

“My Heart is in the Maghrib”: Aspects of Cultural Revival of the Moroccan Diaspora in Israel

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“Tell me *ya Sidi*, what did they take, the Jews, what did they seize from their hosts?”

“Everything, *ya Lalla*; they grabbed it all, whatever was there. [...] [They] took the melodies, with their tastes, hues and sub-hues, and [they took] the food, and they adopted the language, with its depths, its hints and secrets. [...] They took with them curses and bans, smiles and greetings, images and colors, the sun and the sky, the heat and the cold.”¹

In these words, Mishael, the protagonist of Herzl Cohen’s Hebrew novel *Stones of Pure Marble* (*Avnei shayish tahor*) describes to his Moroccan lover the cultural “baggage” that Moroccan Jews had taken with them when they migrated *en masse* to the State of Israel.

Moroccan in Israel form the second largest Moroccan diasporic community, after France.² Approximately 250,000 Moroccans migrated to the State of Israel in the 1950s-60s,³ where they currently number between 750,000 to 1 million.⁴ And yet, this community is different from other Moroccan diasporas in two major ways: it is made solely of Jews, and its members left Morocco with no clear intent of returning. Examining Moroccan Jewish immigrants in Israel as a Moroccan diaspora is generally supported by processes and practices that bind them and their descendants, such as the appeal to a collective memory associated with the old country, a shared negative socio-cultural experience in the host country, a legacy of political activism in response to those experiences and, especially today, a wide and incessantly growing interest in cultural identitarian expressions of

1. Herzl Cohen, *Stones of Pure Marble* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004), 192. (in Hebrew). All translations are ours.

2. Hein de Haas, “Morocco’s Migration Experience: A Transnational Perspective,” *International Migration* 45 (2007), Table 1.

3. Jamaâ Baïda, “The Emigration of Moroccan Jews, 1948-1956,” in *Rethinking Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*. eds. Emily Benichou Gottreich, Daniel J. Schroeter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 321-333.

4. Sarit Cofman-Simhon, “African Tongues on the Israeli Stage: A Reversed Diaspora,” *The Drama Review* 57 (2013): 50.

what has been often referred to as “Moroccanness,” a term used in Hebrew (*marokaiyut*) to denote a certain sense of diasporicity.⁵

In the first years after its arrival in Israel, the Moroccan diaspora was considered inferior by the earlier immigrants to the country, attempting to erase their Moroccan cultural practices. Nowadays one finds a completely different picture. Present-day Israel boasts multiple Jewish-Moroccan cultural expressions: Andalusian music orchestras; numerous theatre productions in Darija; composition of Moroccan-Jewish religious and secular music and poetry; a new dictionary of ‘Moroccan Jewish Arabic’ and numerous study groups for learning Darija; a body of nostalgic literature on Morocco and its Jewish past; recreation of popular festivals devoted to saints’ pilgrimage rites (*hillulot*); cooking traditions from the old country; and, the most popular practice of all, organized “heritage” (*shorashim*) trips to Morocco.

This chapter focuses on this significant cultural production of Moroccanness in contemporary Israel.⁶ Our goals are to describe the current

5. Using “diasporicity” and “diaspora” as working categories of analysis require some clarification as to the very meaning of the term diaspora. Building on William Safran’s defining characteristics of diaspora, James Clifford has suggested that diasporic communities are those [1] who dispersed from an original “center” to at least two “peripheral” places; [2] that maintain a “memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland”; [3] that “believe that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, fully accepted by their host country”; [4] that see the ancestral home as a place of eventual return, when the time is right; [5] that are committed to the maintenance or restoration of this homeland; and [6] of which the group’s consciousness and solidarity are “importantly defined” by this continuing relationship with the homeland. These futures may be instrumental in framing this discussion about Moroccan Jews in Israel as diaspora. See James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (3), “Further Inflections: Toward Ethnographies of the Future” (August 1994): 302-338. According to Kim D. Butler, diaspora scholars seem to agree upon three basic features of diaspora: [1] after dispersal, there must be a minimum of two destinations; [2] there must be some relationship to an actual or imagined homeland which provides the foundation from which diasporic identity may develop; [3] there must be “self-awareness of the group’s identity,” as “diasporan communities are consciously part of an ethnonational group; this consciousness binds the dispersed peoples not only to the homeland but to each other as well.” Butler adds another distinguishing feature of diaspora, involving the temporal-historical dimension: [4] its existence over at least two generations. “Diasporas are multi-generational” since they “combine the individual migration experience with the collective history of group dispersal and regensis of communities abroad.” See Kim D. Butler, “Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse,” *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 189-219. For Safran’s model see: William Safran, “Diaspora’s in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora* 1 (1991): 83-4. Although Safran’s model links the term diaspora with the notion of return we wish to suggest that there are multiple ways to think of the question of return. Note that the Gnawa in Morocco are considered by some a West-African diaspora, although they have no desire to return to their homeland; Chouki el Hamel, “Constructing a Diasporic Identity: Tracing the Origins of the Gnawa Spiritual Group in Morocco,” *Journal of African History* 49 (2008): 258. Recent conceptions of diaspora and diasporicity offer a more nuanced framework for analyzing Moroccan in Israel. See, for example: Roza Tsagarousianou, “Rethinking the Concept of Diaspora: Mobility, Connectivity and Communication in a Globalised World,” *Westminster Papers in Communication and Culture* 1 (2004): 54-6.

6. While Morocco is the name of a particular geography, the term “Moroccanness” seeks to capture a state or condition that are inevitably a product of multiple places of origin and destinations, of “multiple diasporas,” as it were, such as “Andalusia” (sic. *The Israel Andalusian Orchestra*), or “Sefharad,” which have a temporal and cultural dimension as well.

peak of Moroccan cultural revival, to provide a brief history of its development from the early days of immigration to the present, and to explore its sociocultural meanings. We claim that this cultural production and its multiple contexts are essential when looking at Israeli Moroccans as a Moroccan diaspora. Our view differs from previous engagements with similar debates about the cultural identity of Mizrahim (Oriental Jews) in Israel that *a priori* enclosed these communities within the Israeli national framework of reference. Conceiving the story of Moroccans in Israel as a solely “internal” Israeli story is a position held by both the local “hegemonic discriminatory” discourse and by its opposite, “anti-hegemonic” discourse. The new perspective proposed here considers the diasporic experience of Moroccan immigrants in Israel as a contra-narrative to these two former antithetical stands. As such, this chapter sees the cultural production of the Moroccan diaspora in Israel as a vital part in much broader transnational and global processes shared by 2nd-4th generations of diasporic communities worldwide, who reconstruct in their new countries images of their parents’ lost homelands. Unlike practically all other communities of Arab-Jews in Israel, Moroccan Jews can retain access to their ancestral homeland (and to contemporary Morocco), an important fact that shapes the ways in which concepts like loss, memory, and nostalgia have been used by Moroccan Jews in Israel.

It is important to note that this chapter does not engage directly with the renewed religious traditions and customs (*minhagim*) among Moroccans in Israel, an ultimate site of cultural practices which can clearly be associated with the term “Moroccanness.” Interestingly enough, it was only with the actual decline of Morocco as the place (*makom*) of traditions that a renewed interest in the notion of *minhag hamakom* (the custom of *the place*) has emerged. Since the late twentieth century, and mostly in Israel—which has become the new “*makom*” for the larger number of Moroccan-born Jews, their descendants, and their rabbinic and cultural institutions—there has been a growing number of published books devoted specifically to the documentation, contextualization, and, ultimately, the revival of cultural and religious traditions associated with Maghribi *minhagim*, behaviors, and practices. With a strong “ethnographic” character, these works are heavily dependent on the corpus of Moroccan rabbinic texts that was formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷

7. There are several independent institutions that have devoted themselves to the preservation and cultivation of the “Sephardic heritage.” *B’nei Yissaschar* Institute, for example, was founded in 1983 in Jerusalem by Rabbi Michel Meir Abitbul, a Moroccan-born book enthusiast. Aside from a comprehensive bookstore that deals with Sephardic books, since 1996 the institute has been editing and publishing dozens of rabbinic Maghribi books under the auspice of *Otsrot ha-Magreb* (Treasures on the Maghrib). Similarly, numerous volumes in the fields of poetry and hagiographic literature have recently been published by individuals and families. The famous Abuhaseera family, for example, stands at the center of a new four-volume series printed recently in Israel. See: Shlomoh Zalman Mi’arah, *Geoney Mishpahat Abuhaseera* (Haifa: Mechon Maor Yizhak, 2012).

