

## On Double-Diasporicity: Notes From a Pilgrimage Ethnography to the Grave of Amran Ben Diwan

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**Abstract:** Each year, towards the end of spring, many Moroccan Jews undertake *Hiloulot* (festive-pilgrimages similar to *ziyārāt*) to the tombs of local *Sayyid* (or *Tsadikim*, Saints). One such pilgrimage is held near Ouazzane in a *douar* (village) called Asjen where Amran Ben Diwan's grave is located. While some claim that Amran Ben Diwan, who is venerated by Muslims and Jews alike, was a Rabbi from the holy land, others report that he was a local healer. Amid the Moroccan protests of 2011 and in spite of the bombing in Marrakesh, the *Hiloula* of Ouazzane for 2011 was well attended. In the same year, the appointment of a moderate Islamist government indicated a shift towards democratic change for which ongoing protests in Morocco have been appealing. On the basis of an ethnography to the tomb of Ben Diwan (2011), research on the subject over the last decade, and inspiration from interviews with several interlocutors among them the scholar and activist Simon Lévy, this paper takes a look at the tensions between minorities and the changing Moroccan political system. Through the prism of the *Hiloula* – an important symbolic date for the Moroccan Jewish Diaspora and local Jewish residents alike – this paper discusses the imperatives of Moroccan historiography and Diaspora relation to place, people and culture.

**Keywords:** Belonging, Diversity, Heritage, Pilgrimage, Saints, Tourism.

### Contemporary Background and Argument of Paper

Two nationalisms continue to play a role in global Moroccan Jewish religious community identification. First, Moroccan nationalism, which can be indexed against loyalty to the *Makhzan* ruling class/system in Morocco<sup>1</sup>, and second, a form of unfettered patriotism for the modern State of Israel. These national affiliations and their attendant affective implication have created an emotionally elastic double-diasporicity<sup>2</sup> among Moroccan Jews residing outside of Morocco<sup>3</sup> who are often legal citizens and/or self-ascriptive Moroccans as well, from the perspective of the Moroccan state, part of a broad multi-faith (Muslim-Jewish) diaspora.

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1. *Makhzan* (storehouse) is the vernacular term that refers to all instances of Moroccan monarchical power: judiciary, administrative, military as well as the nub of the crown's in-group itself.

2. For the purposes of this article and as a literary encapsulation of the theory that this article puts forward, Capital D Diaspora will be used to refer to Moroccan Jews still longer residing in Morocco and small d diaspora will be used to refer to Moroccans (both Jewish and Muslim) residing outside of Morocco.

3. According to the World map of migration (<https://www.iom.int>, last accessed 22 July 2020) more than 245,000 Moroccans live in Israel making it the fourth site of Moroccans who reside outside of Morocco after France, Spain and Italy.

In the context of a contemporary North African local and national level renewal of political participation since 2011, this double-diasporicity has become politically complicated as Moroccan Palestinian solidarity has sharpened since the election of the moderate Islamist government<sup>4</sup> in 2011, headed by the Justice and Development Parity (PJD)<sup>5</sup> leader Abdelilah Benkirane and since 2017 by Saadeddine El Othmani. Nevertheless, Moroccan Jews are not alone in their conceptual identification as diasporic minorities external to a state-endorsed Arab-Islamist frame. Berbers the putative majority,<sup>6</sup> living both inside and outside of Morocco, that continue to exist as language groups from the south to the north,<sup>7</sup> have gained only limited cultural and political capital notably via the *Amazigh* (Berber) language movement.<sup>8</sup>

While the national Moroccan Berber-Arabic hybrid language Darija<sup>9</sup> is a marker of the effervescence and expressiveness of Moroccan ethnic diversity,<sup>10</sup> the political system has been rather less flexible towards incorporating the multiplicity of minority sentiments present in contemporary Moroccan multi-faith society and diaspora.<sup>11</sup> Herein lies a significant challenge at the inception of the Moroccan democratization process for the *Makhzan* and the PJD: how to maintain the balance between localized and globalized religious, linguistic, social and ethnic identities of Morocco all vying for political influence.<sup>12</sup>

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4. Ashraf Nabih El Sherif, "Institutional and Ideological Re-construction of the Justice and Development Party (PJD): The Question of Democratic Islamism in Morocco," *The Middle East Journal* 66, 4 (2012): 660-82.

