

Moroccan Jewish Emigration to Latin America: The State of Research and New Directions*

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These days, only a few thousand Jewish inhabitants remain in Morocco, which had been the largest center of Jewish life in the Arab World in 1948 when it was home to more than a quarter-million Jews. This historical transition took shape within the context of the departure of Jews from Arab and Muslim countries during the latter half of the twentieth century.¹ While most Moroccan Jews relocated to Israel at the time, other Moroccan Jews chose different destinations in Europe and the Americas.² In Latin America, a preferred immigration destination among Moroccan Jews already in the nineteenth century, they would become a prominent political and cultural element within the local Jewish societies, mostly in Venezuela, northern Brazil and Argentina.³

The scholarship encompassing these Moroccan migrations to Latin America focuses largely on the early developments—in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century—and they may be divided into two main categories: a) Studies that highlight the *push factors* generated in Morocco prior to emigration. These were conducted by and large by historians specializing in the history of the Spanish-dominated zone in northern Morocco,

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1. Stanley A. Urman, “The United Nations and Middle East Refugees: The Differing Treatment of Palestinians and Jews,” Ph.D. Dissertation, The State University of New Jersey, 2010, 47.

2. Michael M. Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 187. According to a quantitative survey undertaken by the Jewish Agency, some seventy percent of the Jewish population in Morocco made Aliyah (immigrated to Israel) from 1961 to 1971, in light of an ambitious Israeli-directed operation to evacuate them (Simha Aharoni, *The Aliyah of Moroccan Jews, 1961-1972* (Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency, Immigration & Absorption Department, 1973) [Hebrew], 9.

3. This emigration to Latin America began as early as 1810, when a few Moroccan Jews began to work as regatões (Amazonian river peddlers), traveling between towns and cities across the Brazilian Amazon (Samuel Benchimol, *Eretz Amazonia: os Judeusna Amazônia* (Manaus: Valer, 1998), 79-104). See also: Margalit Bejarano, “The Sephardic Communities of Latin America: A Puzzle of Sub-Ethnic Fragments,” in *Contemporary Sephardic Identity in the Americas: An Interdisciplinary Approach* ed. Margalit Bejarano and Edna Aizenberg (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012), 26-29; Mario Eduardo Cohen, “Los Que Abrieron las Puertas: los Judeo-Sefardies Arribados a América Latina en Siglo XIX,” *Maguén-Escudo* 133 (October-December) (2004), 16.

the wellspring of these particular Jewish emigrations.⁴ b) Studies focusing on the *absorption* of Moroccan Jews in Latin American countries. The latter came about mostly in light of growing scholarly and local-popular interest in the singular identity of Judeo-Moroccan émigrés in Latin America and the history of their resettlement in that region, mostly in their communities in Argentina,⁵ northern Brazil,⁶ Venezuela⁷ and Peru.⁸

The emergence of the first group of studies may be explained against the backdrop of an evolving scholarly concern regarding the historical links between Spain and North Africa, already from the late nineteenth century but more apparently throughout the Spanish Protectorate in Morocco (1912-1956).⁹ This interest encompassed a curiosity about the Spanish-speaking Jewish communities in that region and their relationship with the Hispanic world.¹⁰ However, a stronger basis for the formation of both types of studies

4. A prime example of the emergence of this group includes the several works by Juan Bautista Vilar Ramírez and Sara Leibovici. see e.g.: Juan Bautista Vilar, "Jewish Moroccan Immigration to Latin America," *The Alliance Review* 25 (45) (1973): 3-22; Sarah Leibovici, "La emigración a América de los sefardíes de Marruecos," in *Díaspóra Sefardí*, ed. María Antonia Bel Bravo (Madrid: Mapfre, 1992), 241-249.

5. See e.g. Victor A. Mirelman, "Sephardic Immigration to Argentina Prior to the Nazi Period," in *The Jewish Presence in Latin America* eds. Gilbert W. Merkx and Judith Laikin Elkin (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1987); Isaac Rubel (ed.), *Presencia Sefaradí en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Centro Educativo Sefaradí, 1992), 43-54; Diana Lia Epstein, "Los Judeo-Marroquíes en Buenos Aires: Pautas Matrimoniales 1875-1910," *E.I.A.L* 6 (1995): 113-133.

