

De-Westernizing Morocco: Pre-Migration Colonial History and the Ethnic-Oriented Self-Representation of Tangier's Natives in Israel

by Aviad Moreno

Abstract

The article presents and analyzes the self-representing narrative strategies through which westernized Jewish immigrants from Tangier (Morocco) de-westernize their personal pre-migration colonial history in the context of the ethnic conflict in Israel. By so doing, the article challenges from a new perspective the general post-Zionist notion according to which ethnic revivals among Moroccan Jews in Israel came about in opposition to the European-oriented national narrative; A narrative that had distorted their authentic Mizrahi culture and history, often in the form of de-Arabization. In an attempt to explain the motivations for de-westernization, the article further implies that not merely did the ethnic revival of Tangier's natives not match the general post-Zionist notion, but moreover that it had often formed shape in the course of contrasting it. Only through de-westernized self-representations, could Tangier's natives contest the general representation of Moroccans as Mizrahim with the sense of "their own" Moroccan ethnic history.

Since the founding of Israeli statehood, Moroccan Jews in Israel constituting a major part of the broad population of *Mizrahim*,¹ have been negatively stereotyped by the hegemonic Ashkenazi-dominated core of Israeli society.² The group has been ranked, both in terms of cultural discourse and resources allocation, at the bottom of the social and economic ladder.³

The related academic literature as well as the general popular discourse considerably altered throughout the history. Principally, until the late 1970s, the predominant national school of thought perpetuated a "melting pot" harmony-oriented ethos, promoting the notion of "the negation of exile" in the course of attaining equality and unity among Jews in their new nation-state.

¹ "Orientals" in Hebrew; It is a widespread term used by several scholars and in the local popular language in Israel for describing the non-Ashkenazi social components; mostly Jews of Middle Eastern, North African and Central Asian origin. While the term '*Mizrahim*' is confusing and oversimplifies the cultural and historical variedness of the entire population, I employ the term throughout the study in order to position my argument in the accurate context of discussion.

² Yaron Tsur, "Carnival Fears: Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel", *Journal of Israeli History* 18 (1997): 73-103; Mikhaël Elbaz, " 'Exile from Within': Moroccan Jews and the Reinvention of Tradition in Israel", in *Herméneutique et Bricolage; Territoires et Frontières de la Tradition dans le Judaïsme*, Actes du Colloque de Bucarest, 27-28 Octobre 2006, ed. Mădălina Vârtejanu-Joubert (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 206-209.

³ Moshe Lissak, *The Mass Immigration in the Fifties: The Failure of the Melting Pot Policy*, (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1999); Shlomo Swirski, *Israel: The Oriental Majority* (London: Zed Books, 1989); Elbaz, "Exile from Within", 209-214.

The notion was led by a concept of *regenerization* especially with regards to the *Mizrahi* collective which were perceived as a backward element. Consequently, socio-economic and socio-political inequalities between *Ashkenazim* and *Mizrahim* in Israel were attributed to the exilic reminder of the latter.⁴

Beginning in the 1970s, the harmony-oriented national narrative was deemed invalid in explaining the apparent ethnic-based discrimination in the young State of Israel. The late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed a form of *Mizrahi* counter-acculturation. This revival was comprised of several reinvented rituals including “*muzika mizrahit*” (Oriental music), “*Bourekas*” films⁵ and carnival-style festivals, such as the national parks *Mimouna*.⁶ The shift also mostly manifested itself in the political swing of 1977 that was described as an accumulative reaction to the discrimination by the secular, Ashkenazi-dominated Labor Party elite. The creation of the political religious party *Shas* in 1984 marked the most influential link between the socio-political struggle and the process of bringing the silenced *Mizrahi* voice to light.⁷

A parallel process of ethnic restoration took place among the community of Jews of Tangier origin in Israel at the time. In 1979, *Mabat*, Hebrew initials for “*Mifgash Bnei Tangier*”- the Reunion of Tangier’s Natives, the principal émigré association of Spanish-Moroccans in Israel, was founded predominately by the Jews of Tangier. The declared purposes of the organization were fourfold: a) to sustain contact between the natives of the former Spanish Zone, b) To preserve, “before it is too late”, the cultural, religious and folkloric patrimony, c) to collect cultural material, and d) to preserve the dialect of *Hakitia* (A Judeo-Spanish dialect commonly spoken among the Jews of Northern Morocco until the 19th century).⁸ At least 769 members from across dozens of cities and towns in Israel had joined this organization by the year 1985.⁹

In the academic sphere, a new generation of scholars with a polemic post-Zionist (based on a broad postcolonial) orientation exposed the ‘innate’ ethnic-based inequality that had characterized the Zionist melting pot notion, according to their own observation. Through their revisionist perspective, the broad tendency was to depict the *Mizrahim* (simultaneously with Arab Muslims), as the victims of the Eurocentric Zionist project. The population of

⁴ Elbaz, “Exile from Within”, 209; Yaron Tsur, “The Israeli Historiography and the Ethnic Problem”, in *Making Israel*, ed. Benny Morris (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 233-236.

⁵ A genre of popular movies in Israel mostly during the 1970s and early 1980s. The genre addressed the ethnic tension generally between *Mizrahim* and *Ashkenazim*

⁶ A traditional North African Jewish celebration held the day after Passover.

⁷ Elbaz, “Exile from Within,” 214-215.

⁸ Mitchell M. Serels, *A History of the Jews of Tangier in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New-York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1991), 177.

⁹ Based on a telephone numbers’ list of *Mabat*’s members in Israel (the number of subscribed members ought to be higher as the figure does not include spouses that had similar phone numbers. The list is found at a private collection in Bat Yam (Israel) owned by Sidney Pimienta and Gladys Pimienta (hereinafter referred to as PPC). I am grateful to them for allowing me access to this valuable material, as well as to other materials in their private collection.

Mizrahim was seen as pawns that played no autonomous or pro-active role in the development of Zionism and were utilized by the Ashkenazi elite.¹⁰ Furthermore, in the light of the Zionist-Arab nationalist conflict, understanding the Arab exilic reminders of the *Mizrahim* comprised a critical double paradox in the mind eyes of the Ashkenazi-dominated harmony-oriented perception: first for its exilic reminders, but moreover, for the structured denial of the right of this population to return to their countries of origin embedded in their ‘Arabness.’