Following a short description of Moroccan Jewish migratory movements to the State of Israel, this article discusses certain artistic and social processes in the fields of creative arts (theatre, poetry, literature, and cinema) arranged according to four consecutive ‘stages’ of reconstructing and reinventing Moroccanness in Israel. This examination leads to a concluding discussion which situates the described processes as part of a world-wide phenomenon of diasporic cultural production in recent times.

Moroccan Jewish Emigration to the State of Israel

Although the Moroccan diaspora in Israel has evolved during the second half of the XXth century, it should be discussed against the larger context of Jewish migratory movements to Palestine from the late XIXth century and during the first half of the XXth century. The vast majority of Jews who settled in Palestine during this period were from East European countries (who came to be called Ashkenazi Jews). Equipped with a European model of ‘nationhood,’ the newly-established Jewish society in Palestine evolved as a colonial project in which the European conception of ethnolinguistic nationalism was nurtured.

When the State of Israel was established in 1948, the economic, cultural, academic, and political hegemony was held by Ashkenazi Jews. During the next two decades, large numbers of Jews emigrated to the country also from Arab and Muslim societies. As Moroccan Jews had constituted the largest Jewish community in a Muslim country, in Israel too they became the largest group of immigrants from an Arab or Muslim country. More than a half-million Jews from Muslim countries has dramatically changed the composition of the Jewish community in Israel, from an Ashkenazi majority until the late 1940s, to almost equal numbers of Ashkenazi and Mizraḥi Jews ten years later.⁸ In fear of losing its economic, cultural, and symbolic prerogatives, the Ashkenazi establishment was engaged in assimilating most Mizraḥim into national Israeli identity.

Moroccan Jews, however, were less easily coopted by the state. Their very existence was deemed “the Moroccan problem.”⁹ The policy that was set to amend this “problem” was called “the Melting Pot”.¹⁰ According to this ideology, all newcomers had to forget their previous identities—especially

8. An umbrella term for Arab Jews in Israel, literally means “Eastern” or “Oriental” Jews.

9. Sami S. Chetrit, *The Mizrahi Struggle in Israel Between Oppression and Liberation, Identification and Alternative 1948-2003* (Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 2006); for English edition, see *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews* (New York: Routledge, 2009); Henriette Dahan-Kalev, “The Study of Mizraḥim in Israeli Sociology—Moroccans as ‘the Case’ of the Case,” *Pe’amim* 108 (2007): 87-126 (in Hebrew). See also Yaron Tsur, “Carnival Fears: Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel,” *The Journal of Israeli History* 18 (1) (1997): 73-103.

10. Yosef Gorni, “The ‘Melting Pot’ in Zionist Thought,” *Israel Studies* 6 (2001): 54-70.

if they were non-European—and adapt new ones. In the case of newcomers from the Muslim countries, it meant being stripped of their Arab cultural traits and being transformed into an idealized, European-style Israeli. Furthermore, seeking to protect their accumulated privileges in living areas, the administration directed the newcomers to peripheral regions and poor neighborhoods lacking in economic and employment options, and with limited opportunities for social or professional mobility. This led to a vicious circle of increasing poverty, discrimination, despair, and frustration. As part of this process, the now Israeli-Moroccan Jewish communities, by and large established and appreciated in their country of origin, became under-respected in their new country.¹¹ Their cultural expressions were considered primitive and premodern by the local hegemonic discourse, who wished to replace them by the more progressive European culture.

Moroccan Cultural Production in Contemporary Israel

1. State Indoctrination and Peripheralization (1950-1970)

For the vast majority of Moroccan immigrants, the move to Israel signified a radical change in their social, civil, urban, and oftentimes economic status. Although officially they became equal citizens of a nation state in which they constituted a Jewish majority, during the first decade in Israel these immigrants were mainly struggling to cope with the harsh realities of high levels of poverty and unemployment which resulted from their outlying and often isolated locations. Adapting to the many challenges of a new cultural system, Moroccan Jews experienced turbulence in their cultural identity and conception of selfhood. In research conducted in late 1950s, anthropologist Alex Weingrod dealt with the assimilation of Moroccan immigrants within peripheral *Moshavim* (rural villages) and the question of their cultural production and consumption. He noted that the cultural forms that many had known and valued in Morocco were annulled in the new villages. The ruralization and peripheralization resulted in the diminishing of former cultural options, which was not met with any “Israeli” alternative.¹²

The cultural void which Weingrod describes was partially created on purpose by the hegemonic establishment that tried, as part of the Melting Pot policy, to erase older cultural traditions, and transform the immigrants into new ideal Israelis. Along with erasing the old, an attempt was made to

11. Alex Weingrod and André Levy, “Social Thought and Commentary: Paradoxes of Homecoming; the Jews and their Diasporas,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 79 (2006): 695.

12. Alex Weingrod, “Change and Continuity in a Moroccan Immigrant Village in Israel,” *Middle East Journal* 4 (1960): 277-291. See especially the section “Cultural Orientation,” 282-285. See also Alex Weingrod, “Anthropological Research about the Absorption of Moroccan Immigrants in Moshavim, 1958,” *The Central Zionist Archives* S1/10117-1t.

fashion and remodel the immigrants into the new culture. In 1953 *Telem* (Hebrew acronym for *teatron la-ma'abarot*, Theatre for the Transit-Camps) was established.¹³ *Telem* was a traveling-theatre that staged selected plays chosen to portray a picture of the new ideal Israeli society for its immigrant audience. It used existing written plays, but as part of its operation, it also commissioned plays from mainstream known authors, with the request to address the multiethnic condition of the immigrant society, as well as to promote the Melting Pot policy.¹⁴ One such play, *Kasablan* (named after Casablanca, the Moroccan birthplace of the main character, Yossef Simantov) was ordered in 1954 from playwright Yigal Mossinson, a promising young national writer. To *Telem*'s great dismay, when Mossinson completed the play—which focuses on Moroccan Jewish characters living in a housing project in Jaffa—they received a play that focuses on the ethnic-sectarian split within the Israeli Jewish society, instead of praising the hegemonic policy. As such, the play was rejected by *Telem* but adopted by the municipal theatre of Tel Aviv, *Hakameri*.¹⁵

Kasablan, a young Moroccan immigrant, was shaped according to the stereotypical representation of the Moroccan Jew by the Ashkenazi host community. He was hot-blooded, high-tempered, irrational, somewhat primitive, yet brave and loyal to his friends.¹⁶ Written by a non-Moroccan, in a production that did not include any Moroccan actors, the play dealt with the adaptation of the Moroccan community to the new country. It was a great success, and continued to grow in popularity after the play was re-produced in 1966 (as a musical) and again in 1973 (as a film).¹⁷ Ophir Maman claims that the play did not become a “flat” indoctrination, since in addition to its stereotypical and orientalist representations, it managed to exhibit some of the Moroccan immigrants' frustrations and resistance.¹⁸

In 1964, another iconic production was released: Ephraim Kishon's film *Sallah Shabbatti*. The protagonist is a stereotypical “Pan Oriental” Jew,

13. Ophir Maman, “Telem, Theatre for the Transit-Camps: the Beginning of ‘the Double Turn’ in Israeli Theatre,” *Katedra* 123 (2007), 126; see also “Telem activities,” *Gnazim Institute [Archives]*, 335/4507/16.

14. In September 1953 a series of articles by Shalom Cohen was published in the left news magazine *Haolam Hazeh*, titled “*Dofkim et-ha-Shechorim*” ([they always] screw the black people), sparking a heated debate on the tension between North African immigrants and the state.

15. Maman, “Telem,” 146-7.

16. Dan Urian, “The Birth of the Moroccan Stereotype in the Israeli Theater: a Reexamination on the play *Kazablan*, 1954,” *Bamah* 159-160 (2001): 48-66.

17. Idit Zertal, “Kazablan from Alhambra,” *Davar*, 16 December 1966; Yossi Beilin, “OK, So, Who has a Greater Honor?” *Davar*, 29 June 1973.

18. This outcome is labeled by Maman as a “double turn,” meaning that the play offered points of appreciation and reference both for the institutional indoctrination and for the immigrants' audiences; Maman, “Telem,” 149-50.

whose origin is unidentified, a mixture of Iraqi, Moroccan, and Yemenite.¹⁹ The film ridiculed the local political establishment and its bureaucracy,²⁰ yet by presenting *Shabbatti* as a superimposed series of lacks—devoid of place of origin (i.e., presumably from an uncivilized world), language, culture, and as someone who exercises no profession²¹—it confirmed and strengthened the arrogant perceptions of the hegemonic discourse over non-European Jews.

