

Rescuing the Mizrahi Jew: A Story of Heroes, Victims, Villains and Consequences

On December 7th, 1932 *The Palestine Post* announced that a community for Moroccan Jews would be established in Jerusalem. The cornerstone for the new community would be the stone the builder's had previously cast aside. From Israel's perspective, the Moroccan Jews that began to immigrate in mass in the early 1950s were unable to contribute to the state building process, but essential to bolstering Israel's Jewish population; the North African Jew, like the rejected stone, was both useless and pivotal to the state. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s *The Palestine Post* and *The Jerusalem Post* published a number of articles focusing on North African Jews immigrating to Israel, a population known as the Mizrahim ("Easterners").¹ The articles struck a careful balance between glorifying the immigrants for their numbers, and branding the Mizrahim as living in the "Dark Ages," coming from a "different world" and bringing with them a "lower level of civilization." The newspapers insisted that the Mizrahi Jews lived under the constant fear of Arab attacks, were confined to impoverished ghettos, suffered from rampant disease, and in the words of Ben-Gurion, were destined to be "destroyed physically or spiritually" if they were not rescued (Ben-Gurion Rebirth and Destiny of Israel 533). Treated as numbers and batches of human material that needed to be transformed, the Mizrahi Jews were brought to Israel and placed in ma'abarot, temporary immigrant camps located on the fringes of society. The immigrants left behind their walled-in ghettos to live in ghettos of flimsy tents. In order to understand the aforementioned heroic narrative and its consequences, articles

¹ In this paper, "Mizrahim" only refers to the Jews from North Africa, even though the term also applies to the Jews from the Middle East and Central Asia.

appearing in *The Palestine Post* from 1948-1950 and *The Jerusalem Post* from 1951 will be analyzed and function as the foundation to this paper. The immigration of Moroccan Jews in particular will serve as a case study. Through the above sources it will become clear that in light of the millions of Jews killed in the Holocaust, the Israeli leadership was determined to increase Israel's Jewish population, even if that required convincing the Israeli population that the Mizrahim needed to be saved and Israel was their savior.

David Ben Gurion: The Architect

In order to understand the heroic narrative's origins and its role as the voice of Israeli policy, it is helpful to analyze a series of speeches made by David Ben Gurion from 1946-1950. Although Ben Gurion does not directly address immigration from North Africa in two of the three public addresses, components of the heroic narrative begin to emerge. First, when discussing the subject of immigration, Ben Gurion preferred not to set limits. In fact, the Prime Minister considered any set of limitations as an assault against the Jewish people, a sentiment that became most evident when he labeled the British White Paper (1939) a "renewed attack" against the Jewish people in a speech delivered to the Elected Assembly and the Zionist General Council on March 24, 1943 (Ben-Gurion David Ben Gurion, Selections 29). Later in the same address, Ben Gurion further condemned the White Paper as a roadblock to Jewish salvation, seemingly ascribing the document mythical powers that threatened the Jews' divine right to return to Palestine (Ben-Gurion David Ben Gurion, Selections 41). Given Ben Gurion's response, it would appear that the White Paper sought to undermine the further development of a Jewish home by cutting off immigration completely; however, this

was not the case. The White Paper allowed for 75,000 immigrants over the course of five years with the hope of reducing the immigrants' "burden upon the people of Palestine" (Rabinovich 51-52). While appearing reasonable to the British, the Jewish Agency swiftly rejected the paper. From the perspective of Ben Gurion and the Jewish Agency, the immigrants were not a *burden*; they were a *blessing*. Although responding to the White Paper, which sought to limit immigrants primarily from Europe, Ben-Gurion's refusal to set limitations and grandiose rhetoric would come to play a key part in the future heroic narrative constructed around Mizrahi immigration.

Secondly, on March 19, 1946, Ben Gurion addressed the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry on the topic of immigration to Palestine. During his speech, he posed the following question to the Chairman and other gentleman: why do the Jews come to Palestine (Ben-Gurion David Ben Gurion, Selections 48)? According to Ben Gurion, the answer was two-fold; Palestine offered an escape from persecution and the Jews came due to their love of Zion. When explaining how the Jews had been exterminated and repressed, Ben Gurion groups Nazi Germany and Morocco under one category; the state of the Jews in both countries is interchangeable (Ben-Gurion David Ben Gurion, Selections 48). Although Ben Gurion's address does not directly focus on immigration from North Africa, the above line of logic resurfaces as a central part of his argument for Mizrahi immigration years later. The Mizrahim needed to be *rescued* from their oppressive regimes, which in the eyes of Ben Gurion, were as repressive as the Nazis. In addition to seeking an escape from persecution, Ben Gurion argued that the Jewish immigrants yearned to return to Palestine due to their "deep passionate love" of Zion (Ben-Gurion David Ben Gurion, Selections 53). In other words, Jews were

desperately crowding at the Jewish home's doorstep. Similar to the storyline of the Mizrahim needing to be rescued, the love of Zion was also destined to be woven into the heroic narrative built around the Mizrahim.

Thirdly, following Israel's independence, Ben Gurion delivered an address on the state's future to the American Zionists in Jerusalem. Arguing along the lines of Israel's Declaration of Independence, which declared, "The State of Israel shall be open to Jewish immigration and to the ingathering of the exiles," Ben Gurion focuses directly on the need for immigration from North Africa and insists that unless the Mizrahi Jews are *saved* or *escape* they are bound to be "destroyed physically or spiritually, or both" (Hacohen 251; Ben-Gurion Rebirth and Destiny of Israel 533). Moreover, Ben Gurion proceeds to argue that immigration may be "politically irrational" or "economically impossible" but neither claim is a valid reason to stop Israel from *saving* its sons (Ben-Gurion Rebirth and Destiny of Israel 534). Combining the arguments he made against limiting immigration in 1943, and for rescuing the North African Jews from their oppressive Arab regimes in 1946, Ben Gurion's speech to the American Zionists in 1950 presents the complete heroic narrative in all its glory.

