With Song and Hard Work: Shirei Eretz Yisrael and the Social Imaginary

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From 1920 to the mid-1970s, the repertory of Shirei Eretz Yisrael (Songs of the Land of Israel or SLI) was created as a Zionist project when early migrants to the Israeli Yishuv were searching for cultural symbols that would unify its diverse population. The act of social imagining wherein the Israeli public created this canon of folksongs developed a quintessentially “Israeli” sound, informed by nationalistic ideology, creating an imagined cultural heritage for Israeli Jews. The invention of this tradition was justified through explanations of national character, which saw the repertory as a natural product of the “folk.” Inversely, as the music of the “folk,” SLI made claims to the national character of the people it sought to represent.

This article explores the processes by which the songs were imagined and circulated, and the work that this repertoire does in terms of establishing a national “Israeli” character. This article problematizes these boundaries of “Israeli” and “non-Israeli” that the genre asserts. Of particular interest is how this creative process actively worked to reject certain diaspora musical systems in order to promote a unified Israeli Jewish culture set apart from other Jewish traditions.
Near the end of the 1935 film *The Land of Promise* (Hebrew title: *Le-Hayyim Hadashim*), we are shown a vignette wherein a group of young students march at a public demonstration. These students, we are told, have been drawn “out of laboratories, libraries and workshops” and into “the living currents of Palestinian life by its songs of reconstruction.” Singing one of these songs, “Shir Moledet” (Song of the Homeland,) accompanied only by their own militaristic marching, we begin to understand their project of “reconstruction:”

We love you, homeland,  
With joy, with song, and with hard work  
From the slopes of Lebanon to the Dead Sea  
We shall traverse you with ploughs  
We shall cultivate and build you up  
We shall make you beautiful.  

This film was commissioned by the World Zionist Organization (WZO) and is said to be the “definitive pre-state portrayal of the developing Jewish national home,” according to The Hebrew University’s film archive. Even in this brief scene, we learn much about the Zionist project and the role of music in shaping it. The poetry delineates borders, literally and figuratively, that encircle the categories of “Israel” and “Israeli.” Referencing what would later become the northern and eastern borders of the State of Israel—Lebanon and the Dead Sea, respectively—the lyrics define “Israel” by establishing borders in terms of its physical space. “Shir Moledet” symbolically constructs a boundary of “Israeliness” by identifying a diligent, singing, and physically capable we. As

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the song’s lyrics explain, their rebuilding task requires “joy,” “song,” and “hard work.” The rebuilding of Palestine is a project which is psychological, cultural and physical.

Nathan Alterman and Daniel Sambursky wrote the poetry and music of “Shir Moledet,” respectively, specifically for this film. However, this piece of music has acquired meaning beyond the film, becoming a quintessential part of the Shirei Eretz Yisrael (Songs of the Land of Israel, or SLI) canon. SLI is a genre of songs created in British Mandate Palestine, which became the State of Israel in 1948, from the early 1920s to around 1974. The circulation of the songs such as “Shir Moledet” in sing-alongs and songbooks led to their incorporation into the SLI genre.

My article will examine the ways in which the musical choices that were made by the “folk” of Israel in the years preceding and directly following the establishment of (political) statehood in 1948 relate to the social imagining of their (cultural) nationhood. National ideology informed — and was informed by — this act of social imagining wherein the Israeli public created a canon of songs that were quintessentially “Israeli.” While Zionist thought at the time promoted an “ingathering of the exiles” [kibutz galuyot,] many of the cultural projects led by cultural Zionists, such as Asher Ginsburg (known by his nom de plume Aḥad Ha’am) sought to create a new concept of “Jewishness” distinct from the diaspora. While Aḥad Ha’am was never a part of the WZO, influential members of the WZO such as Chaim Weizmann and Martin Buber promoted his agenda, and his ideas were central to the effects that Zionism has had on modern Jewish identity. The primary objective of Aḥad Ha’am’s conception of Zionism was to create an original Hebrew culture in the “Land of Israel.” In terms of impact, this amounted to a negation of the diaspora. Building on ideas of cultural Zionists, the SLI established boundaries of

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4 Regev and Seroussi, Popular Music, 57.
“Israeliness” and of “Israeli Music” by rejecting the cultural history of the galut (diaspora) in favor of an imagined Israeli musical history.

