oh, we love Iraqi food,” she says. “We love our kufta [meatballs boiled in spiced tomato sauce], we love bāmīa [okra], we love kuba. I make them all. I learned from my mother.”

“We eat these dishes everyday, just like we did in Iraq,” Carmela adds. “But always with rice. In Iraq rice was the easiest and most affordable thing to buy. My mother used to make food for Shabbat, starting the preparation days before. She would make her own fresh pita bread, sometimes stuffed with eggs and potatoes. On special occasions she cooked mḥashā [stuffed grape leaves and yellow squash] to celebrate, because the bright green and yellow colors of the vegetables make people happy, just by looking at them.”

Carmela gestures towards the table as she says this, pointing at Shula’s steaming, stuffed yellow squash as an example. “And in the winter she would prepare hot dishes,” she continues, “beets, turnips, fava beans, and black-eyed peas. Then when Saturday arrived the food would be ready, and we would take a picnic to eat in the big orchard across from our home.”

Shira, who is Carmela’s younger sister, builds on her recollection. “In the summer, it was very hot in the orchard. So after lunch we would come home thirsty. Our mother kept cold water in jars on the roof, to cool in the breeze. We would climb up there to cool down and enjoy the water. We would also fill our basement with water and put watermelons in it, so that they could be eaten cold.”

7 Fenugreek, one of the main ingredients of ʿamba, is known to impart a kind of “maple-like” smell to a person’s skin when he or she consumes the spice in large quantities (see Mebazaa, Rega, and Camel 2011).
Our small conversation breaks up as the line continues to move past us, with everyone filling their plates. People sit around the living room to eat, some on sofas, some on the chairs, and some on the floor. I look towards Merav and Noam, whose henna has now dried. They begin to wash off the clay that has caked onto their skin in the kitchen sink. It leaves behind beautiful tattooed designs, and they hold up their arms for everyone to see. Everyone cheers. Some of their family members escort them into the living room, so that they can eat as well. After this, the party continues informally for many hours, with much laughter and conversation, as the music booms on the stereo throughout the night.

Later on that evening, I step out onto the balcony, away from the loud music and conversation. It is quiet outside, and the sounds from the party are muffled by the cool city air. I breathe in and turn, noticing that Moshe is sitting in the corner of the terrace with his younger brother, Eli. They welcome me to join them, and I pull up a chair.

Moshe is smoking a cigarette. He takes a deep drag. As he exhales, he says in Hebrew: “Things have really changed.”

“Yes,” Eli says. “But here we are now. And your little granddaughter is getting married.”

Moshe laughs. “I love these gatherings,” he says, switching to Arabic. “It feels like the old days.” Moshe and Eli both grew up in Iraq and emigrated to Israel when they were young adults; Moshe was fifteen, Eli was twelve.

Moshe continues, switching back to Hebrew:

In Basra we were close with our neighbors. Everybody knew everybody. We would spend Friday evenings after synagogue with all our friends and neighbors and sing songs. We met every holiday. We always had wonderful gatherings with extended family and friends, even our Arab neighbors. We celebrated with so
many different kinds of food, and ‘arraq, and we would dance and sing. We really spent so much time together. Our homes were always open for one another.

“Today it is different,” Eli continues, in Hebrew. “These days we gather less for Shabbat and holidays, with fewer people. The singing has also become less and less. When I was young we used to meet together with many friends and listen to Umm Kulthum’s songs. They were broadcast on the radio once a week. It was like a real celebration. We had a lot of fun.”

“I miss the markets in Basra, do you remember the markets?” Moshe says, switching back to Arabic again. Eli nods. “There was special food there, food that you can’t find in Israel. There was khirit, a sweet, yellow candy. We grated it with our teeth and swallowed it. It was delicious.”

“I remember the kemagh,” Eli says, still speaking in Arabic. “It was like whipped cream. There was also dihān, a kind of butter. Both were made from buffalo milk and were sold by the Bedouins in small woven baskets in the marketplace.”

“And there was a vendor near sūq al-dījāj [Arabic: the chicken market], near the entrance to the market. Our father always bought buab qursasi from him,” Moshe adds.

“Buab qarsasi!” Eli exclaims. “Sweet cookies made from the bark of Persian trees. It was cut into small pieces and rolled in flour.”

“It was so delicious.” Moshe says. Both pause for a while, in silence.

“Sometimes after we came to Israel we would really miss these things,” Moshe continues.

“We missed our Arab friends, the ones we left behind,” Eli adds. “We used to meet together, play, swim in the rivers. I don’t know what happened to them, things got so bad after we left. Who knows if anyone is left alive.”
Moshe sighs, then continues speaking again: “I remember the beauty of the city of Basra, the suburbs along the river, the Zubir, the Khura resorts, the Markil seaport. When the river was low it would form small islands and we would go there to grill *mazgūfâ* [qiltu: carp fished from the Tigris river] with our friends. They used to say about Basra, that two giant palm trees guarded the gate to the city. When the Ottoman Empire was divided in 1920, Iraq was placed under the authority of the United Kingdom. The British soldiers could not enter the city, and for some reason any one of them who tried would fall ill mysteriously, and would die. Then one day a British soldier realized that the palm trees had magical powers, and he decided to cut them down. When he did, the trees let out a loud cry, and they fell to the ground, shaking everything around them. After that the British soldiers were able to enter the city. Everything changed.”

“The city was guarded by spiritual powers,” Eli says, looking towards the sky, “because of its beauty.”


“Aḥyā wa-ʾāmūt ʿalā al-ʾBaṣrâ,” he repeats. This time Eli joins him, in the same melody. Both sing quietly, almost as if under their breaths.

Moshe then continues his song, singing solo:

\[
\begin{align*}
Aḥyā wa-ʾāmūt ʿalā al-ʾBaṣrâ & \quad \text{I live and die for Basra} \\
Aḥyā wa-ʾāmūt ʿalā al-ʾBaṣrâ & \quad \text{I live and die for Basra} \\
\text{al-ʾBaṣrâ fīḥā nakhal} & \quad \text{In Basra are palm trees} \\
\text{fīḥā tamar fāg} & \quad \text{With dates above} \\
\text{ḥub al-ʾBaṣrâ bigalbi ḥāṣṭā} & \quad \text{The love for Basra is hidden in my heart} \\
\text{Itaminā ʾishūfā} & \quad \text{I wish to see her} \\
\end{align*}
\]
Al-Jizra wal-Furāt yasfī al-wardī

Al-balām fil-miyā al-hādī

Aḥyā wa-ʾūmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra
Aḥyā wa-ʾūmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra

Shārʿa al-kornīsh mīn ʿaṣāfīr
Itāminā mithil al-ʿaṣāfīr ʿaṭīr

I live and die for Basra
I live and die for Basra

The Tigris and Euphrates nurse the flowers
The boat is sailing in the calm water

Moshe trails off sadly as he finishes his verse. Eli continues Moshe’s song where he leaves off, building upon it:

Aḥyā wa-ʾūmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra
Aḥyā wa-ʾūmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra

Fīḥā al-ṭarab wal-khamra
Khalīt ṭb-galbī baṣra
Aḥyā wa-mūt ʿalā al-Baṣra

I live and die for Basra
I live and die for Basra

There is enchantment and red wine
It leaves pain in my heart
I live and die for Basra

Al-Baṣra bīḥā al-Zābīr, ūm al-nakhal ūm al-khīr
Tʿāṣīsh bīḥā al-balābīl wal-ʿaṣāfīr

Basra has the Zubir, mother of palm trees and mother of richness
There live canaries and birds
I live and die for Basra
I live and die for Basra

Al-Baṣra bīḥā al-Khāra, ṭīt tasāf rūḥī masāra
Bīḥā al-nās ʾāshkāl al-wān

Basra has the Khura, it brings happiness to my soul
There are people of many shapes and colors
I live and die for Basra
I live and die for Basra

Aḥyā wa-ʾūmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra
Aḥyā wa-ʾūmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra

Al-Baṣra ūm al-Mārkīl, hū̀āʾ hā yashfī al-ʿāfīl
Aṭlab min Allāh yakhafīhna, āhīl al-Baṣra

I live and die for Basra
I live and die for Basra

Basra is mother of the Markil, its air heals the ill
I ask Allah to protect us, the people of Basra

Eli stops singing, and Moshe again continues:

Aḥyā wa-mūt ʿalā al-Baṣra
Aḥyā wa-mūt ʿalā al-Baṣra

I live and die for Basra
I live and die for Basra
Asalim ʿalā ḥadqānī finjān qahūa
I will greet my friends with a cup of coffee

Yumkin yiḥkarunī, finjān qahūa
Maybe they still remember me, with a cup of coffee

Moshe’s voice becomes quiet as he finishes the last line. We sit in silence for a time after their song is over. I can hear Mizrahi pop from inside the party echoing in a muffled way, onto the balcony. Moshe’s cigarette now has a long trail of ash hanging from its end, as he has not taken a drag for awhile. He puts it out on the ashtray on a nearby small table.

He places a hand on his brother’s shoulder. “Let’s go back inside,” he says, as he starts to get up. “Merav will probably want us to dance.”

Eli laughs and slowly rises, one hand on the table steadying himself, with the other on his lower back.

Moshe walks over to the balcony door and opens it. A flood of music and laughter spills out into our quiet space, dissolving it. I follow the two elderly brothers back inside the home as we join the party once more.

“All the Good Things that Were Lost”: Geography, Gastro-nostalgia, and Culinary Belonging

David Sutton has coined the idea of a “gustemological approach,” which he defines as an ethnographic methodology that organizes a “wide spectrum of cultural issues” from the perspective of the sensory aspects of food (Sutton 2010: 215).8 A number of ethnographers have demonstrated how, among immigrant and diasporic

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8 Importantly, gustemology builds on literature on the anthropology of food—which focuses on the centrality of food to cosmologies, social practices, and cultural meaning—by examining the intersection of food and the senses.
populations, culinary activities often serve as a site for processing anxieties over cultural loss, where forms of belonging are crafted, recreated, and affirmed through food preparation and consumption in the present (Ben-Ze’ev 2004; Choo 2004; Law 2001; Lee 2000; Srinivas 2006; Sutton 2001, 2006). By bringing together “skilled practices, the senses, and memory,” culinary activities can be considered from a subversive perspective, where individuals maintain agency over their personal sensorial experiences—especially where these do not “conform to the hegemonic” (Sutton 2010: 214). In such cases, these activities can serve as a kind of “release” or “escape” from “dominant sensory regimes” (Sutton 2006: 87). This is especially true for exilic populations who have no hope of returning to the worlds of their childhood, though many continue to harbor a deep inner longing to do so.

David McDonald, for example, has noted the centrality of food rituals to ways of remembering Palestine among Palestinian refugees he encountered in Amman (McDonald 2006). Like Iraqi Jews, these individuals often possess incredibly detailed culinary knowledge tied to their former homelands: when recreated in the present-day, these culinary techniques are carried out with an exactness and specificity that is crucial to the maintenance of trans-geographic and trans-temporal culinary belonging (ibid.: 139). This is also true for many Iraqi Jewish immigrants who articulate a strong sense of gastro-nostalgia for particular Iraqi foods, ones that are deeply associated with their past lives in pre-1950s Iraq (Meir-Glitzenstein 2015: 89-90). The present-day preparations of aromas and flavors associated with life in Iraq, in turn, often prompt lengthy culinary remembrances among Iraqi Jews, resulting in detailed discussions of favored Iraqi foods, as well as the spices, herbs, and culinary techniques involved in their preparation. At the
above celebration, no less than fifteen different foods were discussed at great length over the course of the evening, almost all of which were tied to memories of specific locales of Iraq—such as eating with family in the neighborhood orchard, for example, or fishing with friends on small islands formed by local rivers.

In such cases, culinary knowledge, as well as the skills, sentiments, and embodied memories evoked therein, are often considered secret, “guarded treasures”—sacred forms of knowledge capable of “maintaining community links across space and time” (McDonald 2006: 136). Such intimate forms of “home-making,” especially where considered somewhat inappropriate, contrary, or even counter-hegemonic, are often carefully concealed within “family and personal spheres,” as Meir-Glitzenstein describes of Iraqi Jews. As McDonald similarly notes of Palestinian refugees, such types of food-making occur in the “inner sanctuary of the home,” where they remain protected from the “politics of the street” (Boym 2007: 16; Meir-Glitzenstein 2015: 90; McDonald 2006: 138-139). According to Meir-Glitzenstein:

The food that sustains a young person incorporates the warmth and affection proffered by his or her mother and the society and culture in which he or she grows up, and in this way is associated with the geographical landscape and climate of childhood. Among the often traumatic changes brought about by emigration are those connected with food and diet.

Meir-Glitzenstein 2015: 91

In this sense, the continual preparation of Iraqi foods within Iraqi Israeli homes stands as its own kind of defiant insistence on culinary continuity in the face of traumatic emigration and change. These treasured forms of culinary knowledge can be maintained and passed down to future generations, even where these individuals have no personal memories of the place their parents left behind (McDonald 2006: 139). For example, in
the above vignette we see how Shula is able to become a connoisseur of Iraqi cooking though she never stepped foot in Iraq, thus maintaining a culinary legacy taught to her by her mother. Though younger Iraqi Israelis have become further removed from Iraq in a temporal sense, the continual recreation of culinary belonging promotes a certain “aligning” of flavor palates across generations (Pink 2009: 40). Though these foods are continually re-imagined through the intentionality and agency of individuals, a certain persistent ideological significance associated with the flavors of Iraq of yore are nonetheless maintained within the home (Meir-Glitzenstein 2015; Pink 2009: 40).