Central works are the ones of Ella Shohat and Yehouda Shenhav. The latter argued in general that the Zionist hegemonic discourse invoked the de-Arabization (in a number of forms including Judaized Orientalization) of the historical identity of the *Mizrahim* as part of their forced marginalized incorporation into the Jewish state’s national collective memory. In this context, post-Zionist scholars often replaced the term *Mizrahim* by “Arab Jews”, which was aimed at reflecting their more authentic historical identities.¹¹ The shared approach that was often used, mostly amongst westernized middleclass *Mizrahim*, which correlated with the harmony-oriented Eurocentric national narrative were therefore generally seen as imposed reconstructions formed in the Israeli socio-cultural and socio-political landscape dominated by the Ashkenazi elite.¹²

The establishment of the “*Mizrahi* Democratic Rainbow Coalition” during the 1990s brought together a number of notable scholars and activists promoting a process that may be referred to in general as the self-re-Orientalization of the genuine *Mizrahi* identities in Israel. In the context of shifting bon-tons and hegemonic discourses, manifestations of ethnic revival among the *Mizrahim* were perceived as part of the ongoing struggle to express the authentic *Mizrahi* voices that had been silenced and distorted by the Ashkenazi-dominated European-oriented national bon-ton.¹³

While historians tend to refute or attest this post-Zionist notion vis-à-vis historical evidence,¹⁴ I refute the general notion through a long-term historical

¹⁰ Tsur, “The Israeli Historiography and the Ethnic Problem”, 159.

¹¹ Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (Austin, Tex.: University of Texas Press, 1989); Yehouda Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006). As claimed by Shenhav, the Orientalization of *Mizrahim* embedded within the process of their de-Arabizing Judaization.

¹² Elbaz, “Exile from Within,” 206-212; Joel Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry: Culture, Politics, and the Formation of a Modern Diaspora* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹³ Beinin, *The Dispersion of Egyptian Jewry*, 207-240; Elbaz, “Exile from Within,” 214-220. Sami Shalom-Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010); Sami Shalom-Chetrit, *The Mizrahi Struggle in Israel: Between Oppression and Liberation, Identification and Alternative, 1948–2003*, (Am-Oved, 2004) [Hebrew].

¹⁴ Several works traced the historical Arabic or Levantine affinities of *Mizrahim* while other works emphasized on the other hand their pro-Zionist tendency. Compare, Nissim Kazzaz, *Jews in Iraq in the Twentieth Century* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1991) and Esther Meir-

discussion concerning the interaction between pre-migration histories and their following post-migration representations. Focusing on the case of Tangier, I suggest that the ethnic voice of this group of Moroccan Jews was generated throughout a process of the de-westernization of their westernized history. I propose that the motivations for de-westernization in fact formed shape vis-à-vis the general stereotype and self-representation of the *Mizrahim* and in particular Moroccans in Israel, with which they had disassociated. Through the self-ethnicization of their Moroccan past, rather than emphasizing their historical colonial past, the group formed their ethnic self-representing Moroccan narrative in a harmony-oriented way.

My principal theoretical point-of-departure is that ethnic boundaries are maintained through balanced processes of exclusion and incorporation during the interface with other ethnic groups in space. The association of individual “actors” with an ethnic group therefore depends on their ascription by others and their simultaneous self-ascription in the sense that “they use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction.”¹⁵

This study is based on six depth-interviews conducted among first-generation migrants during the years 2009-2010. All the informants immigrated to Israel beginning in the 1960s and became registered members of Mabat. My analytic approach is inspired by the narratives’ analysis approach, paying particular attention to the motivations of self-representing storytelling and to the means by which it is adjusted to the listener.¹⁶ In particular, I am influenced by the impression that the narratives of first-generation migrants include “ready-made” strategies that form new identities *vis-à-vis* the culture of the country of destination.¹⁷ Over the course of self-representation and personal narration, immigrants may often accentuate elements in their past while corresponding with stereotypes regarding their country of origins, common among the absorbing society.

In this context, I am myself as an Israeli outsider observer that represents the absorbing society, turn the interviewer-interviewee dynamics into an arena of ethnic identity formation. To base the informants’ self-narratives within a broader social framework, I cross-read them with earlier parallel expressions published on the circulars of Mabat circulated during the 1980s and a main publication published in 1990 marking the tenth anniversary of Mabat.

The focus of this study on westernized immigrants from one of the most westernized communities of Morocco will be productive in supporting my

Glitzenstein, *Between Baghdad and Ramat Gan: Iraqi Jews in Israel* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi Publishers, 2009) [Hebrew].

¹⁵ Thomas Fredrik Weybye Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969), 9-16.

¹⁶ Nilli Diengott, *Narrative: An Interdisciplinary Perspective* (Raanana: The Open University of Israel, 2010) [Hebrew], 95-100; For a broader discussion on narrative analysis see, Ulric Neisser and Robyn Fivush, *The Remembering Self: Construction and Accuracy in the Self-Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1994).

¹⁷ Brigitte Boenisch-Brednich, “Migration and Narration”, *Folklore. Electronic Journal of Folklore* 20 (2002): 64-77.

aims to trace the self-representations in ethnic-oriented narratives among first-generation migrants. The term “westernized” refers to individuals that oriented the center of their modernization aspirations and cultural affinities towards the colonial cultural sphere of pre-migration Moroccan society, rather than the Judeo-Arabic Judeo-Spanish or Zionist spheres,¹⁸ as shall be elaborated upon in the following paragraphs.