By focusing on the composition and circulation of SLI songs, this article will illuminate the relationship between the musical representation of the Israeli “folk” and the social imagining of Israeli cultural nationhood in the years preceding and directly following statehood in 1948. I will trace the circulation process to show how music constituted a part of the attempt to build a unified national culture and Israeli identity, concluding by identifying compositional elements in the SLI songs that work to create a concept of “Jewishness” and “Israeliness” distinct from the Jewish cultures of the diaspora.

The SLI canon includes songs composed within the structure, or for the approval of, the Zionist establishment, including various cultural institutions such as the Jewish National Fund and the Histadrut (General Workers’ Union). Songs are linked thematically based on their textual content, which celebrates the experience of the Yishuv (Jewish settlement preceding Israeli independence) through descriptions of the land or references to biblical return. This canon of songs was grouped together largely after they were composed, and later canonized through circulation in sing-alongs and songbooks. This ex post facto category of song does not include every piece that was written during the time of the Yishuv. Definitively, these song were “the creation of composers who consciously or unconsciously sought a means of tonal organization that would reflect both the people’s attachment to the land and the ingathering of the exiles.”

While the pre-State Zionist project bore these songs, many of them became part of the Israeli folksong repertoire: the songs of the “folk” as imagined by the earliest Israeli composers.

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Creating a Nation

Music-making as part of the Zionist exercise began around the time of the second large mass of immigration to Palestine between 1904 and 1914, known as the Second Aliyah.\(^7\) Jewish inhabitants of the “Land of Israel” created SLI folksongs at a time when Yishuv leadership searched for cultural symbols to unify its diverse Jewish populations. Natan Shahar, music scholar and composer in the SLI style, relates this search for unity within music to the use of Hebrew: “Just as the Yishuv needed a common speech and created this by the deliberate use of both tradition and innovation, so did it need a common song, and created this in the same way.”\(^8\) The music of this “imagined canon” was inextricably tied to the processes of nation-building in the Land of Israel.\(^9\)

The process of nation-building is an act of social creativity. As Ernest Gellner writes, “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist.”\(^10\) Benedict Anderson asserts that Gellner’s formulation of invention should not connote “fabrication” or “falsification,” but rather an “imagining” that takes place in the creation of any community.\(^11\) This conception of invention as an “imagining” is apropos to the case of Israel; the Zionist movement was composed of people who imagined the State of Israel into being. These imaginings consisted of the creation of a unifying national culture, including a language—modern Hebrew—food, dance and music.

We can consider SLI folksongs a part of an invented Zionist tradition in Eric Hobsbawm’s terms. Here, traditions that appear to be ancient are often modern and have been “invented.” These invented traditions imply continuity with the past through repetition that instills participants with understandings of certain principles and norms of conduct. The songs making up the SLI genre were created with the intention that they would become the traditional repertoire of the Land of Israel, and, later, the State of Israel. Performance and communal singing of these pieces repeated Zionist unifying symbols, and the symbols entered into the emerging Zionist, and later Israeli, imagination as part and parcel of its tradition.

SLI compositions often involved romanticized descriptions of the geographical area and promoted the settler experience. Themes in later repertoire, following 1948 and the Arab-Israeli War, included the experience of serving in the military and the importance of defending the state. Jehoash Hirshberg mentions two other functions of the SLI repertoire besides creating a unified culture: “to enhance the revival of Hebrew through settings of both biblical texts and modern lyrics; and to unify people through communal singing.”