Facts Bleed Into Fiction

Contrary to the image constructed by the heroic narrative and advanced by Ben Gurion, not *every* Mizrahi immigrant was backwards, uneducated, poor, and plagued by disease. In fact, the strength of the heroic narrative is in its ability to construe the facts in order to paint the Mizrahim as the victims and Israel as their savior. The foundation of the heroic narrative is built upon grains of truth that have been transformed into

widespread stereotypes. Such fact twisting primarily targets three different aspects of the Mizrahi Jews: culture, intellect, and health. On all three of the aforementioned levels, it is important to bear in mind that the Mizrahim are compared to the Ashkenazim (“European Jewry”), who are deemed as the superior Jews and more favorable human material to build the state. In order to capture the heroic narrative’s widespread stereotyping of the Mizrahim, this section will rely primarily on two books: Gabriel Lipshitz’s Country on the Move and Dvora Hacoheh’s Immigrants in Turmoil. The statistics provided by both authors in relation to the Mizrahi immigrant population are very different from those published in *The Palestine Post* and *The Jerusalem Post*. Thus, by comparing Lipshitz and Hacoheh’s data to the sweeping stereotypes advanced in the newspapers, the heroic narrative’s quest to bolster the state’s Jewish population will become all the more clear.²

First, with regards to the population’s culture, the Mizrahim had a high fertility rate, resulting in a population with a higher percentage of children and lower percentage of adults (Lipshitz 54). The Ashkenazi immigrants, on the other hand, had a low fertility rate – having recently emerged from the Holocaust – and consequently a lower percentage of children and higher percentage of adults (Lipshitz 54). Rather than explaining the logic behind the differences in the populations’ compositions, the heroic narrative argued that *all* the Mizrahi Jews belonged to large, backwards families, whereas the smaller Ashkenazi families mirrored those in Israel. The former were primitive,

² The actual rhetoric of the newspaper articles appearing in *The Palestine Post* and *The Jerusalem Post* will be displayed and analyzed in depth in the three sections following “The Heroic Narrative Hits the Printing Press.” As for now, Lipshitz and Hacoheh’s statistical data and the newspaper article’s gross exaggerations will be placed side by side.

irresponsible child rearers who would be taught how to care for their children by the state, and the latter were already responsible heads of wholesome families.³

Secondly, the level of education between both populations differed drastically. For example, 22.5% of the men and 57.8% of the women arriving from North Africa in the 1950's had never attended school, while the same fact applied to only 2.6% of the men and 6.3% of the women arriving from Europe (Lipshitz 54).⁴ Moreover, of those who had received a limited degree of schooling, only 5% of North African immigrants had finished post-primary education, compared to 20% of European immigrants (Lipshitz 54). Emphasizing the differences in education and masking the multitude of factors which could explain why one population was more educated than the other, the heroic narrative claimed that *all* the Mizrahi immigrants were ignorant and backwards, and only Israel could educate and culture them. Israel was the burning torch that would lead the Mizrahi Jews out of the Dark Ages.

Thirdly, the health disparities between the Mizrahim and the Ashkenazim were considerable. In order to screen the immigrants prior to arrival in Israel, the Zionist Executive established a special medical camp in Marseilles, France. The doctors and nurses sent to the coastal town by the Aliyah Department, were shocked and appalled by the conditions of the Mizrahim (Hacohen 138). Although the doctors at Marseilles did not screen every Mizrahi immigrant, rumors of the population's horrendous health spread

³ This common perception of the Mizrahim as members of large backwards families is perhaps most acutely captured in Ephraim Kishon's 1964 Israeli comedy "Sallah Shabati." In Kishon's Film, the father of a Yemeni immigrant family momentarily forgets how many children he has prior to boarding a truck to the ma'abarot (Sallah Shabati. Dir. Kishon, Ephraim. Menahem Golan. 1964).

⁴ The percentages referring to the North African Jews in this paragraph also take into account the level of education of Jews emigrating from Asia in the 1950s (Lipshitz 54).

quickly throughout the medical delegation; the Mizrahim were diseased and poor human material for the state. The Mizrahim's poor health was exacerbated by the fact that their Ashkenazi counterparts, having recently survived the Holocaust, were in seemingly better shape. For example, 300 immigrants, primarily of European descent, were held over at Marseilles in 1948 due to extenuating medical reasons; whereas a year later, over 20% of the 25,000 immigrants, primarily from North Africa, required intensive care and lengthy hospitalization (Hacohen 138). Such a disparity in health prompted Itzhak Refael, a member of the Jewish Agency Executive, to state, "the human material (in Germany) is better than I had thought, especially after having visited the North Africans in Marseilles" (Segev 155). Although 80% of the 25,000 immigrants passing through Marseilles in 1949 were allowed to continue their journey to Israel, the heroic narrative, promoted by the state and reinforced in *The Palestine Post* and *The Jerusalem Post*, depicted the entire Mizrahi immigrant population as drowning in disease. From the perspective of the heroic narrative, every Mizrahi immigrant required a sick bed and Israel held the miracle drug.

By targeting the Mizrahim's culture, intellect, and health, the heroic narrative sought to establish *all* the Mizrahim as helpless victims, the Arab regimes as the sinister villains, and Israel as the Mizrahim's saving grace. Although the Mizrahim were culturally backwards, feeble-minded, and suffered from rampant disease, Israel would teach them how to be responsible parents, shed their intellectual inferiority, and cure the diseases which crippled them. In many ways, the heroic narrative, which will be evident later in dozens of newspaper articles, is built on a grain of truth. As documented by Lipshitz and Hacohen, many of the Mizrahim had larger families than the Ashkenazim, were less educated, and in poorer health; however, this was not the case with *every*

Mizrahi Jew. By applying the above characteristics to the entire population and constantly comparing the Mizrahim to the Ashkenazim, the state was able to effectively argue that the Mizrahim *needed* a savior and were “clamouring at the gates of Israel for admission” (“Morgenthau Blames U.S. Jewry for Difficult Camp Conditions”). The facts, which provided the foundation to the heroic narrative, had bled into fiction, constructing a grand story of victims, heroes, and villains.