Jews in the Extra-Ethnic Colonial Spheres of Tangier

In 1912, a Spanish Protectorate was declared over a belt along the Moroccan northern coast (commonly referred to as Spanish-Morocco). The city of Tangier, located at the northwestern point of the northern coast on the strategic point of the Stairs of Gibraltar had been a center of interest for many Western powers, resulting in its declaration as an International Administration under the rule of a number of European powers. Tangier operated under this extraordinary political status during the period between 1923 and until Moroccan independence in 1956, with the exception of a phase between 1940 and 1945 during which Spain annexed the city to the bordering zone of Spanish Morocco.¹⁹

Tangier’s geopolitical history is manifested in several noticeable demographic changes. Tangier turned into a center of European attraction beginning in the mid-19th century. In 1912, some 80% of the European population in Morocco resided in the city.²⁰ The process of Europeanization reached its peak towards the 1950s. In 1927, the foreign citizens in Tangier’s International Administration represented some 17% of the city’s population. In 1952, no less than a quarter of the entire population was registered as foreigners, amongst which the vast majority were Europeans.²¹ Additionally, tourism reached its peak during the year 1952 as 100,000 tourists (mostly westerners) visited the city of Tangier, while its Muslim population did not exceed over 105,000 at the time.²² In the colonial context, the European population quickly acquired an inflated sense of power and control over the center of economic and cultural life.

Consequently, amongst the first indicators of modernization under colonial rule was the adaptation of European languages by locals. Whereas French, and to a smaller extent other European languages, gained great prestige as a *lingua franca*, it seems that for the city of Tangier, and especially among Judeo-Spanish

¹⁸ Yaron Tsur, “The Brief Career of Prosper Cohen: A Sectorial Analysis of the North African Jewish Leadership in the Early Years of Israeli Statehood”, *Sephardic Jewry and Mizrahim Jews: Studies in Contemporary Jewry* XXII (2007): 67-68.

¹⁹ Lotfi Sayahi, “Aqui Todo El Mundo Hablaba Espanol: History of the Spanish Language in Tangier”, *The Journal of North African Studies* 9 (2004): 37.

²⁰ Serels, *A History of the Jews of Tangier*, 82.

²¹ Sayahi, “Aqui Todo El Mundo Hablaba Espanol,” 37.

²² Serels, *A History of the Jews of Tangier*, 169.

speaking Jews, the modern standard Spanish language was most influential.²³ A local tour guide wrote in 1947, two years after the International Administration had resumed: “[...] in fact, beside the Arab part of town, Tangier is a Spanish city as for its language, its religion, its character and the widespread use of the Spanish Peseta [...]”²⁴ In addition, most of the foreigners were in fact Spaniards. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) tripled the number of Spanish speakers in the city as thousands of Republican expatriates arrived, where the number of Spaniards in Tangier rose from 11,703 in 1935 to 18,618 in 1941.²⁵

The common language spoken amongst the indigenous Jews of the region until the 19th century was an ancient local Judeo-Spanish dialect called “*Hakitia*”. Dissimilar to the French Zone of Morocco, the encounter of local Judeo-Spanish Jews in the Spanish Protectorate Zone and Tangier with the Spanish language was an unprecedented phenomenon in colonial history. For the first time, the language of the colonizers paralleled with great similarity to the language of the colonized indigenous population, giving a different meaning to the term westernization. Jews in the region shared a common linguistic background with the colonial elements, and their embracement of the colonial language and its by-product of cultural assets was smoother than ever.

In fact, many viewed it as the revival of their own ancient ethnic idiom and thus abandoned their previous way-of-speaking. In an article published in 1945, Benishu remarked that the “dialect or great parts of it, is no more than a mere memory, which continues to exist only among the older generation.” The Hakitic ethnic dialect was rapidly vanishing during the 1900s as it was undergoing a rapid and vast process of re-Hispanization.²⁶

Furthermore, in pre-colonial Morocco, the Arabic language was a critical economic component and gained “market value” among many Judeo-Spanish speaking Jews interacting with the extra-ethnic world. In the colonial context, socio-economic mobilization correlated with trends of westernization. The local middleclass began associating *Hakitia* and the extra-ethnic Arabic with the older indigenous economic order, including the generation born approximately around 1900s.²⁷

Many of Tangier’s middleclass Jewish youngsters developed different modernization aspirations. Among the new generation born during the colonial era, many acquired professions that included constant contact with the colonial sphere. Statistics on emigration to Israel during the 1960s illustrate the unique rates of expansion in the Northern region. The percentage of people holding white collar and free professions among immigrants from the region

²³ Sayahi, “Aqui Todo El Mundo Hablaba Espanol,” 42.

²⁴ Antonio J. Onieva, *Guía Turística De Marruecos : Plazas De Soberanía, Protectorado Español, Tánger* (Madrid: Artes Gráficas Arges, 1947), 317.

²⁵ Sayahi, “Aqui Todo El Mundo Hablaba Espanol,” 39.

²⁶ Yaakov Bentolila, “The Study of Moroccan Judeo-Spanish (Hakitia),” *El Presente: Studies in Sephardic Culture* 1 (2007): 160.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 162; Alegria Bendelac, *Mosaics: A Jewish Girl Grows in Tangiers* ([Jerusalem?] Center for Programming, Department of Development and Services, W.Z.O, 1987?), 10.

(28.6) was almost as double than the national Jewish Moroccan percentage (17.6) and higher than in other central metropolises such as Casablanca or Rabat. Similarly, the percentage of artisans, which represent traditional occupations of the region, was relatively smaller overall.²⁸

Another indication arises from the spatial perspective. Within this specific context of modernization, many Jews started to select their place of residence in the city according to the colonial-based socio-economic preferences and not necessarily according to ethnic-based trends. According to telephone directory of Tangier in 1959 Jews scattered around 170 streets out of the 434 streets listed in the directory. Along these streets, they obviously had constant contacts with their non-Jewish counterparts, who were in general Europeans or westernized locals.²⁹

An open letter published in the first communal bulletin ten years earlier protested against the degeneration in the field of communal education, denouncing the habits of local Jews to attend the extra-communal European schools during the Shabbat.³⁰ While the writer may mirror a common view among many local Jews, the subtext of this letter reflects and stems from a historical reality. For other Jews, those pupils who used to attend the non-Jewish schools, as well as their parents who sent them, it had become a common extra-communal and extra-ethnic way of life that often clashed with the ethnic one.