Philip V. Bohlman emphasizes the invented-ness of this Zionist folk tradition. He explains that the justification of “imagined canons” of folk music tends to operate in a cyclical way, where the invented-ness of the tradition disappears through explanations of national character. From this perspective, folk music can be seen as the natural production of the “folk,” according to

their particular folk spirit. The music is therefore frequently regarded as reflecting the people it claims to represent. However, this circular logic ignores guided composition in which ideology influences the process of the composition of songs. Composers built upon source materials that they felt would reflect their national and ideological agendas in the process of creating the SLI folksong repertoire. As the music was to be seen as of the “folk,” the music can likewise be seen as better reflecting the Zionist ideal of an “Israeli” than a true or authentic expression of some sort of folk spirit of the inhabitants of the area.

**Circulation of Songs of the Land of Israel**

SLI was so popular that the notions of “Israel” and “Israeliness” it promoted were inescapable to the forming audience. SLI songs circulated in broadsides, performances by professional singers and choirs, recordings, radio broadcasts, youth groups and public schools. The demand for new SLI songs was driven by the ubiquitous performances of the repertoire. Communal singing was by far the most widespread mode of circulation of this genre. Communal sing-alongs were an extremely popular phenomenon, especially in the rapidly expanding urban centers after the fourth and five waves of immigration to British Mandate Palestine from roughly 1924 to 1939. During this period of transition, communal singing moved from a rural context to an urban context; from spontaneous informal gatherings to semi-formal events led by a communal singing instructors who taught new songs. These events gained popularity in part because they were some of the only public entertainment allowed on Shabbat. Since films, concerts, and plays were not allowed to run on Friday nights due to the religious restrictions of Shabbat, mass sing-alongs became a major source of weekend entertainment.

The Jewish National Fund (JNF), a Zionist non-profit organization involved in fundraising of money to buy and develop land for the Yishuv, compiled SLI songbooks and recorded albums. These songbooks and albums facilitated the circulation of SLI beyond Jewish settlements in Palestine. They reached members of the Jewish diaspora as tokens of authentic “Israeli” culture. The JNF created postcards, for example, with printed song texts for Jewish settlers to send to their friends and family in the diaspora. Many postcards contained transliterations and vowel pointing under the Hebrew letters, indicating that these objects were meant for an audience of non-Hebrew speakers.21 (Fig. 1) Other Zionist organizations, such as the Cultural Centre of the Federation of Hebrew Workers, published folksong anthologies.

In 1929, the JNF’s first songster publication, called Mezameret Ha-Aretz (Israel Sings) sold out and led to the production and distribution of more songbooks.22 From 1929 to 1942, the JNF became the largest publisher of SLI. According to Natan Shahar, author of several studies on the SLI genre, “the fact that a national Zionist institution, with an extremely broad [reach], was engaged in disseminating songs, procured public recognition and prestige for the actual songs, the song publications and the song composers.”23

When referring to the circulation of these songs, either through postcards or communal singing events, it is important to understand this process through Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma’s model of a culture of circulation. This model posits that meaning is transmitted not only through the circulating meme (i.e., song) but that the act of circulation itself can be a “constitutive act” that creates meaning.24 In the case of SLI, it is not only...

21 This particular postcard contains the music and lyrics for “Shira Heḥalil” (Song of the Flute) by Mordechai Zeira. Photo reproduced here with permission of image owner.
23 Shahar, The Eretz-Israeli Song, 3.
Fig. 1: Many postcards contained transliterations and vowel pointing under the Hebrew letters, indicating that these objects were meant for an audience of non-Hebrew speakers. SLI Postcard from Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael (Jewish National Fund).
the textual and musical content of these songs that is meaningful, but the actual culture of circulation that disseminated the meaning of the music to its interpretive community.

One can think of SLI as contributing to the social imaginary of “Israeliness,” or a social formation that comes about through the circulation of publications and mass-mediated performances. As Byron Dueck explains,

social imaginaries come into existence as people perform and publish for unknown audiences, and especially as they acknowledge the previously circulating performances and publications of others...Imaginaries emerge as performances, broadcasts, publications, and acts of bodily discipline respond to previous ones, and anticipate others to come.25

These imaginaries work to develop socially shared understandings of what it means to participate in collective life, establishing one’s relations to others in social networks and formations.