6. See e.g. Abraham Ramiro Bentes, *Os Sefardim e a Hakitia* (Rio de Janeiro A.R. Bentes, 1981); Benchimol, *Eretz Amazonia*, 79-104; Abraham Ramiro Bentes, *Das Ruínas de Jerusalem a Verdejante Amazonia: Formacao da 1a. Comunidade Israelita Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Bloch, 1987); Egon and Frieda Wolff, *Documentos-Contatos Comerciais, Século XIX*. Vol. 1: A-K (Rio de Janeiro: Do Instituto Histórico e Geográfico Brasileiro, 1988), 267-277; Reginaldo Jonas Heller, *Judeus do Eldorado: Reinventando uma Identidade em Plena Amazônia; a Imigração dos Judeus Marroquinos e do Norte da África para o Brasil (Pará e Amazonas) durante o Século XIX* (Rio de Janeiro: E-Papers, 2010); Avraam Amzalak, "La Presencia Djudia en la Amazonia," *Aki Yerushalaim: Revista de la Emision en Djudeo-Espanyol de Kol Israel - La Boz de Israel* 26-27 (December, 1985), 19-22; Haim Avni, *Judíos en América, cinco siglos de Historia* (Mapfre: Madrid 1992), 102-106.

7. See for example Jacob Carciente, *Presencia Sefardí en la Historia de Venezuela* (Caracas: AIV; CESC, 1997); Leon Benioel, "Présence Judéo-Marocaine au Venezuela," in *Mosaïques de Notre Mémoire, les Judéo-espagnols du Maroc*, éd. Sarah Leibovici (Paris: U.I.S.F., Centre Don Isaac Abravanel, 1982).

8. Ariel Segal, *Jews of the Amazon: Self-Exile in Earthly Paradise* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1999).

9. See e.g.: Rodolfo Gil Benumeña, *Marruecos andaluz* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Vicesecretaría de Educación Popular, 1942).

10. The aforementioned studies by Juan Bautista Vilar are only a segment of his wider scholarship encompassing these links. His outstanding early-career works include: *Emigración española en Argelia (1830-1900). Colonización hispánica de la Argelia francesa*, published in 1975; and his book *Tetuan: en el Resurgimiento Judío Contemporáneo (1850-1870)* from 1985, which included chapters on the emigration of Jews from Tetuan to Latin America. Another article that focused on emigration within a broader discussion about the history of Jews in this region is: Juan Bautista Vilar, "Evolución de la Población Israelita en Marruecos Español (1940-1955)," *Estudios Sefardíes* 1 (1978): 117-119. Earlier=

came about against the backdrop of the late stages of the mass emigration of Jews from Arab-Muslim lands, with the birth and renewal of communal infrastructures in their destination countries. Some of these infrastructures were world organizations including, primarily: the American Sephardi Federation, established in 1973, and the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries (WOJAC), founded in 1975.¹¹ In Latin America, this transition was symbolically marked by the founding, in 1973, of La Federación Sefaradí Latino americana (FeSeLa).¹²

These shifts began to set the base, beginning in the early 1980s, for the establishment of a few local research centers and designated journals. Most prominently, in the specific Judeo-Moroccan context is El Centro de Estudios Sefaradés de Caracas (CESC; The Center for Sephardic Studies in Caracas) founded in 1982, primarily by Jews from Tangier and the ex-Spanish Protectorate in Morocco. Since its establishment, the CESC has issued the *Revista Maguén-Escudo* (the Maguén-Escudo Review) in association with the Asociación Israelita de Venezuela (AIV; The Israelite Association of Venezuela), the principal association of Sephardic communities in Venezuela, also dominated by local Moroccan Jews.¹³ The AIV and CESC became a major source of publications about emigration and assimilation, mostly via *Maguén-Escudo* that had already started publishing in 1970.¹⁴ A less abundant source was the Centro de Investigación y Difusión de la Cultura Sefardi in

=characteristics of this curiosity are marked by the works of M. L. Ortega, *Los hebreos en Marruecos* (Madrid: Compañía Ibero-Americana de Publicaciones, 1919); Manuel Alvar's lengthy study from 1949 to 1959 of Jewries of Tetuan, Larache and Melilla; and fieldwork in 1962-1963 across the entire region, undertaken by Armistad, Silverman and Katz (see: Joseph H. Silverman Samuel G. Armistead, Oro Anahory Librowicz, and Israel J. Katz, *Romances Judeo-Españoles de Tánger (Recogidos por Zarita Nahón)* (Madrid: Cátedra-Seminario Menéndez Pidal, 1977), 17-22.

11. Within WOJAC, the population of Jews from Morocco was represented by Shaul Ben-Simhon, a deputy of the Association of Moroccan Immigrant. See: Esther Meir-Glitzstein, *Between Baghdad and Ramat-Gan: Iraqi Jews in Israel* (Jerusalem: Yad Ben Zvi Publishers, 2009) [Hebrew], 355.

12. About this organization, see: Margalit Bejarano, "Transnational Sephardi Zionism: Salomón Garazi and the Cuban Chapter of FESELA in Miami" in *Judaica Latinoamericana*, Silvia Schenkolewski-Kroll, Florinda Goldberg, Yosef Rosen (eds.), vol. VIII (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, forthcoming).