The Heroic Narrative Hits the Printing Press

The immigration of Mizrahi Jews from Morocco appeared as a topic of debate in a number of articles published in *The Palestine Post* and *The Jerusalem Post* from 1948-1951. In the following section, the articles’ rhetoric will be analyzed in order to capture the heroic narrative’s construction and its transformation over time. Although the articles focus on different dimensions of the heroic narrative, including the victim, hero, and villain, it will become clear that each article uses the heroic narrative to further Israel’s quest to increase its Jewish population, while masking the consequences of mass immigration. The articles will be grouped, analyzed, and presented in the following order: the state of Jews in Morocco, the immigration of Moroccan Jews to Israel, and the status of Moroccan Jews in the Israeli ma’abarot. Each of the above groupings plays an essential part in the heroic narrative and serves to highlight the narrative’s gaps, as well as its consequences.

Enter: Victim, Hero, and Villain

First, when addressing the conditions of the Jews in Morocco, nearly every article appearing in *The Palestine Post* and *The Jerusalem Post* from 1948-1951 portrayed the population as living in utter poverty. One article, published on March 23, 1949, went as far as to claim that 230,000 of Morocco's 238,000 Jews lived in extreme poverty ("30,000 in March"). In other words, nearly 97% of the Moroccan Jews were dismally poor; the statistic, which is not supported by any source in the article, reaffirms the writer's willingness to portray all Moroccan Jews as poor without providing evidence to support his or her claim. As the heroic narrative continues to gain momentum over time, the Jews' poverty, which had been central to the articles early on, becomes secondary to the population's primitive lifestyle. The perception that all Moroccan Jews are primitive is most clearly articulated in two articles published by Maurice Carr in *The Palestine Post* in May of 1949. The first article, "Exodus From Morocco," argues that the older generations of Moroccan Jews continue to live in a past that has "lost all meaning and relish" (Carr "Exodus from Morocco"). Carr supports his claim by drawing on the fact that older Moroccan Jews – like the Arabs – never stand upright and prefer to squat at all times, whether conversing in the street with neighbors or working behind the counters at the market (Carr "Exodus from Morocco"). According to Carr, the older Jews' preference to squat epitomizes their unwillingness to "straighten out their whole lives" and desire to remain in the "Dark Ages" (Carr "Exodus from Morocco"). In his second article, "The Age of Stagnation," Carr vividly describes the primitive children of the Moroccan mellah:

“Unwashed children, thin, rickety and often wearing nothing but a torn shirt, play out in the streets, scattering from time to time at the approach of a diminutive donkey...” (Carr

"The Age of Stagnation").

By addressing both the old and the young, Carr’s articles strive to convince the reader that all Moroccan Jews are destined to be born into, and die in a primitive world. In addition to being poor and primitive, the Moroccan Jews are plagued by several diseases. According to Carr, “nearly every adult is afflicted by endemic diseases of the eyes, bones, skin and blood” (Carr "The Age of Stagnation"). Such an inclusive statement seeks to convince the reader that disease runs rampantly throughout every Moroccan Jew’s body. The tendency of the newspaper articles to address the conditions of *all* Moroccan Jews is key, whether referring to the Jews numerically, by generations, or simply stating “every Jew”. Although Carr has personally encountered a limited number of squatting elders and naked children, his articles seek to depict the *entire* Moroccan Jewish population as poor, primitive, diseased, and desperately in need Israel’s help. The Moroccan Jews were victims of Arab oppression and would certainly not be able to survive if Israel did not save them.

After firmly establishing the Moroccan Jew as the victim, the heroic narrative casts Israel in the role of the hero; the Moroccan Jew is the damsel in distress and Israel holds the key to her freedom. As explained by Marc Jarblum, a leading French Zionist who visited the mellahs, the Jews in Morocco viewed themselves as outsiders, often mistreated by their Arab counterparts (Laskier 107). As such, the Jews of Morocco saw Israel as a land offering “the possibility of freedom” (Laskier 107). Building on Jarblum’s remarks, journalists deemed immigration to Israel as “the road to paradise,”

and referred to the Moroccan Jews as “inmates” of the mellah (Carr "Exodus from Morocco"). Carr, for example, argued that the Moroccan Jews were invigorated and inspired by the birth of Israel, and “for the first time in their lives they knew what it was not to be afraid” (Carr "Exodus from Morocco"). With Israel’s independence, the mellah “crumbled to dust and dirt in the minds of its inmates” (Carr "Exodus from Morocco"). In addition to physically rescuing the Jews from the mellah, the newspapers claimed that Israel would save the Jews from spiritual imprisonment. After the Jewish Agency initiated a campaign of enlightenment Moroccan Jews would no longer continue to live in the Dark Ages where they “neglected and lost the spiritual heritage of their forefathers” (Carr "The Age of Stagnation"). Given the above rhetoric, it appears that Israel was doing the Mizrahi Jews a favor by accepting to be their hero, a point most apparent in the remarks of Israel’s Foreign Affairs Minister Moshe Sharett, who claimed, Israel was “very anxious to bring the Jews of Morocco over...but [couldn’t] count on the Jews of Morocco to build the country” (Massad 56). Projecting Israel as the hero taking on the burden of the Moroccan Jews, the heroic narrative claimed that every Moroccan Jew wanted to be saved and ignored the fact that many Moroccan Jews – who were financially secure – did not want to be *rescued*. In fact, surveys conducted throughout Morocco revealed that the mass majority of middle-to-upper-class Jews were not interested in academic and vocational programs sponsored by the Youth Aliyah; a group sentiment that mirrored the feelings of other financially secure Jews the world over (Hacohen 242). Thus, contrary to the heroic narrative’s basic argument, not every Moroccan Jew was simply a damsel in distress and Israel was not merely her knight in shining armor.

