## Abstract

The meaning of migrant housing materiality has not been adequately researched, especially when compared to the meaning of the home for immigrants, a matter of extensive discussion in the past two decades. This paper focuses on the meaning of housing materiality for twelve immigrants who migrated from Morocco to Israel some 60 years ago. Drawing on qualitative data gathered in 2007 and 2008, the paper develops a theoretical framework considering 'house as community' and 'house materiality' as two interrelating explanations for the migrant housing materiality. Through this framework, the paper first explores former houses of participants in Morocco and then presents current houses in Tel Aviv, Israel, to establish links between the two housing forms and reveal the meanings of objects in the homes. It is argued that as a reaction to the dominant Israeli society, housing materiality enables participants to educate successive generations and Israeli society about the rich cultural life of Moroccan-Jews that existed before their migration to Israel.

**Keywords**: House, Home, Materiality, Moroccan immigrants, Israel

## Materiality of the migrant house

The meaning of home has been extensively explored in the last two decades and more (Clapham, 2011; e.g. Easthope, 2004; Mallett, 2004; Somerville, 1997). In particular, the meaning of home for migrants has been one of the most discussed topics, with the home interpreted in multiscalar ways, including the neighbourhood, the city or even the nation (Baldassar, 2001; Blunt, 2003; Blunt and Dowling, 2006; Botticello, 2007). In comparison, the meaning of housing materiality is an emerging topic, where recent literature has mainly focused on two aspects; the size, organisation and design of the house (e.g. Dowling, 2008; Dowling and Power, 2012; Hand, Shove and Southerton 2007; Klocker, Gibson and Borger, 2012), and objects within the house (e.g. Drazin and Frohlich, 2007; Makovicky, 2007; Money, 2007; Rose 2003, 2004). The size of the house has been examined from both socio-cultural and sustainable perspectives, such as the reasons that lead people to have a large house, or an open plann interior design. The main themes explored here are the strategies families employ to deal with the material excesses in their everyday lives, mostly produced around children.

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Literature on objects in the house has focused on mundane objects such as family photographs, cabinets, mementos and ornaments. The main themes explored here are the production and management of families' memories, the consumption practices that households are engaged in, and the production of an extended domestic space – a space that stretches beyond the home and over time (Rose, 2003: 5). For example, examining the way photos are framed in the home, Drazin and Frohlich (2007: 51) argue that these modes of framing mirror the relationships within and surrounding the household, and locate them in short-hand time frames characteristic of the social exchanges appropriate to those relationships. Rose (2003) asserts that the domestic spatiality of family photos is stretched beyond the home through a relation with people, places and times that are not home at the moment of looking, or at least they no longer appear as they did in the photo. These accounts emphasise how homemaking involves negotiations with and between household members, as well as other people outside the household.

However, the meaning of the house materiality for migrants has been neglected in this discussion. Little has been written about what brings immigrants to purchase or build a certain house and decorate it in a certain fashion in their new destination countries. Despite Miller's statement that 'the home is the single most important site for material studies' (2001: 3), not many studies have focused on the material aspects of the migrant house. Studies which try to explain the migrant housing materiality mostly interpret the house in one of two interrelating ways: the house symbolises the migrant group as a community (with the group's unique needs and the relationships with the community surrounding the migrant group), or/and it is produced in relation to the materiality of housing in the origin country of the migrant group. These two perspectives will be examined below and then will provide a framework for analysis of the findings in this paper.

## House as community

One focus of house as community has been the disparity between the available housing stock in the host country and the actual needs of migrants (Datta, 2008; Jacobs, 2004; Levin, 2012; Parutis, 2011; Thomas, 1997). Thomas (1997: 98), in her study of Vietnamese migrants and their housing in Australia, examines the different conceptions of home as well as different physical house forms in the two cultures, and points to the tensions arising from those differences. Another example is Parutis' study (2011: 265),

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which shows how East European migrants in London skilfully manipulate the British housing market in order to achieve maximum benefit from the limited housing options available.

A different focus of house as community has been on belonging and performance in the house and in public spaces. Studies have shown that the migrant house/home is a dialectical place that entails notions of belonging and memories as well as material culture. Walsh (2006: 123), for instance, looks at different objects in the expat's home as signs of processes of belonging. She explores mobile homes of British expatriates in Dubai through the analysis of three belongings (objects) in the homes, arguing that even though belonging is often experienced as intangible, expatriate home-building clearly presents a mutual constitution of imaginative and materialised belonging. Migrants also use community spaces for enacting and experiencing collective affective belonging abroad (Fortier 2006). Fortier explains how an Italian community centre in London produces 'a portable Italianness through traces that are filled with sensuality, with the bodily experience of contact' (2006: 63).