Through their own sensory experiences, the children and grandchildren of exiled Iraqis thus come to form their own embodied ways of tasting a place they will never see.

Ethnographers who focus on gustemology have noted a kind of fundamental connection of “taste to place,” where culinary knowledge, method, and experience are often intricately tied to specific locations and feelings of belonging (Seremetakis 1994; Sutton 2010: 215; Trubek 2008). This extends to the food of different eras, where the multi-sensorial embodiment and reenactment of tastes and flavors can themselves become “a form of time travel,” allowing individuals to, however briefly, literally re-inhabit the sensations of remembered worlds that might not exist in the present day (Caldwell 2006: 98). It is striking that, in her research among Iraqi Jews, Meir-Glitzenstein has noticed some of the very same “taste to place” synaesthetic remembrances that I encountered in my fieldwork. These include the special emphasis placed on preparing and serving tbit and patcha (as tied to Shabbat and other domestic celebrations), the centrality of ṭamba as a condiment (as tied to remembrances of street vendors in Iraqi marketplaces), the remembrance of date palm trees (often associated
with memories of *silān*, or date honey, and the particular desserts of Basra), as well as the connection between grilled *mazgūfa* and time spent with friends on the banks of the Tigris river (Meir-Gliztenstein 2015: 90). I noticed that many of these same synaesthetic associations were evoked in my interviews with Iraqi Jews, most notably when in the presence of the aromas and spices of the very foods of which they spoke.

According to Meir-Glitzentstein, “it is possible to assume that Iraqi cuisine was awarded such a nostalgic place in the memories of Iraqi Jewish immigrants, well beyond that of its direct culinary significance, because it became a symbol of all the good things that were lost in the process of leaving” (ibid.: 91). Among Iraqi Jews, food preparation is a highly valued activity, demonstrating how the maintenance of culinary tradition can be imbued with a moral dimension (Cowan 1991; Sutton 2010). Furthermore, in celebratory contexts, the preparation of certain foods is assumed to be a given—forming a fundamental component of how joy is expressed and experienced in the sensorial realm, and what it means to celebrate. Moshe exemplifies this when he proclaims, “There can be no celebration without *tbiṭ!*”

Most Iraqi Jews regard the continued preparation of Iraqi Jewish cuisine as something inherently good, as a means of celebrating a continued cultural link with Iraq. In this regard, unique knowledge of specific culinary methods becomes a point of pride—as evidenced, for example, when Moshe praises his daughter’s culinary prowess, and her ability to make *ʿamba* from scratch. In another example, an elderly Iraqi named Shira proudly describes the way in which her preparation of *tbiṭ* is deeply connected to food staples unique to central Iraq (including potatoes and beans). In so doing, she not only demonstrates her sophisticated culinary knowledge, she also affirms a strong personal
connection to a specific area of Iraq. Similarly, I have heard a number of southern Iraqi Jews explain the importance of saffron to many of their foods, particularly seasoned rice dishes, which have been influenced by Persian cuisine due to their location near the border with Iran. In another example, Iraqis from Basra often prepare their own unique desserts, in which different species of local dates figure prominently; these are tied to specific candies, cookies, and breads common to the special marketplaces of the city. These foods are deeply associated with remembrances of the beautiful date palm trees that line the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, especially those near Basra’s Shaṭ al-ʿArab area (Meir-Glitzenstein 2015: 90). Moshe’s and Eli’s spoken testimonies are rife with such “taste to place” sensorial connections, where they evocatively describe the integral link between their favored foods and the geography of their childhood city.

Meir-Glitzenstein argues that among Iraqi Jews, positive memories of Iraq often arise as food memories. This is, in part, due to the way in which they are associated with domestic realms and Jewish domains—thus generally perceived as non-threatening to Israeli belonging (ibid.). She further notes that these positive memories are often juxtaposed with unpleasant and angry sentiments directed towards public spheres in Iraq, particularly those involving Muslims and other Iraqi Arabs. At times, my research seems to substantiate this point, as evidenced, for example, at various moments throughout Nuri’s testimony, described in Chapter 3. Yet as we see in the previous vignette, nostalgic culinary remembrances can also act as a kind of catalyst for the expression of further alternative memories and sentiments, ones associated with a kind of inappropriate longing for Iraq that transcends contemporary Israeli nationalist affiliation. This resonates with Nadia Seremetakis’ argument that “sensory memory or the mediation of the
historical substance of experience is not mere repetition but transformation that brings the past into the present as a natal event” (Seremetakis 1994: 7). It is also a good example of what David Sutton refers to as the “causal force” of flavor, where sensorial evocation associated with unique flavor templates of the past can exert influence in the present day, thus impacting the expression of remembrance and meaning in unpredictable ways (Sutton 2010: 215).

**Familial Celebrations: Songs of the Visible**

In many ways, Merav and Noam’s party is a fairly typical Iraqi Jewish familial celebration in the home, where a plethora of iconic foods like *tbit, patcha*, and *ʿamba*, among many others, are served. I witnessed such celebrations many, many times over the course of my fieldwork—on the occasion of celebrating births, for example, as well as during circumcisions, marriages, and religious festivities including Shabbat. At many of these events, I noticed that it is not uncommon for elderly Iraqis to sing festive songs, often adapting new lyrics to known tunes for joyous expression. Importantly, these songs are less “hidden” than the more private and painful songs discussed in previous chapters: for example, my informants were willing to discuss their joyous songs more openly. They were also more open to sharing the original source material for their musical inspirations, many of which are based on popular Iraqi and Egyptian songs of the 1940s-60s. In this sense, these joyous songs are somewhat differentiated from the more painful, personal songs detailed in earlier chapters, while still clearly belonging to a similar tradition of personal and emotional musical expression. Though they are still relegated to intimate spheres of family and close friends, they nonetheless enjoy a certain level of visibility;
this contrasts with songs sung in much more intimate, small gatherings that portray deep feelings of pain, tackle traumatic and violent topics, and/or offer incisive social criticism.

And yet, even within the occasion of Merav and Noam’s party, various smaller spheres of intimacy within the larger familial context continually form and disperse; in some of these, particularly intimate musical expressions take place. Throughout the evening, there are times when I am fortunate enough to be pulled into such a conversation of social intimacy, as when Shira acknowledges our “secret” culinary knowledge of boiling eggs with black tea. In this moment, our shared knowledge becomes a kind of “embodied form of social distinction,” helping to differentiate us both as “community insiders” within this particular moment (Sutton 2010: 213). At other times, I am unequivocally aware of my exclusion from those who surround me: for example, there are a number of private moments and conversations from which I purposefully keep my distance, where I sense that I should not intrude. In many ways, my witnessing of Moshe and Eli’s communal testimony on the balcony is largely fortuitous; I just happened to be outside as they were speaking with one another, and they just happened to invite me to join them as they were discussing their evocative memories of Basra.

Yet in spite of its similarity with other festive occasions I attended among Iraqi Jews, Merav and Noam’s party is also unique in certain ways—particularly in its resonance with layl al-ḥināʾ, a celebration that has gradually faded among Iraqis in Israel but was once common among both Jews and Muslims in pre-1950s Iraq (Manasseh 1999: 167, 192). Though Merav and Noam manage to recreate many aspects of this older tradition, their interest does not seem to lie in the particular cultural relevance of henna to Iraqi Jewish wedding traditions. On the contrary, it is the trendy aesthetics of floral henna
designs that appeal to Merav, as evidenced by the person she chooses to apply the henna—a friend and an amateur designer, who learned about henna tattoos while backpacking in India. Merav’s interest in henna is emblematic of the newfound, fashionable status of such tattoos in Israel—part of a larger pattern of “ethnic” trendiness that is en vogue, and a point to which I will return in Chapter 6 (Manasseh 1999: 267-271, 335; Dardashti 2007, 2008a, 2008b). Notably, Tova’s designs differ greatly from the henna tradition of mid-twentieth century Iraq, where the dye was typically applied in a solid color covering to the hands, the fingertips, and the feet of the bride and groom, before being wrapped by paper or candied ḥalqūm (Manasseh 1999: 270). In Merav and Noam’s case, Tova applies contemporary, elaborately floral henna designs to their hands and forearms.

These differences notwithstanding, it appears that the mere presence of henna in this pre-wedding context incites some of the elderly Iraqi Jewish women present—in particular, Merav’s great aunt Shoshana—to perform a song associated with older celebrations of layl al-ḥināʾ in Iraq. Utilizing the song “Abu al-ḥināʾ” as a melodic and lyrical template, Shoshana improvises a song text specific to the occasion of Merav and Noam’s wedding. Her performance draws heavily on the kind of improvisatory song traditions prevalent at pre-wedding celebrations of mid twentieth-century Iraq, where professional female Jewish singers would create unique, impromptu songs texts based on known songs in honor of the young couple (Avisur 1987a: xiv-xv; Manasseh 1999: 137).
Layl al-hināʾ and the Legacy of Daqqāqā

According to Avishur, the tradition of female Jewish performance at layl al-hināʾ celebrations extends back several centuries (Avishur 2009). These musicians were known to have excellent voices and good memories, and would usually perform for free (ibid.). By the eighteenth century, however, this tradition was professionalized and exclusively performed by a troupe of female Jewish singers and percussionists called daqqāqa— which originates from the Arabic word daqq, meaning to strike, or to hit (Avishur 1987a: xiii; Manasseh 1999: 137, 167-168; Shiloah 1983: 20). These musicians would simultaneously sing and perform on various percussion instruments, typically the dumbek, def, and naqāra [Arabic: kettledrum]. Guests would also join their songs by singing along to refrains and clapping hands. Their songs were typically in the Baghdadī qiltu dialect, although local songs prevalent among Muslims were frequently incorporated into their repertoire as well (Avishur 1987a: xiii). Additionally, the daqqāqa tradition was noted to have a hereditary element, having been passed down from mothers to daughters (Avishur 1987a: xiv; Manasseh 1999: 434). Not only would daqqāqa singers perform at weddings, they were also hired for other life-cycle celebrations among both Muslims and Jews, including births as well as during pilgrimages to holy temples in Iraq (Manasseh 1999: 138).

Layl al-hināʾ was thus considered a joyous occasion. The groom’s family would typically visit the bride’s home, where they would be greeted by the daqqāqa, who would play music throughout the night to the delight of all present. At times other groups might also perform, such as professional male chālghī al-Baghdādī performers of maqām, as well as abu shbahoth musicians (male musicians who specialized in Jewish repertoire).
(Manasseh 1999: 265). The predominant group, however, was the daqqāqa, who specialized in lively songs of the jawla ceremony, performed as henna was applied to the bride and groom’s hands, feet, and fingernails (Avishur 1987a: xiii-xiv). The high-spirited nature of the party was said to have an element of superstition to it: Avishur has noted that the bride and the groom were supposed to be kept up all night partying, as it was considered dangerous for either of them to sleep the night before their wedding (Avishur 2009). David Sassoon, writing in 1949, has remarked that a “lack of music” at such a bridal party was “considered a bad omen” (Sassoon 1949: 185).

Until the mid twentieth century, layl al-ḥināʾ parties and celebrations would typically take place at the homes of both Jewish and Muslim brides; while this celebration continued, gradually the music was largely replaced by 78 RPM records, and, later, Western and Arab popular music (Manasseh 1999: 167). In Iraq, daqqāqa performance disappeared completely upon the departure of all the performers in the 1950s, though they occasionally continued to perform in Israel (Shiloah 1983: 20; Manasseh 1999: 192). However, with the passing of the famous daqqāqa singers Lulu Shamma (of the Shamma family daqqāqāt, which included four generations of performers), as well as Sinyora Halabi (who passed away in 2004), no more daqqāqa singers remain. Thus, it appears that, on some level, this tradition has ceased to exist (Avishur 1987a: xiv; Manasseh 1999: 193).

Nonetheless, daqqāqāt maintain a continued relevance within Israel, where their melodies and lyrics have been adopted and adapted by Iraqi Israelis in the context of wedding celebrations and other festive occasions. Daqqāqa songs associated with layl al-ḥināʾ typically focused on blessings and praise for the bride and groom, as well as praise
for their families, where singers would utilize known songs as templates upon which to improvise lyrics pertinent to the young couple (Avishur 1987a: xiv). Of the daqqāqa repertoire, the song “Abu al-ḥinā” [Arabic: father of henna] finds particular relevance at Merav and Noam’s party, where Shoshana, a relative of the bride, adapts this song in composing her own lyrics—which largely focus on honoring the groom. As is typical of this song, Shoshana refers to the groom with the honorable title of “abu al-hinā’.” Her unique lyrics, however, reference specific aspects of the young couple’s appearance, personalities, and love story. In so doing, Shoshana thus recreates aspects of daqqāqa performance in the present.