During the decade of Moroccan immigration, the hegemonic Israeli cultural discourse publicly disseminated an ideal form of Israeliness, and an orientalist stereotype of the Moroccan Jew. Yet among the immigrants, who operated within the confinements of an imposed peripheralization, cultural manifestations were usually limited to familial and inner-community circles, and did not reach nation-wide stages. In retrospect, the peripheralization of the Moroccan diaspora in Israel had eventually contributed to the preservation of an independent Moroccan identity in terms of language, music, and culture, and it was the geographical periphery of Israel that provided the launching pad for this identity to powerfully manifest itself several decades later.

2. Protest and resistance (late 1950s to late 1970s)

In 1959, Jewish Moroccan immigrants who resettled in an impoverished former Palestinian Arab neighborhood called Wadi Salib in Haifa (labeled by the local press as the “Mellah” of Haifa), rioted against the ongoing and multi-faceted discrimination of North African immigrants by the Israeli state.²² The protests spread to other places, but were severely suppressed by the government that deemed them as a false allegation of discrimination against Jews of Arab descent. This allegation was unbearable for the government because it proved the failure of its Melting Pot policy, and its proclaimed goal of creating an egalitarian society.²³ Led by a Moroccan immigrant named David Ben Harush, the protests acquired the status of a national trauma, and unveiled for the first time the profound frustration of North African immigrants with their socioeconomic and cultural marginalization.

19. “Sallah,” writes Ella Shohat, “represents an amalgam of Oriental Jewish stereotypes: his pajama evokes the Iraqi, his Bible and synagogue-attendance the devout Yemenite; his violence and penchant for *kriza* (frenzy) call up the image of the Moroccan, while his arak (Oriental liquor), backgammon, and indolence are presumed to be common to all Orientals. The lack of national specificity carries over even into the accent of the new immigrant, which is clearly intended... to be a kind of ‘pan-Oriental’.” Ella Shohat, *Israeli Cinema: East/West and the Politics of Representation* (New York & London: I. B. Tauris, 2010), 134.

20. Igal Burszty, “Israeli Cinema’s ‘I’m in the East and my heart is in the West’,” in *Israeli Identity: Between Orient and Occident*, ed. David Tal (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 204.

21. Shohat, *Israeli Cinema*, 138.

22. *Israel State Archives* 78.17.1.7; 78.17.1.44.

23. Henriette Dahan-Kalev, “The Wadi Salib Riots,” *Theory and Criticism* 12-13 (1999): 155. For a detailed study that associates between Wadi Salib’s Arab refugees and subsequent Moroccan evacuees, see Yfaat Weiss, *A Confiscated Memory: Wadi Salib and Haifa’s Lost Heritage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011).

A boost to local Moroccan Jewish culture occurred in 1965 when the Master of Jewish *Piyyutim* (religious poetry), Rabbi David Bouzaglo, left Casablanca and arrived in Israel. Bouzaglo, who single-handedly launched a campaign of restoration and preservation of Andalusi/Gharnati and Cha'abbi musical and liturgical traditions, wandered among the communities of Moroccan immigrants in the Israeli peripheries until his death in 1975. He was a cultural hero that inspired his listeners who crowded to see him in religious poetry events that took place in private homes, synagogues, and cinema halls. Bouzaglo thus acquired the position of the reviver of *Piyyutim* culture and the tradition of *Shirat Bakeshot* ("Requests Poetry") in Sephardic synagogues in Israel.²⁴ Depicted as emblems of "premodern" religiosity and influenced by Arab melodies, the *Piyyutim* culture was sharply distinct from mainstream secular national culture.

An important musical institution, *The Azulay Brothers*, is a record and music store established in Jaffa in the mid-1950s by four Moroccan Jews, the Azoulay Brothers, and is to this day run by two of the brothers, Yitzhaq and David.²⁵ "Koliphone," the Azoulays' record label, pioneered and produced Arabic music sung by Jews from North Africa and the Middle East. Koliphone recorded and distributed albums of local start-up singers, as well as of renowned Jewish Moroccan singers such as Jo 'Amar (1930-2009), Samy Elmaghribi (1922-2008), and Zohra El Fassia (1905-1994)²⁶ who were overlooked by the hegemonic Israeli cultural scene.

There are many instances of Moroccan protest against the political establishment. In 1959, in response to the Wadi Salib riots (that had erupted after the police shot a Moroccan resident of the neighborhood, Ya'akov Elkarif), Jo 'Amar released "Drunk-Man Song" (*shir hashikor*) in which he says: "Oh, police, come arrest me..." Soon after 'Amar wrote one of his best known hits, "Employment Office" (*Lishkat Avodah*), in which he "masterfully calls attention to the suffocating discrimination faced by Moroccans upon

24. Israeli-born Moroccan filmmaker Rafael Balulu (b. 1981) has recently released a feature length documentary about R. David Buzaglo's legacy: "Song of Loves: R. David Buzaglo" (Israel, 2015). The film has been celebrated in numerous articles and reviews. See for example, David Guedj, "The Story of the Greatest Poet and *Paytan* of Moroccan Jewry in the XXth century," *Haaretz*, 14 May 2015 (in Hebrew).

25. Artist Sagie Azoulay (b. 1979) son of David Azoulay, produced a short documentary, "29 Raziël St., Jaffa Clock Square" (Israel, 2011). The film, an expression of the renewed intergenerational Moroccan dialogue, can be accessed online at <https://vimeo.com/17877795>.

26. In the 1970's Koliphone was soon to become an active archive of North African Jewish music culture, reserving the work of pioneers such as "Cheikh Elafrite" (Issim Israël Rozzio, Tunisian) while promoting young Maghrebi artists such as Geoula Barda (Libyan), Raoul Journo (Tunisian), Esther Alfassi (Moroccan), "Cheikh Mwijo," (Moshe Attias, born in Meknes, 1937), and many others. The best source for these historical treasures is a blog by Chris Silver, "Jewish Maghrib Jukebox": <http://jewishmorocco.blogspot.ca>.

their very arrival in Israel,” as Chris Silver writes.²⁷ ‘Amar gave expression to the collective memory of Moroccans in Israel, invoking the trauma of children separated from their parents, and sent to the *Kibbutz* (“*Zad fi balna klam ennas/fin faraqna min waldina/Jina malqina shi bash/ya rabbi henn ‘aalina*”). And thereafter: “I went to the employment office/He asked ‘where are you from’/I told him ‘from Morocco’/He told me to get out.” For ‘Amar, the rejection of the Moroccan is tied to the acceptance of the Ashkenazi: “I went to the employment office/He asked ‘where are you from’/I told him ‘from Poland’/He told me ‘please, come in.’”

The post-1967 euphoria that prevailed among many Jewish Israelis diverted public attention from the continuing economic and cultural discrimination encountered by the Arab-Jews. Nevertheless, the progressive *zeitgeist* of the 1960s in the West had an impact on the cultural condition of Arab-Jews in Israel. Thus, dealing with the African-American struggle in the U.S., Dan Almagor’s 1972 musical, “Don’t call me Black” (*al tikra li shahor*), was also understood as an allegory to the socio-ethnic problem in Israel, which began to boil again.²⁸

The renewed upsurge started in the Musrara slum in Jerusalem in 1971 with the establishment of The Black Panthers. Similar to their predecessors, the new protest movement was led by Moroccan activists. They demonstrated against the discrimination aimed at Mizraḥi Jews, their living conditions, the high rates of unemployment, and the unequal opportunities granted for them in comparison to the prerogatives given to Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union. The group which first associated with the Israeli left (*Matzpen*) adopted its name and some general concepts from the American Black Power movement, thus creating in the local vocabulary a parallelism between “Mizraḥi” and “Black.” As in the case of the former Wadi Salib riots, the protests were met by a forceful and rather panicked reaction of the government, and in effect “catapulted the Panthers to the center of public attention.”²⁹

The tremors created by the Black Panthers protests also affected cultural productions by Mizraḥi immigrants. In 1973 the *Ohalim* (tents) movement was established in Jerusalem’s poor neighborhood *Katamonim*, seeking a solution for social and ethnic discrimination through youth action.³⁰ The

27. Chris Silver, “Sing Out, Maghreb! Jewish Moroccan Protest Music,” April 24, 2013. <http://jewishmorocco.blogspot.ca/2013/04/sing-out-maghreb-jewish-moroccan.html>

28. Oz Frankel, “What’s in a Name? The Black Panthers in Israel,” *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* 1 (2008): 9.