Lastly, house as community has also centred on the meanings of the facades or specific spaces within migrant houses, as a reflection of conflicts or tensions between migrant groups and the hosting society (Allon, 2002; Levin and Fincher 2010; Lozanovska, 1997; Mitchell, 2004). Allon (2002: 8), for example, examines the Sydney suburb of Earlwood, where houses have been modified by southern European migrants in a process which has been named 'Mediterraneanisation' by opposing local residents. Allon asserts that it is through these 'Mediterraneanised' houses that 'the migrant residents evoke their translated identities and multiple belongings' and thus it is an essential part of their settlement in the new country. These studies understand the migrant housing as an expression of the relationship between the migrant group and the surrounding society in the host country.

**House materiality**

Though literature on house materiality for migrants is emerging, its main focus has been the exploration of housing interiors of migrant groups, especially those who migrated from traditional societies to western societies (Tolia-Kelly, 2003; 2004; Dibbits, 2009; Savas, 2010; Turan, 2010). Tolia-Kelly (2003: 326-7) examines artefacts in homes of South Asian women in Britain. She traces religious and cultural artefacts in the women's homes, sees them as echoes of other textures of landscapes, narratives and social

histories, and argues that they help situate diasporic groups politically and socially in relation to their national identity. In another study, Tolia-Kelly (2004) explores visual representations of landscape in South Asian homes in Britain. These objects are valuable beyond the framed text, and are experienced in the everyday lived environments of the home 'as essential nodes of connecting South Asian women to lived landscape of the past, pre-migration' (2004: 685). She argues that these non-elite representations, in the form of family photographs, prints and landscape photographs, operate beyond the mode of the visual, incorporating embodied memories of past landscape and relationships with pre-migratory lives in colonial territories.

Turan (2010: 43-44) explores houses of Palestinian migrants in diaspora. She illustrates how objects as symbols of a person's collective group help with the creation of a sheltering and nurturing environment. Turan highlights the materiality of objects and argues that their meaning and their capacity to prevent failing memory and sustain a collective identity are generated by their material characteristics and not solely by their social value. Similarly, Savas (2010: 313-314) looks at interiors of houses of Turkish migrants in Vienna to show how the materiality and aesthetics of these homes create a collective sense of belonging. Savas argues that a particular 'Turkish home' is collectively formed through shared aesthetic and practices, while she challenges the common view that homes of migrants in diasporic settlements reflect past life or a mixture of the two cultures with two sets of different objects. Instead, Savas asserts that Turkish homes in Vienna are made through a new aesthetic 'which serves to produce and reproduce a communal Turkish narrative of migration to and dwelling in Vienna'.

Literature about Moroccan migrants and home is scarce (e.g. Salih, 2003), and literature about Moroccan housing materiality is even more limited. Dibbits (2009) studies domestic interiors of Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands, where she explores the meaning of traditional looking furniture, *sedari*, which appears in many Moroccan homes. The *saderi* are low banquettes running along three sides of the room, found in countries from the Maghreb to Turkey and Iraq, which offer an alternative to the tradition of sitting on floors on carpets or mattresses (2009: 551). Dibbits questions the commonly used premise that the *sedari* are used as an ethnic symbol (Gans, 1979), connecting the immigrants to their country of origin. She contends that the *sedari* not only function as an ethnic symbol but also signal affluence and fashionability and respond to an emotional longing for the (re-)creation of experiences of conviviality.

A common theme of all these studies of migrant interiors and housing forms is that they seek to reveal the meaning of the migrant housing form, furniture and objects. Does the form of the house have any meaning at all? Why are these objects displayed? Do they have symbolic meanings or practical meanings, as Dibbits argues? Do they symbolise relationships with the surrounding community or are they utilised to create links to previous houses, and consequently, previous lives?

## Exploring houses of Moroccan immigrants in Israel

This paper draws on data from a qualitative inquiry involving twelve Jewish migrant participants who were interviewed at the end of 2007 and the beginning of 2008 around metropolitan Tel Aviv.[1] The seven women and five men migrated between 1948 and 1962 as young adults and during interviews most were in their 70s. The interviews occurred in the participants' current (self-owned) homes, and sometimes involved other family members. The interviews were semi-structured and the interviewees were asked about their former house in the homeland, what made it a home, their immigration experience, their housing career in Israel, the choice of the current house and its construction, and the meaning of home. Interviewees were also requested to draw these past homes in Morocco. Interviews included a tour in the house/apartment and backyard (if it existed), with photographs being taken. Participants were recruited through connections at work, family and friends and a snowball method. The Israeli-Moroccan Association was also contacted and provided contact details of two community members. This is not a representative group for migrants from Morocco in Israel, and the term 'Moroccan' is used to indicate only the birth country and ethnicity of participants and no other fixed qualities. It is crucial to understand the complexity that arises with the definition of a group of people by the name of their country of birth, as if they are all alike, sharing the same essential characteristics. This often leads to a mistaken fixed identity attached to the migrant group. As Fortier (1999) explains in her study of Italian immigrants in London, in many cases 'cultural practices are reified and naturalised as "typical expressions" of ethnic identity; they are seen as *resulting* from that identity rather than *performing* that identity' (1999: 43, my emphasis).