Having already cast the victim and the hero, the final player in the heroic narrative is the villain, a part given to the sinister Moroccan Arab. Whereas Israel sought to rescue the Moroccan Jews, the Moroccan Arab sought to destroy the Jewish population. Addressing the threat of rising Arab nationalism, Rabbi Barnett Brickner, who was interviewed by *The Jerusalem Post* on March 18, 1951, urged the Jewish Agency to treat the emigration of Jews from Morocco as a “preventive measure” (“Rise of African Nationalism Threatens Thousands of Jews”). Moroccan Jewry was in a state of extreme danger, Rabbi Brickner argued, and if the Jewish Agency failed to expedite immigration, the Muslims “would give vent to their nationalism by attacking the Jews” (“Rise of African Nationalism Threatens Thousands of Jews”). Unlike the Jewish Agency’s fear that the Iraqi and Soviet governments would put an end to Jewish emigration, the concern with emigration from Morocco was the Moroccan Arab’s drive to eliminate the Jewish population. Although the position advanced by Rabbi Brickner was supported by past incidences of violence against Moroccan Jews, such as the 1948 massacres of 8 Jews at Oudjda and 39 Jews at Djérada, the notion that the community lived under the *constant* threat of Arab attacks was simply not true (Laskier 95-96). In fact, Rabbi Brickner’s claims directly contradict an article published in *The Jerusalem Post* two months earlier, which argued that “the wave of Arab nationalism which has been sweeping the Middle East has had little impact on the average Moroccan” (Oyserman). The article went on to state that “the Jewish community lives in comparative peace” and “on the whole the two communities (Jewish and Muslim) mix freely” (Oyserman). Nevertheless, the latter’s argument was an exception to the dominant narrative advanced by the former. The Moroccan Arabs, intoxicated by Arab

nationalism, sought to destroy the Jewish population and could only be stopped if Israel intervened; the hero had to rise up and defeat the villain.

Voiceless Objects

After establishing the victim, hero, and villain, the heroic narrative redirected its gaze onto the actual immigration of Moroccan Jews to Israel and the population's ensuing transformation. When addressing the immigrants' transformation – a process that Ben Gurion referred to as the need to “remould them into homogeneity” – the majority of the newspaper articles devalued and silenced the Moroccan Jews (Ben-Gurion Rebirth and Destiny of Israel 406). Rather than acknowledging their distinct culture and history, the articles labeled the entire population as unfit human material. Moreover, the second stage of the heroic narrative argued that all the Moroccan Jews were willing to sacrifice their identities in exchange for entering Israel's gates. By embracing the above rhetoric, the heroic narrative – once again – concealed the realities on the ground and refused to confront the consequences of mass immigration.

When addressing the Moroccan Jews' transformation, newspaper articles typically embraced two approaches: the first focusing on sweeping changes, and the second addressing specific developments. Both approaches sought to maintain the image of the Moroccan Jews as the victims and Israel as their hero. First, an article published in *The Palestine Post* on October 5, 1949, serves as a prime example of the Moroccan Jews' complete transformation. The article discusses the progress of Moroccan Jews who have spent six months in Norway, prior to immigrating to Israel. According to M. Kol, the Head of the Youth Aliyah Department, the Moroccan Jews had “been transformed from

little more than ‘uncivilized’ street urchins into weel (well) behaved young citizens” (“Moroccan Urchins Made into Citizens”). In addition to freely abandoning their backwards culture, the Moroccan Jews had become healthier; many of them had “gained an average of one centimetre in height and one kilogram in weight” (“Moroccan Urchins Made into Citizens”). By addressing the population’s changes in the above order, the article seemingly implies that the Jews old, Arab culture is the reason for their poor health. Similar to a plant that needed to be watered, the Moroccan Jews were primitive objects that could grow into Israeli citizens, if only guided by a helping hand. While expounding upon the immigrants’ transformation, the article does not address the needs or wishes of the Moroccan Jews; not a single immigrant is ever interviewed. Initially introduced as a number, rather than a people, the article treats the Moroccan Jews as objects – parcels that can be transported, stored, repackaged, and delivered to the homeland.

In addition to focusing on sweeping transformations, the second approach taken by newspaper articles addressed specific changes in the Moroccan Jews’ behavior. For example, an article written by Monty Jacobs and published in November of 1949 recaps the journey of North African immigrants from Norway to Israel. In the article, Jacobs claims that the Mizrahi children were “rather wild” until being taught how to behave by their Israeli instructors (Jacobs). Jacobs proceeds to explain – in disbelief – that the children “had to be taught how to sit at [a] table, [and] how to use pyjamas and beds” (Jacobs) . By using the above set of examples, the article casts Israel in the role of the heroic teacher; the state has accepted the burden of the ignorant Moroccan Jews and will remake them into respectable citizens. As was the case in the aforementioned article,

Jacobs does not interview any of the Moroccan children about their transformation from wild-to-civilized. In fact, the only question posed to a Moroccan youth is with regards to the plane ride from Norway to Lydda (Jacobs). Thus, similar to Israeli policy, Jacobs silences the Moroccan Jews, labels them all as numbers, and insists that Israel is rescuing the population from the Dark Ages.

As thousands of Moroccan Jews began to immigrate to Israel from 1948-1951, the heroic narrative – whose prior success was a direct result of its powerful rhetoric – could no longer rely solely on words. Although still embracing the victim, hero, and villain framework, Israeli actors found themselves responsible for transforming the Moroccan Jews and moving entire populations across continents. Attempting to live up to their promises of lifting the Moroccan Jews out of the Dark Ages, Israel established preparatory camps in Europe to transform the immigrants; a process of enlightenment that carried no consequences when confined to the columns of newspapers, but would result in serious conflicts between the Moroccan Jews and other Israelis down the road. Refusing to acknowledge the costs of erasing another's culture and history, the heroic narrative silenced the Moroccan Jews and rarely voiced any signs of discontent or resistance on their behalf. From the perspective of the heroic narrative, the Moroccan Jews accepted losing their identity. Thus, the second stage of the heroic narrative begins to reveal the consequences of the first, while masking those of the third and final stage yet to come.