29. Frankel, “What’s in a Name?,” 27.

30. Shlomo Hasson, “The Emergence of an Urban Social Movement in Israeli Society—an Integrated Approach,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 7 (1983).

initial program was developed in a community theatre workshop. Their first play, directed by Arie Itzhak, was called *Joseph Goes Down to Katamon* (an allusion to the Biblical story where Joseph “goes down to Egypt”). In a straightforward and critical way, their plays raised the dilemmas and difficulties of living in a Mizrahi neighborhood under a reality of inequality and cultural repression.³¹ The same year also witnessed the Yom Kippur War, a watershed moment in Israeli history which initiated a trend of self-critical thinking in various circles.³²

In this atmosphere, youth theatre workshops continued to raise awareness of the difficulties of living in underdeveloped socioeconomic peripheries. In Pardess-Katz, a community theatre group under the direction of Yossi Alfi staged the play *The Second Half* (1974).³³ The criticism expressed on theatre stages in the periphery during the mid-1970s paved the way to established important theatre companies. One of the most important productions of this period was Yehoshua Sobol’s musical *Kriza* at Haifa Theatre.³⁴ The play was based on interviews with residents of poor neighborhoods and peripheral towns, mainly of Moroccan origin, presenting their deep frustration with ongoing inequalities. *Kriza* was developed from a previous screenplay entitled *Nerves*, which was meant to be presented under *Omanut La’am* (Art to the People) company. The latter organization replaced *Telem* (which disintegrated in 1966), partially as a state cultural indoctrination tool to be used in community centers and development areas. *Omanut La’am* did not accept *Nerves*, being afraid that in light of the Black Panthers protests it would merely raise incitement and violent outbursts instead of calming the public.

Kriza widened the scope of *Nerves* based on additional interviews with Moroccan immigrants, while also adding songs and choreography. The stories in the play were organized according to the contrasts between past and present, between Morocco and Israel, and between the generational gaps that were created between the immigrants of the 1950s and their Israeli-born children, and between the aforementioned and the 3rd generation of Moroccan Israelis raised in discrimination and poverty.³⁵ Despite *Kriza*’s greater attention to the Moroccan immigrants’ situation, the writer and almost all of the actors were still of non-Moroccan origin, and thus did not witness firsthand the matters they were protesting against. An almost single exception was the Rabati-born

31. Chetrit, *The Mizrahi Struggle*, 186.

32. Susan R. Hattis, “The Domestic Fallout of the Yom Kippur War,” *Israel Affairs* 6 (1999).

33. Sarit Cofman-Simhon, “Filling a Space: Maghrebi Language Theatre in Israel,” *Teatron* 30 (2011): 96.

34. Nurith Nethanel, *Breaking Mirrors; Representing and Fashioning Israeliness in the Plays of Yehoshua Sobol and Hillel Mittelpunkt* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2012).

35. Nethanel, *Breaking Mirrors*, 29-30.

musical composer Shlomo Bar (b.1943), known for his popular songs “At Our Village Todgha,” and “Children Are Joy.” In 1979, Bar established his own music group *Habreira Hativ‘it* (The Natural Selection), and put music to one of Erez Bitton’s best-known poems, “A Moroccan Wedding.” The group’s first album, *Elei Shorashim* (To the Roots), which combined classical North African music, Gnawa influences, along with Asian and Western motifs, bearing a completely new cultural message.³⁶ Thus, along with the wave of Mizrahi protests, the cultural representation of the Moroccan question on the national cultural scene began slowly moving from the hands of Ashkenazi producers to the hands of young artists, writers, and musicians from the Moroccan diaspora. These translated the protest into cultural productions of various sorts, which occurred alongside the ongoing old cultural traditions taking place mainly in religious or familial contexts.

3. Collaboration and Cooptation (1960s to 2000s)

Protests were one of the strategies used by Moroccan activists in Israel to fashion their sense of political identity. Realizing the electoral potential of the Moroccan community, certain state agencies assumed a policy of cooptation and compensation, while various groups within the Moroccan diaspora sought collaboration and reconciliation by means of participation and opening up Moroccan culture to the general public. It is against this background that the *Mimouna*, a popular Moroccan-Jewish festival, has emerged as an institutionalized social and cultural outlet for Moroccans who seek to engage in the public national sphere. In the mid-1960s, a young Moroccan politician, Shaul Ben-Simhon (b. 1929), advocated for removal of the *Mimouna* festival from the confines of the Moroccan community into the national public sphere. The *Mimouna* was thus turned into an event frequented by the highest political figures, often seeking the vote of the Moroccan diaspora.³⁷

Facing the Black Panthers’ action and its corollaries, and trying to counter the allegations of cultural suppression, the authorities sought to forge a better image of their cultural hegemony. In 1971, a state-sponsored Oriental song festival was organized by the National Broadcast Services.³⁸ In other venues the government attempted to prove its recognition of Mizrahi culture

36. Erez Bitton (born in Oran in 1942 to a Moroccan family) published his first poetry book *Minkha Marokanit* (Moroccan Offering) in 1976. This book deals with the cultural encounter between East and West and the longing for the disappearing Jewish-Moroccan world. At the same year, poet Yihiel Zaafrani published a poetry book titled *Ga’agu‘im la Maghreb* (Yearning to the Maghrib) (Traklin Press, 1976).

37. See “Golda Mayer at the Mimouna celebrations,” 16 April 1972, *The Central Zionist Archives* PHIS/1472307. See also Rachel Shar’abi, *The Mimouna Festival, From the Periphery to the Center* (Tel Aviv: Hakibitz Hameuchad, 2009).

38. See the 1971 festival audio-record at: <http://stereo-ve-mono.com/2205>. The festival continued annually until 1982, and for a last time in 1985.

by establishing various institutions such as the Center for Integration of Eastern Jewry Heritage (1976).³⁹ Yet, as concerns the governing party, these efforts came too late. In the elections of 1977, Labor, which ruled the country since its establishment, was kicked out of office by the opposition, the Likud party. This reversal happened in large part due a massive vote of Mizraḥi Jews who were disappointed with the previous establishment.⁴⁰ This situation confirmed the electoral power of the Moroccan Community. Yet promptly realizing that the new administration was also indifferent to the community's needs, a host of Mizraḥi political movements and parties were established by Moroccan-born Jews: Sam Ben-Chetrit's (born in Talsint) *Beyahad, Tami* (The Movement for Israel Tradition; 1981) led by Aharon Abu-Haseirah (born in Erfoud), and *Shas* (World Union of Torah Keeping Sepharadis; 1982) first led by Nissim Ze'ev, Shlomo Dayan (born in Tetouan) and Itzhak Peretz (born in Casablanca). It was also during the 1970's that more and more *Hilulas* (festivals commemorating important religious figures) were added to the Moroccan Jewish calendar.⁴¹

By the 1980s, the *Mimouna* became the most obvious framework through which one can examine the visibility of the Moroccan question in Israel.⁴² In 1980, author Nehoray Meyer Chetrit⁴³ (born in Gouram, 1943) established in Ashdod the "Tafilalet Group," consisting of about twenty Moroccan performers, which revived traditional Judeo-Moroccan singing and dancing, and performed at the *Mimouna* main event in Jerusalem, acquainting the general Israeli public with these genres.⁴⁴ More theatre productions followed, including *A Moroccan King: Kabbalistic Drama in Three Acts* (Haifa Theater, 1980) by Gabriel Ben-Simhon (born in Sefrou, 1938), which featured music and songs composed and performed by above-mentioned Shlomo Bar. This was the first time that a play written by a Moroccan was made public on the stage of a national theatre. The play represents Ben-Simhon's attempt to

39. Yaron Tsur, "Israeli Historiography and the Sectorial Problem," *Pe'amim* 94-95 (2003): 7-56.

40. Uri Ram, "Israeli Sociology: Social Thought Amidst Struggles and Conflicts," *Irish Journal of Sociology* 23 (2015): 98-117.

41. For example, "The House of Rabbi David ou-Moshe" was established in Safed in 1973 by Avraham Ben-Haim, a forestry worker who dreamt that the medieval saint Rabbi David ou-Moshe (from the village Agouim in the High Atlas) told him that his spirit had left Morocco to reside forever with him in Safed. See Yoram Bilu, "Personal Motivation and Social Meaning in the Revival of Hagiolatric Traditions among Moroccan Jews in Israel," in *Tradition, Innovation, Conflict: Jewishness and Judaism in Contemporary Israel*, eds. Zvi Sobel and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, 47-69 (Albany, 1991).