Jewish children from the local middleclass attended in great numbers the prestigious non-Jewish schools located in the city, while the local Jewish educational institutions deteriorated.³¹ The webpage “Tangerinos,” a virtual community of Tangier natives around the world, illustrates in retrospect the extent of the phenomenon. 274 out of 435 Jewish subscribers (learned by sorting the local Jewish names from the list) that mentioned their school, mentioned non-Jewish schools, mostly the “Lycée Français” schooling system (in its variety of names and levels of study: Régault, Perrier, Saint Aulaire, Berchet, Ibn Batouta).³²

Some 546 Europeans that stated their schools mentioned the same Lycée Français Schools. An additional number of 250 Muslims attended the same French educational institutions. While the figures do not provide accurate information, they indeed replicate the notion about crucial parts of the pre-migration typical daily life of many of the future migrants. For some

²⁸ Simha Aharoni, *Aliyat Yehudei Maroko: tahkir kelali le-yovel ha-ashor*, (Yerushalayim: ha-Sohnut ha-Yehudit, 1973), 36, 113.

²⁹ Telefonica de Tanger S.R., “Anuario Telefonico- Tanger,” 1959. (The calculation indicates only the numbers of local inhabitants who had telephone services and is based on typical Jewish names).

³⁰ Comunidad Israelita de Tanger, *Boletin Oficial* (Tanger: Editions Internationales, 1949), 13.

³¹ Tangier budget for the first half of 1955- American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), AR Geneva: Morocco-budget-finance 1947-1954, file C56.301, The AJDC Archives, Jerusalem, Israel; Comunidad Israelita de Tanger, *Boletin Oficial* (Tanger: Editions Internationales, 1952), 15.

³² http://tangers.free.fr/email/annuaire/annu_a.php, accessed on 1 May 2010.

youngsters at school age that would later become the core of migrants' society in 1980s Israel, school, where they had spend much of their daily life, was a field for constant inter-ethnic encounters.

In the context of colonization, extra-ethnic networks exposed growing number of Jews to Christian habits. Amongst local Jews, the Christmas holiday was marked in some way, mainly through their participation in parties at their work places or schools, which correlated with an emerging European-oriented culture of leisure. Alegria, a young girl from Tangier who attended the French Lyceum, reflects the tension between the ethnic and extra-ethnic sphere, in her memoir. Despite her father's objection, her mother used to buy her a small present at Christmas time and hand it to her at a special ceremony. She did so since she did not want her daughters to feel deprived in front of their non-Jewish classmates.³³

An indication to the level of exposure to this extra-ethnic European culture is clearly defined in a recording of Mabat's organized trip to Tangier in 1987. Sitting in a café at the heart of their former hometown, the former residents spontaneously recalled and sang along joyfully a Spanish Christmas song, which was stopped only because the rabbi had been noticed by them.³⁴

For many youngsters of the westernized middle class, extra-ethnic activities played a key role in shaping their identity despite standing in contrast to their immediate domestic-communal sphere. Alegria's words are again instructive:

“As we grew up and became more independent of family life, going out with friends of all circles, having dinner at their homes, meeting them for drinks or meals at one of the cafes or restaurants in town, we gradually gave in to the temptation of sharing a ham omelet or going to the beach on one of the nine days of Av...we usually kept quiet about our transgressions as we did not want to upset our parents.”³⁵

Thus, the transformation between the *Hakitia* and the modern Spanish language (as well as other European languages and in particular the French language) only symbolized the broader transformation from an ethnic-oriented way of life (i.e. Jewish life) towards an extra-ethnic westernized routine in the colonial spheres of Tangier. The transformation had a versatile quality and varied in its impact from one individual to the next. Many of the westernized Jews still experienced ethnic life, but it had become only one element of their complex modern identity and life style. Such manifestations are embedded in the informants' personal memories and are highlighted at certain points throughout their narratives.

³³ Alegria Bendelac, *Mosaics: A Jewish Girl Grows in Tangiers*, 43.

³⁴ “Todos llevan al niño”, “La virgen lavaba”, recordings of Mabat's organized trip, File: Y 05696-f, The National Library of Israel- Sound Archive, Jerusalem.

³⁵ Bendelac, *Mosaics: A Jewish Girl Grows in Tangiers*, 43.

The Judaization of Morocco

In its opening pages, Mabat's main publication, circulated in 1990, stated that Jews had been natural inhabitants of Morocco much earlier than Arabs had. A map of the Jewish communities of the Magreb preceding 750 BC, the date of Arab conquest, was attached to support this notion. The following essay, titled "Where did we come from?" further reinforced the tendency to Judaize the history of Morocco using the legend of Jewish settlement in the city of Tangier and its surroundings during the biblical period.³⁶

In response to my question regarding his memories from Jewish holidays in Tangier, Carlos³⁷ declared in an explaining intonation, "Look, Tangier was a city of Jews! During *Yom Kippur* all the cinemas and cafes were shut down!" Such reference to his history astonished me as several moments earlier when I had invoked a discussion on his school years he had mentioned his contact with non-Jewish friends at the Lycée Français on daily basis. In this context, he even had mentioned that the private lessons of Hebrew at home were the only practices really attaching him to his Jewish identity, stating "I have never been religious, never went to the synagogue and even did not know how to daven."³⁸

The irony in Carlos's words ought to be read in an accurate context. Questions regarding Jewish aspects in Tangier repeatedly invoked a tendency to narrate a collective story with an idealized sense of shared past. For instance, in response to a similar question about her way of celebrating the Jewish holidays as an adolescent in Tangier, Ruth replied: "I remember my grandmother giving charity to the needy on Purim." This memory was accompanied by an elucidation, where "This was our unique costume in Morocco; we the Jews of Tangier knew how to give..."³⁹

At first glance, it seems that the belief regarding the broad tendency of Moroccan Jews to adjust and merge their pre-migration *Mizrahi* history into the national ethos in order to assimilate seems to appear vividly in the self-described narratives of Tangier's Jews in Israel. Yet, in this case, in contrast to the general post-Zionist notion it seems that harmony-oriented ethnic self-representations are specifically designed with aims of silencing the modern colonial elements in one's biography and personal memory, rather than any historical Arab-oriented *Mizrahi* element.

Many visual elements in Mabat's publication may serve as an example. Next to the map of pre-Islamic Maghreb, the editors attached a portrait of the English

³⁶ Mabat Revista 1989-1990 (Vol.1, 8-9, 40), PPC, Bat Yam Israel.

³⁷ Unless a reference to a published source appears, all first names have been changed to pseudo-names for the sake of protecting the privacy of the informants.