SLI, as a genre intended to be the “folksong” of Israel, identifies and imagines its “folk” through its circulation. The circulation of song texts makes up the discourse that acts to reflexively create a public. Social theorist Michael Warner writes that publics must be self-identifying, self-organized, and exist by virtue of being called to attention.26 Where Warner uses “you” to address a public and call them to attention, SLI often uses “we.” While printed SLI songbooks identified composer and poet, an uncommon feature for a folksong genre, the boundary between the composer/poet and the public is blurred by the use of the word “we.”27 The composer/poet self-identifies as a member of the

27 An example of the poet identifying with the communal singing public can be seen in the lyrics to “Shir Moledet” at the beginning of this article.
public, negating their identities as musicologist, cultural commentator, or politician. It is important to notice that the public addressed by SLI is definitively not the same public that is identified through membership in a nation, army, or religion.\textsuperscript{28} The act of self-identification—of becoming a member of this public voluntarily—is what, in turn, defines the public in itself. As this genre identifies aspects of the model “Israeli,” it rejects those inhabitants in the region who are not able to self-identify as a part of this model public. They may still not be able to self-identify as a model “Israeli,” even if one has been able to acquire Israeli citizenship. Due to the circulation of the genre in the diaspora, the circulation of these songs allows listeners and singers to also identify as “model Israelis” without acquiring citizenship or living in the area. Those people who self-identify with the public of SLI know themselves to be “the people” of Israel, distinct in this space of liminal and disputed identities.

Ethnomusicologist Martin Stokes writes that musical performance has a role in the creation, manipulation and negotiation of meanings.\textsuperscript{29} He stresses that “music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides means by which people recognize identities, places, and boundaries which separate them.”\textsuperscript{30} Lee and LiPuma agree with Stokes, adding that the culture of circulation of music creates these boundaries through the circulation of cultural forms which assume the existence of an audience and interpretive community.\textsuperscript{31} The songbooks, songs, and postcards circulating SLI in the early days of the Zionist project identified an interpretive community. The genre fulfilled an aesthetic and affective expectation of being a folksong, thereby identifying the public and interpretive community as the “folk” through the process of circulation.

Genres of folksong are considered to be of the “folk,” but they also produce the “folk.” The circulation of these folksongs communicated

\textsuperscript{28} Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” 56.
\textsuperscript{30} Stokes, \textit{Ethnicity, Identity and Music}, 5.
\textsuperscript{31} Lee and LiPuma, “Cultures of Circulation,” 192.
the very notions of what it means to be “Israeli.” Identifying yourself as a member of the public addressed by SLI’s “we” meant that you could see yourself as a model “Israeli.”

**Composing Model “Israelis”**

Daniel Sambursky, the composer of “Shir Moledet,” was born to a family of Russian Jews. Sambursky’s family, like many of those Eastern European Jews who were derogatorily called Ostjuden, rejected their own cultural history and absorbed German and Zionist values which dominated the “Land of Israel” at the time.\(^{32}\) While Sambursky heard Yiddish and Hasidic melodies at home, it was the music of non-Jewish Central Europe that most influenced his compositions in the SLI genre.\(^{33}\) Sambursky’s background is similar to that of around 189 composers of SLI. The composers were almost all émigrés from Central and Eastern Europe. Most of the composers born in Eastern Europe received formal music education in Germany and France.\(^{34}\) Their compositional training is reflected in their output.

While SLI is eclectic, drawing inspiration from Russian, Yiddish, Hasidic and other folksong traditions, by the mid-1920s the inclusion of what were termed “foreign influences” subsequently labelled the songs as not authentically “Israeli,” and therefore not part of the SLI repertory.\(^{35}\) Early pieces in the SLI repertory drew influence from Russian folksongs and Hasidic niggunim (wordless melodies). As the genre became more widely circulated, however, the most popular songs were ones considered empty of such Hasidic or Russian “foreign influences.” The label of “foreign influence” was applied to different musical traditions inconsistently. While musical contributions from the Klezmer repertory might be rejected on the basis of influence by the Roma,

\(^{31}\) Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine*, 147.