13. Aviad Moreno, "Maguen-Escudo," in *Encyclopedia of Jews in the Islamic World*, ed. Norman A. Stillman (Brill Online, 2016).

14. See i.e. Juan Bautista Villar, "Emigrantes Judeo-Marroquíes en América durante el Siglo XIX," *Maguén-Escudo* 48 (July-September) (1983): 21-24; Sarah Leibovici, "Algunos Apuntes para la Historia de la Colonia Tetuaní de Caracas" *Maguén-Escudo* 50 (January-March) (1984): 3-11; María Liberman, "Judíos en la Amazonia Brasileña (siglos XIX-XX)," *Maguen-Escudo* 81 (1991): 19-25; Abraham Botbol Hachuel, "Los Sefaradés y Su Aporte al Desarrollo Económico y Cultural de Venezuela," *Maguén-Escudo* 85 (October-December) (1992): 50-57; The AIV and CESC also issued several autobiographical memoirs by Moroccan immigrants that encompassed their emigrations. They include: Abraham Botbol Hachuel, *Huellas de un Peregrino* (Caracas: Centro de Estudios Sefaradés de Caracas, 1994); Sara Fereres de Moryussef, *Larache: Crónica Nostálgica* (Caracas: AIV, 1996); Alegria Bendayan de Bendelac, *Voces Jaquetiescas* (Caracas: AIV, 1989); Moisés Garzón Serfaty, *Tetuán Relato de una nostalgia* (Caracas: AIV, 2008).

Buenos Aires that issued *Revista Sefárdica*.¹⁵ In Brazil, given the lack of a well-built communal infrastructure that was dominated by Moroccans at the time, the first comprehensive works on this topic saw the light mostly with the initiative of pro-active Moroccan descendants.¹⁶

The tendency to explore this emigration as part of “communal revitalization” projects persisted through the late twentieth century and up to today. For instance, Jacobo I. Garzón, the president of the Jewish community of Madrid (from 2001 to 2008), a Moroccan immigrant himself, dedicated part of his recent book *Los Judíos Hispano-Marroquíes (1492-1973)*, issued in 2008, to the group’s emigration to Latin America.¹⁷ *Maguén-Escudo* and *Sefárdica* also dealt with this topic not long ago.¹⁸ The topic also triggered the curiosity of students, descendants of Moroccan immigrants to Latin America, who would investigate historical cases related to this migration in their doctoral research.¹⁹

Finally, the attention to the resettlement of Moroccan Jews in Latin America should not be seen as the exclusive asset of Moroccan communities. Editors of several academic Journals, mostly for Latin American studies, and of a few books about Sephardic Jewish history, allocated some space for studies concerning the emigration of Moroccan-Jews to Latin America; they were probably seen by them as an “appealing” anecdote within their series or journal that focus on Latin American histories or about Sephardic Jews.²⁰

In the 1970s, in light of the 1971 local “Black Panthers” ethnic protest, the scholarly focus on the Jewish populations from Arab lands, and mostly on their

15. Juan Bautista Vilar, “La Emigración Judeo-Marroquí a la América Latina en la Fase Pre-Estadística (1850-1880),” *Sefárdica* 11 (1996): 39-44; Mario Eduardo Cohen, “Los que abrieron las puertas: los judíos marroquíes en América Latina (siglo XIX),” *Sefárdica* 16 (2006): 143-153.

16. See e.g. studies mentioned in footnote 6.

17. Jacobo Israel Garzón, *Los Judíos Hispano-Marroquíes (1492-1973)* (Madrid: Hebraica Ediciones, 2008).

18. Mario Eduardo Cohen, 2004; Jacobo Israel Garzón, “Destinos de Emigración de Los Judíos de Norte de Marruecos entre 1700 y 1956,” *Maguén-Escudo* 136 (July-September) (2005), 34.

19. Amelia Bemerguy, *Imagens da Ilusão: Judeus Marroquinos em Busca de uma Terra sem Males, Pará 1870-1910*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Pontifícia Universidade de Católica de São Paulo, 1998; Aviad Moreno, *Ethnicity in Motion: Social Networks in the Emigration of Jews from Northern Morocco to Venezuela and Israel, 1860-2010*, Ph.D. Dissertation: The department of Middle Eastern Studies, Ben-Gurion University, 2015; Angy Cohen, *Remembering Sepharad: Life Stories of Sephardi Jews from Northern Morocco*, Ph.D. Dissertation, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid and Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in progress.