42. In 1979, Sam Ben Chetrit founded the Public Committee of the *Mimouna* Celebrations in Israel.

43. Chetrit's Hebrew book from the period, something between a memoir, a novel, and a biography of a community, was published in early 1983. See Nehoray-Meyer Chetrit, *La Terreur du Rêve: Recit épineux sur l'Histoire Juive Maroc*, Tel Aviv: Papirus, 1983.

44. Around the same time more and more *Hilulas* (festivals commemorating important religious figures) were added to the Moroccan Jewish calendar.

acquaint the Asheknazi audience with the Moroccan-Jewish culture, and at the same time to respond to the negative stereotypes about the Moroccan Jew in other plays, such as Yigal Mossinson’s *Kasablan*.⁴⁵

The following two decades saw many new cultural productions that were expressly made for the consumption of the general Israeli public by first- and second-generation Moroccans. Their work focused on presenting the experience of emigration from Morocco and the difficulties of settling in Israel, oftentimes charged with mystical and religious symbolism.⁴⁶

In the political sphere, the period between the mid-1980s to the early 2000s was characterized by improved relationships between the Kingdom of Morocco and the State of Israel.⁴⁷ In 1986, King Hassan II met with former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, in Morocco, in an act that signaled the beginning of Moroccan Jewish “heritage trips” to their homeland. These trips had an empowering effect for the Moroccan diaspora in Israel. These trips had a deep personal significance for travelers who were able to reconnect with their previous lives, memories, language and traditions.⁴⁸ Jewish Israelis with no roots in the Arab world suddenly realized how emotionally and

45. Dan Urian, “Sefrou and Baghdad,” *Israel Affairs* 17 (2011): 543.

46. The long list includes, among others, on the theatrical scene, Gabriel Ben-Simhon’s play *Bouzamima* (1984). In poetry and literature, Sami Shalom Chetrit poetry books: *Ptiha* (Opening, Tel Aviv: Eked, 1988); idem, *Freiha Shem Yafe* (Freiha, a Nice Name; Tel Aviv: Sifrei Noor, 1995), and idem, *Shirim Be’Ashdodit* (Songs in Ashdodian; Tel Aviv: Andalus, 2003). In 1990 Albert Swissa (b. in Casablanca, 1959) published *Aqud* (Bound), a novel set in Jerusalem that gives voice to Yohai, Beber, and ‘Ayiush, children of North African immigrants from Morocco. In documentary filmmaking, notable films include: Selim Fatal’s series *In the Shadows of the Atlas Mountains* (1993; it had 6 episodes: Ep. 1. “Maghrebi Jewry;” Ep. 2. “War-Storms in the Desert;” Ep. 3. “The Road to Oujda;” Ep. 4. “The Children of Oslo;” Ep. 5. “Next Year in Jerusalem;” Ep. 6. “The Tragedy of Egoz.” See also: “Recordings made by Selim Fatal in preparation of his series between 1987-1992,” *Israel State Archives* 45.0.35, David Ben-Shitrit’s *Easterly Wind: A Moroccan Chronicle* (2002), Nissim Mousak’s *Have you heard about the Panthers?* (2002; *Israel Film Archive*, <http://www.jer-cin.org.il/website/modules/films/Film.aspx?fid=4603>), David Belakhsan and Asher Nakhmias, *The Favus Children* (2003; *Israel Film Archive*, <http://www.jer-cin.org.il/website/modules/films/Film.aspx?fid=3119>), and Eli Hamo and Sami Shalom Chetrit’s *The Black Panthers (in Israel) Speak* (2003; Meirav Alush-Levron, “The Mizrahi Memory and the Zionist Dominator: Voices from the Fringe in Contemporary Documentary Cinema,” *Israel* 14 (2008): 129-30. Fictional films include Hanah Azulay Hasfari’s *Shkhur* (1994; *Israel Film Archive*, <http://www.jer-cin.org.il/website/modules/films/Film.aspx?fid=4790>), followed by David Der’ei’s *Khta Yisbakh Sbakh* (2004). In the realm of visual arts, the exhibition *Mother Tongue* took place in 2002 (Yigal S. Nizri, *Eastern Appearance: A Present that Stirs in the Thickets of Its Arab Past* [Tel Aviv: Babel, 2004]).

47. With the 1994’s “Casablanca Declaration” which called for economic cooperation between the two states, and the ensuing Oslo agreements, diplomatic relationships were established between Morocco and Israel, which lasted until “Al-Aqsa Intifada” broke out in September 2000.

48. Based on interviews with participants in these groups, as well as on my personal experience as a tour guide (O.O.Y.). In many cases members of the second generation were the ones to push their parents to re-visit Morocco. The “return” to Morocco was sometimes a journey to the Jewish past of certain families or places. See in that regard the personal documentaries of Yael Bitton’s *Les 12 enfants du Rabbin* (2007), Sami S. Chetrit’s *Azi Aiyma* (2009), and Kathy Wazana’s *They Were Promised the Sea* (2013).

culturally invested members of the Moroccan diaspora were in Morocco. This realization was understood (and still is) as an antithesis to the hegemonic Zionist discourse of “negation of the diaspora,” a dogmatic concept that was advanced by certain Ashkenazi Israelis who reject any affinities with their countries of origin, and was imposed on other diasporas. The “discovery” created a dissonance concerning the ways in which the diaspora and its culture should be seen and, with regard to the processes described above, it helped push the Moroccan diasporic cultural productions from the periphery to the center.

4. Independence and Commodification (1985 to 2015)

Since the mid-1980s, and at an increasing pace from the mid-2000s onwards, a new sense of Moroccanness has been evolving in Israel. Its main motivation is to produce culture directly for the community. As Ronit Ivgi (1949-2016), the founder of the first Moroccan theatre in Israel (Teatron ha-Maghreb), told us, the main reason for her action was the obligation she felt to enable her parents and grandparents to enjoy theatre in their language, a privilege withheld from them since they left Morocco.⁴⁹ Asher Cohen, a member of Ivgi’s ensemble, and later the founder of his own Moroccan language playhouse, added that the establishment of his theatre was not an act of protest, and that, “it did not reflect any political aspiration; it was rather a fulfillment of an actual need of the community, and an act of respect towards an older generation that felt culturally alienated from mainstream Israeli theatre productions.”⁵⁰

This new trend might have begun with bands and singers that performed in familial ceremonies in Moroccan Arabic. These were probably the inspiration for groups that decided to upgrade this format into a more artistic form, like the *Sfta'im* (“Lips”) music-group. *Sfta'im* was founded in 1985 by Haïm Ulliel (b. 1956) and a group of friends in the southern town of Sderot. The band devoted itself to the preservation of traditional Moroccan music, connecting old lyrics and tunes with modern instruments and energies. One of the innovations of the group was that it sung in Darija rather than in Hebrew. Haïm Ulliel has been quoted as saying that “until *Sfta'im*, people felt ashamed to sing in Moroccan.”⁵¹

49. Interviews with Ronit Ivgi, 2011; 2015.

50. Interviews with Asher Cohen, 2015.

51. Li-or Auerbuch, “There is no Funding, but there is *Mimouna*: the Moroccan Theatre is Blooming,” *Ma'ariv*, July 24, 2009. Beyond its own achievements, the group supported other young musical groups which originated in Sderot like *Tipex* (1990), and *Knesiyat Hasekhel* (1990), all are second generation to the Maghribi immigration.

A popularization of Moroccan religious music occurred more or less simultaneously. In 1988 Arie Azulai the mayor of Ashdod, his deputy Eliyahu Ben Hamo along with Moti Malka established in their city, “The Center for Piyut and Poetry Ashdod” (*ha-Merkaz le-Piyut ve-Shira Ashdod*). The Center served as a training school for singers of sacred songs and for musicians who play traditional North African instruments. The Center’s success led to the subsequent founding in 1994, also in Ashdod, of the “Israel Andalusian Orchestra” (*ha-Tizmoret ha-Andalusit ha-Yisre’elit*). The project was initiated by the former founders of the *Piyutim* center who were joined by Yehiel Lasri (b. 1957) and Samy Elmaghribi (Shlomo Amzaleg; 1922-2008). The orchestra consisted of two parts, an “authentic ensemble” with immigrants from North Africa and Israelis of Mizrahi origin as instrumentalists, and “the orchestra” which consisted mainly of immigrants from countries of the former Soviet Union or native-born Israelis.⁵² From 1994 to 2009, the Orchestra performed numerous concerts in Israel and abroad, winning the Israeli prize for culture in 2006, “for its lifetime achievement and special contribution to society and the State.”⁵³

In 2009 the Israel Andalusian Orchestra encountered financial problems which led to its disintegration. However, the Orchestra members were able to renew its activity in Ashkelon, under the name ‘The Mediterranean Andalusian Orchestra.’⁵⁴ In its reincarnation the Orchestra continues to put on highly esteemed concerts, such as the musical event dedicated to the memory of Jo ‘Amar (who died in 2009), ‘The Sounds of the Maghreb concert,’ ‘Casablanca Concert,’ and ‘Oum Kalthum Forever.’ Recently, the former Israel Andalusian Orchestra has renewed its activity and thus, currently, the two large Andalusian orchestras exist side by side.