Figure 5.1. “Abu al-ḥinā’” Sung by Shoshana. Recorded June 2016, Tel Aviv, by Liliana Carrizo.

Refrain:

Abu al-ḥinā’, mā najūz minā  
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Abu al-ḥinā’, mā najūz minā  
Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone

Verse:

Noam basiṭ dakān  
Noam got a store

Wa-Merav abḥībahu ʾāqla ṯār  
And Merav’s head spins with love

[Refrain]

Noam ‘ayūnū khādar’ mahalha  
Noam has beautiful green eyes

Wa ib-Merav šabāḥ yitmanāhā  
And wishes to marry Merav

[Refrain]

Yā nās qūmū bārkūlu  
People come and bless him
Figure 5.1 (cont.)

Wa b 'arsū hilū hilūlu And at his wedding cheer him

[Refrain]

Noam labis 'ars al-fustān Noam is wearing a wedding outfit
Wa mahīd mithṭhalu mā kān And nobody looks handsome as him

[Refrain]

Noam al-hīnā’ biyādū Noam has henna on his hands
Wa-Merav sart naṣību And Merav becomes his destiny

[Refrain]

Noam shaklu maḥalha Noam handsome with good looks
Arqṣu wa-ghanālu wa-hilū hilūlu Dance, sing and cheer for him
Shoshana’s lyrics detail particular aspects of the couple’s lives: for example, the fact that Noam owns a store, and that he has green eyes and handsome attire. Her lyrics seem to narrate the henna application as it occurs; she sings “Noam has henna on his hands” just as Tova begins to apply the wet clay (Figure 5.1, line 12). Immediately after, Shoshana proclaims, “…and Merav becomes his destiny,” utilizing the qiltu Arabic word “naṣīb” [destiny], a sentiment that is articulated earlier in the evening by Shula, who sings that the newborn child is “naṣīb” [destined] as well (see Figure 5.1, line 12 and Figure 5.4, line 15). At this moment in her song, Shoshana alludes to the powerful symbology of henna application; when henna is applied to the groom’s hands, the couple is seen as being spiritually united by an unbreakable bond, even though they are not yet married. In addition, the henna itself serves as a blessing, and provides protection against the evil eye.9 As Shoshana sings, I notice that the elderly Iraqi Jews in the crowd appear

9 Information related in an interview with Shoshana and Carmela, June 2016, Tel Aviv, Israel.
particularly delighted by her clever lyrical improvisation. It is clear that not everyone understands her Arabic lyrics, especially the younger members of the family. Nonetheless, the song is enthusiastically received by almost everyone present, who respond with ululations and cheers. The audience claps along with the duple meter of her song, which manifests a fast 6/8 rhythm (see Figure 5.1). Notably, her verses follow the same beat but incorporate a 2/4 feel, which switches back to 6/8 for her refrain. This rhythmic modulation creates an overall lilting feel, common to the intricate rhythmic patterns of accomplished daqqāqa musicians of the past (Avishur 2009). This is, in part, attributed to the presence of multiple talented percussionists within each ensemble (for an example of intricate overlapping daqqāqa percussion rhythms, see the musical transcription in Figure 5.2; see also Avishur 1987a: xiii-xv). Shoshana’s lilting rhythmic delivery is also similar to the lighter genres of pasta songs that typically conclude performances of Iraqi maqām (Simms 2004; Zubaida 2002).

In a musical sense, Shoshana draws heavily from the way “Abu al-ḥinā’” was sung by daqqāqa singers of the past. Though she is an amateur, she nonetheless adopts a powerful singing voice, one that was common to famed daqqāqa singers (Manasseh 1999: 137). Like almost all renditions of this song, she utilizes the repeated refrain “Abu al-ḥinā’, mā najūz minā” as a kind of springboard from which to improvise texts, while also utilizing more elaborate melodic contours in her verses that differ from the two-note iteration of the choral refrain. Her fast rhythmic 6/8 delivery is common to renditions of this song (see Figure 5.2). Furthermore, her song is in maqām ʿajam, like the original melody. Notably, maqām ʿajam is associated with feelings of joy in Jewish liturgical expressive practices of the Levant (Kligman 2001: 455, 478, 2008: 188; Shelemy 1998: 455, 478).
124). In the Iraqi tradition, it shares many similarities with the Persian dastgâh of māhur, including a melodic emphasis on the third pitch of the mode and the festive association (Avishur 1987a; Manasseh 1999; Simms 2004: 165). Importantly, none of the sorrowful and painful private musical expressions examined in the previous chapters utilize ʿajam. Shoshana’s performance imparts a deep feeling of embodied joy and elation on the occasion of her niece’s celebration, demonstrating the affective capacity of this particular maqām, whose expression is intricately tied to how emotions of joy are processed, embodied, felt, and understood among members of this community. The emotional resonances of her song are clearly contagious, as the crowd responds with effusive expressions of joy and celebration.

The following transcription of “Abu al-ḥināʾ,” from one of the few extant recordings of daqqāqa singers, provides a useful point of comparison with Shoshana’s song (see Figure 5.2, below). It was performed in 1987 by Sinyora Halabi, one of the last daqqāqa singers living in Israel. In this video recording, Halabi is accompanied by a troupe of other elderly female Jewish daqqāqa singers and percussionists, including Nozhat Avad, Nadira Marshiah, Shoshana Eliahu, and Dalia Naim. Notice the fast, intricate 6/8 rhythmic pattern utilized by these daqqāqa singers, which Shoshana also adopts in her unaccompanied vocal refrain.

**Figure 5.2. “Abu al-ḥināʾ.”** Sung by Sinyora Halabi. From the video recording “Ha-hatuna hayehudit b’Baghdad,” [Hebrew: “The Jewish Wedding of Baghdad”]. Olam Ha-Bima, Tel Aviv, 1987.

\begin{table}[h]
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textit{Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najūz minā} & Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone \\
\textit{Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najūz minā} & Father of the henna, we will not leave him alone
\end{tabular}
\end{table}
Sinyora Halabi’s performance of “Abu al-ḥināʾ” occurred at the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center in Israel in 1987, as part of a staged reenactment of past Iraqi-Jewish weddings. Her rendition focuses on the call-and-response delivery of the repeated refrain “Abu al-ḥināʾ, mā najūz minā”: Sinyora Halabi calls out “abu al-ḥināʾ,” to which the rest of the performers respond “mā najūz minā!” This stands in contrast to Shoshana, who sings the entire refrain with no call and response (though some of the people present
occasionally join her in singing her refrain). Another difference lies in Shoshana’s incorporation of improvised lyrical verses, which follows each iteration of her refrain, forming a kind of extended ABAB… (etc.) musical form. Unlike Shoshana, Halabi does not include any verses with improvised lyrical content or further melodic elaborations. This is possibly due to the staged occasion, where Halabi did not have an actual celebration to inspire improvisation. Thus, we are lacking this point of comparison. Nonetheless, many musical similarities emerge between the two versions—not just in rhythmic feel, lyrical refrain, and the use of a declamatory singing voice. The melodic contour of Shoshana’s refrain bears a striking resemblance to that of Halabi. Furthermore, Halabi’s song also evokes maqām ʿajam. Though her song only uses three pitches, they are the first three pitches of the mode.

“Abu al-ḥinā’” in Musiga Mizraḥit

Beyond influencing the spontaneous song creations of Iraqi Jews, aspects of “Abu al-ḥinā’” have the infiltrated popular Israeli music. The recently released 2011 album Halfla Iraqi Soḥefet v’Matrifa [Hebrew: “A Sweeping and Awesome Iraqi Hafla”] includes a collection of songs by various Mizrahi artists. On the album is an adaptation of “Abu al-ḥinā’” by Sholmit Buchnik called “Maḥrozet l-ḥina” [Hebrew: “A Necklace of Henna”]. “Maḥrozet” is a Hebrew term commonly used in popular Mizrahi and Israeli music to refer to contemporary “reworkings” of older, often beloved songs, including those popular among Jews prior to immigration, as well as older shirei Eretz Yisrael songs. Though the term literally means “necklace,” or “string,” it is employed in a metaphoric sense to refer to a musical chain connecting past generations with the
The daughter of Libyan Jews, Shlomit Buchnik is known for her contemporary renditions of popular songs of various Middle Eastern and north African origins, including Iraqi, Moroccan, Turkish, Tunisian, Libyan, Algerian, and Yemenite. Though she has not enjoyed nearly as much fame as other Mizrahi musicians like Eyal Golan, Achinoam Nini, or Ninet Tayeb, she nonetheless performs regularly at concerts and community celebrations.

In many ways, Buchnik’s song is unrecognizable from the “Abu al-ḥināʾ” of daqqāqa origins. For example, it incorporates aspects of the original 6/8 rhythm into a fast 2/4 tempo in the ṭqāʾ maqsūm, performed by synthesized riqq and dumbek. After a short opening mawwal, the song kicks in with Western instrumental accompaniment, including electric guitar and a driving electric bass line. Her song is also based in the ʿajam maqām family (faṣila), though she utilizes a variant known as maqām shūq ʿāfzā. This maqām shares ʿajam’s lower tetrachord, but incorporates ḥijāz as its upper tetrachord. Despite these modal similarities, Buchnik’s melodic contour is entirely different from that of both Sinyora Halabi and Shoshana (see Figure 5.3, below).

Figure 5.3. “Maḥrozet l-ḥinā.” Sung by Shlomit Buchnik. From the album Hafla Iraqit Soḥefet v’Matrifa, Unicell, Petach Tikvah, Israel, 2011.

Shlomit: Yābu al-ḥināʾ, wi yābu al-ḥināʾ wi yābu al-ḥināʾ

Oh, father of henna, wi [vocable] oh, father of henna, wi, oh, father of henna

---

See, for example, Gabi Berlin’s “Maḥrozet Shirei Eretz Yisrael,” and “Maḥrozet Shirim Drom Americaim” [Necklace of Songs from South America] on the album Platina (Sisu Home Entertainment, 2006), Yishay Levi’s various remakes of songs under the title “Maḥrozet” on his album Shirim sh’Ahavti [The Songs I Loved] (NMC United, 2012), or George Bar’s “Mahrozet Iraqi” [Iraqi Necklace] on his album Boi el Ha-yam [Come to the Sea] (Ben Mush Productions, 2005), among hundreds of others. The term can also be employed to refer to a “chain” of songs that share thematic material within a single album (personal communication, Dr. Iddo Aharony, Feb 12th, 2017).
Chorus: *Mā najūz minā!* 
We will not leave him alone!

Shlomit: *Wi abu al-ḥinā’, wi ābu al-ḥinā’ yā mā najūz minā* 
Wi, father of henna, *wi*, father of henna, we will not leave you alone

Chorus: *Yābu al-ḥinā’!* 
Father of henna!

Shlomit: *Wi yābu al-ḥinā’* 
*Wi*, oh father of henna

Chorus: *Mā najūz minā!* 
We will not leave him alone!

Shlomit: *Mā najūz minā!* 
We will not leave him alone!

Chorus: *Yābu al-ḥinā’!* 
Father of henna!
Buchnik’s song incorporates sonic markers associated with an imagined Iraqi past, including synthesized vocal ululations reminiscent of those common among Mizrahim in celebratory contexts. She is accompanied by instruments such as the nāī and qanūn which, while an important component of many Arab and Iraqi music genres across decades, were nonetheless not part of the way daqqāqa musicians originally performed this song. Manasseh notes that, upon immigration to Israel, performances of daqqāqa repertoire were occasionally accompanied by “regular Arab musical ensemble[s] of melodic and percussion instruments” (Manasseh 1999: 193). Thus, it is possible that
Buchnik is re-imagining daqqa repertoire from the perspective of these previous, post-immigration transformations. Buchnik also incorporates other sonic references to older Arab expressive practices, including occasional improvised melodic interjections that include Arabic words such as “yāʿāïnī” [Arabic: “oh my eye] and “layaltī” [Arabic: my night]—both of which have a lengthy history associated with performances of layālī in both Iraqi maqām and Jewish liturgy. Buchnik also incorporates other lyrical interjections explicitly associated with joy, such as farhāna [Arabic: happy], as well as the Hebrew word taʾanug, meaning pleasure. Despite her utilization of certain sonic markers associated with Arab expressive practices, her song is nonetheless fundamentally based in a Western harmonic idiom, as indicated by the bass line, which follows a I-V-IV harmonic progression (see Figure 5.3). In this way, her performance is typical of many songs associated with musīqa mizraḥit.