³⁸ An interview held on 30 September 2009.

³⁹ An interview held on 18 November 2009.

port of Tangier during the 17th century.⁴⁰ In a number of images portraying the atmosphere of Jewish education in the region, a photograph of AIU Tangier School in 1950 appeared next to a portrait of Jewish philanthropist, Sir Montifiore, who had donated to the modern efficient schooling system in the city during 19th century.⁴¹ In the “visitor’s notes” proceeding Mabat’s trip to Tangier during the late 1980s, the attached photograph showed of a Jewish women mourning at the Tetuan’s (a city neighboring Tangier) Sephardic Jewish cemetery at the end of the first decade of the 20th century.⁴²

In this context, despite clear personal memories from the colonial spheres of Tangier, many tended to manifest the non-Arabic origins of their history in Spanish Morocco through unambiguous ethnic-oriented collective memories that often preceded their lifetime or referred to the period of their earlier childhood. The sense of Jewish collective history was often granted with a sense of personal history.

According to Monique, her mother initiated the first private Jewish school in Tangier. “I have a picture”, she explains.⁴³ In response to my question about her memories of Jewish immigrants in Tangier, she stated:

“Well, the community absorbed, out of its own choice, Jewish refugees from Europe during World War Two. All families in the city used to donate charity each week and during the holidays. We children used to fight over the privilege to give the needy his coin. In Morocco we learned how to give!”

Subsequent to this question, I further asked if people used to remit from abroad for that matter. She replied:

“Yes, the heads of the community used to write to wealthy people like Rothschild [the 19th century well-known Jewish philanthropist] ...but most of the time poor people from Morocco used to write to Tangier....they had heard that Tangier is an ‘el Dordo’...they came. This used to be an example for community management for the mankind [para toda la gente]!”⁴⁴

It seems that the tendency to focus on earlier elements in the history of Tangier contributed much to the ability of these individuals to refer to their pre-migration history in collective terms of idealized-nostalgic ethnic past rather than through their complex personal memories.

⁴⁰ Mabat Revista 1989-1990 (Vol.1, 6), PPC, Bat Yam Israel.

⁴¹ Ibid., 28.

⁴² Ibid., 99; See other example: Ibid., 6, 21-23, 25, 27, 34, 37.

⁴³ An interview held on 30 September 2009.

⁴⁴ An interview held on 30 September 2009.

The Value of Self-Representing Narratives

“There is no such a thing as an ‘*edab*’ (ethnicity, in the Jewish and mainly Israeli context) without mores and I’d like [Israeli] people to realize that!... You cannot tell one, ‘you have nothing’... it reminds me of what one lady [referring to Golda Meir] once said, ‘You used to live in caves.’ I have it recorded on tape and I will never ever erase it!...This is why I find it important to collect all this material...”⁴⁵

In these words of resentment, Alberto, a Tangier’s native who had acquired engineer training in Morocco and France and who had referred to his experience in the colonial sphere of Tangier, explained the reason for his intensive preoccupation in the commemoration of Spanish-Moroccan ethnic heritage in Israel.

Deliberately voiced in front of an Israeli interviewer conducting research destined to be published, the ethnicization trend ought to be reassessed in the context of self-representation in front of existing stereotypes. For instance, in continuation to the nostalgic recollection of Jewish habits in Tangier, Monique referred to wedding ceremonies in the following words:

“Weddings were not like here [Israel]...that was something; there was a *hiba* [decorum]! The *benna*⁴⁶ that we had in Tangier was respectful, wonderful... the first time I went to a wedding ceremony here in Israel, I said to myself ‘What is this? A circus?’ The bride had not arrived yet and people were already seated around the table eating like pigs...our matrimones took place in the synagogue. There was a choir and the bride used to be carried to the synagogue with a great deal of respect [...]”⁴⁷

Ruth’s idealized image of internal Jewish immigration to Tangier reflects another message she had intended to voice:

“ [...] many Ashkenazim came to Tangier during World War Two. We only knew they were Jews, that’s all. In Morocco I was not familiar with the term ‘Ashkenazim.’[...] Here on the other hand, you should know, I have seen harsh racism. For example my sister had to marry a guy of Russian origin and his parents, upon hearing that she was Sephardic, could not accept it ...eventually he had left my sister and married a ‘goya’...it is shocking! I have seen that in the land of Israel...incredible.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ An interview held on 14 June 2009.

⁴⁶ A traditional celebration among Afro-Asian cultures usually preceding the wedding ceremony.

⁴⁷ An interview held on 30 September 2009.

⁴⁸ An interview held on 18 November 2009.

In response to my question regarding his celebration of Jewish holidays, Carlos who had stated earlier that he had been detached from religious ethnic life, replied:

“Well, I used to celebrate them like everybody else. Listen! That was the most beautiful way to be Jewish. It was a simple and intelligent form of Judaism. Everybody observed the holidays, many went to the synagogue but still went the cinema right after, or take the car to go on a trip on Shabbat. I always say it used to be the most correct form of Judaism.”⁴⁹

His intonation, and the subtext of his words, illustrate that he had reconstructed the image of Tangier with aims of contrasting the binary approach towards Jewish religion common in Israeli orthodox-oriented religious concepts. The traditionalization of his past had a self-representing message - being conformist while staying attached to tradition symbolizes in his eyes his Moroccan identity in the forefront of the present image of Israeli Judaism.

In correlation, Clarice admitted in the context of discussion, that in Tangier she used to feel more French than Jewish and had felt alienated while attending a synagogue.⁵⁰ And yet, a question regarding her way of celebrating holidays later on evoked the following nostalgic representation, “During *Purim* we had special little cakes, one for each member of the family [to hand us *mishloah manoš*], today [in Israel] we really have nothing!...*Purim* here will not be like it was there...in Tangier everybody felt our holidays very strongly.”⁵¹

It seems that ethnic-oriented representations of their past, especially among westernized migrants, enfolded much more into them than mere references to their past. The self-representing quality of the narratives presented here aimed at self-acculturation into the Israeli national narrative from an upper-hand standpoint, rather than at challenging it altogether. Monique’s criticism about the tacky Israeli wedding mores was followed by the point that her exilic past ought to play a greater role in the foundation of Israeli renewing Jewish civilization.