A special innovation of the XXIst century was the founding of Darija-language theatre groups by members of the second generation of the Moroccan diaspora. The first was *Tami* (an acronym for *teatron marocai Israeli*, “The Israeli Moroccan Theatre”) which was established in 2001 by Ronit Ivgi in

52. Meirav Aharon, “Riding the Culture Train: An Ethnography of a Plan for Social Mobility through Music,” *Cultural Sociology* 7 (2013): 448.

53. In a clear shift from a *Melting Pot* strategy to a *Mosaic* approach, the committee’s explanations shed light on the ways in which the State has adopted and practically “Isrealized” an Arab cultural ingredient into its “cultural palette”: “The Israel Prize is hereby awarded to the Israel Andalusian Orchestra for its contribution to Israeli society in placing Andalusian song and music at the center of the Israeli experience,” the judges said. “Its success in making Andalusian music a part of the Israeli culture, heard in Israel and across the world, constitutes a significant contribution. The chants of the *Piyutim* and the pleas that were hidden at the synagogues are spreading to many sectors, as one of the colors of the contemporary Israeli cultural palette.”

54. For a documentary about the struggle carried on by the instrumentalists of the orchestra, see David Noy and Meirav Aharon’s *Kivun Kelim* (Fine Tuning; 2010), <https://youtu.be/dhZSM8wYvcU>, accessed 15 November 2015.

the peripheral town of Migdal Ha'Emek. The actors were mostly amateurs, and its first play was Molière's 1668 play, *L'avare*, translated to Darija by Asher Cohen.⁵⁵ Following the huge success of the group, other Darija groups soon followed. In 2003, Hanny Elimelech opened another community theatre, this time in Ashkelon. The group premiered with *Ourika* (with Haïm Ulliel), a play based on Beckett's 1953 absurdist play, *En attendant Godot*, adapted to a Moroccan setting, the Atlas Mountains' valley of Ourika.⁵⁶

In the following years Darija theatre groups multiplied. In 2004 Ronit Ivgi's theatre split. Her group, retaining the name 'The Israeli Moroccan Theatre' presented a Darija production of Goldoni's 1746 comedy, *The Servant of Two Masters*, while the group branching from it, Asher Cohen's 'Al-Maghreb Theatre,' played Molière's 1671 comedy, *Les Fourberies de Scapin*. In the following years the number of Darija (oftentimes slightly mixed with Hebrew) performances increased even more: Avner Dan (b. 1948), a pioneering Moroccan comedian in the 1980s, wrote, directed, and acted in several shows, such as *Al Familia*, *The Nice Mother in Law*, and *Concertto for Muffetta*. Other plays, such as Herzl Amzaleg's *Mama Diali*, Hanny Elimelech's *Mama*, *Winter's Funeral*, Arik Masha'ali's productions, *L'Mahaboul*, *Leon*, *Mrati*, *The Doctor in Spite of Himself*, and *Allegra*; Asher Cohen's *Everything is included*; Moshe Azran's *Saturday's Skhina*; and Sarah Avni's *Neighbors' Quarrel*, have all contributed to the ongoing visibility of Moroccan Arabic, and to the fashioning of a new sense of Moroccanness in Israel today.

A general survey of these performances indicates that most of them are comedies, and that many refer to everyday life of the Moroccan Jewish community. They present multiple geographies and temporalities, ranging from pre-emigration Morocco, through the calamities of migration, the early years in the new country, and current everyday life in Israel. Aside from the popular comedies there are also musical dramas like Hanny Elimelech's 2006 production, *Café de Marie*, which takes place in November 1955 in a Casablanca café on the eve of Sultan Muhammad V's return to Morocco from exile.

Indeed, the sense of Moroccanness portrayed in many of these plays is a Moroccan-French-Israeli amalgamation of Morocco, somehow frozen in the 1960s, along with the ambiance of Moroccan diaspora neighborhoods in Israel. All plays contain many references to Morocco itself: the Moroccan

55. Interviews with Ronit Ivgi 2011, 2015, and with Asher Cohen, 2015.

56. Sarit Cofman-Simhon, "Filling a Space: Maghrebi Language Theatre in Israel," *Teatron* 30 (2011): 101.

flag;⁵⁷ pictures of Sultans Mohammed V,⁵⁸ Hassan II,⁵⁹ and Mohammed VI;⁶⁰ references to actual places in Morocco, many of which represent 1950s-1960s landscapes; and songs, longing for those times.⁶¹ Combining memories, realities, and fiction, the theatrical stage has thus become an essential arena for imagining Morocco. An additional observation in regard with both theatre and music bands is their common origin in peripheral towns where the Moroccan diaspora was settled since its arrival in Israel: Sderot, Migdal Ha‘emek, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and others. In these places, away from the erasing effect of the hegemonic cultural discourse, Moroccan culture was preserved and reappeared in powerful and productive ways.

The revival of the Moroccan language in theatre was intensified in the last few years also by the publication of Hebrew-Moroccan dictionaries, Judeo-Moroccan reading and speaking groups, and by singers performing in Moroccan Arabic.⁶² These extremely popular singers among the Moroccan diaspora include the actors-singers Raymonde Abecassis (“Raymonde El Bidaouia;” b. 1943), Mike Karoutchi (b. 1963), Zehava Ben (b. 1968), and young artists such Neta Elkayam (b. 1980). Karoutchi, highly esteemed in Morocco due to his continued efforts to retain connection between homeland and diaspora, is himself a descendent of a legacy of Jewish-Moroccan performers who passed their art down from father to son.⁶³ Elkayam, who represents the youngest generation of Jewish Moroccan singers, describes her deep sense of Moroccanness, which is based not only on past memories of the previous generation, but also on frequent performances in Morocco, frequently collaborated with Moroccan Muslim artists,⁶⁴ composing new lyrics in Moroccan Arabic.⁶⁵

57. E.g. Asher Cohen, “The Gossiper,” 2012, <https://youtu.be/SFIZzIVKeSo>, accessed 10 December 2015.

58. Asher Cohen, “L’avare,” 2012, <https://youtu.be/l78Vp3r40Jk> accessed 10 December 2015; Asher Cohen, “Wedding in Square,” 2013, <https://youtu.be/RcikYyGjJxc>, accessed 10 December 2015.

59. Gibli Yakov, “Untitled theatre play,” 2011, <https://youtu.be/SnlET2gBwDc>, accessed 10 December 2015.

60. Asher Levi, “L’mra kbiha,” 2013, <https://youtu.be/prz4fdECW5w>, accessed 10 December 2015.

61. The mother in the play *Mama* sings, among other things, about her longing to Morocco.

62. Marcus Hanouna, *A Dictionary of Jewish Moroccan* (Hebrew Version) (Israel: HMD, 2008); Marcus Hanouna, *Artichoke Wedding, Plums’ Divorce: The Wisdom of Moroccan Jews’ Proverbs* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2010).

63. Interview with Mike Karoutchi, June-July 2014.

64. Elkayam and her musical partner, Israeli-born Moroccan Tunisian Amit Hai Cohen, have created musical interpretations of Maghribi Jewish songs by Albert Swissa, Salim Halali, and Zohra El Fassia, among many others. Elkayam’s performance of Zohra El Fassia’s song *Hak Ya Mama* inspired Moroccan actor and singer Fayçal Azizi (b. 1986), who released his hit cover of *Hak Ya Mama* in Morocco in 2014.

65. References to Moroccan music have appeared in Israeli pop since the early 1990s in various forms from mockery to celebration. Mainstream Ashkenazi Musician Matti Caspi (b. 1949), for example, incorporated Moroccan rhythms in his 1990’s album *Songs in Tomato Sauce*. See, for example, the music video for *Nahlieli* (wagtail): <https://youtu.be/8umyOmFEQ6M>, in which Caspi=

A very recent trend (2010 onwards) that directly relates to the Moroccan diaspora is a novel reflexive discourse led by young Moroccan and Mizrahi artists which critically reexamines their identity *vis-à-vis* normative Israeliness. With the work of the Elkabetz brothers,⁶⁶ TV series like *Zaguri Imperia*,⁶⁷ and the new poetry movement *Ars-Poetika*, predominantly identified with a rebellious young Moroccan poet Roy Hassan (b. 1983),⁶⁸ contemporary Israel has seen an unprecedented prosperity of Moroccan cultural creativity.⁶⁹ It encompasses a wide range of artistic modes of expression, it displays a sincere longing and attachment to a sense of Moroccan-ness, it strengthens the identity of the Moroccan diaspora in Israel, and it commercially supports a considerable number of people.