20. Examples are enclosed within the following citations: Diana Lia Epstein, “Judíos de Marruecos en Argentina: La Inmigración Política (1955-1970)” *Estudios Migratorios Latinoamericanos* 59 (2006): 69-97; Diana Lia Epstein, “Los Judeo-Marroquíes en Buenos Aires: Pautas Matrimoniales 1875-1910.” *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe [E.I.A.L.]* 6 (1995): 113-133; Maria Liberman, “Moroccan Jews in the Brazilian Amazon,” in *Recherches sur la Culture des Juifs d’Afrique du Nord*, ed. Issachar Ben-Ami (Jerusalem: Communauté Israelite Nord-Africaine, 1991), 105-112; Mirelman, “Sephardic Immigration to Argentina,” 1987.

resettlement in Israel, witnessed a major change in Israel's academic arena.²¹ The "Moroccans," as Jewish immigrants from Morocco were commonly referred to, evoked much interest among local scholars and intellectuals, due to their view as a symbol of the erupting ethnic clashes between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews in Israel.²² However, the extensive focus among scholarly work on this local conflict, as well as on its roots within the broader Arab-Israeli conflict, seems to have led to the neglect of some earlier and parallel developments outside of Israel: among Moroccan, as well as among other Sephardic populations in Latin America.²³ Thus far, Margalit Bejarano is one of the only Israeli scholars, whose research encompasses a relatively large focus on Moroccan Jews in the Americas.²⁴ Her extensive scholarship on Sephardic Jews in Latin America and the Caribbean included several studies in Spanish and English; however, she made only a few references to the Moroccan Jewries in that region in her Hebrew publications.²⁵ Prominent scholars who dealt with the broader North African Jewish migration have neglected this topic altogether.²⁶

Not only studies in the Hebrew Language are conspicuously lacking but also writing on the topic in Arabic. A unique example is 'Abd al-'Aziz Shahbar,'s book *Dirāsāt Hawla Yahūd Tiṭāwīn* (Studies regarding the Jews of Tetuan), in which he dedicated a section to emigration of the Jews from Tetuan from the nineteenth century until 1948.²⁷

21. This transition was marked by the emergence of a new generation of critical sociologists and anthropologists (Yaron Tsur, "The Israeli Historiography and the Ethnic Problem," in *Making Israel*, ed. Benny Morris (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 236-238).

22. *Ibid.*, 240; Yaron Tsur, "Carnival Fears: Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel," *Journal of Israeli History* 18 (1997): 93-103.

23. For instance, *Pe'amim*, a quarterly journal in the Hebrew language published by the Ben Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East. It dealt extensively with North African Jewries; however its references to Moroccan communities in Latin America are still conspicuously lacking.

24. Her most recent publication that overviews this topic is: Bejarano, "The Sephardic Communities of Latin America," esp. pages 26-29. The recent (2012) translation of Samuel Benchimol's book *Eretz Amazonia: os Judeusna Amazônia* into Hebrew is the only example of an extensive work on Moroccan Jews in Latin America in the Hebrew Language (Shmuel Ben-Shimol, *Eretz Amazonia: Masa'amshel ha-Yehudim mi-Sefarad u-mi-Portugal le-Marokove-la-Amazonia ha-Brazilayit* (Eilat: Lashon Tsaha, Biet Yetsirahla'Or, 2012).

25. Some references appear in: Margalit Bejarano, *Toldot ha-Kehila ha-Sefaradit be-Buenos Ayres ba-Shanim 1930-1945* be-Tfutsot ha-Gola 19 (85-86) (1978): 124-142; "Mekomahshel ha-Kehila ha-Sefaraditba-Yeshuv ha-Yehudi be-Amerika ha-Latinit: ha-Dugma'otshel Havana ve-Buenos Ayres," *Pe'amim* 76 (1998): 30-51.

26. Michael Laskier discussed these early migrations in his study regarding the AIU schools (Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco 1862-1962* (Albany: New York University Press, 1982), 311-312). Nevertheless, he neglected this topic in his studies about the later emigration of Moroccan Jews in the mid-twentieth century.

27. 'Abd al-'Aziz Shahbar, *Dirāsāt Hawla Yahūd Tiṭāwīn* (Tiṭāwīn: Jam'iyat Tiṭāwīn Asmīr, 2000), 48-91.

Most scholars, who focus on the emigration of Moroccan Jews to Latin America are not affiliated with the “hardcore” of MENA studies; they are by large Luso-Hispanophone, specializing in Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula, who study their relations with North Africa and the Islamic World.²⁸ MENA and Islamic studies institutions that allocated space for studies on the emigration of Jews to Latin America were and still are, by and large, Hispanic-oriented and their publications appear in Spanish. This specific scholarship is well anchored in the aforementioned broader interest in Hispano-Arab relations.²⁹ Some attempts to include this Moroccan migration within wide-ranging studies on Middle Eastern migrations were undertaken recently in two books edited by Raanan Rein, but again within the scope of Latin American studies.³⁰

On the one hand, the vast field of research into contemporary Moroccan migrations tended to neglect this historical odyssey, which may in fact be observed as the preliminary, nineteenth century, base of these contemporary migrations.³¹ On the other hand, perhaps in adherence to the disciplinary borders of Latin American studies, references to emigration against the backdrop of Israeli and Moroccan statehoods in the mid-twentieth century are conspicuously lacking.³² Only very recently have we seen a budding

28. Within this academic landscape, a rather unique scholar is Susan Gilson Miller, an American historian specializing in North African History, who published an article on northern Moroccan immigrants in the Brazilian Amazon in the late nineteenth century. 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*, ed. Harvey E. Goldberg (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 190-209.