Importantly, Buchnik’s song still retains important daqqa characteristics, particularly in the use of a maqām from the fašila of ʿajam, which is associated with feelings of joy. Additionally, certain rhythmic figures found in daqqa performances of this song make an appearance in Buchnik’s rendition: for example, the 6/8 rhythmic patterns of Halabi’s version are embedded within the prevailing duple meter of the nāʾr’s melodic line (see measures 1 and 5, Figure 5.3). Additionally, the step-wise melodic movement of the electric guitar line strongly resembles the melodic contour of Shoshana’s duple-meter verses (see measures 10-12, Figure 5.3, as compared with measures 5-6 and 10-11, Figure 5.1). Similarities also arise in Buchnik’s repetition of the phrase “abu al-ḥināʾ mā najūz minā!” as well as her use of a strong, declamatory vocal quality. Like Shoshana, Buchnik’s refrain includes melodic gestures that focus on the
movement between the first and third pitches of the *maqām*, a characteristic common to this mode in the Iraqi tradition (see measures 25-26, Figure 5.3, and measures 3-4 and 17-18, Figure 5.1; Simms 2004: 165). Furthermore, Buchnik’s refrain, like Halabi’s, is delivered in a call and response manner with an accompanying chorus, where the lead singer chants “*abu al-ḥināʾ,*” to which the chorus replies “*mā najūz minā!*” Unlike Halabi, however, Buchnik alternatively repeats both the first and second halves of the choral refrain in a playful manner with the chorus. Furthermore, unlike the traditional *daqqāqa* chorus, which only included female voices, Buchnik’s chorus is comprised of male voices.

“*Go, Oh Breeze, Tell Them!*”: A Song in Celebration of Birth

Shoshana’s “*Abu al-ḥināʾ*” is not the first musical improvisation of the evening. The beginning of Merav and Noam’s party is marked by the interruption of Merav’s mother, Shula, who waltzes into the room with a stunning announcement of a birth in the family. The joy among everyone at this moment is palpable, and compels Shula to improvise an impromptu song, one that is based on a popular Arab song called “*Wāshraḥ Lahā*” [Arabic: “And I will explain to her”] by the acclaimed Syrian Druze musician, Fahd Balan. Fahd Balan’s career began in the late 1950s in Syria; he eventually achieved widespread fame as an actor and singer of Arab popular music. His career lasted over four decades until his death in 1997 (Zuhur 2001).
Figure 5.4. “Ruḥ Yā Nasīm.” Recorded June 2016, Tel Aviv, by Liliana Carrizo.

Refrain:

\[ \text{Rūḥ, yā nasīm, gūl lahum} \quad \text{Go, oh breeze, tell them} \\
\text{Ja’ walid ‘andahum} \quad \text{A boy came to them} \]

Verse:

\[ \text{Mithil al-ward ‘alā al-ghaşān} \quad \text{Like a flower on the branch} \\
\text{Mithil nisma hīmā bil-bustān} \quad \text{Like a breeze whispering in the garden} \]

\[ \text{O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho} \quad \text{Oho, oho, oho, oho, oho} \\
\text{O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho} \quad \text{Oho, oho, oho, oho, oho} \]

\[ \text{Mithil al-gumur yinwar al-layl} \quad \text{Like the moon lights up the night} \\
\text{Wal-najūm tishfī al-‘alīl} \quad \text{And the stars heal the ill} \\
\text{O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho} \quad \text{Oho, oho, oho, oho, oho} \\
\text{O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho} \quad \text{Oho, oho, oho, oho, oho} \]

\[ \text{Hua qisma wa-naṣīb} \quad \text{He is fated and destined} \\
\text{Wa ākhalī bigalbī al-ḥabīb} \quad \text{And I put the beloved in my heart} \\
\text{O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho} \quad \text{Oho, oho, oho, oho, oho} \\
\text{O-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho, o-ho} \quad \text{Oho, oho, oho, oho, oho} \]
Figure 5.5. “Wāshraḥ Lahā.” Sung by Fahd Balan. From Wāshraḥ Lahā, Sono Cairo [Sawt al-Qāhira], Cairo, Egypt, 1967.

Refrain:

Wāshraḥ lahā ‘an ḥālatī  
I will explain to her about my condition

Wāshraḥ lahā ‘an ḥālatī  
I will explain to her about my condition

Rūḥī ‘alīla lājalhā  
My soul is sick for her

Verse:

Rūḥ, yā nasīm, lārdahā  
Go, oh breeze, to her land

Salim lī ‘ālī biḥībuhā  
Greet her with my love for her

Rūḥ, yā nasīm, lārdahā  
Go, oh breeze, to her land

Salim lī ‘ālī biḥībuhā  
Greet her with my love for her

Rūḥ, yā nasīm, fūɡ al-jabal  
Go, oh breeze, above the mountain

Lābd yūm ‘andaha tūṣal  
Maybe one day you'll reach her

Gūl lahā al-b’ud yʿanī anā ṣābir  
Tell her the distance means I am
ānā ghīr mlal  
patient and without boredom

[Refrain]

BʿAllah yā sarab al-ḥamām ghird  
By Allah, oh flock of pigeons
liṭuṣahā min al-nām  
chirping to wake from sleep
Galbhā daltīhā yagūl lahā waltīhā  
Her heart is her guide, it will tell her
aḍnāh al-gharām  
of the one who loves her deeply
“Wāshrah Lahā” was written for Fahd Balan by the Syrian composer Abd al-Fattah Sukar. In his performance of the song, Balan is accompanied by a full Arab orchestra (firqa) replete with a strong percussion section that allows for an intricate 3+3+2 rhythmic delivery. In addition, he incorporates an extended opening mawwal. Shula, on the other hand, sings her impromptu song in a solo fashion, and her delivery
follows a more simple, 2/4 duple-meter feel. Nonetheless, Shula’s melody is drawn almost verbatim from Balan’s song. Notably, Shula switches the melodic form of Balan’s song in an inverse manner: she adapts the melody of his verse as her repeated refrain, while incorporating the melody of his refrain as her verse. Additionally, she ends each of her verses with an original, catchy melodic “o-ho” vocable line. As she sings this line, she shrugs her shoulders in a charming way, dancing along to her song. This is reminiscent of Balan’s performance style, which is characteristically whimsical and light-hearted. Thus, Shula does not only adapt Balan’s song, she also embodies a kind of good-humored joy through similarly playful body mannerisms and vocal delivery.

Shula’s song, like Balan’s, is based in maqām bayyātī. Balan’s recording, however, with full Arab orchestra, is a particularly sophisticated performance of maqām bayyātī in the Mashreqi tradition, especially as compared with Shula’s simpler rendition. The instrumental taqsim, for example, modulates to various maqāmāt of the bayyāt faṣila, including maqām ḥusainī and maqām bayyāt shūrī (also known as maqām qārįğhāır). Husainī utilizes the same lower tetrachord as bayyātī: however, it incorporates a half-flat on the sixth scale degree in both ascent and descent. In bayyātī, the sixth scale degree is lowered in the descent (Rasmussen 2009: 324). The distinction between the two modes is subtle. Indeed, Scott Marcus argues that, in the present day, ḥusainī is arguably no longer a distinct mode from bayyātī, as many of its melodic gestures are “now generally subsumed within maqām bayyātī” (Marcus 2002: 46). Additionally, as Balan’s song develops, later portions of his melody also incorporate modulatory “colorings” from maqām bayyāt shūrī, which includes a ḥijāz tetrachord on G (ibid.: 47).
Importantly, the *maqāmat* that comprise the *bayātt fašila* are often associated with festive occasions in Arab and Jewish contexts, such as weddings, and frequently serve as the opening melodic mode for recitations of the Qur’an (Kligman 2001: 449, 2009: 166; Marcus 1989: 750). In Middle Eastern Jewish liturgy, too, both *maqām bayātti* and *ḥusaīnī* are associated with joy: though in this case, too, there is often little distinction between them in liturgical practice. Notably, *maqām ḥusaīnī* is employed to help announce the arrival of the festive holiday Shavuot, which celebrates G-d’s revelation of the Torah to Moses (Finkelman 1995; Kligman 2001: 457).

Though Shula’s song occurs early in the evening, before the henna festivities have really begun, Shoshana nonetheless seems to draw from the musical legacy of *daqqāqa*—specifically, in her adaption of a known song as a template for lyrical improvisation inspired by joyous news. This is particularly interesting, as Shula was born in Israel in the early 1950s and never stepped foot in Iraq. Nonetheless, through a kind of sonic immersion in secular and sacred Arab expressive practices over the course of her life, as well as fluent linguistic knowledge of different Iraqi dialects, Shula is able to sound and embody an emotional musicality, aspects of which hearken back to an imagined place that she has never seen.

Lyrically, Shula creatively employs thematic ideas similar to Balan’s original song, while also adapting them to fit her particular situation. In both songs, the repeated lyrical refrain focuses on the breeze in an anthropomorphic sense, where human agency is attributed to the wind—particularly in its ability to convey emotional messages to other people across great geographic divides. Balan instructs the breeze to travel to his beloved, to inform her of his heartsick love for her (Figure 5.5, lines 4-9). His song portrays a
connection between the breeze as a messenger of emotion and the intuition of the heart, which itself stands as a similar kind of messenger. When Balan sings, “Her heart is her guide, it will tell her of the one who loves her deeply,” he describes how his beloved’s intuition holds the capacity to communicate the same message that Balan sends through the atmosphere—one of deep and undying love (Figure 5.5, line 12). In a similar sense, Shula instructs the wind to communicate a message of deep and profound love (Figure 5.4, lines 1-2, 7-8, and 13-14). And though she had not yet seen the newborn at the moment of her song creation, she metaphorically describes both his beauty and the magnificent joy he has brought to her family in almost supernatural terms—akin to the stars that light up the sky and the moon that heals the ill (Figure 5.5, lines 9-10). Similar kinds of elaborate anthropomorphic, and even spiritual associations with the moon and the stars, as well as desert flora and fauna, are common in numerous Arabic literary genres across centuries, including classical Arabic love poetry, qasīda, and ghazāl; such imagery extends back to the pre-Islamic age (Alharthi 2015; Allen 2000; Bürgel 1989; Stetkevych 1994).

**Basra as Beloved: I Live and Die for You**

Out on the stillness of the balcony, the quiet and solitude stand in stark contrast to the intensely jubilant, loud atmosphere of the party occurring in the home. It is in this context that Moshe and Eli cultivate a private sphere of intimacy, a moment of respite within which to reminisce. Their memories are largely provoked by the present celebration which, through joyous musical expressions and culinary delights, sensorially elicits remembrances of celebrations past. When I join them mid-conversation, I note that
Moshe and Eli’s speech displays an explicitly nostalgic tone; at that moment, they lament the contrast between what they see as the increasing isolation of society versus the feelings of community and camaraderie they experienced during their childhoods in Iraq. Of note, both of these brothers express a kind of specific longing for certain sensorial experiences of Iraq, in particular, the tastes, flavors, and sounds of their childhoods. Eli, for his part, yearns for the communal musicality he once experienced, which seems to have faded. He reminisces about the weekly meetings he used to have with his friends, where they would gather together to listen to Umm Kulthum. He notes that the act of singing itself has “become less and less.” As their memories deepen, the two brothers speak more and more in Arabic, conjuring the language of their youth in the spoken and sung commemoration of their childhood environment.

As they converse, Moshe and Eli fall into a rhythm that naturally and effortlessly seems to build off each other, where they both substantiate one another’s memories while also adding their own personal details. Moshe recounts a mystical legend associated with the date palm trees of Basra and their captivating beauty, who were said to have possessed their own kind of spiritual power and mystique. His story is important in that it positions life in Basra from the perspective of a before and after, where the end of Ottoman control marked a turning point in the city’s history. Eli affirms Moshe’s tale when he describes how Basra’s profound beauty captivated the divine, who bestowed upon her special protection. The brothers’ almost supernatural descriptions of Basra’s majesty take on a kind of utopian feel, where they yearn for an impossibly beautiful, ideal Basra, a city shrouded in mystique.
It is impossible to divorce Moshe and Eli’s nostalgia from the present-day condition of Basra, which stands in stark contrast to their idyllic descriptions. Since their departure over sixty years ago, Basra has experienced decades of war and terrible violence (Marr 2004; Simons 1994). The major upheavals in Iraq in recent years, including two foreign invasions in 1991 and 2003, as well as thousands of violent bombings across the nation, has certainly taken its toll on the cities and people of Iraq (Tripp 2000; Hussain 2015). The 2003 Iraq War, which included the widespread humanitarian crisis associated with the battle of Basra in 2003, lasted until 2011 and resulted in hundreds of thousands of civilian casualties (Bhattacharya 2003; Sheridan 2013). Meanwhile, by 2014 the Islamic State had seized a large amount of territory in the region, placing Basra in the crosshairs of intensifying violence (Fisher 2015). In the fall of 2015, a few months before Merav and Noam’s wedding, a series of bombings instigated by Islamic State militants occurred throughout Iraq—targeting some of the very same beloved areas of Basra of which Eli and Moshe sing, including al-Zubir.11 Though Eli and Moshe do not overtly mention this violence in my presence, the fact that their song references the very same areas that have been devastated in recent years indicates that these current events were likely present in their minds. Eli alludes to this fact when he says “… things got so bad after we left. Who knows if anyone is left alive.”12

According to Stuart Tannock, nostalgic depictions are not uncommon among populations that have experienced “massive dislocation,” especially where native lands

12 Moshe and Eli are not the only Iraqi Jews I heard express distress over current events in Basra. In a different interview a few months previous, an elderly Iraqi woman exclaimed “rāḥt al-Baṣra!” [Arabic: Basra is gone] as she hit her chest in grief while discussing the way the city had been destroyed by war and violence in recent decades.
have undergone violent and destructive transformation. In such cases, nostalgia can function to mediate the “radical separation” of the past from the present, and of a people from a certain place (Tannock 1995: 463). Accordingly,

Nostalgia... invokes a positively evaluated past world in response to a deficient present world. The nostalgic subject turns to the past to find/construct sources of identity, agency, or community that are felt to be lacking, blocked, subverted, or threatened in the present. The “positively evaluated” past is approached as a source for something now perceived to be missing.