Discussion

Our overview of the cultural politics of what we call “Moroccanness” in Israel derives from a perspective that regards Moroccan Jews in Israel as diaspora rather than merely an ethnic sector within the Israeli society. As we

=and other musicians bounce in white Moroccan-style *djellabas* in a picnic area, an indirect mockery of the cultural habit among working-class Mizrahim to socialize outdoors. In contrast, there have been celebratory adaptations of Moroccan popular (*Sha'abi*) and Gnawa musical styles. For example, in his 1993's album, *The Last of the Lower Class*, Israeli-born Tunisian Kobi Oz (b. 1969) included a protest song that became a radio hit, *Betoch Niyar 'iton* (rolled up inside a newspaper) based on the popular Moroccan wedding Arabic hit *wakha tomchi l'sbitar*. See <https://youtu.be/DRXOUwYVkeQ>. The popularity of globalized postcolonial aesthetics in recent years can be seen today in the work of young Mizrahi musicians in Israel, such as the Israeli-born Tunisian-Algerian Riff Cohen (b. 1984), who embraces a plethora of Maghribi and Western styles. See her *Marrakech* (2015) <https://youtu.be/-o1Fk2G07MY>.

66. Ronit Elkabetz (1964-2016) and Shlomi Elkabetz (b. 1972) wrote and directed a critically acclaimed film trilogy woven around the world of Vivian Amsalem (played by Ronit Elkabetz), a Moroccan-Israeli Jewish woman over the course of thirty years. The films—*Prendre femme* (2004), *Les Sept Jours* (2008), and *Gett, le procès de Viviane Amsalem* (2014)—have brought wider attention to the multilingual characteristics of the Moroccan-Jewish experience in Israel, and specifically Darija, a language that occupies much of the linguistic space in these movies.

67. Written and directed by Maor Zaguri (b. 1981), *Zaguri Empire* is a 51-episodes comedy-drama about an eight-children Moroccan family in Beersheba, that was broadcast in Spring 2014 (first season) and Winter 2015 (second season), and is regarded as Israel's most expensive and most successful title ever. It seems that this TV series, which already ignited a heated debate among Moroccan critics will be regarded as a milestone in the history of Mizrahi self-representation in general, and Moroccan in particular. Zaguri himself is a second-generation Israeli-born Moroccan. His parents were born in Israel in the late 1950s to Moroccan Jewish immigrants from Midelt and Rabat. Despite this generational gap, members of the fictitious family use Moroccan Arabic in their daily communications. The immense popularity of the series has its impact on a wide range of viewers, and Moroccan words such as ‘*hak*,’ ‘*hshuma*,’ and ‘*wakha*,’ were soon incorporated into Israeli slang.

68. Hassan's book *The Dogs that Barked in Our Childhood Were Muzzled* was published in 2014 by ‘Tangier Books’ (a new Mizrahi press). See Ilan Berkovich, “Roy Hasan Is the Hebrew Poet of Our Generation,” *Haaretz* (English edition), September 23, 2015.

69. The music blog “Cafe Gibraltar” (was active in 2010-2015), run by the Israeli-born Moroccan Ophir Toubul (b. 1984), was an active platform for knowledge exchange and interaction among Mizrahi artists, musicians, and readers.

have tried to show, this view can be justified not only on the grounds of sheer ethnic/geographical descent, but also by a strong and ongoing affiliation and identification with a sense of *Morocco* (as a place of origin and as a cultural fantasy) which manifests itself in language, music, images, and conceptions of self that seem to bypass rigid and ethnic national confinements. Although this perspective requires further examination of the multifaceted ways in which Moroccan cultural production in Israel has engaged with the national Zionist space, it seeks to extricate the study of Moroccan Jewish culture in Israel from the Israeli-centric circle and to situate its story within and against global networks of diasporic renderings of modernity. Aspects of the cultural history of Moroccans in Israel thus may be considered emblematic of late modern global processes such as mass migrations, the creation of ethnic diasporas, the negotiation of migrants’ identity, and the regeneration of “unique” cultural components in the context of cultural and linguistic discontinuity.

Looking briefly at the cultural expressions made by members of the Moroccan diaspora in Israel—from the early years of *en masse* immigration within a colonial context, to the present cultural renewal, which takes place within a global, transnational and postcolonial setting—reveals a few consecutive and oftentimes overlapping stages. If during the first two decades the hegemonic authorities repressed all public manifestations of Moroccaness, which met with protest and resistance, in the later decades, both the State and the Moroccans were implicated in various collaboration and cooptation strategies. The current phase, it seems, has seen an unprecedented level of cultural renaissance—a “mission,” perhaps⁷⁰—which manifests itself in a variety of ways (from the autonomous and *avant-garde* to the popular and highly commercial) and spatial-temporal sensibilities (Moroccaness as a site of *intergenerational* and *intragenerational* negotiation). Having said that, we also think that the ongoing imagining and reimagining of “Morocco” by second—and third—generation artists and writers is a nearly inevitable by-product of a long process in which the reconstruction of the lost homeland gains an almost therapeutic value. We do not think, however, that the processes described here are unique to the Moroccan diaspora in Israel, and it is possible that further comparative examinations will reveal similar processes in other global diasporas.⁷¹ The profoundly diasporic manner, which, to our mind, defines the current Moroccan Jewish cultural

70. If we may allude to Frantz Fanon’s famous dictum in his 1961’s *Les Damnés de la Terre*: “Each generation must discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it, in relative opacity.” (“chaque génération doit dans une relative opacité, découvrir sa mission, la remplir ou la trahir.”)

71. For similar observations with regard to Asian diasporas see Hae-Kyung Um, “Introduction: Understanding Diaspora, Identity and Performance,” in *Diasporas and Interculturalism in Asian Performing Arts: Translating Traditions*, ed. Hae-kyung Um, 1-6 (New York: Routledge, 2005).

revival in Israel, can also be seen from both local and global perspectives in immigration and diasporicity.⁷²

The current cultural revival of the Moroccan diaspora in Israel can thus be linked to wide-spread sensations of loss felt by minorities under the homogenizing pressures of globalization. These effects, globally noticeable since the 1970s,⁷³ occur in response to processes such as industrialization, urbanization, depopulation of rural areas, modernization, and centralization. The reaction to these processes often takes the form of festivals celebrating local “authentic” traditions. As such, the Moroccan cultural regeneration in Israel could indeed be seen as part of a global trend of return to singularity as opposed to universal culture. Another interesting aspect of the contemporary Moroccan revival in Israel is the many links it maintains with the transnational Jewish Moroccan diaspora, and with Muslims in Morocco via cyberspace.⁷⁴ This is noticeable on multiple websites where musical and theatrical performances are broadcasted or replayed (such as Youtube), and especially evident in viewers’ comments, exchanges, and discussions following the videos.

The heavy reliance of diasporic communities on social media and cyberspace was noted already by Arjun Appadurai in the 1990s in his analysis of the joint effect of media and migration on the work of the imagination as a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity.⁷⁵ Appadurai asserted that “electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination [... which...] is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern.”⁷⁶ In a similar vein, a study that deals with Dutch-born children

72. Ella Shohat’s call for a “diasporic turn” in thinking of regions such as ‘the Middle East’ and ‘North Africa’ could prove vital to our understanding of Moroccaness in Israel today. According to her relational—indeed, *diasporic*—reading, “each geography constitutes not a point of origin or a final destination but rather one terminal in a transnational network.” See Shohat, “The Sephardi-Moorish Atlantic: Between Orientalism and Occidentalism.” In *Between the Middle East and the Americas: The Cultural Politics of Diaspora*, eds. Evelyn Alsultany and Ella Shohat, 59-61 (The University of Michigan Press, 2013).

73. For Europe, see: Jeremy Boissevain, “Introduction,” in *Revitalizing European rituals*, ed. Jeremy Boissevain (London: Routledge, 1992); for Sweden, see Ann-Kristin Ekman, “The Revival of Cultural Celebrations in Regional Sweden: Aspects of Tradition and Transition,” *Sociologia Ruralis* 39 (1999).