\(^{32}\) Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine*, 147–149.

\(^{33}\) Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine*, 147.

\(^{34}\) Hirshberg, *Music in the Jewish Community of Palestine*, 152.
musical contributions from the Christian secular high culture of Germany were accepted.\textsuperscript{36} Influences from Western art music were welcomed on the basis of their “universality,” allowing Western music to exist not as the “music of a specific culture” but simply as “music.”\textsuperscript{37}

While the earliest forms of the genre included Russian and Yiddish folk melodies set to Hebrew words, these melodies fell out of style in favor of melodies that could more obviously be called “Israeli.” Forms found in Western art music influenced the melodies: songs were pre-composed, as opposed to the more improvisatory styles of song traditions that incorporate geographically-proximate modal systems, such as Arabic \textit{maqamat}, and Persian \textit{radif}.\textsuperscript{38} Melodies in the SLI canon are frequently composed using a natural minor tonality, where the simple harmonic motion of these compositions was drawn from the Western folk music of the time, including no chromaticism or modulation.\textsuperscript{39}

Many of the debates surrounding the composition of Israel’s national music have centered on the question of its national distinctiveness and an “aspiration to an immutable, authentic Jewish-Israeli, musical essence.”\textsuperscript{40} Prior to the establishment of the State of Israel many cultural Zionists believed that they had solved the problem of finding a national music, citing the antho-

\textsuperscript{36} While the Enlightenment brought “secularity” to European nations, many of these countries were still influenced by Christian theology, mythologies, and cultures. As such, their secular culture was still very much Christian. For more on this, see Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini, \textit{Secularisms} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).


\textsuperscript{38} The following videos demonstrate the two modal systems: Michael Ibrahim playing a \textit{taqsim} (improvised piece) using the mode of \textit{bayati} from the Arabic \textit{maqam} system. https://youtu.be/O3z-MSYqlqc; Dariush Talai playing \textit{setar}, incorporating the Persian modal system called \textit{radif}. https://youtu.be/ WdRqPl4aMN8.

\textsuperscript{39} Sermer, “Battle for the Soul of Jerusalem,” 90.

\textsuperscript{40} Loeffler, “Do Zionists Read,” 386.
logical work of musicologist Abraham Zvi Idelsohn. According to ethnomusicologist James Loeffler, “Israeli music began its life in Idelsohn’s own imagination.” Focused on finding a unifying feature of Jewish music, Idelsohn’s anthologies, published in 1914 and 1933, were influenced by a desire to construct a new secular national culture through the careful curation of music from the nation’s past.

Seemingly influenced by Wagner, Idelsohn’s musical mission negated most music from diaspora Jewry when searching for a national music. Richard Wagner asserted in his 1849 *Judenthum in Musik* that Jews were only capable of mimicry and could not contribute creatively to culture, be it musically or otherwise. While Wagner’s ideas are now largely rejected as blatant anti-Semitism, his influence on the discourse of Jewish culture reverberated from within Jewish communities. Idelsohn and other cultural critics considered musika yehudit (Jewish music) to have been tainted by centuries of assimilation. Like many other Zionist thinkers who believed in the “healing” effects of their movement, Idelsohn believed that the music of the galut would be “reborn as Hebrew national music cleaned of its national detritus.” These ideals governed Idelsohn’s prolific writings on the creation of Israel’s national music.

Music of the geographically-proximate Yemenite Jews was considered to be a welcome influence, due to a common theory, supported by Idelsohn, that their music had some relationship to the music of biblical times. This assertion that traditions are granted legitimacy through their perceived association with an-

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43 For example, one of Idelsohn’s most famous contributions, “Hava Nagila,” created using the melody of a Hasidic niggun, has become a universal Jewish symbol, rather than Israeli or Zionist.
cient practices. Yemenite Jews, who Idelsohn wrote had “lived in seclusion for the past thirteen hundred years,” were seen as providing a connection to the ancient Hebrew culture that supposedly existed prior to the Jewish diaspora. As a result, Yemenite music was selected as an example of Israel’s cultural heritage, and the guttural vocal techniques, seen as typical of Yemenite singing traditions, was welcomed as a stylistic element of this folksong.