Tannock 1995: 454

Thus, positive and even utopian visions of the past can be employed as a strategy for reconciling displacement and exile, as well as present-day devastation and tragedy (ibid.). According to Svetlana Boym, the “non-return home” often becomes “a central artistic drive,” as seen in Moshe and Eli’s communal testimony, which serves as its own kind of “home-making” (Boym 2007: 16). The nostalgic sentiments surrounding these brothers’ remembrances of Basra open the veritable floodgates for their expression of more deeply hidden sentiments, particularly through song. These include their intense love for Basra, as well as their secret longing to return to their old friends and former home. In this case, the brothers’ “inability to return home is both a personal strategy and an enabling force,” allowing them to articulate their devotion to their native city, lamenting its devastation while also re-envisioning it in ways directly linked to their ongoing experience of exile (ibid.).

Figure 5.6. “Aḥyā wa-āmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra.” Sung by Moshe and Eli. Recorded June 2016, Tel Aviv, by Liliana Carrizo.

Moshe [Refrain]:

\[
\begin{align*}
Aḥyā wa-āmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra & \quad I \text{ live and die for Basra} \\
Aḥyā wa-āmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra & \quad I \text{ live and die for Basra}
\end{align*}
\]
al-Baṣra fīḥā nakhal
fīḥā tamar fūg
ḥub al-Baṣra bigalbī ḥaṭṭā
Itaminā ṣḥūfā

In Basra are palm trees
With dates above
The love for Basra is hidden in my heart
I wish to see her

[Refrain]

Al-Jizra wal-Furāt yasfī al-wardī
Al-balam fīl-miyā al-hādī

The Tigris and Euphrates nursing the flowers
The boat is sailing in the calm water

[Refrain]

Shārʿa al-kornīsh mlīn ʿasfīr
Itaminā mithil al-ʿasfūr ʿaftīr

The Kornish street is full of birds
I wish to be a bird and fly there

Eli [Refrain]:

Aḥyā wa-mūt ʿalā al-Baṣra
Aḥyā wa-mūt ʿalā al-Baṣra

I live and die for Basra
I live and die for Basra

[Verse]:
Fīḥā al-ṭarab wal-khamra
Khalīt ṭī-balbī ḥaṣra
Aḥyā wa-mūt ʿalā al-Baṣra

There is enchantment and red wine
It leaves pain in my heart
I live and die for Basra

Al-Baṣra bīḥā al-Zubīr, ūm al-nakhal
ūm al-khīr
Tʿaʾīsh bīḥā al-balābil wal-ʿasfīr

Basra has the Zubir, mother of palm trees, mother of richness
There live canaries and birds

[Refrain]

Al-Baṣra bīḥā al-khūra, rīt tasāf rūḥī
masrūrā
Bīḥā al-nās āshkāl al-wān

Basra has the Khura, it brings happiness to my soul
There are people of many shapes and colors

[Refrain]

Al-Baṣra ālim al-Mārkīl, hūʾāʾa yashfī
al-ʿaltī

Basra has the Markil, its air heals the ill
Figure 5.6 (cont.)

\[ \text{Aṭlab min Allah yakhaṣīh āhl al-巴斯ra} \]  
I ask Allah to protect the people of Basra

Moshe [Verse]:

\[ \text{Asalīm ʿalā sādqānī fiṣjān qahūa} \]  
I will greet my friends with a cup of coffee

\[ \text{Yumkin yiṣṭkarunī, fiṣjān qahūa} \]  
Maybe they still remember me, with a cup of coffee
“Aḥyā wa-āmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra” was originally popularized in the 1950s by the Iraqi singer Ḥidaīrī Abū Azīz, a tailor who was born in 1909 in Shatrah, Iraq (d. 1973). Abū Azīz began his career appearing on Radio Baghdad in 1937, and eventually achieved widespread fame (Al-Aboud 2015). He is known for a distinctive, rural musical style, where he would often sing his vocals unaccompanied, or in conjunction with a sparse number of acoustic instruments, including dumbeek and nāī (which often heterophonically accompany his vocal lines). He was also occasionally accompanied by chāghlī al-Baghdādī ensembles, which, as previously mentioned, were common in Iraq in the 1940s and 50s. His song was further popularized by other Iraqi singers of that time, including Nasir Hakim and Dakhil Hassan (also of Shatrah, Iraq, who was known to be a dear friend Ḥidaīrī Abū Azīz) (ibid.). Though many attribute authorship of “Aḥyā wa-āmūt ʿalā al-Baṣra” to Abū Azīz, it was a popular song before his performances, and is likely of an unknown, rural origin. Nonetheless, Abū Azīz’s version is arguably the most widespread of the mid-twentieth century, and was frequently heard by Moshe and Eli throughout their childhoods. Consequently, I refer to one of his most famous performances of this song, from a 1945 Colombia Records recording, as a useful point of comparison with Moshe and Eli’s personal rendition. Notably, Abū Azīz includes the phrase “Aḥyā wa-māt ʿalā al-Baṣra, ʿum al-ṭarab wal-khamra,” [gilit Arabic: Basra, I live and die for you, mother of enchantment and red wine], which references a strong, dark red wine known as khamra. For this reason, this version was considered improper and

13 Personal communication, Iman al-Abdul Wahid, April 20th, 2017.
14 Personal communication, Dr. Scheherazade Hassan, July 17th, 2017.
15 This information was shared by Moshe and Eli later that same evening, when I inquired about the origins of their song (Moshe and Eli, interview, June 2016, Tel Aviv, Israel).
16 Personal communication, Iman al-Abdul Wahid, April 20th, 2017.
was banned on Iraqi radio and TV in the early 1960s for a time, until its lyrics were altered to “ūm al-tamar wal-khaḍra” [gilit: mother of dates and greenery].

**Figure 5.7. “Aḥyā wa-āmūt ‘alā al-Baṣra.”** Sung by Hiḍaīrī Abū Azīz. From *Aḥyā wa-āmūt ‘alā al-Baṣra*, Columbia Records, 1945.

Refrain:

Hiḍaīrī Abu Azīz (soloist):

*Aḥyā wa-āmūt*  
I live and die

Chorus:

‘alā al-Baṣra!  
For Basra!

Soloist:

*Aḥyā wa-āmūt*  
I live and die

Chorus:

‘alā al-Baṣra!  
For Basra!

Soloist:

ūm al-ṭarab wal-khamra  
Mother of Enchantment and red wine

*Aḥyā wa-āmūt* ‘alā al-Baṣra  
I live and die for Basra

*Hilwa al-Baṣra*  
Sweet Basra

Verse:

*Al-Baṣra bīhā al-Mārkīl*  
In Basra is the Markil

*Marā yakḥafīḥ bil-ʿalīl*  
Her reflection heals the ill

*Al-Baṣra bīhā al-Mārkīl*  
In Basra is the Markil

*Marā yakḥafīḥ bil-ʿalīl*  
Her reflection heals the ill

Yā rāb āṣīr, yā jāltīl  
Oh G-d cover her, oh great one

Yā rāb āṣīr, yā jāltīl  
Oh G-d cover her, oh great one

Yakḥafīḥnā ahl al-Baṣra  
Protect us, the people of Basra

[Refrain]

*Al-Baṣra bīhā al-Zubīr*  
In Basra is the Zubir

*Bīhā nakhal bīhā khīr*  
There are palm trees and richness

*Al-Baṣra bīhā al-Zubīr*  
In Basra is the Zubir

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17 Personal communication, Dr. Scheherazade Hassan, July 17th, 2017.
Figure 5.7 (cont.)

Bīhā nakhal bīhā khīr
Ghanāʾ nafrāḥ ḥaṭa ṭīl
Ghanāʾ nafrāḥ ḥaṭa ṭīl
Wal-samʿa bil-īsm “al-Ṭāṣra”

There are palm trees and richness
Sing and we are happy until dark
Sing and we are happy until dark
And listen to the name “Basra”

[Refrain]

Al-Ṭāṣra bīhā al-Khūra
ǔm al-qiṣir yā rūḥī tashūf
Al-Ṭāṣra bīhā al-Khūra
ǔm al-qiṣir, yā rūḥī tashūf
Khālī ṛūḥak masrūra
Bīhā ṭūḥ ʾashkāl al-wān
Rūḥī wa-ʾhayyatī al-Ṭāṣra

In Basra is the Khura
Mother of palaces, oh that my soul sees
In Basra is the Khura
Mother of palaces, oh that my soul sees
It brings your soul happiness
There are apples of many shapes and colors
My soul and my life is Basra

\[=112\]

Maṣūm nahāwand

Soloist

Chorus simile

Ah- yā wa-ʾāmūt al-Ṭāṣra
Ah-yā wa-ʾāmūt al-Ṭāṣra

ǔm al-ṭar- ab

wal-kham- ra

Instrumental interlude

yā wa ʾāmūt ʾal-a al- Ṭāṣra
hi-l- wa al-Ṭāṣra

al-Ṭāṣra bī- hā al-Ṭāṣra bīl ʿa- līl
Like Abu Azīz’s performance, Moshe and Eli’s rendition is in *maqām nahāwand*, though the melody is limited to the lower five pitches of the *maqām*. In the Iraqi tradition, *nahāwand* is often associated with strophic songs, including leaps from the tonic to the fifth scale degree, followed by a step-wise melodic descent—all characteristics prevalent in this song (Simms 2004: 157-58). In Syrian Jewish liturgy, it is also the mode of choice for descriptions of divine compassion and redemption (Shelemay 1998: 61-62). These associations of *maqām nahāwand* resonate with the song’s lyrics, which describe the beauty and enchantment of the city, and a hope for redemption through experiencing her sights, flavors, and sounds.

In his performance, Abū Azīz is accompanied by a *chālgī al-Baghdādī* ensemble, which includes percussion. Moshe and Eli, while unaccompanied by rhythmic instruments, nonetheless follow a steady beat that is largely in duple meter, similar to Abū Azīz. In addition, also like Abū Azīz, they occasionally incorporate an extra beat into their overall duple-meter feel (see the 3/4 measures in Figures 5.6 and 5.7, respectively). Notably, Moshe and Eli’s song is in a slower tempo than that of Abu Azīz.
And though Eli joins Moshe in singing one of the refrains at the beginning of their song, they do not perform the choral refrain in the same lively call-and-response manner. Thus, the brothers’ rendition has a slower, more melancholic feel.

In terms of form, both songs follow a simple, extended ABABAB (etc.) format. Moshe and Eli adopt the melody of Abū Azīz’s song almost verbatim, predominantly utilizing the first half of the refrain’s melody (A) as the melody for their refrain (A), as well as the melody of the verse (B) for their own verses (B), respectively. The second half of the melody of Abū Azīz’s refrain (Figure 5.7, measures 9-15) makes only one appearance in Eli’s verse, which I have labeled in Figure 5.6 as “verse (melody 2)” (Figure 5.6, measures 31-38). Additionally, a section of melody from Abu Azīz’s verse (Figure 5.7, measures 35-42) is not adapted into Moshe and Eli’s version.

The original song references Basra as “ūm al-ṭarab wal-khamra,” connecting the notion of ṭarab with both musical enchantment, intoxication, and pain (Figure 5.7, line 5). Eli echoes this sentiment when he incorporates a similar lyrical reference to ṭarab: “fīhā al-ṭarab wal-khamra” (Figure 5.6, line 13). Tarab typically translates as “enchantment,” and it is integral to maqām performance. Racy describes the concept of ṭarab as the “merger between musical and emotional transformation,” which is often achieved through intense performance or musical listening (Racy 2003: 5). It can be conceived as a kind of “ecstatic condition,” comprised of a range of overlapping emotions that “elude specificity,” but that can variously include acute joy, enthusiasm, or grief, depending on the particular affective capacity of the maqām being performed (ibid.: 203). Tarab has also been likened to experiences of both intoxication and mystical transcendence (ibid.: 8, 12), a point to which both versions of this song allude through
their direct lyrical connection between “tarab” and dark red wine (khamra). The lyrical reference to Basra as the “mother of tarab” is particularly poignant, as it positions the city as the source of an almost divine, transformative power. This is echoed in Moshe’s and Eli’s spoken testimony, leading up to their song, where they describe the spiritual power attributed to Basra’s date palm trees. Similar sentiments are revealed in Eli’s description of the Markil seaport, whose air is said to “heal the ill” (Figure 5.6, line 20). This is an adaption of Abu Azīz’s original lyrics, where he says that the Markil’s “reflection” has the capacity to heal the ill (Figure 5.7, lines 8-11).

The repeated refrain builds a similar emotional poignancy surrounding the love the singer has for the city. In both of these renditions, Basra is described in terms of an almost desperate kind of love, where the singer professes his blind devotion and proclaims that he would give his life for the city. In this sense, Basra, whose name is already a feminine Arabic proper name, is further feminized through its association as the “beloved,” a theme that is found in a multitude of Arabic and Turkish poetic media. The tormented love associated with separation from the beloved can be alternatively evoked in both a physical-amorous and spiritual-divine sense, depending on the genre (see, for example, see Andrews 1985; Danielson 1997; Racy 2003; Shiloah 2001; Touma 1996).