74. See a general and theoretical reference to this observation in Daniel Dayan, “Particularistic Media and Diasporic Communications,” in *Media, Ritual and Identity*, eds. Tamar Liebes and James Curran (London: Routledge, 1998). See also Amina Loukili, “Moroccan Diaspora, Internet and National Imagination: Building a Community Online Through the Internet Portal Yabiladi (2007), and Aomar Boum, “‘The Virtual Genizah’: Emerging North African Jewish and Muslim Identities Online,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 46 (2014): 597-601.

75. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 3.

76. Appadurai, *Modernity*, 4.

of Muslim Moroccan parents has outlined how this second-generation created an imagined Morocco in cyberspace.⁷⁷ Although the new generation have no physical attachments to Morocco, they create a place of imagined relationships to their parents’ homeland by forming social relationships on the Internet with other second-generation Dutch Moroccan youth.⁷⁸ The intergenerational relationships thus appear as a major issue within diasporic cultural revivals. In Israel, second and third diasporic generations, born or raised in the host country, currently express a deep empathy towards the first generation who endured the hardships of immigration. These new generations are actively engaged in recovering their parents’ and grandparents’ memories, and recreating an imagined version of the homeland in the host country, which is most noticeable in the realm of cultural productions.⁷⁹

As a result of our perspective that Moroccans in Israel shook off the oppressive and monolithic character of Israeli culture and recreated its own Arab component, the question that ultimately drives our discussion is whether or not these changes will affect the diaspora’s discourse concerning the relations between Jews and Muslims. Arguably, the situation is rather complex, as on the one hand already from the first days of the Black Panthers a few of its members linked the discrimination against Arab-Jews in Israel with that of the Palestinians, and preached for common Jewish-Arab action. In similar veins there are groups and individuals today who call for inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue based on the common cultural heritage of Arab-Jews and Arabs. Yet, it appears that by and large, Moroccans in Israel, concomitantly with its Moroccan cultural renaissance, conform to the separatist mainstream Israeli nationalism.⁸⁰

After his father’s death, Mishael, the protagonist of Herzl Cohen’s novel with which we opened this chapter, meets fellow Moroccans who come to pray for the memory of his father. They comfort him and among their soothing words utter a sentence which transmits arrogance towards the Arabs. Mishael explodes and says:

Hey, you who sway in prayer, pay attention, see how your hearts broaden when you hear an Arabic song, see what a single

77. Lenie Brouwer, “Dutch Moroccan Websites: A Transnational Imagery?” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32 (2006): 1153-68.

78. Kevin M. Leander et al., “The Changing Social Spaces of Learning: Mapping New Mobilities,” *Review of Research in Education* 34 (2010), 369.

79. See Weingrod and Levy, “Social Thought,” 696-7; Yohai Oppenheimer, “The Tune Still Returns in Your Veins,” *Pe’eamim* 125-127 (2011): 403. With regard to the Moroccan diaspora in the Netherlands see Marieke Sloodman, “Reinvention of Ethnic Identification Among Second Generation Moroccan and Turkish Dutch Social Climbers,” *New Diversities* 16 (2014).

80. See for example Yoav Peled, “Towards a Redefinition of Jewish Nationalism in Israel? The Enigma of SHAS,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 21 (1998).

short *Mawal* does to your souls. Your hearts immensely crave and burn by the sound of a Moroccan or a Tunisian violin leant on a knee, a violin which tunes its strings to Mecca and Medina, praising great *Allah* and Prophet Mohamed his messenger; which with its bow cuts the air that feels your lungs into small pieces. Do you remember cradling in your mothers' wombs when a skillful *Mu'adhin* sent her long and soft windings from his minaret? Do you remember how those reached instantaneously and directly inside her, knocking on the sides of her womb? And you, tiny and naked with closed eyes, floating in those warm and salty waters, still free from any prejudice and hatred, opened your hands, stretched your legs, and kicked in the exact rhythm; behold, this is the music you love, these are the poets you love, and the singers, the composers and players, all of them sons of Arabia, all Muslims of higher or lesser devotion. Behold, because of their songs you gather around any stage, delight yourselves with that music, and that Arab-ness, good Jews of their fathers, exists in every part and every corner of you.⁸¹

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81. Cohen, *Stones*, 30-1.

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ملخص: "قلبي معلق بالمغرب:" بعض جوانب الإحياء الثقافي لمغاربة الشتات في إسرائيل.

يمثل المغاربة اليوم في إسرائيل ثاني أكبر مجتمعات الشتات اليهودي المغربي بعد فرنسا. وفي السنوات التي تلت الوصول إلى إسرائيل في خمسينات وستينات القرن الماضي، اعتبر هذا الشتات المغربي أقل شأنًا من طرف المهاجرين الأوائل، الذين حاولوا محو الممارسات الثقافية المغربية السابقة. ويجد المرء اليوم صورة مختلفة جدًا، إذ تفتخر إسرائيل اليوم بتعدد الأشكال الثقافية اليهودية المغربية. ويتناول هذا المقال بالعرض والتحليل مظاهر وتجليات الإحياء الثقافي والمعاني الاجتماعية الثقافية المغربية الموجودة في إسرائيل المعاصرة من خلال رصد تاريخ تطورها وممارساتها المستمرة، ووضعها بالتالي في سياقات الإنتاج الثقافي للشتات الموجود في جميع أنحاء العالم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الشتات المغربي، اليهود المغاربة، الخصوصية المغربية، الإحياء الثقافي، المجتمع الإسرائيلي.

Résumé: “Mon Coeur est au Maghreb:” Aspects du renouveau culturel de la diaspora marocaine en Israël.

Les Marocains en Israël représentent la seconde plus large communauté diasporique juive marocaine, après celle de la France. Suite à leur arrivée en Israël à partir des années 50, les marocains ont été considérés en tant qu’inférieurs et leur identité culturelle a été réprimée. De nos jours, la situation est très différente, Israël se prévalant fièrement de nombreuses manifestations culturelles juives marocaines. Cet article étudie les aspects de la présence culturelle des Juifs marocains en Israël. Ainsi, on note l’existence d’orchestres de musique Andalous, de pièces de théâtre en Darija, d’un nouveau dictionnaire du dialecte arabe des Juifs marocains, des célébrations dédiées aux pèlerinages vers les sanctuaires de saints Juifs, et des voyages organisés au Maroc pour visiter leur patrimoine. Cet article aborde le thème de la renaissance culturelle de la “marocanité” dans l’Israël contemporain, qui fait partie de l’effervescence de la culture diasporique de par le monde.

Mots Clefs: Diaspora marocaine, juif marocain, marocain, renouveau culturel, société israélienne

Abstract: “My Heart is in the Maghrib:” Aspects of Cultural Revival of the Moroccan Diapsora in Israel.

Moroccans in Israel form the second largest Jewish-Moroccan diasporic community, after France. After arrival in Israel in mid-XXth century, Moroccan immigrants were considered inferior and their cultural identity was repressed. Today, one finds a very different picture. Present-day Israel boasts multiple Jewish-Moroccan cultural forms. The essay examines the cultural practices of Moroccan-Jews in Israel, including: Andalusian orchestras, theatrical productions in Darija, a new dictionary of Moroccan Jewish Arabic, popular festivals devoted to Jewish-saint pilgrimages, and “heritage” trips to Morocco. The essay addresses the cultural revival of “Moroccanness” in contemporary Israel, situating it within a diasporic cultural production world-wide.

Key words: Moroccan Diaspora, Moroccan Jewry, Moroccanness, cultural revival, Israeli society.

Resumen: “Mi corazón está en el Magreb:” Aspectos del renacimiento cultural de la Diapsora marroquí en Israel.

Los marroquíes en Israel forman la segunda comunidad judía-marroquí más grande de la diáspora, después de Francia. Después de su llegada a Israel a mediados del siglo XX, los inmigrantes marroquíes fueron considerados

inferiores y su identidad cultural fue reprimida. Hoy en día, uno encuentra una imagen muy diferente. El Israel actual posee múltiples formas culturales judío-marroquíes. El ensayo examina las prácticas culturales de judíos marroquíes en Israel, incluyendo: orquestas andaluzas, producciones teatrales en Darija, un nuevo diccionario de árabe judío marroquí, fiestas populares dedicadas a peregrinaciones judías y viajes “patrimoniales” a Marruecos. El ensayo aborda el renacimiento cultural de la “marroquinería” en el Israel contemporáneo, situándolo dentro de una producción cultural diaspórica en todo el mundo.

Palabras clave: Diáspora marroquí, judería marroquí, marroquí, renacimiento cultural, sociedad israelí.