The Promise of Paradise

In an article published by *The Palestine Post* on October 5th, 1949, M. Kol, the Head of the Youth Aliyah Department, declared that Israel's ma'abarot were a "paradise" in comparison to Morocco's mellahs ("Moroccan Urchins Made into Citizens"). The ma'abarot, Kol was referring to, were the temporary immigrant camps that would serve as the new homes for the Moroccan Jews. Located on the geographical peripheries of Israel, the ma'abarot welcomed in excess of 12,000 Moroccan Jews from 1950-1951 (Hacohen 267). Labeled by the heroic narrative as the final destination on the "road to paradise," the ma'abarot were consistently plagued by a number of issues and their Moroccan inhabitants were depicted as threats, rather than citizens of the state (Carr "Exodus from Morocco"). Whereas immigration forced the heroic narrative to confront the dangers of its rhetoric in the first stage, the ma'abarot would play a similar role in revealing the consequences of the second stage.

The first major problem facing the Moroccan immigrants in the ma'abarot was the lack of all-weather roads. The immigrants were tormented by rainstorms on a weekly basis, which resulted in the dirt roads leading to the ma'abarot flooding and transforming the immigrant camps into distant islands inaccessible to food supply trucks and other services. The danger of the roads flooding is most starkly captured in an article published on January 9, 1951, in *The Jerusalem Post*. According to the reporter, weekend rainstorms had prevented delivery trucks from bringing food to the majority of the ma'abarot. When the delivery trucks finally arrived at the camps, "most of the ma'abarot had only enough food for one or two more days" ("Ma'abarot in Jerusalem Hills Need All-Weather Roads"). Rather than constructing new roads, the Israeli government continued to ignore the danger posed by the rainstorms; bread delivery was delayed a

total of three times in the winter of 1951 alone ("Bread Reaches Ma'barot"). That said, the government was able to provide transportation for CARE, a humanitarian organization that delivered "countless dolls, instruments for children's orchestras, games, and crayons" to the children in the Ramle ma'abara that same winter ("Ma'abara Kids Get Care Toys"). Thus, government transport services were able to deliver toy trumpets while struggling to deliver bread. The flooded roads leading to the ma'abarot caused the immigrants unnecessary hardship, and were never mentioned in the promise of paradise.

Secondly, in addition to preventing delivery trucks from running their routes, heavy rainstorms constantly uprooted the Moroccan immigrants' flimsy tents. According to one article published in *The Jerusalem Post* on January 8, 1951, "70 persons were made homeless by the collapse of 10 tents" ("Rains Flood J'lem Camps"). It is important to note that the 70 immigrants rendered homeless by the rainstorms were living in only 10 tents ("Rains Flood J'lem Camps"). Although no longer confined to a walled-in Moroccan ghetto, Kol's "paradise" was clearly not as spacious as the heroic narrative had promised ("Moroccan Urchins Made into Citizens"). Similar to the Israeli government turning a blind eye to the need for all-weather roads, the government was slow to act on the immigrants' appeals for better households, or at least sturdier tents. Nearly 10 months after the incident in the Kiasaion ma'abara, heavy rainfall "affected some 1,600 families who [were] still living in tents" throughout all the ma'abarot ("Heavy Early Rainfall Catches Ma'barot in North Unprepared"). As was the case with the roads, the living conditions of the Moroccan immigrants would not magically improve over night; it was a task that required time and money, both commodities that the Israeli hero was no longer willing or able to invest.

Thirdly, heavy rainfall prevented the Moroccan immigrants from leaving the ma'abarot. Hacoheh's "Immigrants in Turmoil" explains how inclement weather resulted in the population rarely receiving timely medical attention. According to Hacoheh, "weeks went by between doctor's visits to those in the southern Negev" (Hacoheh 197). In one extreme case, a woman, who had recently given birth, was forced to cross a flooded wadi by foot on her way home from the hospital (Hacoheh 197). Claiming that it was not "sufficient" to provide each ma'abara with doctors, nurses, and hospitals, the Israel Defense Forces established a transport service in the Kfar Ono ma'abara on December 14, 1951, nearly a year after transportation problems were initially identified ("Ma'barot Transport Service Opened").⁵ The transport service would consist of 40 cars and a single jeep that would operate 24 hours a day in the case of emergencies ("Ma'barot Transport Service Opened"). Whether attempting to right the wrongs of its past, or finally confronting the consequences of their heroic narrative, the Israeli government's transport service in the Kfar Ono ma'abara was too little, too late.

Given the dismal conditions in the ma'abarot, many immigrant families attempted to leave the camps for the cities; cities offered the promise of a better life and employment. Whereas one would expect the immigrant's plight to stir feelings of sympathy throughout the Israeli populace, the heroic narrative condemned any acts of internal migration. For example, an article published by *The Jerusalem Post* on November 1, 1951, blamed the immigrants for having "abandoned good earth" ("Ma'bara Moving Harms Economy"). The Israelis "attitude should not be one of compassion," the

⁵ The funds for the Kfar Ono ma'abara transport service were provided by the Israel Defense Forces, the U.S. "Materials for Israel" campaign, and other Israeli government offices ("Ma'barot Transport Service Opened," *The Jerusalem Post* Dec. 14, 1951).

article states, considering that the newcomers' internal migration posed a threat to both the state's infrastructure and economy ("Ma'bara Moving Harms Economy"). In other words, the immigrant's migration to the cities was not a desperate attempt to better their circumstances, it was a selfish act that "sabotage[d] the interests of the state" ("Ma'bara Moving Harms Economy"). Two years earlier, *The Palestine Post* ran a similar article, equating the "atmosphere of idleness" in the ma'abarot to a "poisonous fog" that could spread throughout the state, if not properly contained ("The Skilled Worker Is King"). The article went on to claim that the North African immigrants' low standard of living, "if allowed to continue, [was] bound to influence the standard of the entire working class" ("The Skilled Worker Is King"). In order to contain the poisonous fog and save the Israeli working class from the Moroccan Jews and their North African brethren, Israel forced the immigrants to remain in the ma'abarot; the hero had effectively reduced the victims to a number.

