

Call for chapters

In the Name of the Father?

A Literary Journey into Jewish Masculinities across the Middle East and North Africa

While he descended the air stairs, we were all excited and anxious to feel the appeal of Israel that we had dreamed of. (...) Before we knew what was happening – a white cloud of DDT enveloped Abu Shaul, a man both respected and influential within Baghdad community. Through this cloud we saw my father lift his hand towards the spray gun; it was a silent protest. Hair, moustache and eyebrows turned white. The silk tie, the starched shirt and his elegant suit instantly changed into dusty rags. After that humiliating moment and them treating him like the head of a herd of animals, I saw my father, silently, try to maintain his dignity by refusing to sneeze. Tears streamed from his eyes, his face muscles contorted like a tormented mask...and everything seemed disfigured, ugly and revolting. The spasms lasted only a few moments but my father had won, he hadn't sneezed. There and then I witnessed the last victorious moment of Abu Shaul's life. The creature that later left the airport was no longer my father, all that remained was his pride.

Sami Michael, *Shavim ve-shavim yoter*

In the late 1940s, the Muslim-majority countries across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region were home to hundreds of thousands of Jews. However, a series of global and regional developments, marked by destabilizing forces, compelled many to leave their countries, nearly ending the Jewish presence in most Muslim-majority countries by the 1970s. This migration represents a profoundly intricate phenomenon that defies a singular definition. Scholars have shed light on various facets, including the role played by the Israeli Zionist establishment (Tsur 2000; Laskier 2006; Bashkin 2017), and the involvement of Jewish organizations (Messika 2018). Recent advancements in Jewish studies scholarship have taken a more micro-historical analytical stance and have focused on representations of these migrations in retrospect in various contexts (Baussant 2017; Boum 2014; Miccoli 2023). In this vein, scholars have drawn upon concepts from *migration studies*, placing a greater emphasis on comprehending these migrations from the immigrants' perspective rather than from the outside (Moreno 2020, 2022; Sadjed 2021; Rossetto 2022). In literary studies of these migrations, a parallel trend emerges when the traditional focus on Mizrahi (MENA) Jews in Israel--ranging from the early writings of Yehuda Burla and Yitzhak Shami to the contemporary poetry of Erez Bitton—is being replaced by comparative analyses, and the study of connections between pre- and post-1948 Jewish-Arabic literature and the other literary creations by MENA Jews (Starr 2000; Lital Levy 2010; Behar 2021; Shabbat Nadir 2021).

While there has been progress in connecting the field of MENA Jews with broader discussions on migration, there remains a notable gap in advanced examinations at the intersection of recent

developments in gender and migration studies, even when gender related aspects are explored in other Jewish histories outside of the MENA region (Boyarin 1997; Baader et al. 2012).

Migration scholars have emphasized gender-specific coping strategies during migration, highlighting how women often adapt more effectively to challenging circumstances (Franz 2003; Korać 2003). Memories of their childhood lead MENA Jews to vividly recall how their parents navigated these challenges differently, grappling with the 'expectations of recognition and its absence' (Markussen 2020: 1446). Fathers, in particular, faced profound challenges related to 'misplaced masculinities' (Jansen 2008). Many MENA Jews remember the struggle of men, especially fathers, to establish themselves in their host countries, whether in Israel, Europe, or elsewhere. This struggle often resulted in severe consequences, including depression and, tragically, deaths due to destabilization. Remarkably, many of these fathers, despite not being chronologically old, were considered too aged to adapt to their new circumstances.

These traumatic memories resonate with the concepts elucidated by Marianne Hirsch in her work on post-memory (2012) or second-generation memory. Additionally, Suleiman's concept of the 1.5 generation becomes particularly pertinent in this context—a generation marked by 'premature bewilderment and helplessness,' where trauma sets in before the establishment of a stable identity typically associated with adulthood (Suleiman 2002: 277).

These and other developments may help push the boundaries of understanding the literary narratives encapsulating the Mediterranean Jewish migration experiences (Moore and Shellman 2004) while delving into the intricate intersections of gender (Berg 2006; Lutz 2010; Charsley and Wray 2015) **as well as aging** (Zontini 2015; Näre et al. 2017).

Building on these innovations and cross-disciplinary readings, our research endeavour aims to advance the evolving terrain where Jewish migration from MENA intersects (Dahan-Kalev 1999; Motzafi-Haller 2012; Oppenheimer 2014), with gender studies, specifically delving into the realm of **masculinities** that is even more understudied in this context. This exploration seeks to shed light on the nuanced experiences of MENA Jewish men during their migration journeys, contributing valuable insights to Jewish, migration and gender studies in the literature. We strive to offer a specific life-course perspective on 'ageing gendered identities' in the context of migration (Markussen 2020: 1443), a perspective which still awaits further exploration (Gardner 2002; Christou 2016).

The following queries may delineate potential avenues for further exploration:

- How is the Sephardi and Mizrahi father figure portrayed in Hebrew literature? Is there a difference between the portrayal of the father figure in Israel and in other national contexts?
- How does 'misrecognition'—or the 'sense of discontent' (Markussen 2021: 1446)—manifest in gender and intergenerational relations?
- Recognition is a 'vital human need' (Taylor 1992: 26) and a crucial asset for intersubjective identity formation (Honneth 1995). Individuals build their intersubjectivity through love-, legal-, and solidarity-based relationships and, through them, grow in self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem, respectively (Honneth 1995; Markussen 2021). How do authors address the challenge, recurrent in the migratory process, of downward mobility and the 'drop in wealth, status and recognition' (Jansen 2008: 186; Al-Rasheed 1992)?

- How those who were children at the time of migration and are now well into the ageing process engage with difficult migration memories along gendered lines? To which extent the memory narratives of migrants' children could be interpreted as a 'later coping strategy' for handling their parents' traumas during the migration process?
- If one considers the narratives of 1.5/2nd-generation migrant men, who often play the role of the keepers of community heritage and history, could we interpret 'memory work as a form of care work' (Rossetto 2023)?
- How have ageing and gender—notably the performance of masculinity—shaped the process of identification of these Jews over time? Which patterns of community and the intergenerational transmission of (Jewish) masculinity models (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and migration trauma can we apprehend by this experience?
- What differences exist between the second-generation immigrants and the memory of “the grandfather” in the third-generation immigrants in the literature?

We anticipate that this collection will offer a pioneering perspective on Jewish masculinities, significantly enriching our understanding of the intricate intersections of aging, gender, and migration. Our goal is to publish these contributions in an edited volume through [Edizioni Ca' Foscari – Venice University Press](#), ensuring rigorous peer review for scholarly excellence.

We plan to convene a **workshop in Venice (Fall 2024 or Spring 2025, date to be announced)** where we will collectively explore and discuss our individual contributions, fostering synergies among our diverse perspectives.

We invite you to submit your proposed contribution by **February 28, 2024**.

Notification of acceptance will be confirmed by **March 15, 2024**.

(Submission of accepted chapters by approx. December 31, 2024.)

Please send the following details as a single PDF file **to one of the email addresses provided below**:

- Title;
- Abstract of your contribution (max. 250 words);
- Brief bio (max. 250 words);
- Contact information (name, affiliation, email address).

Do not hesitate to contact us for further inquiries related to the publication.

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