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[1] The study is part of a larger research which included houses of four migrant groups, aiming at looking at diverse backgrounds and processes of migration and settlement.

Between 1948 and 1964 there were three main immigration waves from Morocco to Israel after the establishment of Israel. The total number of Moroccan immigrants who arrived in Israel from 1948 until 2010 is almost 270,000, the largest number of immigrants from any Muslim country to Israel (CBS, 2011; Mey-Ami, 2005: 3). Since the third wave ended in the mid-1960s, the population of Morocco-born Israelis has aged significantly. In 2005, 156,000 Morocco-born persons lived in Israel representing 2.16 percent of Israel's total population, of them 90.6 percent were above the age of 45 (CBS, 2006).

The majority of Moroccan immigrants and other migrants from Muslim countries in Israel were sent to inhabit urban and rural settlements that were established in the country's peripheral regions in the mid-1950s (Yiftachel, 2000: 420). Due to this unique distribution pattern, the percentage of Moroccan immigrants in the four major cities in Israel is relatively low, and their presence is much stronger in small towns in southern and northern regions or in towns around major cities. Additionally, the distribution has been strongly affected by the location of temporary housing camps, where many of them were settled soon after arrival.

The social status of Moroccan immigrants in Israel has been a focus of many studies. Moroccan immigrants in Israel were required to assimilate into Israeli society and blend into the Israeli melting pot. They were expected to forgo their traditional values and symbols and adopt Israeli western values. Coming from a Muslim country, they were seen by the western Jewish Zionist majority[2] as primitive and inferior to the western culture (Levy, 1997). This attitude led to an intensive interference in all areas of life, including settlement, employment and even personal hygiene, as well as the breaking down of the traditional familial order and the weakening of the patriarchal authority in Moroccan families (Mey-Ami, 2005: 4). In Morocco, Jews lived in multi-generational patriarchal family formation and value was placed on having a large number of children. The receiving society was, in those years, essentially western-oriented, innovative and secular (Glassman and Eiskivoits, 2006: 462).

Moreover, Moroccan communities were separated from their spiritual leaders. Mostly these leaders stayed in Morocco but even communities whose leaders migrated were dispersed around the country according to arbitrary decisions of the settling institutions (Portugali, 1993). Immigrants left all their assets and belongings in Morocco

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[2] Jewish immigrants who emigrated mainly from Europe before 1948, *Ashkenazim*.

and arrived in Israel with no financial means. Some of them were villagers, but many others were urbanites who lived in large cities and were accustomed to urban life. But everyday life in the pre-modern Moroccan city was very different from life in the new modern Israeli state. Their trading skills and crafts were not appreciated anymore and instead they were sent to live in small towns, facing unemployment or labour-intensive work (Levy, 1997; Portugali, 1993).

In the 1960s, Israeli-Moroccans were in the lowest stratum of Israeli Jewish society, and had high levels of unemployment and illiteracy. A group called 'Black Panthers' was established in 1971 by second generation Oriental Jews[3] (most of them of Moroccan origin), demanding their voices be heard by the establishment, which until then comprised only western Jews. This plea for social justice has led to the gaining of political power by Oriental Jews for the first time in Israel. The Likud party[4] won the political election of 1977, representing a large number of Oriental Jews (Levy, 1997; Mey-Ami, 2005).

Today, Israeli-Moroccans have largely integrated into Israeli society. Since the late 1980s, with a modest but systematic improvement in the socio-economic status of many of them and the rise of some to positions of power in the socio-political structure, many of the earlier adversities of the early days have been alleviated, though not entirely removed (Levy, 1997: 28). Moroccans in Israel have been accepted and embraced by official authorities with the gradual end of the melting pot ideology. As a sign of reconciliation, a Jewish-Moroccan traditional celebration was proclaimed an official Israeli holiday (the *Mimuna*). As a study on Moroccan immigrants in Israel and The Netherlands shows, Israeli-Moroccans experience little prejudice in Israel in comparison with their Dutch counterparts, whether they keep their ethnic identity or not (van Oudenhoven and Eisses, 1998). Yet, Israelis of Moroccan origin are still overrepresented in the lower stratum of Israeli society (Levy, 1997), and a large number still live in isolated, stigmatised and deprived urban areas, marginalised both geographically and socially (Yiftachel, 2000: 434).