The gendered allusion to Basra as the subject of this song, as a city that is also a woman, parallels many female forms of suffering in Iraqi Jewish women’s songs. Basra’s recent history, which has included invasion, terror, and human tragedy, involves similar kinds of subjugation as that experienced by Iraqi women (albeit on a much larger scale). Moshe alludes to Basra’s vulnerability, recounted just moments before he sings this song, in his legend depicting the fall of Basra’s spiritual protection—a violation that occurred as the
result of foreign, British invasion after the fall of the Ottoman Empire. By drawing on specific allusions to gendered themes and relationships in Arab poetry and Iraqi Jewish women’s songs, Moshe and Eli thus reveal their present-day torment over the pillage of Basra as juxtaposed with lyrical imagery of the city’s past magnificence.

Detailed geographies of the city figure prominently within Moshe and Eli’s nostalgic portrayal. In Moshe’s recollections, he incorporates the same areas detailed in Abū Azīz’s song—specifically, al-Zubir, al-Khura, and the al-Markil seaport. Thus, it is conceivable that, through its repeated occurrence over the course of their lives, this song has itself served as a way for these brothers to maintain specific memories of Basra’s neighborhoods—some of the very places that have been subjected to numerous violent bombings in recent years. Significantly, Moshe also sings of other areas not included within the original song—for example, areas of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, as well as Kornish street, an area that has also seen extensive violence (Figure 5.6, lines 7-10).

Some of the most poignant moments of Moshe and Eli’s testimony are revealed through metaphor, where they express their longing to return to their native land. Moshe’s description of the birds of Kornish street, for example, seems to trigger his wishful hope to metaphorically transform into a bird, in order to fly back there (Figure 5.6, lines 9-10). Importantly, many genres of Arab love poetry incorporate imagery of birds, often pigeons, who are instructed to fly across geographical divides and carry messages of love intended for a beloved from whom the poet has become separated (Al-

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18 The amount of car and suicide bombings over the past 15 years targeting areas of Basra of which Moshe and Eli sing are almost too numerable to list here. In 2004, scores of car bombs were detonated across the city, some of which occurred in the port areas right near Kornish street (Fisher 2004). Other examples abound. The 2011 bombings of Basra, for example, occurred within the very marketplaces Moshe describes (see Mohammad 2011). In addition to the 2015 bombing in al-Zubir, the same area witnessed devastating suicide bombing attacks in 2004 and 2012, killing hundreds of civilians (see Fisher 2004; Harnden 2004; Mohammad 2012).
Binali 2007). In many ways, Moshe’s description of shapeshifting mournfully describes the impossibility of his return, while also communicating a message of love to a place located across great geographical and political divides.

Like Moshe, Eli also draws heavily from the original song lyrics in his sung geographical remembrances; nonetheless, he also builds on imagery utilized by Moshe, as in his description of the birds of al-Zubir (Figure 5.6, lines 16-17). Like Moshe, Eli describes the pain of his separation in exquisite detail, by connecting the powerful notion of tarab with his personal despair (Figure 5.6, lines 13-15). At this moment, he displays great lyrical ingenuity through his incorporation of a clever rhyme between the word “ḥaṣra” [Arabic: pain] and “Baṣra,” thereby pulling these words into an integral, almost equivalent association with one another. This stands in contrast to the happiness associated with the Basra depicted in Abu Aziz’s 1945 version: “Sing and we are happy until dark … And listen to the name ‘Basra’” (Figure 5.7, lines 20-21).

When Eli expresses his concern for the people of Basra, he creatively adapts Abū Azīz’s lyrics, referring to G-d as “Allah” and expressing a heartfelt wish for the protection of the Arab friends he left behind (Figure 5.6, line 21; Figure 5.7, lines 12-14). In light of the contemporary bloodshed in Basra, Eli’s words take on a deep poignancy. Such sentiments, which express a cultural affiliation with Iraq, or concern for non-Jewish friends, are considered inappropriate if spoken outright in Israeli public spheres. They betray a profound sense of connection with other Iraqis—in this case, particularly those who hail from Basra—one that trespasses many of the strict self/other, Jew/Arab boundaries inherent in prominent discourses of Israeli nationalism in the present day. This builds on the spoken testimony of both brothers, expressed right before their song, in
which they nostalgically recount their experiences spending time with their Muslim friends, as well as their continued worry over their fate.

Immediately after Eli invokes Allah’s protection, Moshe wistfully sings of a hypothetical future reunion with the friends he left behind, where he will “greet his friends with a cup of coffee,” thereby showing his continued affection (Figure 5.6, lines 22-23). Moshe’s words allude to regional associations of hospitality and care directly connected with the act of serving coffee. This is tied to the elaborate Bedouin madāfa tradition, where hospitality is expressed through the social ritual of drinking coffee (Racy 1996: 407). Importantly, elements of this tradition are frequently encountered in communities across the Levant, including Iraq (ibid.: 413). Racy describes how this tradition is linked with feelings of social connection and friendship; furthermore, it is deeply associated with the notion of settling tribal disputes (ibid.: 406). By drawing on this shared cultural meaning between Jews and Muslims of the Levant, Moshe subtly depicts a kind of metaphoric wish for transcending Muslim/Jewish tension, one that would allow him the possibility of reuniting with his old friends. In many ways, this moment of his song conveys his profound critique of the political antagonisms that have severely impacted the course of his life, and his hope to transcend them. Eli articulates a similar sentiment when he praises Basra’s cosmopolitan population as one of its virtues, where “there are people of many shapes and colors,” thereby nostalgically recalling a time and place where Jews and Arabs were not enemies (Figure 5.6, line 19). Notably, this phrase is an adaption of Abu Azīz’s description of the “many shapes and colors” of the city’s apples (Figure 5.7, line 27). Moshe’s final line emphasizes his brother’s point, when he expresses his heartbreaking wish for a reunion, hoping that “maybe” his friends
“still remember” him (Figure 5.6, line 23). The impossibility of such a reunion adds poignancy to his words.

**Living History and Community through Imagined Musical and Culinary Worlds**

Various ethnographic studies of exiled populations note that, among these communities, cultural practices associated with an original home are often secretly and steadfastly maintained, especially in the case of forced immigrations, and among those individuals who possess an intense longing for an impossible return to their native lands (McDonald 2006). Such cultural practices can include food preparation and musical expression, artistic practices such as embroidery, or poetic composition, among others. According to McDonald, these practices all share a number of similarities with one another—as activities through which individuals can potentially “live history,” thereby recreating embodied belonging of the past in the present (ibid.: 136-137).

This points to a phenomenon that both ethnomusicologists and gustemological anthropologists have demonstrated; where the evocative, sensorial capacity inherent in food and musical practices are intricately tied to processes of remembering and deeply felt notions of self (Ben-Ze’ev 2004; Buchanan 2009; Choo 2004; Diehl 2002; Law 2001; Lee 2000; McDonald 2013; Srinivas 2006; Seroussi 2014; Shelemay 1998, 2006; Sutton 2001, 2006). Ethnomusicologists have recently begun to touch upon this topic, focusing on the overlap and similarities between musical and culinary realms (see McDonald 2006; Williams 2006). For example, Anthony Seeger has usefully described how both food and music are deeply implicated in processes of boundary making and social differentiation (Seeger 2007). Sean Williams has also identified a number of parallels
between food and musical practices, particularly within three important realms: 1) in terms of skill and knowledge, where culinary and/or musical talent undoubtedly exists among individuals, yet is often cultivated and developed through the guidance of more experienced individuals over time; 2) in terms of creation and consumption, which for both music and food often occurs in social settings, and can be tied to particular instances and important life experiences; and 3), in terms of sensorial evocation, where scent, flavor, and sound can each conjure embodied memories in a visceral, and immediate sense (Williams 2006: 3-4). All of these realms are deeply implicated in larger social understandings and worldviews.

Identifying parallels between musical and culinary activities is a useful starting point. But what of their convergences? Based on my analysis, my data suggest that it is important to consider how food and musical practices, as a constellation of related activities, implicate and impact one another. It is not just the similarities between food and musical remembrances that are of importance; rather, through their similar synaesthetic capability, culinary and musical practices can converge to allow for multiple levels of memory encoding and retrieval across sensory modalities (Shelemay 2006: 26). Significantly, each of the above parallels between food and music noted by Sean Williams interweave different realms of memory in crucial ways: procedural memory—of learned skills, episodic memory—of particular events and experiences, and semantic memory—of meaning and social understanding (Schacter 1996: 134-135; Shelemay 2006: 28). Cultural practices involving food and music often co-occur, but this is not merely coincidence: in the case of many of the Iraqi Jewish celebrations I attended, the
simultaneous presence of food and music intensify and augment different forms of procedural, episodic, and semantic memory recall through multi-sensorial evocation. We can pinpoint some of these processes within precise ethnographic moments, when present-day sensations of sight, touch, sound, smell, and taste compound to evoke powerful embodied memories of sensations past. Triggered by the sights and smells of Shula’s feast, for example, a group of elderly Iraqis (Moshe, Shira, and Carmela) all share intricate food memories of Iraq, just as, during these same moments, they savor many of these reimagined palates in the present. These memories also involve visual sensation, as when the presence of the yellow squash in mhashā conjures a sense of joy linked with specific, vivid food colors—a sight memory which Carmela associates with mhashā of the past. This also extends to temperature, where both Shira and Carmela recall particular foods associated with the seasons, as well as feelings of cold and warmth. In the same conversation, the presence of Shira’s homemade ḏamba, as well as her hot, fresh pita, triggers Moshe’s tactile remembrances of eating ḏamba with hot bread in the marketplaces of Basra, of the liquid mango spilling all over his hands, as well as the memory of the aroma such foods would impart to his skin. This olfactory remembrance appears to cue a range of related sensory memories for Moshe: later in the evening, he returns to a detailed description of other foods unique to Basra’s marketplaces, recalling specific sensations, including the way his teeth would grate against a specific kind of candy known as khirit. Within the same conversation, his brother Eli recounts his own specific sensorial memories of taste, which includes the particular dairy products and desserts common to the city. Importantly, these memories of

19 The association of emotion with colors of particular foods and vegetables has been noted by other Iraqi Jewish cooks (see, for example, Goldman 2006 and Soffer 2015).
food and music evoke a strong sense of emotionality among these brothers, one that is enhanced by their visual memories of the city’s striking beauty. At the same time, the brothers nostalgically recall the sonic environment of their childhoods, connecting their remembrances of the city with feelings of celebration, communal musicality, and enjoyment. Importantly, these sensorial reminiscences are all triggered by the similarly joyous, evocative contemporary layl al-hina’ celebration of the present, just as they form a site for processing loss associated with both their own exile, as well as the tragedy of contemporary events in Iraq. Provoked by numerous senses associated with this party, Moshe and Eli’s memories of sight, smell, touch, and taste combine and augment one another, and are eventually embedded within the framework of sound, when the brothers embark upon an impromptu adaptation of a song associated with their youths.

The affective capacity of maqām performance plays an integral role in this process. Arab musicians often metaphorically describe maqāmāt in terms of color and flavor, demonstrating how certain maqāmāt can induce specific, yet multiple and overlapping levels of synaesthesia (Shelemay 1998: 125-126). In the celebratory context described in this chapter, performances combine improvised Arabic poetry with evocative melodic modes that are specifically associated with joy, including maqām bayyātī and ‘ajam. In this case, various levels of sensorial evocation thus snowball—cuing further levels of embodied memory and eliciting powerful, and at times inappropriate cultural affiliations and reminiscences. This process relies fundamentally upon the senses, which are evoked in differential, overlapping ways across various realms of memory, including procedural knowledge of culinary and musical skill; episodic and recollections of particular times, places, and instances; and the continual construction of
semantic meaning implicated therein (Schacter 1996). In performative remembrances, numerous levels of sensation are conjured, evaluated, and manipulated as a powerful means of “living history” and community in the present day (McDonald 2006). As a constellation of embodied practices, they form a kind of affective modality through which remembrance and belonging is performed, felt, and understood (Gill 2017). This process is not only integral to the cultivation of community in the present, it allows for the maintenance of taboo remembrances that are deeply important to contemporary understandings of self.

Though these affective recreations of Iraq focus on a distant temporal and geographical past, it is important to remember that they are, nonetheless, entirely situated within the present—part of the “embodied process of boundary making central to feelings of solidarity in exile” (Diehl 2002: 81). This is exemplified when Shira affirms our shared culinary knowledge as “an Iraqi thing,” a “secret” that only we as Iraqis share. Similarly, Moshe describes the secretive nature of his feelings for Basra, when he says “the love for Basra is hidden in my heart, I wish to see her” (Figure 5.6, lines 5-6). This reference to secrecy, and hidden sentiment, is important, as it alludes to the deep value of these personal remembrances, especially in the maintenance of defiant, subversive forms of belonging. These secretive remembrances are only secret because of the present situation these elderly individuals find themselves, where belonging to an Arab past is positioned as incongruent with a nationalist present.