29. See e.g. Juan Bautista Vilar, “La emigración judeo-marroquí a la América Latina en la fase pre-estadística (1850-1880),” *Awraq: Estudios sobre el mundo árabe e islámico contemporáneo* 15 (1994): 63-113.

30. Mario Eduardo Cohen, “Los judíos marroquíes en el Amazonas, pioneros de la inmigración a América Latina del siglo XIX. ¿Integración o asimilación al medio?,” in *Más allá de Medio Oriente: las diásporas judía y árabe en América Latina*, ed. Raanan Rein (Granada: Universidad de Granada Editorial, 2012), 15-23; Diana Lia Epstein, “Instituciones y liderazgo comunitario de los judíos de origen marroquí en Buenos Aires,” in *Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica. Similitudes, diferencias y tensiones*, ed. Raanan Rein (Sevilla: Fundación Tres Culturas del Mediterráneo, 2008), 135-158. Juan Jose Vagni’s short conference paper was part of his interest in the bilateral relations of North African and Latin American countries (Juan José Vagni, “The Moroccan Jews in South America: An Unknown Migration,” in *XXVI International Population Conference of the IUSSP* (Marrakech, Morocco, 2009).

31. For instance, Hein de Haas, who has conducted extensive research on contemporary Moroccan migration trends, thus far has not referred to the emigration of Jews to Latin America (see his most recent publications on the topic: Hein de Haas, Mohamed Berriane and Katharina Natter, “Introduction: revisiting Moroccan migrations” *The Journal of North African Studies* 20 (4) (2015): 503-521; Hein de Haas, “Morocco’s Migration Experience: A Transitional Perspective” *International Migration* 45 (4) (2007): 39-70.

32. It included a one-page summary by Vilar (Juan Bautista Vilar, “Emigrantes Judíos del Norte de Marruecos a Hispanoamérica durante el Siglo XX,” *Maguén-Escudo* 21 (February) (1972), 21. For a short annotation, see Mitchell M. Serels, *A History of the Jews of Tangier in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Sepher-Hermon Press, 1991), 175-181. Also see three-page survey by Garzón, *Los Judíos Hispano-Marroquíes*, 197-223.

interest in comparative studies of the post-1948 emigration of Moroccan Jews to Latin America and their parallel emigration to the more dominant diasporas, mainly to Israel. This work includes a dissertation by the author of the present essay, research that began in 2009 and was concluded in 2014; and a dissertation still in progress by Angy Cohen.³³ These two projects have yielded a forthcoming jointly-authored article and others that are still being written.³⁴

The current scholarship on the topic depicts a rather monolithic, ethnic-oriented story of emigration. A general idea deduced from the existing literature about the modern settlement of Jews from Morocco in Latin America is that their Judeo-Spanish background was an innate stimulus of their departure to that specific destination; that their choice was based on an exclusive primordial cultural link with the Hispanic world. For instance, the Brazilian scholar Samuel Benchimol recounted the emigration of Jewish-Moroccan laborers to Brazil during the nineteenth century, starting with their collective ancestry in the Iberian Peninsula as early as the fifteenth century.³⁵ This approach led to the undermining of other *push factors* within the broader context of global change in migratory trends. It included the unprecedented emigration from MENA countries to Latin America, in which Muslims, Druze, Christians, as well as various groups of Jews participated; in other words, many groups other than Judeo-Spanish-speaking Jews.³⁶

Even by simply re-analyzing some available historical information previously used by the aforementioned scholars, Jewish emigration to Latin America may be put into a more globally-minded context that would go beyond the common disciplinary boundaries and the politically-oriented view of Jewish migration and of the MENA region. Notably, as pointed out by Vilar, until 1912, Moroccan Jews traveling overseas did not, in fact, declare their Moroccan Jewish origins.³⁷ Individuals from northern Morocco entered Brazil throughout the nineteenth century on European passports, principally

33. See footnote 19.

34. Angy Cohen and Aviad Moreno. "Revisiting Morocco from Israel and Argentina: contrasting narratives about the trip back among Jewish immigrants from northern Morocco," *Journal of Jewish Identities*, forthcoming.