“You know sometimes I think ‘Jerusalem’ was there, not here. Here **we** have lost all proportion...this is hurting me. I say Judaism is disappearing. All the beautiful things that were beautiful in our Torah [literally, the first five books of the bible, meaning the religious tradition], are vanishing. This is the reason that I tell you that I have plenty of disappointment...**we** are losing the beauty, what has unified **us** as Jews for generations. You should know that **we** are becoming

⁴⁹ An interview held on 30 September 2009.

⁵⁰ An interview held on 14 June 2009.

⁵¹ Ibid.

worse than the gentiles. **We** must change and never forget our past...”⁵²

Her choice to offer a collective moral lesson by referencing to the Moroccan past, especially by employing a first person plural tense (We), illustrates the value of her self-representation and gives meaning to its overstated Jewish orientation. Other immigrants expressed this idea differently:

“The Israeli society expects you to assimilate, be like everybody. It is impossible after so many years. After 2000 years we had been there, and besides, I am sorry, but it is an asset, not something we should renounce, or be ashamed of...the Israelis have a lot to learn from us [Tangier’s natives] about being a prosperous Jewish society.”⁵³

Through the emphasis on the collective ethnic elements in her Moroccan past, Ruth classified it as a valuable asset that the Israeli society foolishly overlooks. Mabat’s publication directly articulated this notion, where one of the few paragraphs in the Hebrew language in Mabat’s publication are the opening lines:

“The state of Israel has yet to crystallize a culture that can be identified as her own. Hence, this is the reason for the significance of our activity [in Mabat], which is to try to implant among the nation the notion that they ought to take into account our heritage, our history, our culture, our habits, our melodies, our *piyutim*, our songs etc. many first signs are testifying that it is possible, and that our level of efforts will be a critical factor, **of our ability to contribute to the Israeli culture...**”⁵⁴

The fact that these opening words appear in Hebrew (and do not repeat themselves in a Spanish translation) invokes the notion that the Mabat co-ethnic organization established at the midst of ethnic tension in Israel, was intended to facilitate the assimilation of Tangier’s immigrants into the nation state’s sense of cohesiveness through the ethnicization of their shared history. The idea that Israel needs the Jewish elements in Moroccan past in order to establish itself culturally is traced several times throughout Mabat’s publication. For instance, the publication states, “We cannot pretend that everything works well for our Israel.” In addition, the essay concludes by stating, “Israel needs its [Diasporas] assistance and its *aliyah*.”⁵⁵ The same idea was repeated five years earlier in a circulation that dealt with the *raison d’être* of Mabat organization.⁵⁶

⁵² An interview held on 30 September 2009.

⁵³ An interview held on 18 November 2009.

⁵⁴ Mabat Revista, 3.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 100, 104.

⁵⁶ A letter circulated among Mabat’s members, 19 September 1985, PPC, Bat Yam Israel.

The ethnic-oriented publication focuses on success stories among the community in Israel. Such are the artists David Sousana or Jacob Salama (later converted to Yavin) described as “The boy from the *juderia* (the Jewish quarter)” that had turned into a thriving industrialist (Mabat 1990, 85-86). The climax is expressed in an interview with the member of the *Knesset* Daniel Levy who had succeeded mostly in the mission to bring pride to the community in Israel. A facsimile containing a number of newspaper items visually confirms this notion.

In this context, the manifestation of pure stable Zionism may appear. In Monique’s reference to the refugee episode in Tangier she chose to contrast Tangier’s Jews with the Ashkenazi refugees fleeing to the city. According to Monique, after the war, most of the Ashkenazi guests in Tangier chose to go to Argentina or Canada, whereas Tangier’s Jews came to Israel with love and passion. “They came out of the fact that we all used to read each year in the *Haggadah*: ‘Next year in Jerusalem,’ Jerusalem was our dream,” she concludes.⁵⁷ This statement obviously does not correlate with her own complex choice to immigrate to Israel during the 1970s after few years in Spain and France, nor does it explain the broader history of a community that did not begin to vanish until the 1960s,⁵⁸ where many of its residents chose western destinations. It simply serves as a rhetoric tool of self-representation in certain context of narration oriented towards the harmonic narrative.

Accentuated Sephardicness and the *Mizrahi* Revival

The revival of the Sephardic ethnic component should be understood within the context of similar self-representing narratives that are made to incorporate the narrators into the harmony-oriented discourse. In an attempt to contrast the emerging image of Moroccans, “their own” contextualized Moroccan habits were brought to life.

The celebration of the annual ritual of the Mimouna, one of the symbols of *Mizrahi* cultural revival in Israel, led to an internal reaction among many of Tangier’s Jews across the country. The main initiator of Mabat, Dr. Avital, testified overtly in Mabat’s main publication that her initiative to found the *émigré* organization took shape vis-à-vis the costumes of celebrating mass Mimouna by the mob of *Mizrahim*. The “dissatisfaction” with the emerging stereotype of Moroccans, as well as its counter self-representation, invoked the initiative among Mabat’s initiators.⁵⁹ A more constructive example is the declaration on Mabat’s circular from 1988, depicting its *raison d’être*:

⁵⁷ An interview held on 30 September 2009.

⁵⁸ During 1972 some 4,000 Jews still documented as Tangier’s residents (See, Aharoni, 55, 102).

⁵⁹ Mabat Revista, 105; A similar testimony is found in a letter distributed among Mabat’s members on 25 May 1988, PPC, Bat Yam, Israel.

“We certainly have the obligation to increase the awareness of the Israeli public to the fact that not all Jews of Moroccan origins are of a *Maghrebi* [North African] culture...”⁶⁰

The celebration of the ritual in pre-migration Morocco had little significance for the majority of local Jews, and even more so among the westernized sector. In post-migration Israel, such symbols played a new role of in shaping migrants’ collective identity and became imperative tools in the self-representation of their absolute history. David’s reference to the costumes strongly enforces this idea. David told me about the first time he initiated a Mimouna celebration in Israel during the 1980s:

“The costume was pretty common in Israel and my friends asked me, ‘Well you’re Moroccan why don’t you celebrate it?’ I reply: that is a Mimona?, I will show you what the real Mimona is.... I told them it is not what you see here, the hopping monkeys in the parks...our Mimona is much more profound.”⁶¹

In this context, the Hakitic pronunciation of the word “Mimona,” rather than *Mimouna*, was a linguistic nuance that gained new meaning per se in Israel. An attempt to refer to the costume with the common non-Hakitic pronunciation “Mimona,” usually resulted in a decisive correction.