The meaning behind a Moroccan complex of public buildings has been studied by Weingrod (1993), who examined a shrine and associated buildings constructed on

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[3] People of Middle Eastern or North African origin, *Mizrahim*.
[4] Led by Menahem Begin (who was of western origin himself), the Likud was a right-wing party that came into power after almost thirty years of left-wing leadership in Israel.

the outskirts of the small Israeli town of Netivoth. The buildings were built around the grave of the great new Jewish *zaddik* (saint) Rabbi Israel Abouhatzeira, popularly known as the Baba Sali (1993: 370). These structures, says Weingrod, have been designed to express a distinctly Moroccan or Maghrebian set of motifs. They fit in the Israeli landscape when observed from a distance, but when one comes nearer the outer Israeli container opens to reveal 'the Maghreb within'. The bold design is striking, with a large plaza built of red and black tiles and the buildings designed in stark, strong colours of white and deep-purple red. There is a large open inner courtyard with a fountain placed in its centre and everything flows in curves and arabesques. Weingrod explored the meaning of these buildings and what they signify, asking why these foreign, distant motifs and places have been transplanted to Israel (p. 375). He claims that these buildings, the 'imagining of Morocco', can be best understood as a response to the long standing Zionist hegemony.[5] He believes they signify a deep break with the Israeli cultural past and in particular, with the Zionist ideological system that had been the dominant discourse within the Jewish community even before the establishment of the State of Israel. Weingrod further states that the bold presentation of Moroccan buildings transfers Morocco to Israel and thus renders it legitimate in the new land. By bringing Morocco to Israel, this diaspora is retrieved and raised up so that the past historic experience can henceforth be viewed positively and with the same significance as the ideology of Zionism.

Weingrod traces the meaning of the construction of 'Moroccan' public buildings but the meaning of 'Moroccan' houses in Israel has not been studied. The next two sections will establish links between participants' former houses in Morocco and current houses in Israel. The two perspectives of house as community and house materiality are considered in each section, allowing a discussion of houses in Morocco and Israel from a comparative viewpoint.


## Former houses in Morocco

Most Moroccan Jews lived in big cities, where they could be involved in city life and rent houses in the Jewish ghetto, the *Mellah*. According to participants, Jewish communities lived in the *Mellah* for many years, with their kosher butchers, grocery stores and other

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[5] Represented by Ashkenazi Jews.

everyday needs nearby, as renters in houses owned by Muslims. These houses comprised a large number of rooms built around a large central yard and arranged mostly in two storeys (but sometimes extending to four). The open courtyard contained a common well and one or two staircases to the upper levels. Each family typically had one or two rooms around the courtyard, and the common kitchens and toilets were located in the corners of each floor. In some cases the Muslim owner lived on the top floor but mostly the building was solely occupied by Jewish families. All the participants were urbanites who lived in big cities in Morocco before migration.

## House as community

All the participants describe their childhood house as simple and basic, like life in Morocco in those days. The large common kitchen was shared by all families on the same floor; each family with its own corner. The rooms were extremely large with high wooden ceilings and in the case of the upper levels, were linked to an open corridor that was formed around the central courtyard. Though simple, houses were very clean and neat.

Regardless of their simplicity, these houses were the centre of a rich community life for participants. For them, their home was not only the family's apartment, but also the entire structure of rooms around the courtyard. Most of them felt they were part of a community, knowing all other children and having close relationships with other families. Haim[6] explains it well:

> What I liked is that [in the] first floor [there are] six neighbours, everybody has children, so the children sit at one family, play at another, the next day play at a second family, and everybody goes to school together, everybody knows everyone, and in summer, especially in summer… in Sukkoth[7] for example, where would they build the Sukkah? In the same vacant place where you enter, this is where they built the Sukkah…

Jewish holidays played a significant role in everyday life in these houses. Neighbouring families celebrated holidays together as one big family. Everybody knew each other and the children felt comfortable to freely visit other houses. This specific configuration of housing with shared facilities (common kitchen and toilets) created an intimate living, where everybody was involved in other families' lives (Figure 1).

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[6] All names are pseudonym.
[7] A Jewish holiday celebrated around September each year. Families build a simple temporary structure (the Sukkah) and eat and sleep in it for eight days.

**\*\* INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**

It is clear from Haim's drawing that his house is not merely the one room his family lived in, but the whole structure built around. His actual house is only one fraction of this structure, and in fact, in his drawing he did not even mention where it is located.

Similarly, Avraham emphasises the importance of this central space to the whole Jewish community. He clarifies how his family rented an entire floor at a very low rent from a Muslim owner. The internal courtyard was very large and many families would ask his mother to use this space for celebrations. Being a Jewish minority in a Muslim country probably contributed to the harmony and closeness among Jewish families in the *Mellah*. Even though relationships with Muslims were very good at that time (before 1948), Jews still formed a religious minority and sometimes were treated by the authorities with suspicion (Levy, 1997). Almost everybody around the neighbourhood was Jewish and the community was extraordinarily united.