Promising the immigrant's paradise, the Israeli government placed the Moroccan Jews into ma'abarot located on the geographical peripheries. Although the government claimed that the immigrant camps were only a "temporary" solution, Moroccan Jews continued to live in poorly constructed tents for years after their initial arrival. Problems spotted by the government early on, such as the lack of all-weather roads, suitable housing, and services, were allowed to fester. The Knesset Labor and Public Services Committees even voiced "general approval of the Army and Government departments operating [in the ma'abarot]" ("Knesset Group Satisfied with Gov't Service to Ma'barot"). Moreover, the inhabitants of the ma'abarot were not integrated into mainstream society. The heroic narrative, which had reassured the Moroccan immigrants that they would be

valued, had broken its promise. Well on its way to doubling its Jewish population by the end of 1951, Israel no longer pretended to care about the immigrants; the heroic narrative had fulfilled its purpose (Hacohen 1).

Reflecting on the Heroic Narrative:

It is important to note that the heroic narrative was not simply confined to *The Palestine Post* (1948-1950) and *The Jerusalem Post* (1951). Although both newspapers serve as the foundation of this analysis, leading politicians roundly embraced the heroic narrative's rhetoric to justify Israel's policies towards the Mizrahi immigrants. Perhaps the document that most clearly captures the complete heroic narrative, as presented in this paper, is Ben Gurion's "The Call of Spirit in Israel" (Ben-Gurion Rebirth and Destiny of Israel 399-441). Published in the *Government Yearbook* in October of 1951, Ben Gurion's text seeks to convince the reader of three main ideas: North African immigrants would never reach their "rich potential" if they were not rescued, the state would have to "remould them into homogeneity," and Israel was not simply "bringing in droves of creatures" (Ben-Gurion Rebirth and Destiny of Israel 409, 06, 01). Ben Gurion's three points mirror the three stages of the heroic narrative: the victim and the hero, the immigrant's transformation and migration, and the immigrants' status upon arrival. As was the case with the heroic narrative presented by the newspapers, "The Call of Spirit in Israel" does not explain the consequences of each stage. Thus, both Israeli government policy and the newspaper reports were responsible for the creation and development of the heroic narrative, understood its consequences, and chose to defy them.

Another fact that must not be ignored is the language in which the heroic narrative was written. *The Palestine Post*, which became *The Jerusalem Post* in 1950, was the most prominent newspaper to write in English in Israel. The newspaper was based in Jerusalem, the political and intellectual center of the state; whereas the majority of other mainstream newspapers were based in Tel Aviv. Given the newspaper's choice to print in English and close proximity to the Knesset and the Hebrew University, its audience was primarily politicians, intellectuals, foreigners, university students, and educated Ashkenazi immigrants. The North African Jews arriving at the ma'abarot read neither *The Palestine Post*, nor *The Jerusalem Post*. Thus, the newspaper sought to control the discourse on Mizrahi immigration by influencing those in positions of authority and power, while excluding the subject of their heroic narrative.

Following the liquidation of six million Jews in the Holocaust, Ben Gurion and the state turned towards the East. North African Jews, who suffered from poverty, a backwards culture, and disease, were deemed the most viable candidates for increasing the state's Jewish population. The Mizrahim would not be responsible for building the state, they were only necessary "spare parts" (Burg 32). Israel accepted the burden of transforming the Mizrahi Jews and the heroic narrative refused to acknowledge the consequences of erasing the Mizrahim's culture and history. The Israeli government presented Mizrahi immigration as a rescue mission and used the heroic narrative to conceal its flawed policies and justify mass immigration; and rather than recognizing the reality beyond the newspaper columns, the Israelis bought the black and white story.

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- "Moroccan Jews in Jerusalem." *The Palestine Post* Dec. 7, 1932.
The foundation stone will be laid to the Moroccan Jews' community in Jerusalem today.
- "The Jewish Year." *The Palestine Post* Sep. 6, 1937.
Anti-Semitism increases in North Africa as a result of events in Palestine.
- "Moroccan Arabs Fight Fascism: Stories of Atrocities." *The Palestine Post* Oct. 2, 1938.
Massacres in Tripoli claim the lives of 12,000 North African Muslims.
- "Anti-Jewish Laws Urged on Sultan of Morocco." *The Palestine Post* Aug. 25, 1941.
A discussion of the anti-Jewish laws that would force Moroccan Jewry to move from modern cities to the ghettos.
- "Slum Quarters of Jerusalem." *The Palestine Post* Mar. 24, 1942.
Moroccan Jews live in horrible conditions in Jerusalem.
- "Youth Hostel Congress." *The Palestine Post* Nov. 28, 1947.
The Moroccan Delegation makes great linguistic progress by speaking in Hebrew at a conference and voices its interest in developing Palestine.
- "Moroccan Sultan Warns Jews." *The Palestine Post* May 24, 1948.
The Sultan urges Moroccan Muslims to refrain from violence within the country and claims that Moroccan Jews are completely "Moroccan".
- "Planning Wanted." *The Palestine Post* Feb, 23, 1949.
North African immigrants protest and demand work.
- "30,000 in March." *The Palestine Post* Mar. 23, 1949.
Reports that all Jews in Morocco live in utter poverty.
- Carr, Maurice. "Exodus from Morocco." *The Palestine Post* May 3, 1949.
Moroccan Jews live as prisoners in the Mellahs and immigration to Israel is the road to freedom. There is a need to enlighten Moroccan Jews who continue to live in the "Dark Ages."
- Carr, Maurice. "The Age of Stagnation." *The Palestine Post* May 12, 1949.
Moroccan Jews live in complete poverty and suffer from rampant disease as well as the pervasive fear of Arab attacks.
- "Immigrants at Rate of 300,000 a Year." *The Palestine Post* May 15, 1949.