In contrast to the borrowing of musical elements from Yemenite Jewry, the music of other diaspora Jewish groups was rejected. Each of these groups in the galut experienced an internalization of the Wagnerian notion that denied the existence of a Jewish musical culture in the diaspora. For example, musical practices of Jews in Muslim-majority countries, later called Mizraḥi, was disqualified as “Jewish” and “Israeli” due to the large influence it derived from Arab maqamat, diwan poetry and poetic styles, and the use of Arab musical instruments.

Mizraḥi musicians who wanted to contribute to the canon of SLI had to operate from within the established conventions of the genre, without the influence of the musical culture of their birth countries. Idelsohn’s ideal for composing nationalistic music emphasizes a particular way that Mizraḥi musicians could be represented in this repertoire; specifically, his call to incorporate a type of “oriental sound” into national songs. Idelsohn valued Western depictions of Eastern musicality, often imbued with classic Orientalist tropes, such as sensuality and repression, over actual contributions by Mizraḥi musicians. Mizraḥi Jewry had to compose within a distinctly non-Mizraḥi style in order to have

their music considered part of SLI.\textsuperscript{50} Those who did not adopt the style were considered to be composing for a different genre, \textit{musiqa mizraḥit}. It is important to note that while \textit{musiqa mizraḥit} eventually gained mainstream popularity, it is unlikely to be claimed as a national representation of Israel's music.\textsuperscript{51}

This process of changing compositional style in order to conform to national conventions was necessary in order to have their compositions printed in songbooks and performed at sing-alongs and festivals. Edelman describes this as a part of a greater cultural process that “attempted to assimilate all Eastern immigrants into Western patterns.”\textsuperscript{52} Among Central European Ashkenazim, “foreign influence” was considered the music of the Ostjuden. Therefore, Ashkenazi music can only be considered SLI if the music omits the characteristic augmented second interval of the harmonic minor-based Klezmer modes and adopts the more Western-sounding natural minor tonality.\textsuperscript{53} The greater cultural process of eschewing “Eastern” influence transferred Orientalist tropes used to oppress and encourage assimilation in Central Europe onto anti-assimilationist Eastern European Jews and Mizraḥim.

The circulation of the poetry of SLI identifies a particular “folk” that excludes certain members of the Jewish diaspora. Specifically, the emphasis on the physical building and militant protection of the “Land of Israel,” a theme included in many songs of this genre, harkens to a concept of “muscular Judaism” or the “muscle Jew.” The lyrics of SLI frequently mention feats of strength and physical activity, such as in the song “\textit{Kor’im Lanu La-lekhet}” (They are Calling Us to Go) by Efi Netzer:

\textsuperscript{50} This began to change around the 1980s, when select Mizraḥi songs entered the canon through public sing-alongs, festivals and incorporation in song publications. Regev and Seroussi, \textit{Popular Music}, 123–124; 232.
\textsuperscript{51} Regev and Seroussi, \textit{Popular Music}, 213.
\textsuperscript{52} Edelman, \textit{Discovering Jewish Music}, 241.
\textsuperscript{53} Regev and Seroussi, \textit{Popular Music}, 53.
Again the valley is spread in front of us
And the mountain range rises above it
Joyful are those who march with us
And can conquer both on foot!\textsuperscript{54}

The poetry of this song, with references to the scenery and the act of physically conquering it, is typical of the themes of SLI poetry. Max Nordau introduced ideas of “Muscular Judaism” in 1898 in a speech at the Second Zionist Congress.\textsuperscript{55} Nordau felt that this new conception of the physically competent Jew would revolutionize the image of the people as “Zionism regenerates the Jewish body through the physical education of the young generation, which will regenerate the long-lost muscular Judaism.”\textsuperscript{56} Nordau’s emphasis on physical activity grew out of a German nationalistic idea that strong nations were full of people who had healthy minds in healthy bodies. To Nordau and his supporters, “Muscular Judaism” was seen as diametrically opposed to the stereotypes of degeneration and frailty associated with diasporic Judaism.\textsuperscript{57} In popular thought at the time, Jewish and non-Jewish racial thinkers alike considered Jews to be more prone to