The family house itself was commonly talked of as a representation of family warmth. When participants were asked what made them feel at home, most of them referred to the warmth of their families and to the intimate daily life with the neighbours. Most houses contained two rooms, but in some houses the family had only one room, therefore everybody lived together. This word, 'together', was often mentioned. Sonia states:

> …and this, what I've always loved and until today I keep telling the young children, that we lived together, the children lived together, like we slept in one room, ate in one room, we were all the time together. For us, I don't know if that was the only thing that contributed, the family also contributed to it, the parents and so, but I think it contributes a lot to the family that the children sleep in one room. I think it contributes more than if everybody is locked in their own room and… that's ok, today it's modernization but in my opinion it contributes more. That you live together. […] I don't know, it was this kind of unity.

The actual space and number of rooms was not so important as much as family togetherness. Interviewees glorify the olden days as encouraging family togetherness, not only because of the tight living space in which they all lived, but also the pre-modern everyday living, which enabled families to spend more quality time together. This is presented in contrast to today, where vast space and modern technologies bring family

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members to spend time either in their rooms alone or watching TV, an activity perceived as estranged as well. This brings to mind Vietnamese migrants in Australia who cannot get used to new forms of housing in Australia (Thomas, 1997). In participants' current houses, as will soon be revealed, they wish to preserve this feeling of community and family togetherness.

## House materiality

Due to variations between different *Mellahs* in various cities and between families' wealth, building materials varied. As Rachel mentions, some of the houses had illustrated tiled carpet-like floors, while others had simple plastered floors that were repainted every Friday. A few houses also had tiles on walls of public spaces. In some houses there were painted glass domes above the central yard, but these were houses of wealthy relatives and no participants actually resided in such a house. In most houses the yard was open to the sky. The entrance gate of the building was often a big timber door, and it was impossible to see what was happening inside the building from the street. The streets were as narrow as corridors between high walls for protection against the sun, as is typical of a Muslim city (Whitcomb, 2007). Only when one entered the wooden gate and the following internal corridor, did the large courtyard become visible.

Another important aspect often mentioned in interviews was the unique materiality of the buildings and furniture in the houses. Most participants described these simple houses with great detail, illustrating on the one hand their modest character, but on the other their unique colourful details. Sonia recalls a house of a distant relative:

> …again these wooden doors, you open and suddenly you see a different world, a paradise, it's this patio, full with vegetation, full, and I still remember it was geranium. And the house was big and they were really wealthy.

This feeling of a hidden space out of public sight appears in many of the narratives. Figure 2 shows Yehuda and his best friend, both aged 16, in front of the timber door at the entrance of his house, in a photograph taken two years before he emigrated. Other architectural details in Yehuda's house were colourful tiles, mosaics on the walls, high ceilings, arched windows and 'beautiful curtains' that maintained a feeling of home.

**\*\* INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE**

Participants frequently described Moroccan furniture as multifunctional and very typical of Moroccan houses, symbolising another side of the simple life there. It was made of a wooden frame with a thick mattress on top and served both for daytime as a couch and night-time as a bed. Each house contained a number of these couches/beds. Though none of the participants mentioned the Moroccan name *sedari* (Dibbits, 2009), it seems that they referred to it. Many participants also referred to the strong influence of French rule on Moroccan design. Both Margaret and Rachel mention the French windows that they adored, and Rachel describes how her father, who admired sophisticated French-stylish furniture, would purchase every so often a piece of French furniture such as a buffet or a dining table. Houses in Morocco had a distinct rich materiality which participants described vividly.

## Current houses in Israel

Stories of settlement of Moroccan participants are not homogenous and each had their own unique route that finally brought them to live in their current house. Many of them had lived in other localities and neighbourhoods before moving to their current home, and their stories represent diverse housing forms and locales. At the time of the interview, three of the twelve participants lived in apartment blocks built in the 1950s or 1960s in inner-ring localities of metropolitan Tel Aviv. Two participants lived in allocated detached prefabricated houses that were built in the early 1970s in an outer-ring locality. Five participants lived in high-rise apartment blocks, built since the early 1990s, and two built their own houses in northern inner-ring neighbourhoods of Tel Aviv in the 1970s.

### House as community

All participants insisted that their current houses do not resemble their houses in Morocco. Avraham, for instance, is determined that there is nothing left from his Moroccan past: 'No, no, everything has been erased. Yes, I don't care, my wife also doesn't care'. Avraham insists that he does not 'do' things in the Moroccan way, namely he does not perform his Moroccan identity (Fortier, 1999). This may be because the pressure to assimilate into the Israeli society in the early days after immigration was very strong, and eventually led to this partial denial of Moroccan identity. Yehuda states that there is nothing left from his Moroccan past, and he does not wish to have anything that reminds him of his past house. Moroccan participants may feel their current houses have nothing in common with their former houses, yet when delving into the houses

some aspects that were present in former houses in Morocco appear to be preserved in current houses in Israel.