35. Benchimol, *Eretz Amazonia*, 17-20.

This historiographical approach is also marked by the sub-title of his book's second edition in Hebrew: "The Journey of the Jews from Spain and Portugal to Morocco and to the Brazilian Amazon."

36. Charles Issawi, "The Historical Background of Lebanese Emigration, 1800-1914," in *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration* eds. Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris, 1992), 30-31; Jeff H. Lesser, "From Pedlars to Proprietors: Lebanese, Syrian and Jewish Immigrants in Brazil," in *The Lebanese in the World: A Century of Emigration*, eds. Albert Hourani and Nadim Shehadi (London: Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I.B. Tauris, 1992), 396-398.

37. Vilar, "La Emigración Judeo-Marroquí," 12-13.

Spanish, English or French.³⁸ Moreover, it must be pointed out that these transatlantic journeys of Jews came against the backdrop of a budding migration trends among Moroccan Muslims.³⁹

In their destination lands, while being scattered throughout the interior, many of the pioneer Jewish immigrants found the maintenance of practices, such as endogamy, eating kosher food, or observing the Sabbath laws, nearly unmanageable.⁴⁰ In fact, only by the end of the nineteenth century were Jewish immigrants from Morocco numerous and powerful enough to organize their own communal institutions in the Argentinean capital.⁴¹ Similar developments took shape in Venezuela.⁴² In Brazil, “church-like” Moroccan synagogues were built as early as the 1820s, but only in 1889, after ratification of the new Constitution of the First Republic of Brazil that legalized the practice of non-Catholic rites, Moroccan immigrants could establish a steady community.⁴³

Besides the focus on their unique Sephardic ethnic background as a motive for emigration, scholars highlighted the persecution of Jewish minorities in Morocco in an attempt to explain the prominence of Moroccan Jews in this departure.⁴⁴ Victor A. Mirelman wrote:

The local Jews [in northern Morocco], who had suffered from pillage and massacres at the hand of their Muslim neighbors on the eve of the Spanish conquest, welcomed the Spaniards as saviors...With their [Spaniards'] departure on May 2, 1862, the Moroccan reaction led many of the city's [Tetuan] Jews to emigrate.⁴⁵

Within this context, some pointed at the atmosphere of ethnic segregation, embodied by the daily lives of Jews within the *mellah*, the Moroccan Jewish quarter that was perceived by these scholars, and others, as a local *ghetto*,

38. Bemerguy, “Imagens da Ilusão,” 29.

39. A few examples are the movement of Moroccan Muslims to French-ruled territories in Algeria, mostly the city of Oran, and the early emigration of Muslim traders from Fez to Manchester (see David Seddon, “Labour Migration and Agricultural Development in Northeast Morocco: 1870-1970,” *The Maghreb Review* 4 (1979): 69; Fred Halliday, “The Millet of Manchester: Arab Merchants and Cotton Trade,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19 (1992), 161.)

40. Miller, “Kippur on the Amazon,” 204; Mirelman, “Sepharadim in Latin America,” 242; Vilar, “La Emigración Judeo-Marroquí,” 46; Benchimol, *Eretz Amazonia*, 84; Mirelman, “Sephardic Immigration,” 23; Bengio, “Juifs Marocains en Argentine,” 220; Bejarano, “The Sephardic Communities,” 25.

41. On November 5, 1891, La Sociedad Israelita según Ritual Sefardita, the Israelite Society by Sephardic Rite, was founded. See, Mirelman, “Sephardic immigration” 17-19.

42. Garzón, *Los Judíos de Tetuán*, 218; Vilar, “La Emigración Judeo-Marroquí,” 46; Carciente, *Presencia Sefardí*, 128; Carciente, *Presencia Sefardí*, 137-41.

43. Liberman, “Moroccan Jews in the Brazilian Amazon,” 109; Benchimol, *Eretz Amazonia*, 42-46.

44. José Cohen-Chorcrón “El ‘Diario de Melilla’ de Francisco de Miranda y la Vida Judía en Marruecos Durante la Segunda Mitad del Siglo XVIII,” *Maguén-Escudo* 134 (January-February, 2005), 27-32; Benchimol 42-46; Vilar, *Tetuan: En el Resurgimiento Judío Contemporáneo*, 91-103

45. Mirelman, “Sepharadim in Latin America after Independence,” 243.

designed to force the isolation of Jews.⁴⁶ European intervention was therefore presented as an “emancipator,” providing relief through emigration for an oppressed Jewish minority. The Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), a Franco-Jewish schooling system, that established schools in northern Morocco in the mid-nineteenth century, was a major stimulus of emigration.⁴⁷

The notion that the *mellah* was a spatial manifestation of a “pariah” condition of Jews in Morocco of the nineteenth century has been a subject for scholarly debate (a debate that exceeds the scope of this short essay). However, a thought-provoking fact is that in one of the most significant points of departure from Morocco to Latin America, the city of Tangier, a *mellah* was never officially established. Jews could and, indeed many of them did, dwell and own property throughout this city.⁴⁸ This reality lies in contrast to the conventional idea that the isolation of Jews within the *mellah* became a major trigger of their emigration as a persecuted ethnic minority.