Immigrant camps are overcrowded in Israel and immigrants are provided with only the bare essentials.

"Making Room for Newcomers: Building Houses and Camps." The Palestine Post May 22, 1949.

Seven hundred North African immigrants arrived this week in Israel.

"Mrs. Myerson Says Israel Has Million." The Palestine Post Jun. 6, 1949.

The Jews in North Africa need and want to come to Israel.

"More Youth Centres to Be Opened." The Palestine Post Jul. 27, 1949.

The Youth Aliyah begins to plan a campaign to end "unjustified prejudice" against the North African immigrants and their children in particular.

"Dobkin Urges Pioneering: N. Africans May Form Own Bloc at Meeting." The Palestine Post Sep. 16, 1949.

North African Jews who intend to immigrate are ill prepared, a failure that Eliahu Dobkin attributes to the Zionist Movement.

"No Sympathy for Moroccan Jews." The Palestine Post Sep. 19, 1949.

At the Eastern Zionist Conference in Paris, M. Maurice Timsce, a Moroccan delegate, claims that Moroccan Jews are facing severe discrimination in Israel.

"Moroccan Urchins Made into Citizens." The Palestine Post Oct. 5, 1949.

Moroccan youth have transformed from "street urchins" into well-behaved citizens over the course of six months in Norway. The camps awaiting the Moroccans in Israel are a "paradise" in comparison to their former mellahs.

Gailmor, William. "Juvenile Delinquency in Israel." The Palestine Post Oct. 7, 1949.

There is no difference between a Moroccan youth pulling out a knife and an Israeli youth raising his fist, both actions are based on the child's upbringing.

"Immigrants Prefer Moshavim." The Palestine Post Nov. 10, 1949.

Moshavim would be more beneficial to the North African immigrants by offering them individual houses and living conditions similar to their former way of life.

Jacobs, Monty. "Morocco to Lydda Via Norway." The Palestine Post Nov. 18, 1949.

Moroccans waiting to be moved to European transit camps are depersonalized and referred to as "another batch." The Moroccan children are also depicted as wild and lacking basic manners.

"The Skilled Worker Is King." The Palestine Post Nov. 18, 1949.

North African immigrants are used to a low standard of living and their low level of living threatens to bring down the rest of the working class in Israel.

"Emigration from U.S. Opposed by Some Leaders." The Palestine Post Jan. 5, 1950.

Moroccan Jews live in horrible conditions in the Mallahs and their prospects for a future in Morocco are grim.

"Morgenthau Blames U.S. Jewry for Difficult Camp Conditions." The Palestine Post Jan. 20, 1950.

Morgenthau insists that the North African Jews are desperately trying to enter Israel's gates.

"Immigrants from Two Different Worlds Meet at Gates of Haifa." The Palestine Post Jan. 25, 1950.

Advances the argument that North African Jews are from a different world and different level of civilization than Jews from Europe.

Articles From *The Jerusalem Post*:

"Absorption of Mass Immigration." The Jerusalem Post Jan. 1, 1951.

Explains the fundamentals behind mass immigration, but does not specifically address North African immigration.

Sira, Y. Ben. "Social Tasks in Town Planning." The Jerusalem Post Jan. 1, 1951.

Addresses the difference between "absorbing" and "containing" new immigrants, but does not focus on North African immigration specifically.

"Rains Flood J'lem Camps." The Jerusalem Post Jan. 8, 1951.

Heavy rains knock down 10 tents in one ma'abara, resulting in 70 immigrants becoming homeless.

"Ma'abarot in Jerusalem Hills Need All-Weather Roads." The Jerusalem Post Jan. 9, 1951.

Gravel roads must be constructed to ensure that the immigrants living in the ma'abarot will not starve whenever a storm strikes, cutting off the transportation of food from the settlements.

Oyserman, Ben. "Moroccan Jewry Turns to Israel." The Jerusalem Post Jan. 10, 1951.

Moroccan Jews live in peace with the Arab community, but are confined to ghettos. The Moroccans who live in the mellah have shown interest in immigrating to Israel, while the "well-off" Moroccan Jews do not want to leave. The article includes a picture of the mellah and a photo of a Moroccan Jewish family.

Boas, Henriette. "Police Staff Give Immigrants a Helping Hand at Ma'abarot." The Jerusalem Post Jan. 15, 1951.

Details the role of the Israeli police in one ma'abara, which includes playing with the children and inspecting cleanliness.

"Ma'abara Kids Get Care Toys." The Jerusalem Post Jan. 18, 1951.

Toys are delivered to the immigrant youth in the Ramle ma'abra for Hanukah. The article serves as another example of the press focusing on moments of happiness, rather than telling the immigrants' stories of struggle.

"100,000 More to Enter Ma'barot This Year." The Jerusalem Post Jan. 24, 1951.

Reports that 100,000 new immigrants will live in "tents" or "aluminium huts" this year.

"Knesset Group Satisfied with Gov't Service to Ma'barot." The Jerusalem Post Feb. 2, 1951.

The Knesset offers recommendations for the ma'barot, but voices general content with current conditions.

"Bread Reaches Ma'barot." The Jerusalem Post Feb. 22, 1951.

Bread supplies have been replenished at the ma'barot in Jerusalem. The bread shipment arrived when nearly all flour was depleted.

"Immigrants Refuse to Stay in New Village." The Jerusalem Post Mar. 7, 1951.

A group of new immigrants refused to settle in the desert and demanded to be relocated to a populated city.

"Rise of African Nationalism Threatens Thousands of Jews." The Jerusalem Post Mar. 18, 1951.

The immigration quota for North Africa must be increased to save the Jews from rising Arab nationalism.

Cale, Ruth. "Newcomers Speak Out." The Jerusalem Post May 10, 1951.

New immigrants from Baghdad and Rumania are interviewed, but none from North Africa.