A major part of belonging to the Israeli-Moroccan community is represented through cooking traditional food. This does not require any special arrangements in the kitchen, and food can be cooked with modern kitchen utensils, though most participants still keep traditional utensils brought from Morocco by their mothers, mainly kept in the kitchen cupboards and not on display. Violet, an artist, painted her mother dressed in a traditional costume, cooking the Moroccan dish couscous (Figure 3). The traditional costume locates the woman in the painting within its Moroccan community and signifies that she belongs to it. Cooking couscous and dressed as she is, she performs her Moroccan identity to the full extent (Fortier, 1999). Through this painting her daughter communicates her pride in the Moroccan tradition, an important practice in the Israeli dominant society. In a similar way to the Moroccan complex in Netivoth (Weingrod, 1993), the house is always a stage for political agency, even if more obscure.

## ** INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

Yehuda demonstrates his belonging to the Moroccan community through his study, where he spends most of his days. His wife is of Ashkenazi origin, and his house does not show any signs of 'Moroccan' presence, except for his study. Yehuda was the Mayor of a development town in the Negev desert[8] for almost 20 years, and now he lectures at Tel Aviv University and is busy with documenting his life. I was given his contact details by the Moroccan Association as a success story of Moroccan migration. When I arrived he did not want to speak much about his migration story but printed out a number of pages from his recently published biography. He also showed me computer presentations he had prepared for special family occasions that summarise his life story with images and sound. He comments:

> This is my home, this room. I spend most of the day in it, not most of it but a lot. I write, make presentations, record, as you can see I record the whole story. Not only the immigration [story] but the entire story from Morocco until today, in pictures, presentations and more. This is for the children, the grandchildren and… all their friends, family and everyone, when they learn about their roots they can use it.

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[8] The southern region of Israel.

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On the wall in his study there are a number of documents from different stages in Yehuda's life (Figure 4), including a framed newspaper article from the late 1950s at the bottom left-hand side, where Ben-Gurion[9] praises him for his hard work, and a hand-written letter he received from Ben-Gurion, located above. In the middle is a framed *ktubah*[10] of his great grandparents in Morocco.

**\*\* INSERT FIGURE 4 HERE**

The fact that Yehuda presents letters from a leader who has for years been the symbol of discrimination against Moroccan and other Oriental Jews by the (western) Ashkenazi Zionist authorities in Israel, shows a fulfilled desire to become part of the Israeli establishment. But he also presents his roots to indicate that he is a proud member of the Moroccan community. In the corner of that wall there are some Moroccan traditional copper utensils such as a mortar, pestle and candlesticks. Whether it is their study or the kitchen, Moroccan participants wish to foster the feeling of community through their house materiality (Savas, 2010, Turan, 2010), but always in relation to Israeli society.

## House materiality

Quite a few Moroccan artefacts are displayed in participants' houses. For example, Moroccan 'authentic' utensils that are not for everyday use, such as a teapot and ornamented glasses on a metal plate, are often displayed in glass cabinets (Figure 5). Eight of the participants have such a cabinet with these traditional features, located in a central place in the house. In two of the houses a traditional bellows hangs on the wall. This exhibition of Moroccan tools and utensils is part of the story participants articulate to family members and guests. These objects enable participants to reminisce and relate their childhood story. This can be seen as part of the participants' 'precipitates of re-memories' that connect them with their collective history and past (Tolia-Kelly, 2003: 314). Belonging to the Moroccan community is perceived as invaluable (Savas, 2010). There is also a silent resistance in participants' everyday display allowing them to oppose years of concealed oppression that was forced upon them by Israeli western-

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[9] The first Prime Minister of Israel, who was himself of western origin.
[10] A Jewish marriage contract signed by both fathers of the couple before the marriage ceremony.

oriented authorities, which expected Moroccan (and other Oriental) migrants to forgo their cultural identity within the Israeli melting pot.

** INSERT FIGURE 5 HERE

Another common feature in many houses was the abundance of sacred Jewish symbols and artefacts. Some of them contain blessings (of which the most popular was the 'Blessing of the Home', mostly located near the entrance door) and some contain other kinds of blessings and signs. A very popular symbol is the *hamsa*, a palm-shaped amulet known for its good luck, popular throughout North-Africa which has been fashionable in the past few decades in Israel. These symbols in Moroccan houses hold a religious meaning and are very visible (Figure 6). They link to another phenomenon, saint worship, which is a highly important cultural characteristic among Moroccan Jews, present in all strata of population (Ben-Ami, 1998: 13). Even secular people of Moroccan origin tend to adopt these rituals of visiting the saints' tombs on the anniversary of their death, and having a celebration (*hillulah*) there. Avraham displays a picture of one of the most prominent Moroccan saints, the Baba Sali (Figure 7) (see Weingrod 1993). His tomb is the focal point for pilgrimage from all over the country. Participating in celebrations around the saints' tombs has become a distinct way of performing Moroccan identity, thus displaying a painting of the Baba Sali at home ties Avraham with the Israeli-Moroccan collective (Savas 2010; Tolia-Kelly, 2003).