Moreover, as opposed to the general pro-colonial view about the nature of “European influence” in most studies, it would seem that contacts with European immigrants in fact generated new perceptions that increased poverty in the country of origin. For instance, AIU graduates often rejected their fathers’ crafts—shoemaking or tailoring, for example—because they were associated with the lower classes. Most of these AIU graduates sought clerical posts in Tangier’s commercial houses, but as such posts were few due to waves of European labor immigration into Morocco, Jews with European education and languages came up against a glass ceiling. Even those willing to ply a craft met with obstacles in the context of local European-led modernization.⁴⁹

Finally, towards the statehoods of Israel and Morocco in the mid-twentieth century, new waves of emigration of Moroccan Jews to Latin America evolved. According to Juan Bautista Vilar, in 1946 Argentina became the most popular destination among Moroccan Jews, but in 1950, Venezuela became more popular.⁵⁰ Jews from Morocco also immigrated to Brazil at the time in search for better economic opportunities.⁵¹ As in the past, this post-1945 popular migration movement from northern Morocco to Latin America was fed by interpersonal and communal networks.⁵²

46. Diana Lia Epstein, “Marroquies de Origen Judío en Argentina. Cohesión y Dispersión Comunitaria,” *Revista de Historia* 12 (2011): 3; Benchimol, *Eretz Amazonia*, 54; Mirelman, “Sephardim in Latin America,” 245; Bemerguy, “Imagens da Ilusão,” 31-33.

47. Benchimol, *Eretz Amazonia*, 52; Judith Laikin Elkin, *The Jews of Latin America* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1998), 28-29; Mirelman, “Sephardim in Latin America,” 244.

48. Miller, “Apportioning,” 57-60.

49. For instance, the 1890s building boom that grew out of rapid urbanization, generated positions that were monopolized by Spanish workers. See, Miller, “Kippur on the Amazon,” 193-194.

50. Vilar, “Evolución,” 117.

51. Israel Garzón, *Los judíos de Tetuán*, 221.

52. Moreno, “Ethnicity in Motion,” 128-129, 168-202.

The daily periodicals *España* and *El Día*, commonly consumed by the Spanish-speaking Jews and non-Jews in northern Morocco during the mid-twentieth century, mentioned political and cultural developments in Latin America, bringing them to their readers' awareness.⁵³ They also advertised travel information from northern Morocco to Latin America.⁵⁴

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Source: *España*, October 24 (1950): 5

Obviously, at the time, Jews in Morocco would generally experience international migration, mostly to Latin America, differently than most of their Muslim neighbors who had not established communities in that region. The “century-old” connections to family members and communal infrastructures in Latin America and beyond fostered ethnic migration infrastructure among Jews. It also created a sense of a shared historic migration saga, coupled with feelings of belonging to a transnational ethnic community. This came at a time when other migration options to Israel, France, Canada and other modern destination appeared. It also came at the crossroad of global change that fostered the beginning of mass emigration waves among Muslims from Morocco.

Despite a large number of significant studies on the emigration of Jews from MENA countries, including Morocco, the common mind-set

53. See e.g. Francisco Gracia Pacheco “¿Porqué hay Crisis Económica en la Argentina?” *España* (September) (1952): 2; “Atmosfera de tensión en Buenos Aires,” *España* (August) (1956): 5.

54. See e.g. *España* (September 6) (1950): 7; *España* (September 11) (1950): 2.

dominating this broad field of study seems to provide a rather restrictive frame of analysis. This frame confines itself to analyzing the influence of geo-political developments on the emigration of Jews, against the backdrop of Israeli statehood in 1948 and the evolving Arab-Israeli conflict. The events often encompass perceived cultural and political alienation among Jews from the surrounding Muslim societies, in the context of local nationalism.⁵⁵

The case of Jewish emigration from Morocco to Latin America, beginning in the early nineteenth century is one of several cases of Jewish emigration from Arab-Muslim countries whose exploration may contribute to our disaggregation from monolithic narratives, and lead to the construction of new views regarding the motivations for mass emigration of Jews from Morocco and beyond. The case may entail the analysis of this exodus, mostly to the State of Israel, within a longer-term, geographically broader context of global migrations among Moroccan Jews, as well as non-Jews. Through this lens we may even “de-politicize” to some extent the commonly-held view on Jewish-Muslim relations in colonial and post-colonial contexts.