Braun. The Jerusalem Post Jun. 22, 1951.

Photo of a Jewish Tunisian cobbler continuing his trade in an Israeli immigrant camp.

Raphael. "State Needs 600,000 in Next Four Years." The Jerusalem Post Aug. 20, 1951.

Immigrants are "needed" but do not match social structure of the Jewish people. For example, there are no doctors or nurses in the waves of immigrants from Yemen and Iraq.

Perry, Vic. "Flying Them In." The Jerusalem Post Sept. 30, 1951.

Immigrants flown in from Arab countries may be primitive but their children will be "fine material" for the Jewish state.

"Heavy Early Rainfall Catches Ma'barot in North Unprepared." The Jerusalem Post Oct. 9, 1951.

Heavy rainfall has ripped the roofs off many tents and has caused the sewage to overflow at certain immigrant camps.

"Ma'bara Moving Harms Economy." The Jerusalem Post Nov. 1, 1951.

Immigrants who leave the camps in search for work or better conditions should not be met with sympathy or compassion. Instead, they should be viewed as a threat to the state's economy.

"Ma'barot Transport Service Opened." The Jerusalem Post Dec. 14, 1951.

The government has opened a transport service at the Kfar Ono ma'bara that will provide free rides 24 hours/day when emergencies arise at the camp.

Novels, Journal Articles, and Film:

Alcalay, Ammiel. Keys to the Garden. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1996.

Presents excerpts from poems and novels written by Mizrahi Jews. Many works discuss the authors' hardships as an "Eastern" Jews living in Israel.

Avraham, Burg. The Holocaust is Over; We Must Rise from Its Ashes. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Ben Gurion and the state of Israel view the Middle Eastern Jews as "spare parts" and never recognize their sacrifices for coming to the state and leaving behind their capital, homes, and history.

Ben-Gurion, David. David Ben Gurion, Selections. New York: Labor Zionist Organization of America - Poale Zion, 1948.

The Jews' love of Zion is the main reason behind immigration and the repressed state of the Jews in Morocco is similar to the conditions of the Jews in Nazi Germany.

Ben-Gurion, David. Rebirth and Destiny of Israel. New York: Philosophical Library, 1954.

Presents the full text from Ben Gurion's "The Call of Spirit in Israel," an essay published in October of 1951 that describes the remaking of the North African Jewish immigrants, the immigrants' lack of capital and culture, and the void of compassion for the immigrants throughout Israel. The compilation also provides the full text for Ben Gurion's "To America's Jewry," an address to the American Zionists in Jerusalem on September 3, 1950. In the speech Ben Gurion claims that North African Jews are destined to be "destroyed physically or spiritually" if they remain in their Arab countries.

Ben-Gurion, David. Memoirs David Ben-Gurion. New York: The World Publishing Company, 1970.

A series of essays written by Ben Gurion on the birth and formation of Israel from the pioneering days to the establishment of a democracy. While addressing

several topics, the essays do not specifically focus on Jewish immigration from North Africa.

Hacohen, Dvora. Immigrants in Turmoil. Trans. Gila Brand. Ed. Henry Feingold. New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003.

Provides statistics on North African emigration from 1949-1953 and discusses the poor health of North African immigrants as well as the conditions of the ma'abarot. According to Hacohen, many immigrants from North Africa were admitted to Israel regardless of their poor health and not all Moroccan Jews wanted to leave for Israel.

Laskier, Michael. North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. New York: New York University Press, 1994.

Laskier recounts two massacres of Jews in the cities of Oudjda and Djérada on the Moroccan-Algerian border. He explains why Jews left Morocco for Israel - mainly economic incentives - and presents a report from Marc Jarblum, a French Zionist who traveled to Morocco.

Lipshitz, Gabriel. Country on the Move: Migration to and within Israel, 1948-1995. Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998.

Lipshitz explains the age breakdown, education, income, and occupations of North African immigrants to Israel in the 1950's.

Massad, Joseph. "Zionism's Internal Others: Israel and the Oriental Jews." Journal of Palestine Studies XXV.4 (1996): 53-68.

Massad argues that early Zionist intellectuals did not look favorably upon "oriental" and "Eastern" Jews. Theodor Herzl's "The Jewish Question" did not seek to include oriental Jews in the new Jewish state, Ahad Ha'Am feared that immigration from Yemen would negatively influence settlement culture, and Vladimir Jabotinsky sought to eliminate the oriental nature of the Jews that he discovered in Palestine.

Pearlman, Moshe. Ben Gurion Looks Back. Trans. Moshe Pearlman. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965.

Ben Gurion explains discrimination, lack of educational outlets, and framing of the "Oriental" and "European" Jew.

Sallah Shabati. Dir. Kishon, Ephraim. Menahem Golan. 1964.

This Israeli comedic film acutely captures the image of the large, backwards Mizrahi immigrant family.

Segev, Tom. 1949 The First Israelis. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986.

Provides valuable emissary reports and insights into the health of the North African immigrants, in addition to the rumors spread concerning the population's poor human material.

Segev, Tom. The Seventh Million. Trans. Haim Watzman. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1991.

Addresses the attitudes of indifference assumed by leading Israeli politicians towards Holocaust survivors who would later migrate to the state. Segev also captures the state's drive to transform the immigrants.

Tadmor, C. Israel Economic Statistics. Israel Business Pamphlets. Jerusalem: The Economic Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1953.

Provides statistics on immigration and the North African immigrants.

Tadmor, C. Israel Economic Survey January-June, 1952. Israel Business Pamphlets. Jerusalem: The Economic Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1952.

Presents percentage tables on the Jewish immigrants' place of birth and age (1949-1952).

Tadmor, C. Israel Economic Survey July-Dec. 1952. Israel Business Pamphlets.

Jerusalem: The Economic Department of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, 1953.

States the percentage of Israel's investments going towards building and housing purposes for the immigrants, and claims that nearly 50,000 immigrants remained in temporary housing (throughout 1952) despite the government's best efforts to properly house them.