** INSERT FIGURE 6 HERE

** INSERT FIGURE 7 HERE

Another phenomenon raised in many interviews was the return visit. This is a visit immigrants pay to their former country and is very common among Moroccan immigrants in Israel. Since the late 1980s when relations between Israel and Morocco were established, Israeli-Moroccan immigrants could visit their homeland for the first time. This became a growing industry, including not only Moroccan immigrants but also family members and friends (Levy, 1997).

Of the twelve participants, nine have visited Morocco at least once or more. All of them found it a means to re-connect with their origins, bonding with their families and past. All of them tried to visit their family houses, though it was difficult sometimes because most of these trips are organised by travel companies and thus are not sufficiently flexible. Some travellers were astonished by the changes that have occurred

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after the end of French rule, but some loved revisiting their childhood and past. Many participants brought back artefacts and objects from Morocco. Rosa brought decorations and cushions from one of her last visits (Figure 8), noting that there were sumptuous furniture and home wares she was unable to bring home due to luggage limitations.

**\*\* INSERT FIGURE 8 HERE**

Today not only Morocco-born immigrants visit Morocco but also other Israelis from various origins. After years of occupying the scapegoat role within ethnic groups in Israel (Levy, 1997), Moroccan immigrants have gradually gained recognition from the dominant culture. Israeli society now acknowledges that Moroccan Jews have a rich culture, thus it is worthwhile tracing its history with a visit in Morocco. Current houses in Israel record these visits through objects on display, facilitate story-telling practices and connect participants to the Moroccan community. The visits also serve as a vehicle for integrating into Israeli society, while creating openness towards the Moroccan migration narrative and heritage.

Lastly, a phenomenon that clearly embodies Moroccan house materially is the 'Moroccan room'. Two of the participants, Violet and Alisa, have such rooms in their houses and the topic was raised in a number of interviews. Rosa wanted to design such a room but eventually did not, and Rachel elucidates:

> We were in Los Angeles at my husband's brother and his wife was Moroccan and she had a large house, really, so there she designed a Moroccan room. So a Moroccan room is a table say round and low with a copper tray and above it you have the coffee tools, the teapot, the place mat, arranged in such a way and you also see a perfect order, and these are closed rooms waiting for a guest to come, but in order to have it you must have a large house, and it doesn't suit everyone.

Violet is an artist and her paintings and works of art decorate the house, including the Moroccan room. She states that she has always dreamt of having a Moroccan room so her children and grandchildren would learn about their roots. Violet further explains the Moroccan character:

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> A Moroccan house has a lot of faith, and there is a lot of… I don't know how
> to tell you but Friday night means *kiddush*,[11] it's very important the family and
> the *kiddush*. […] Everywhere I can - I give Moroccan form. I haven't seen
> anyone who has done a Moroccan room. […] Because it's a lot of thought a
> Moroccan room – the floor is from glass, the ceiling is from glass. The
> Moroccan curtains, the Moroccan cloths.

Violet's room was inspired by the Moroccan King's official guestroom in the Palace where Violet had been a visitor (Figure 9). It is not clear why this construction is so important to Violet, as it does not represent the everyday lives of Moroccan Jews in Morocco. Houses like these were extremely affluent, and most Jewish families did not possess this kind of wealth. By duplicating a room in the Palace, the room reflects elite design and taste. It might be that Violet feels the room represents the richness of Moroccan life, which she wishes to communicate to successive generations.

**\*\* INSERT FIGURES 9, 10 HERE**

Alisa, too, has a Moroccan room in her house, similar in its concept to Violet's, though smaller and not as fancy (Figure 10). This room has different tones and character. Traditional Moroccan tools and carpets are hung on the walls and the room looks much more representative of Moroccan Jews' lives than Violet's room. Alisa showed me a tool that was used for spraying scented water before Jewish celebrations.

Interestingly, as opposed to Moroccan immigrants in the Netherlands who have the *sedari* in their lounge (Dibbits, 2009), only two participants of the twelve display this traditional furniture in their home and not in their lounge but as a separate room. Both Moroccan rooms, despite being very different, have the same purpose – they are used as small museums; not as rooms for everyday use but as display rooms that promote history and storytelling. These Moroccan rooms explicitly state Moroccan presence as Moroccan design is brought into the house, although not for the sake of reminiscence but for socio-political reasons.

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[11] Jewish ritual that includes benediction over wine.

# Meanings of housing materiality for Moroccan migrants in Tel Aviv

Meanings of housing materiality of Moroccan migrants in Israel have been revealed in this paper through the exploration of former and current houses in Morocco and Israel from two interrelated perspectives of house as community and house materiality. The first perspective, house as community, sees the house as an expression of the relationships between the migrant group and the community surrounding it. Here, it was clear that housing in Morocco was structurally very different from housing in Israel, in a similar way to the case of Vietnamese and Chinese migrants in Australia (Levin, 2012; Thomas, 1997). While participants' houses in Morocco were one- or two-room apartments organised around a courtyard, in Israel most participants lived in modern apartments or in one-family houses. But in contrast to Vietnamese in Australia, who have experienced difficulties arising from the mismatch between the different conceptions of home and housing forms, Moroccan migrants in Israel do not express any difficulty in adjusting to the different form of housing. This may be because in the 1950s the young State of Israel experienced adversity and migrants had to adjust quickly to scarcity of food and housing, making do with everything that was available. Yet some participants mentioned that their current housing design does not promote family togetherness, as they wished to replicate their modest housing in Morocco with the family warmth that accompanied it.