As mentioned above, the modern Spanish mother tongue of Tangier’s natives was the result of a vast process of linguistic transformation between the ethnic dialect of the *Hakitia*, and the extra-ethnic colonial Spanish beginning in the 1800s. The *Hakitia*, that had been defined by philologists as a “dead” dialect during the mid-1900s, was later revived. For example, Mabat mentioned the preservation of *Hakitia* as one of the four main fundamental goals of the organization.⁶² Mabat’s members were encouraged to recollect Hakitic expressions that they had presumably grasped in Morocco. For example, as part of a traditional recipe contest organized by Mabat, participants were asked to narrate anecdotes referring to the dish and to recall the occasions in which the dish was eaten, all while encouraged to use Hakitic terminology rather than the anticipated authentic Spanish phrasing.⁶³

Quite surprisingly, the section dedicated to *Hakitia* on Mabat’s publication began with a statement in the Hebrew language. The chair of the Sephardic association *Sefarad* stressed that despite the geographic distance, the Jews of Spanish Morocco have a lot in common with the Judeo-Spanish communities of the Mediterranean Basin.⁶⁴

Other forums that enabled self-representation with an academic aura were also substantially employing the word *Hakitia*. For example, the “Gaon Center for

⁶⁰ Ibid.,5.

⁶¹ An interview held on 13 February 2010.

⁶² See footnote 9.

⁶³ A letter circulated during 1990 [day and month are not stated], PPC, Bat Yam, Israel.

⁶⁴ Mabat Revista, 67.

the Culture of Ladino” organized folkloric events with Spanish-Moroccan orientations, which were titled “Hakitia Evenings.” The word *Hakitia* further symbolized non-academic events organized by the migrants themselves aiming at the ethnicization of their shared memory. Such was the 2008 “Journée Hakitia,” French for “Hakitia day,” organized in Ashdod by Soly Anidjar who was born and raised in Casablanca but originated in the town of Larache next to Tangier.⁶⁵

Particularly remarkable in this context is the fact that some of the participants in this Hispanic-oriented discourse as a result of internal migration had spent most of their lifetime in the Arabic-oriented regions of Morocco, which had become even much more so after Morocco declared independence in 1956. They saw an advantage in cultivating their Tangerine or Spanish-Moroccan heritage, which back in Morocco was strictly confined to their domestic or narrowed Jewish communal milieu.

This self-representation perhaps motivated many to rethink the harsh denouncing of the dialect and other costumes by their parents and themselves in colonial Morocco. They began to grasp *Hakitia*, which became a semantic emblem, as their own cultural asset.⁶⁶ The process took place across the Spanish-Moroccan (mainly Jews originated in Tangier, Tetuan and Larache) émigré communities in the world,⁶⁷ and ought to be analyzed within different frameworks of discussion that also take into account the new mentality of networking in the process of ethnic-oriented self-representation.

Yet it seems that the overstated reference to Hakitic origins had exceptional meaning in the Israeli context. Monique, for example emphasized her non-Arabic origins. She referred to the words used by the official from the Ministry of Absorption in Israel, who offered her an apartment:

“He gave me [an apartment] amongst all the Moroccans that spoke Arabic... I went to protest. I said, ‘Why do you give me [an apartment] there?’ The official replied, [aberrantly imitating an Israeli accent] ‘We gave you with your people, you are a Moroccan? No?!’ ...I said, ‘Listen, I don’t know Arabic, neither did my forefathers

⁶⁵ <http://dafina.net/forums/read.php?50,234289>, accessed on 11/11/10.

⁶⁶ Bentolila, “The Study of Moroccan Judeo-Spanish (*Hakitia*)”, 162.

⁶⁷ Several works concerning the dialect were composed by first-generation migrants following their migration. See for instance: Alegria Bendelac., *Los Nuestros: Sejina, Letuarios, Jaquetia Y Fraja: Un Retrato De Los Sefaradies Del Norte De Marruecos a Traves De Sus Recuerdos Y De Su Lengua* (1860-1984) (New York P. Lang, 1987); Amram Benarrosch, *Palabras De Allà : Un Sabor De Haketia: En Memoria De Rachel* (Rehovot: Impr. Ya’il, 2004); Gladys Benaim Bunan, *Tu Boca En Los Cielos: El Judeo-Español De Los Nuestros - La Haketia De Menashé Y Alfonso* (Beverly Hills: Laredo Publishing, 2007); Esther Cohen Aflalo, *Lo Que Yo Sé* (Madrid: E. Cohen Aflalo, 2000); Isaac Benharroch B., *Diccionario De Haquetia: Guía Escencial Del Dialecto De Los Judíos Del Norte De Marruecos* (Caracas: Ediciones Asociación Israelita de Venezuela: Centro de Estudios Sefaradies de Caracas, 2004). Additionally, Prof. Yaakov Bentolila, a first-generation immigrant from Tetuan in Israel, dedicated most of his academic career to the study of the dialect. Other Israeli scholars of Spanish-Moroccan origins who focus in their research on the dialect of *Hakitia* are Nina Pinto-Abecassis and Isaac Guerson.

...we never spoke Arabic in Tangier. Our language was completely different, Hakitia...”⁶⁸

Hakitia was only an emblem in the process of the group’s ethnic revival, which included other manifestation supported by academic fields such as linguistics, folklore, musicology and historiography.⁶⁹ Ruth’s reference to my question regarding her associations with non-Jewish Spaniards in Tangier is another instructive example to the ethnicization of colonial history within the self-representing ethnic narratives. I asked: “How did they [your Spanish friends] relate to the fact that you were Jewish?” Her answer was: “With no special significance...we were just like them, nothing different. Now that I’m here [in Israel] I have been studying a lot about the *Anusim* [*Conversos*] and the Expulsion from Spain...I now think that they were the decedents of *Anusim*...”⁷⁰ Ruth, who had been very involved at the non-Jewish social milieu of Tangier decided to depict her natural bond with Modern European Spaniards through a narrative that gave ethnic meaning to her extra-ethnic affiliations, implying that it was an outcome of post-migration retrospectives.