\textsuperscript{54} Translated quote adapted from Regev and Seroussi, \textit{Popular Music}, 62. The relationship between SLI and Israeli folk dancing might be another way that the genre related to the promotion and circulation of notions of a physically-competent Jew, but the discussion of folk dancing is out of the scope of this article. For more on this connection, see Gdalit Neuman, “Dancing Between Old Worlds and New: Max Nordau’s New Jew Idea and its Manifestation in Pre-State Israeli Folk Dance,” \textit{Performance Matters} 2 no. 2 (2016): 110–122.

\textsuperscript{55} While the rebirth of the Jewish people in “the Jewish homeland” was often attached to valorizing the healthy, physically competent, heterosexual, masculine Jew—and such ideas have continued with the national militarization of Israel—it is not the entire story. See Shaun J. Halper, “Coming Out of the Hasidic Closet: Jiří Mordechai Langer (1894–1943) and the Fashioning of Homosexual-Jewish Identity,” \textit{The Jewish Quarterly Review} 101 no. 2 (2011): 189–231; and Allan Arkush, “Antiheroic Mock Heroics: Daniel Boyarin versus Theodor Herzl and His Legacy,” \textit{Jewish Social Studies} 4 no. 3 (1998): 65–92.


\textsuperscript{57} Zimmerman, “Muscle Jews,” 13.
“nervousness” and hysteria. The Jew, who was susceptible to these feminized mental illnesses, could be cured of his effeminacy through physical activity and feats of masculine strength. The function of this physically-adept Jew was to counteract what Nordau identified as the rapidly-advancing physical degeneration of the Jewish people.\(^5\) The communal singing of texts which communicated ideals of physical conquering the land and the importance of working together represented the ideal of the new, muscular Jewish “Israel.” The circulation of these texts, which highlight the importance of musculature, reinforced the idea that the Israeli would be different, separate, and more physically-capable than the diaspora Jew.

Tied to negative conceptions of diaspora were the languages spoken by \textit{galut} Jews. In the same way that the music of the \textit{galut} was seen as having being tainted by assimilation, those attempting to establish a Jewish national language saw diasporic languages as polluted. Yiddish, German, Arabic, Judeo-Arabic, and Judeo-Spanish were all invalidated as national languages due to the languages’ association with non-Jewish societies and even the persecution of Jews. Instead, modern Hebrew, developed from the Jewish liturgical language with contemporary additions, emerged as the Zionist \textit{lingua franca}.\(^6\) It follows that SLI, seen as national music, would be written in the new national language. The value of speaking Hebrew was promoted through the circulation of this extremely popular folksong genre, where other languages were considered to be less “Israeli” and therefore not desirable.


Conclusion

Through the culture of circulation surrounding the genre of SLI, Zionist organizations such as the Jewish National Fund and General Workers’ Union disseminated values of being a model “Israeli.” These values often served to single out examples of “model” cultures, often at the expense of the music, language, and culture of Jews of the galut. In the twentieth century, a time of unprecedented destruction of Jewish culture, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, the contribution of the Zionist movement to the annihilation of diverse Jewish cultural histories is unfortunate. To fully understand the importance of the context of creation of this repertoire is to understand the lasting effects these ideas have had in developing the notion of “Israel” and “Israeli,” and, in turn, the effect they have had on Jewish culture all over the world. As Bohlman puts it, “if, indeed, the canon’s continuity with the past is spurious, the continuity it lends to a national agenda in the present is not.”60 While the creation of the genre was an act of social imagining, the reverberating effects that this repertoire has had on concepts of “Israel,” “Israeli,” and “Jewish” are very real.

Bibliography


60 Bohlman, The Study of Folk Music, 119.