The remembrances associated with the songs and food of these individuals thus continue to survive and thrive behind layers of encoded and overlapping sensory modalities, allowing for the sustenance of deeply important memories and sentiments. In
this way, surviving Iraqi Jews can “safely” embody multiple, contradictory aspects of themselves in a way that does not threaten their current affiliations, allowing themselves to embrace what Ottenheimer refers to as the “discontinuous self” without overt contradiction (Joseph and Ottenheimer 1987: 226; Ottenheimer 1982). Their contemporary, sensorial reimaginings of Iraq are, accordingly, indicative of how they continually navigate their position between fractured loyalties and cultural affiliations, maintaining both joyous and yearning sentiments for past places and times, and helping reconcile the impact of displacement, violence, and trauma in the present.
The early years of Israel’s statehood were dominated, in a sonic sense, by a hegemonic Zionist soundscape, epitomized by the genre of *shirei Eretz Yisrael* and in line with the way that political forces of the time had envisioned a Eurocentric “core culture” [Hebrew: *libah*] for the nascent state (Ben-Dor 2006; Seroussi 2008: 20; Shohat 2006; Zerubavel 1995). As we have discussed, the efforts to shape a Zionist soundscape were often guided by an ideology of exclusion, or “*shlilat ha-gola*” [Hebrew: negation of the diaspora]. Nonetheless, within synagogues and local Mizrahi communities, “alternative soundscapes” maintained a continual presence (Seroussi 2014: 39). The pervasiveness of these non-mainstream expressive practices were revealed through the advent of technological developments, in particular the cassette industry of the early 1970s, which allowed for the development and exposure of music from within Mizrahi communities on a much larger scale.

In many ways, the widespread popularity of *musiqa mizraḥit* in recent years has helped make Arab musical sounds less foreign to Israelis, thus opening the door for other genres deeply influenced by Arab expressive practices—in particular, *musiqa etnit* [Hebrew: ethnic music] (Dardashti 2008a: 64; Regev and Seroussi 2004). Musicians and groups associated with *musiqa etnit* are often consciously marketed as “peaceful” collaborations between Israeli Arabs and Jews. Indeed, in spite of the violence of the first and second *intifāda*, many such bands have flourished, financed by private organizations
interested in cross-Palestinian/Israeli artistic cooperation (Dardashti 2008a; Brinner 2009). *Musiqā enit* typically incorporates modal melodic and rhythmic frameworks, including *maqām* and *iqāʿ*, as well as Middle Eastern acoustic instruments like the *ʿud*; it also frequently includes stylistic borrowings from Eastern traditions such as Persian *dastgah* and Hindustani *raga*, among others (Brinner 2009). Though it is not considered an overtly popular genre, it nonetheless tends to attract diverse crowds of young, liberal Ashkenazim, older Mizrahi Jews (in particular, Iraqis), and Arab-Israeli audiences. In an effort to maintain its legitimacy, this music is often promoted as “Eastern classical music,” equated in caliber with Western classical music as a means of justifying its artistic quality (Dardashti 2001).

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, other offshoots of *musiqā mizraḥit* also emerged in the Israeli public sphere, including “ethnic rock” (also referred to as “Mizrahi rock”), which was largely popularized by Mizrahi stars like Eyal Golan, Sarit Haddad, and Dudu Tasa, as well as Zohar Argov in his later work (Regev and Seroussi 2004: 184). This genre melds Arab vocal qualities with American and British rock (and even, at times, metal rock), while also incorporating elements of Jewish spirituality. Mizrahi pop, which significantly overlaps with “Mizrahi rock,” also emerged during the 2000s and 2010s, exemplified by youthful artists such as Eden Ben-Zaken, who blend melismatic vocal stylings with contemporary Western pop aesthetics (including catchy melodies, synthesized beats, electronic instruments, and simple harmonies based in a Western idiom).

The gradual embrace of Arab-infused music within the Israeli public sphere coincided with a number of coeval social processes and trends. These included an
increased consumption of “Arab things” by Israelis—including perceived notions of Arab music, food, and culture (Stein and Swedenburg 2005: 11-12). The signing of the Oslo accords in 1993 and increased diplomacy between Israel and her Arab neighbors allowed Israelis to travel more frequently to neighboring Arab countries. During this time, it became trendy for young Israelis to backpack across these areas, as well as to other Asian locales such as India, thus increasing their awareness of “ethnic” places and musical forms (Dardashti 2008b: 317). These trends were deeply influenced by discourses of modernity, and they coincided with an increasingly widespread globalized music market that promoted world and ethnic music as exotic and unique (Dardasthi 2008a: 64). During this time, Israeli youths began to realize that “home-grown” ethnic material existed within Israel’s borders, just waiting to be “rediscovered” (Dardashti 2008b: 317).

As a result, many young Israelis have turned their interest towards sacred Middle Eastern *piyyutim*—which are seen as a kind of ancient source of spiritual wisdom (Seroussi 2008: 22). In recent years, these *piyyutim* have undergone a veritable revival, thanks largely to the efforts of the Avi Chai Foundation. This NGO, founded by an American Jewish philanthropist, has been extremely influential in the realm of Israeli popular culture. The foundation’s avowed goal is to promote a kind of inclusive and relevant Judaism within Israel, thus helping to promote the centrality of the Israeli state to the Jewish people as a whole. It actively pursues a philosophy of *hithadshut yehudit b’Yisrael* [Hebrew: Jewish renewal in Israel], and works to attract young Israelis who embrace a newfound form of progressive, spiritual “new age” Judaism (Dardashti 2007; Dardashti 2015).
Reformulating Zionism: Inclusive Judaism and the Search for Roots

These social trends coincided with a deep weakening, and subsequent reconfiguring, of what had heretofore been a more unified Zionist narrative. This process was further propelled by impactful social processes and events that reshaped Israeli society, including the traumatic assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (1995), the increase of post-Zionist debates in intellectual circles, the massive immigration of people from the Soviet Union and Ethiopia, and an increased awareness of identity politics among second- and third-generation Mizrahim (Dardashti 2008b: 313; Seroussi 2008: 24; Stein and Swedenburg 2005). Though one might expect that these phenomena would ultimately result in a fragmentation or breakdown of Zionism in practice and affiliation, in some ways, the opposite phenomenon has occurred. Newer, more inclusive notions of Zionism have emerged that promote Jewish diversity while continuing to assert Jewish exclusivity—thereby reformulating, but never fundamentally questioning, the Zionist enterprise (Belkind 2014: 129; Seroussi 2008: 18; Ram 2004).

Popular Mizrahi songs have formed an integral component of this process (Ram 2008). For example, Mizrahi singers such as Jo Amar have frequently incorporated religious Jewish songs and *piyyutim* into their repertoire; these have, in turn, been promoted by the religious and conservative Shas party in an effort to politicize young Mizrahim while also reinforcing their religiosity (Regev and Seroussi 2004: 224). At the same time, *musiqa mizraḥit*, while still retaining some of its lower-class associations, has nonetheless gained widespread acclaim as a national music aligned with the current wave
of Jewish revivalism (Dardashti 2001; Regev and Seroussi 2004; Saada-Ophir 2006). Today this genre is arguably considered “more consensually Israeli” than many shirei Eretz Yisrael (Seroussi 2008: 20).

Examples of popular Mizrahi hits that blur the boundary between religious and secular topics abound. “Po zeh lo Eropa” [Hebrew: “It ‘Ain’t Europe Here”], for example, has become a veritable emblem of Israeli national pride among young Israelis. Sung by the famous 69-year-old Mizrahi star Margalit Tzan’ani, this wildly popular song was sponsored and promoted by Arisa, a Tel Aviv club that hosts large parties across the city, often geared towards the gay community, that typically draw throngs of party-goers every weekend. The song’s upbeat, lively duple-meter feel, complete with accordion accompaniment, is reminiscent of polkas of the klezmer tradition, while Tzan’ani’s melismatic delivery hails from her Yemeni musical background. The song’s lyrics articulate a clear vision of what it means to be Israeli: it sarcastically critiques Jews who assimilate with non-Jews, while proclaiming a Jewish “core” innate to all Israeli citizens.

Figure 6.1: Excerpt of lyrics from “Po Zeh Lo Eropa” (Big Boss Records, PIL LTD, 2015). Composed by Doron Medalie, sung by Margalit Tzan’ani. Translated from Hebrew by Liliana Carrizo.

Refrain:
Here, here, it ain’t Europe
Here it’s Israel – you should get used to it
My love, hey, here it ‘ain’t Europe
Here it’s craziness, the Old Middle East

Verse:
Everywhere you feel like Miss Universe
And work hard with the non-Jews to assimilate

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1 Contestations over the inherent value of this genre nonetheless regularly arise within the Israeli public sphere. For example, as recently as 2011, the famous Israeli singer Yehoram Gaon proclaimed musiqa mizrāḥit to be “terrible garbage” and a “natural disaster” for Israel (Friedman 2015).

2 Margalit Tzan’ani is also known by the name “Margol.”
And you have a start-up because of a Jewish brain
You wish for a Spanish passport

In the beginning we were created wild
Americans with an Arab sense of honor
It won’t help you to keep cursing
You’re addicted to Israel!

Raise your hands! Hands in the air!
I recognize you from afar
Deep in your heart you are still a child of Elohim
You’re not from London or from Amsterdam
Your look, my dear… is from Bat Yam

Notably, the song’s video centrally features one of Israeli’s most famous drag
queens, Uriel Yekutial, who lip synchs to Tzan’ani’s song as he dances through the
streets of Tel Aviv in an ornate ball gown. One of the more poignant moments of the
song arises when the drums dramatically cut out for a rubato, heart felt delivery by
Tzan’ani. At that moment, her lyrics address all Jews when she says, “deep in your heart,
you are still a child of Elohim” [using the Hebrew word for “G-d” prevalent in the Old
Testament]. The message relayed by both the song and the video is clear: all Jews—
whether gay, European, Arabic-speaking, secular, or religious—are an integral part of
what constitutes the Israeli nation, first and foremost because they are “children of
Elohim.”

The Zionist soundscape I encountered during my fieldwork was one that has thus
expanded, over the course of decades, towards an embrace of certain Arab and Middle

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3 Bat Yam is one of Tel Aviv’s lower- to middle-class suburbs.
4 Here the Hebrew lyrics incorporate the slang word “wadg,” a word typically associated with the Israeli
gay community, which translates as “appearance” or “look.”
5 This music video can be seen online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UxbGdh0ekac.
Eastern sounds as en vogue—a trend that continues in the present day.⁶ Importantly, however, such performances are only considered acceptable through their careful positioning as a legitimate sonic component of Israeli identity (Dardashti 2008b: 316). Spoken Arabic, for example, can be considered cool or trendy by many Israelis in certain contexts; however, as I described in the introduction, its presence can also be considered a dangerous transgression—particularly during moments of war and heightened social tension. Similarly, the inclusion of Arabic lyrics and poetry within musical performances can also be considered trendy. However, these expressions are typically limited to non-threatening modes: for example, any words that explicitly reference Palestinian hopes for independent statehood, such as “bilādī” [Arabic: my land, or my nation], are considered both dangerous and unacceptable (ibid.). Thus, the Israeli public’s eager consumption of “Arabness” is necessarily “desituated … stripped of its threatening traces of Palestinian ethnonationalism” (Stein 2005: 268). This is especially true in light of the Israeli government’s increased efforts towards asserting Jewish hegemony in Israel, as evidenced by the election of Netanyahu’s right-wing government in 2009, the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, and the increasing prevalence of ultra-nationalist religious discourse in media outlets (Belkind 2014: 128).

The expansion and diversification of an imagined Zionist core has prompted many young Israelis on a journey commonly referred to, in recent years, as “mehapes et ha-shoreshim” [Hebrew: searching for roots]. Many second- and third-generation Mizrahi

⁶ As Edwin Seroussi convincingly argues, any attempt to delineate a Zionist soundscape must consider its ever-changing nature, and, of course, the constant refiguring and negotiation of social boundaries implicated in a region with such hotly contested political stakes (Seroussi 2008). As scholars of Israeli music have amply demonstrated, the on-the-ground reality of musical networks within Israel is that they are constantly shifting: collaborations between musicians, culture brokers, and audience members are formed and unformed on a regular basis in relation to periods of war, tension, and relative peace, demonstrating how these musical genres, expectations, and innovations are themselves “in a constant process of (re)configuration” (Brinner 2009; Dardashti 2008a; Horowitz 2010; Seroussi 2008: 11; Seroussi 2014: 38).
Jews express a strong desire to learn more about their grandparents’ heritage. Such efforts are particularly visible in the realm of popular culture, in which attempts to rectify the social wounds inflicted by Israel’s discriminatory policies in the early years of statehood are often based on an ideology of re-inclusion. Just as many young Israelis are flocking to learn the religious piyyutim of their ancestors, so too have they begun to seek out elderly Iraqi musicians in an effort to revive a musicality they see as crucial to their Jewish heritage. Yet the idea of “desituated Arabness” is fundamental to their “search for roots,” in which Iraqiness is reimagined according to how this heritage fits within newer, constantly evolving understandings of national belonging.