Alberto narrated angrily how he had received a letter from the *merkaʕ klitah* (absorption center for new immigrants) in which he was informed that he would have to leave regardless of the fact he had no other place to go to at the time. “That was on the day of *Tishab be-Av*,”⁷¹ he said, “I was outraged, I was expelled from Spain on the day of *Tishab be-Av* [referring to the 1492 incidents] and now on the same historical date, I am being expelled again in the Land of Israel?!”

I should be clear that it is not my intention to question the historical authenticity of such cultural differences between the Judeo-Spanish and Judeo-Arabic populations of Morocco. In fact, such an attempt would be historically misleading. The Hakitic term “forasteros” referring to Arabic-speaking Jews in Morocco (literally meaning strangers), should reflect the notion of a well-fixed pre-migration self-perception as Sephardic.⁷² Yet, it seems that by emphasizing

⁶⁸ An interview held on 30 September 2009.

⁶⁹ Reflected clearly in Mabat’s publication and circulars. See for example, *Mabat Revista*, 43-72, 89-95, see also the musicological field work conducted among Mabat’s members, Weich-Shahak Susana, *Judeo-Spanish Moroccan Songs for the Life Cycle* [Sound Recording] (Jerusalem: Jewish Music Research Centre, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989). See also the publication proceeding Mabat’s exhibition, *Jewish Communities in Spanish Morocco* (Tel Aviv Beth Hatefutsoth, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, 1983), 1-44.

⁷⁰ An interview held on 18 November 2009.

⁷¹ A annual mourning day in the Jewish calendar.

⁷² Susan Gilson-Miller, “Kippur on the Amazon: Jewish Emigration from Northern Morocco in the Late Nineteenth Century “ in *Sephardic and Middle Eastern Jewries: History and Culture in the Modern Era*, by Harvey E. Goldberg (Bloomington Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 192. Simon Levy, “José Benoliel et Abraham I. Laredo: érudits Tangérois,” in *Tanger Espace Imaginaire* (Rabat et Tetouan: Université Mohammed V, Rabat et l’Ecole supérieure roi Fahd de traduction de Tanger, Université Abdelmalek Es-Saadi, Tetouan, 1992), 77-79.

the Hispanic ethnic origins these historical differences gained new self-representing meanings. Perhaps it was aimed at clarifying to the Israeli listener in a relatively harmony-oriented way that their European-oriented Moroccanness does not overlap with the “artificial” Europeanization of other *Mizrahi* francophone Jews, but rather is supported by their own “authentic” ethnic heredity. In this context, is not surprising that the circulars and publication of Mabat used the Spanish language exclusively rather than the prestigious French language, common among many of the immigrants, graduates of the French schooling system and the former citizens of a Cosmopolitan city as Tangier.

Concluding Discussion

Clearly, the ethnic voice of Tangier’s natives in Israel should further pound the “dead horse” representing the utopic phantasm depicting a melting pot society in Israel. It may also support the common notion regarding the uneven power relations between various groups of *Mizrahim* and the Ashkenazi-dominated power elite in Israel including its manifestations in the ethnic-based “traditional” uprising.

Yet, as it appears clearly throughout the research, amongst such voices of ethnic revivals, many contribute to the growing criticism about the overbearing and generalizing post-Zionist approach towards their justification; An approach that often reduced ethnic voices of Moroccans to the level of a broad socio-cultural struggle between the European-oriented Ashkenazi-dominated national power elite and the marginalized non-European components of Israeli society.

Whenever there arose an opportunity to discuss their ethnic past, many of Tangier’s natives in Israel tended to narrate their narrative in collective terms, aimed at shaping their ethnic self-representation in the context of the ethnic tension in Israel. By so doing, many westernized Tangier’s natives were in fact de- and re-constructed major parts of their authentic complex memory from Colonial Morocco. Nevertheless, the process of de-westernization did not correspond with the trend of the “official” self-re-Orientalization process that have taken shape in Israel since the 1970s, and has been overemphasized in the public and academic discourse, but in fact quite the contrary.

Natives Jews of Tangier attempted to exclude themselves from this typecast of *Mizrahi* ethnic revival. Only through the means of ethnic-based self-reconstructed representation, the Jews of Tangier in Israel could truly revitalize their unique self-representation. Merely via ethnic-oriented narratives, they could contest the general depiction and self-representation of Moroccans in Israel with an aura of “their own” collective ethnic Moroccan identity. The process of their Sephardic revival, including the linguistic recovery of the *Hakitia*, therefore ought to be read in this context of new identities formation, which was more oriented towards harmonic cohesiveness in the multiethnic social context in Israel.

The focus on the westernized elements amongst Tangier's natives is only a reminder to the numerous particular histories within the large group agglomerated under the term '*Mizrahim*'.⁷³ In closing, I have no intention to dismiss any manifestations of Arab affinities among the population of Jews originated in Arab countries, nor do I undermine the fact that many amongst them employed narrative strategies of re-Arabization in the context of their ethnic identification. I rather suggest employing extra sensitivity to such elements that accurately reflects their long-terms history as more complex, variable and uniquely contextual. In this context, further attention to patterns of social gathering among immigrants in the new country of destination should be part of the analysis.

Subsequently, post-migration self-representations of the past should not be (dis)regarded by historians only in terms of historical erroneousness or authenticity. Only through long-run spectacles, Moroccans alongside with other groups of immigrants agglomerated under the term '*Mizrahim*' shall truly appear as active historical agents in the history of Israel, rather than pawns in a generalized story of unequal power-relations between two civilizations.

Aviad Moreno is a PhD student in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies, at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (Beer-Sheva, Israel). The author is currently writing a dissertation about the role of migration networks in the emigration process of Spanish Moroccan Jews to Israel, Europe and Latin America during the 20th century.

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⁷³ The cases of the immigrants' communities from the neighboring Spanish-Moroccan cities would be the first to resemble the examined case.