As opposed to writings on the migrant house as a reflection of tensions between migrant groups and the hosting society, and in particular where facades have been the focus of conflicts with established residents (Allon, 2002; Lozanovska, 1997; Mitchell, 2004), participants in this study do not express their ethnicity via the external appearance of their houses. Though the majority of the houses were apartments, four participants lived in semi-detached or detached houses and their exteriors could be modified to express their owners' symbolic ethnicity (Gans, 1979). Nevertheless, none of the participants have adapted their facades in a way that communicates their 'migrant identity'. This can be explained by the oppressive Israeli society during the 1950s and 1960s which expected Moroccan immigrants to become western and modern and forgo their cultural identity. This paper adds to the literature on House as Community that for Israeli-Moroccans, the house does not reflect contested relationships with the dominant society but is a means for a collective statement aimed at Israeli society that claims the right of Israeli-Moroccans to cultural legitimacy.

The second perspective, house materiality, understands the house in relation to the materiality of housing in the origin country of the migrant group. Findings of this study support works about interiors of migrant groups that contend that the materiality of migrant houses represents narratives and social histories that help situate diasporic groups politically and socially in relation to their national identity, as in the case of South Asian women in Britain (Tolia-Kelly, 2003). Moroccan immigrants quietly resist the Israeli culture that expected them to hide and deny their cultural background and instead, in their homes they display objects brought from Morocco. This is achieved with everyday tools and decorations displayed in glass cabinets, in the lounges or hung on walls, but always inside the house. Findings also support the idea that house materiality creates a collective identity and a communal narrative of migration, as in the case of Turkish migrants in Vienna (Savas, 2010) and does not try to recreate 'Moroccan' homes to reflect past life. Moroccan migrants in Israel use these objects to share their story of life in Morocco, a story they feel has mostly been ignored by Israeli society. Participants wish to rectify this injustice by telling their children and grandchildren, as well as other non-Moroccan guests in the house, about the rich cultural life and heritage of Jews in Morocco.

The significance of objects displayed in the house is that they generate conversation and storytelling. The 'return visit', a practice common to Israeli-Moroccans since the 1980s, addresses the same purpose of storytelling, though not in the intimate space of the home but in the homeland. The house, thus, is perceived as an extension of the return visit because objects purchased in Morocco are brought in for display. In a similar manner to the way the return visit enables educating the next generations and other non-Moroccan Israelis, the house, and the Moroccan room in it - if it exists - serves as a device for teaching about the rich cultural life of Jews in Morocco. This also sustains Weingrod's (1993) idea that the bold presentation of Moroccan buildings in the town of Netivoth transfers Morocco to Israel and thus renders it legitimate in the new country. Israeli-Moroccans have always fought for recognition of their ethnic identity against the Zionist ideology, the dominant Israeli discourse. What participants present in their houses is similar to the representation of the buildings in Netivoth because it transfers Jewish-Morocco into the houses and renders it legitimate and even imperative to the national Israeli story of migration. This paper adds to the literature on House Materiality that materiality in the homes of Moroccan immigrants should be read as a political statement. Ethnic objects are not displayed to reflect a lost past, but they have

socio-political meanings that are embedded in their ethnic attributes. The purpose of these objects is not to connect members of the group but to situate them against Israeli society, generate discussion and in consequence, reposition Israeli-Moroccans in society.

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## Figures

Figure 1: Haim's drawing of his past home in Morocco (Photograph: author, 2008).

Figure 2: The entrance door of Yehuda's house in Morocco, 1946 (Source: Yehuda's private collection).

Figure 3: Violet's painting of her mother cooking couscous, displayed in the stairwell (Photograph: author, 2008).

Figure 4: Yehuda's study wall (Photograph: author, 2008).

Figure 5: Sonia's sets of Moroccan glasses and teapot, alongside holly books (Photograph: author, 2007).

Figure 6: Avraham's entrance hall, with a typical *hamsa* with the twelve breastplate stones (symbolising the twelve Jewish tribes), and an octagonal framed 'Blessing of the Home' (Photoograph: author, 2007).

Figure 7: Rosa's lounge with cushions from Morocco (Photograph: author, 2008).

Figure 8: Avraham's painting of the saint Baba-Sali (Photograph: author, 2008).

Figure 9: Violet's Moroccan room (Photograph: author, 2008).

Figure 10: Alisa's Moroccan room (Photograph: author, 2008).