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55. A recently-published encyclopedia entitled *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations from the Origins to the Present Day*, addressed the post-1945 period in Jewish-Muslim relations as, “The Great Rupture in the Middle East” (Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora, *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 375-444). See also: George E. Gruen, “The Dwindling Jewish Communities in the Muslim Countries of the Middle East: Their Current Status and Reasons for Mass Emigration,” in *Still Moving: Recent Jewish Migration in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Daniel J. Elazar and Morton Weinfeld (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 381-393; Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 141-253; Michel Abitbol and Alan Astro, “The Integration of North African Jews in France,” *Yale French Studies* 85 (1994): 248-261; Laskier, The Alliance, 1994, 186-187.

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ملخص: الهجرة اليهودية المغربية إلى أمريكا اللاتينية: أوضاع البحوث والاتجاهات الجديدة

قراءة قرن قبل "الهجرة الجماعية" لليهود من المغرب خلال منتصف القرن العشرين إلى إسرائيل وجهات أخرى في الغرب، انخرط اليهود المغاربة في الهجرة لمسافات طويلة، ومعظمهم من الجزء الشمالي من البلاد الذي كان يهيمن عليه الإسبان إلى أمريكا اللاتينية. وترك هؤلاء الرواد الأوائل بصمات على الثقافات اليهودية المغربية الدائمة في هذا المحتوى، حتى في الأيام الحالية. وتفحص هذه المقالة وضع البحوث المتعلقة بهذه الهجرة طويلة الأمد. وهنا أود الإشارة إلى الاهتمام الكبير بين الباحثين الناطقين بالإسبانية والبرتغالية من حقول الدراسات الأمريكية والايبيرية اللاتينية، من جهة؛ وإلى غياب واضح لهذه الدراسات في العالم العربي وإسرائيل من جهة أخرى، وهذا فضلا عن الباحثين الذين يركزون على الهجرة المغربية المعاصرة. كما أن تاريخ الهجرة المحلي لديه إسهامات محتملة في مجالات الاهتمام المذكورة أعلاه، وأنه يمكن أن تعمل على تفكيك الروايات الشائعة عن رحيل اليهود الموجه سياسيا من الأراضي المسلمة العربية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإستوغرافية، الهجرة، اليهود، أمريكا اللاتينية، البرازيل، الأرجنتين، فنزويلا، المغرب، طنجة، تطوان، إسرائيل.

Résumé: L'émigration juive marocaine vers l'Amérique latine: état de la recherche et nouvelles orientations

Près d'un siècle avant l'émigration de masse des Juifs du Maroc au milieu du XX^{ème} siècle, vers Israël et des destinations en Occident, les Juifs marocains s'étaient engagés dans des émigrations de longue durée, typiquement de la partie septentrionale occupée par les Espagnols en direction

de l'Amérique latine. Cet article examine l'état des recherches relatives à cet épisode migratoire de longue durée. Je souligne le manque d'intérêt manifeste des spécialistes des études au MENA et Israël pour le sujet et conclut en suggérant que cet épisode migratoire peut contribuer au développement des études susmentionnés.

Mots clés: Historiographie, Migration, Juifs, Amérique latine, Brésil, Argentine, Venezuela, Maroc, Tanger, Tétouan, Israël.

Abstract: Moroccan Jewish Emigration to Latin America: Research State and New Directions

Almost a century before the “mass emigration” of Jews from Morocco during the mid-twentieth century, to Israel and to destinations in the West, Moroccan Jews had been engaging in long-distance emigrations, typically from the Spanish-dominated northern part of that country to Latin America. This article surveys the state of research pertaining to this long-lasting migratory episode. I point at the conspicuous lack of interest among MENA-and Israel-Studies scholars in the topic, and conclude by suggesting that this migration episode has potential contribution to the aforementioned areas of study.

Key words: Historiography, Migration, Jews, Latin America, Brazil, Argentina, Venezuela, Morocco, Tangier, Tetouan, Israel.

Resumen: Emigración judía marroquí a América Latina: Estado de investigación y nuevas direcciones

Casi un siglo antes de la “emigración masiva” de judíos de Marruecos a mediados del siglo XX, hacia Israel y hacia destinos en Occidente, los judíos marroquíes habían participado en emigraciones de larga distancia, típicamente de la parte norte de España dominada por los españoles País a América Latina. Este artículo examina el estado de la investigación relacionada con este episodio migratorio de larga duración. Señalo la evidente falta de interés entre los estudiosos de los estudios MENA e Israel en el tema y concluyo sugiriendo que este episodio de migración tiene una contribución potencial a las áreas de estudio antes mencionadas.

Palabras clave: Historiografía, migración, Judíos, América Latina, Brasil, Argentina, Venezuela, Marruecos, Tánger, Tetuán, Israel.