**The Revival of Iraqi Jewish Music**

It is a warm Tel Aviv night, and I am headed to a ḥafla featuring a group called “La Falfula Groove” at Ozen Bar, a popular concert venue in central Tel Aviv. The group’s leader is David Regev Zaarur, an accomplished qānūn player, and one of a number of young Iraqi Israelis seeking to revive the music of his ancestors in contemporary settings: Zaarur’s great-grandfather was Yusuf Zaarur, a renowned qānūn player from Baghdad. La Falfula Groove is comprised of five musicians who specialize in the performance of popular Iraqi songs of the mid twentieth century, including pasta songs. They also feature a young, beautiful Israeli bellydancer named Yohani Perez.

The band’s name is a play on words formed from a mixture of Spanish and English—demonstrating the influence of global world music trends on the group’s marketing. Their promotional materials feature a striking picture of David Zaarur, wearing a loose, tropical-themed shirt. A black Panama hat is perched upon his head. He
is sitting behind his qānūn, and his face displays a whimsical and charming countenance. To his left stands Yohani in a striking red dress, pictured as she exhales smoke from her lips. These materials target a youthful audience, mostly middle-class Israelis who view the performance of Iraqi Arab music as chic and socially inclusive. Nonetheless, these concerts do not only attract younger Israelis—there are a number of elderly Iraqi and Mizrahi Jews who frequent these performances as well.

As I step into the crowded venue, the distinct aroma of marijuana hits my nose. I maneuver myself towards the center of the room, mingling shoulder-to-shoulder with others in the audience. I see a few young people with cigarettes in their hands, twirling their arms in a style reminiscent of bellydancing. At the back of the room stands an old man, quietly nursing a drink. Unlike the flowy dresses and cutoff jean shorts sported by most of the people in the crowd, he wears a formal, button-down shirt, and has a kipah on his head.

As the night progresses, the group performs popular Iraqi standards of the 1940s and 50s, including “Fōg al-Nakhal” [Arabic: Above the palm tree] and “Ishrab Kāsak” [Arabic: Drink from your cup]. Their renditions are remarkably similar to those found on earlier recordings of famous Iraqi Jewish musicians, including those of Yusuf Zaarur, as well as the al-Kuwaiti brothers. This is largely thanks to the group’s impressive ability to perform masterfully on a number of Arab instruments common to that time period, including the qānūn, def, dumbek, violin, and ʿūd—an instrumental combination highly reminiscent of the mid-twentieth-century takht ensembles that became popular in Iraq in the 1950s and onwards. Though the audience continues to talk, drink, and dance
throughout the evening, they seem to thoroughly enjoy the music, and respond to the group’s performance with ululations, claps, and yelps of joy.

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Recent cultural output by second- and third-generation Mizrahi artists—including filmmakers, authors, cookbook writers, and musicians—have reversed older Zionist narratives associated with the “neo-lachrymose” perspective of Arab-Jewish history (Cohen 1994: xv). Instead of depicting Mizrahim as victims who left behind their horrible primitive lands for a better and modernized life in Israel, their work instead idealizes these individuals’ former environments in Arab lands (Dardashti 2008a; Shemer 2005).

Much of the recent literature by and about Iraqi, Syrian, and Egyptian Jews depicts a nostalgic idealization of these Jews’ native lands as a “lost paradise” and “Eden.”[7,8] These trends are propelled by Mizrahim who exhibit anxiety over the quickly disappearing cultural legacy of their elders, and the fear that it might be lost forever (Dardashti 2008: 324). Following recent scholarship, I argue that rather than “undoing” the injustice of one era, however, this kind of “romantic-idealistic perception” of the

[7] See, for example, Memories of Eden (Shamash 2010), My Father’s Paradise (Sabar 2008), The Last Jews in Baghdad: Remembering a Lost Homeland (Rejwan 2004), and “Paradise Lost—an Iraqi Jewish Story” (Hurt-Mannheimer 2004), as well as what Lital Levy calls “cookbooks-cum-community history” such as Mama Nazima’s Jewish-Iraqi Cuisine (Goldman 2006), Aromas of Aleppo: The Legendary Cuisine of Syrian Jews (Dweck 2007), and A Pied Noir Cookbook: French Sephardic Cuisine from Algeria (Clabrough 2005). For more on this discussion, see Levy 2008.

[8] This position is similar to what Marc Cohen describes as the “Golden Age” myth of Muslim tolerance, which tends to venerate Muslim acceptance of Jews over the past millennium and describes their relations as virtually utopian (Cohen 1994: xvi). Largely the result of Arab propaganda and anti-Semitism, this myth can be considered as the opposing position vis-à-vis a neo-lachrymose perspective: in which Arab anti-Semitism is presented as an entirely contemporary phenomenon that has arisen as a direct result of Israel’s aggressive policies. There exists a slight irony in the fact that younger Mizrahi Jews—who are themselves often quite nationalistic as Israelis—adopt a similar position espoused by those Arab nationalists who are highly critical of Israel’s existence. Nonetheless, these Mizrahim clearly do not extend this argument to the same logical conclusion, which would amount to a deep criticism of Israeli nationalism. Instead, they adopt this perspective as a means of clamoring for equal cultural recognition within the framework of Israeli national history and heritage.
Orient inevitably reproduces an Arab-Jewish dichotomy, pulling in “two different directions along a connective-separating axis of an Arab/Jewish hyphenated identity” (Dardashti 2008a: 325; Raz-Krakotzkin 2005: 180; Shemer 2005: 149). Furthermore, such perspectives often strip elderly Mizrahim of their agency, portraying them as one-dimensional victims of immigration—“recently excavated yet no longer relevant cultural relics” (Daradshti 2008a: 325).

In this context, a number of once professional, elderly Iraqi Jewish musicians have experienced a new found fame. In recent Israeli media, these musicians have been referred to as “The Buena Vista Baghdad Club,” in reference to the elderly Cuban musicians of the Buena Vista Social Club album (1997) and documentary (1999) (Dardashti 2008a: 318). They are regularly approached by young students, asked to record with popular artists, and featured in documentaries such as Charlie Baghdadi (2003) and Iraq n’Roll (2011). As in the Buena Vista Social Club, these films follow certain discursive tropes: namely, a younger musician or filmmaker undertakes to save a group of aging musicians from obscurity through discovering and refiguring their artistry in a way that is culturally relevant. These depictions are problematic, as they tend to conflate larger social approval (often Ashkenazi Israeli) with Iraqi recognition and self-worth (Dardashti 2008a).

In Iraq n’Roll, for example, filmmaker Gili Gaon follows popular Mizrahi rocker Dudu Tasa in his rediscovery of the music of his famous grandfather, Daud al-Kuwaiti (of the al-Kuwaiti brothers). His documentary focuses on the neglect of the brothers upon their arrival in Israel in the 1950s, as well as recent attempts to reclaim their significance in the Israeli public sphere. The film includes a memorable scene in which a street in Tel
Aviv is re-named “al-Kuwaiti,” thanks to a city ordinance passed in order to honor these musicians. This move is met with a great deal of social resistance: at the unveiling ceremony, the Israelis present argue passionately over whether or not this posthumous honor should be bestowed upon the al-Kuwaitim. As one individual sarcastically decries, in Hebrew, “There are people here who will see this [street sign] and think, ‘what, do I live in Gaza now?’”

This film accurately depicts some of the discriminatory attitudes still present in Israeli society. It poses some painful and troubling questions: namely, how could the immense talents of these Iraqi musicians have gone unnoticed in Israel for so long, and what steps can be taken to remedy the tragedy of their neglect? Ultimately, Tasa’s efforts to reconfigure the music of his ancestors in a rock context serves as a kind of answer to these questions. The film details Tasa’s creative process in adapting actual recordings of his grandfather and great uncle and setting them to harmonically complex and catchy rock arrangements. The promotional materials for the film, released by its sales distribution company, Ruth Films, delineate the motivation fueling Tasa’s creative efforts and what he hopes to accomplish through this process:

On his moving quest to rediscover his cultural heritage through his grandfather’s music, Dudu decides to devote his next album to new and more contemporary reinterpretations of the al-Kuwaiti’s works, creating a dialogue between the generations, and helping to restore this suppressed musical and cultural legacy to its rightful place within the rich and diverse tapestry from which modern Israeli culture and identity have been woven.


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9 See http://www.ruthfilms.com/iraq-n-roll.html
As this quote demonstrates, Tasa hopes to reclaim his ancestors’ musical past as a means of legitimizing it within a nationalist present. As Yair Dalal says of Tasa’s journey within the documentary, “He is in an amazing process of searching for his roots. Anyone who doesn’t have a cultural past cannot create a cultural future.”

Artists such as David Regev Zaarur and Dudu Tasa are not alone in their endeavors. Edwin Seroussi has noted how the reinvention of “Jewish sonic pasts” has become a “pervasive feature of … recent trends in Israeli popular music” (Seroussi 2014: 40). These trends are deeply fueled by nostalgic sentiment; the return of previously excluded soundscapes serves as an ideological move towards the reintegration of diasporic Jewish cultures within the Zionist nation (a reversal of the “shhilat ha-gola” philosophy of Israel’s early years). Within this context, a number of young Israelis have developed remarkable expertise in Middle Eastern piyyutim, as well as Arabic, Turkish, and Persian music stylings—demonstrating a deep inner drive to reclaim a heritage they feel they were denied (Seroussi 2008: 39).

The newfound interest in Iraqi music has largely focused on popular Iraqi songs. It has not, in my view, increased the visibility of the practice of private singing I encountered. Many of the elderly Iraqis I came to know are charmed by young Israelis’ interest in their heritage, and are grateful for attempts within the Israeli public sphere to make amends for the decades of discrimination they faced post-immigration. Nonetheless, most of them continue to be fiercely protective of their personal songs, which remain concealed within private, intimate contexts.

Nevertheless, one cannot help but recognize that these songs have provided a continual, underground alternative soundscape to dominant Zionist canons of the past.
Their musicality underlies a deeply-rooted, “shared sonic space” among Iraqi Jews and Muslims, one that has undoubtedly helped to, over time, increase the recognition of Arab expressive practices in the Israeli public sphere (Seroussi 2013: 280; 2014: 39). At the same time, these songs have also allowed them to embrace their suppressed histories and embodied counter memories, thus maintaining the persistent significance of their exiled selves. As Lipsitz explains,

Counter-memory looks to the past for hidden histories excluded from dominant narratives. But unlike myths that seek to detach events and actions from the fabric of any larger history, counter-memory forces revision of existing histories by supplying new perspectives about the past … Counter-memory focuses on localized experiences with oppression, using them to reframe and refocus dominant narratives purporting to represent universal experience.

Lipsitz 1990: 213

Israelis continually wrestle with the inherent frictions of daily life, where the competing political tensions of the present day are inherently tied to the persistent presence of traumas past. The private musical engagements of Iraqi Jews, which continue to address these internal dissonances—as well as deep emotions associated with experiences ranging from severe trauma to unbridled joy—form a fundamental component of this process.

Throughout this dissertation, I have worked towards a theorization of individuals in exilic situations, and the role of creative expression in reconciling schizophrenic loyalties and torn identities. I have adopted a relational perspective of the postcolonial reconfiguration of the Middle East and its impact on the creation of ethnonational identities, focusing on a small number of elderly Iraqi Jews whose private songs serve as an expressive means for negotiating their complex exile as both Jews and Arabs. I argue that this study has particular relevance today: for just as Palestine was recognized as a
“non-member observer state” by the UN General Assembly in 2012, so too has the Israeli government counterattacked with an advocacy campaign (sponsored by the Foreign Ministry of Israel) highlighting the plight of Iraqi Jews. The “I am a Refugee” campaign equates Iraqi Jewish emigration from Iraq with that of Palestinian refugees, and argues that any kind of peace agreement must consider the restitution claims of both parties (see, for example, Diker 2012; Shmulovich 2012). An interesting case of political acrobatics, this kind of reappropriation of a community’s legacy in the service of nationhood is particularly unsettling.\textsuperscript{10} Importantly, the private, subaltern songs of Iraqi Jews highlight the contradictions inherent in such state-sanctioned discursive formations, especially where official remembrance is used as a bargaining chip in issues of peace and war. Through this investigation, I follow a number of scholars who hope to resuscitate the history of Arab-Jewish cohabitation from its fate as a “sweet, sticky bit of nostalgia,” and instead reveal its unique position, one that flourished “not with a gun or with warfare, but rather through negotiation” (Beinin 1997; Cohen 1994; Lee 2008; Shohat 1999, 2006). Such a perspective is essential for understanding many regions of geopolitical conflict across the globe, in which constructed ethno-nationalisms promote states of war and conflict at the expense of human life.

\textsuperscript{10} There exists, to my mind, an innate contradiction between equating citizens with stateless refugees—one that plays out in a number of different settings. For example, the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center (directed internally towards Israelis) proclaims Israel as the one true home for Iraqi Jews, just as the World Organization for Jews of Arab Countries (directed outwardly towards international circles) equates the refugee experiences of Palestinians with that of Iraqi Jews. Yet the question remains: how can a population simultaneously be refugees and yet repatriated to their only home?
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