5. Parti de la Justice et développement (*hizb al adala wal tammia*). For more a more detailed analysis on the rise of the PJD in Morocco and Benkirane as a figurehead in the movement, see Farid Boussaid, "The Rise of the PAM in Morocco: Trampling the Political Scene or Stumbling into it?," *Mediterranean Politics* 14, 3 (2009): 413-19; Miquel Pellicer and Eva Wegner, "The Justice and Development Party in Moroccan Local Politics," *The Middle East Journal* 69, 1 (2015): 32-50.

6. Gabriel Camps, *Les Berbères: Mémoires et identités* (Paris: Actes Sud, 2007).

7. Jean Servier, *Les Berbères* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2011), 11.

8. Moha Ennaji, "Recognizing the Berber Language in Morocco: A Step for Democratization," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 15, 2 (2014): 93-99; Eva Pföstl, "Challenges for Multiculturalism and Minority Rights in Contemporary Maghreb: The Berber/Amazigh Movement in Morocco and Algeria," *European Yearbook of Minority Issues Online* 11, 1 (2014): 211-25.

9. *Darija* or Moroccan /Algerian/Tunisian Arabic is not considered a national language and yet used as a *lingua franca* across North Africa.

10. Madeleine Dobie, "Francophone Studies and the Linguistic Diversity of the Maghreb," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23, 1 (2003): 32-30; Az Eddine Jalaly, *Initiation à l'arabe parlé au Maroc, Volume 1* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2012).

11. Youssef Boutahar, "Religious Minorities as "Subalterns" in Post-2011 Morocco: Between Modalities of Co-existence and the Quest for Recognition." In *Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in the MENA Region: Minorities, Subalternity, and Resistance*, eds. Hamza Taybi and Jochen Lobah (Rabat: Hans Seidel Foundation, 2019), 111-26.

12. In addition to Jewish Moroccan diasporic communities and the microscale Jewish community of Casablanca, contemporary Moroccan ethno-religious diversity spans multiple groups, some transient others less so, including a significant Christian minority, predominantly settled sub-Saharan African,

*Al Yahud wal Berber Sakin Almaghrib Qadimoun*

(Jews and Berbers lived in the ancient Maghreb).

During my travels across Morocco and in my interactions with friends and interlocutors since 2010 the famous Moroccan history textbook phrase *sukān al-Maghrib al-aqdamūn huma al-barābira abnā' u māzigh* (in ancient Morocco/Maghrib lived the sons of Amazigh Berbers) has, on several occasions been relayed to me as *al-yahūd wa al-barbar sukān al-maghrib al-aqdamūn* (Jews and Berbers lived in ancient Morocco/Maghrib). The insertion of a Jewish genealogy demonstrates perhaps, at least at the level of the imaginary, that Jewish and Berber influence on Moroccan culture is thought to be such that it is inscribed into Moroccan children's history books.<sup>13</sup> It would appear that a significant Jewish Moroccan past though often *officially absent* in the historical development of Morocco and its national identity maintains an enduring oral presence. Building on the work of Boum regarding generationally differentiated perceptions,<sup>14</sup> within Morocco a confusion exists regarding the size of the Moroccan Jewish community *dialna* (belonging to us), sometimes by opposition and at other times related to *ukhrā* "other" Jews, often perceived to be solely from the US and Israel. This mystification continues to have an impact, both positive and negative, on non-elite Muslim attitudes towards Jews.<sup>15</sup> For the ruling *Makhzan*<sup>16</sup> but also within elite Moroccan circles however there is a pride in the outward

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ex-patriate (including large numbers of French and Spanish) who are Catholic and Evangelical as well as small autochthonous Christian Berber groups in addition to Shi'a and Bahā'i Muslim minorities (Hamza Taybi and Jochen Lobah *Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion in the MENA Region: Minorities, Subalternity, and Resistance* (Rabat: Hans Seidel Foundation, 2019).

13. Thanks in particular to the Moutaïb and Charrat families (interviews July and September 2011, 2012, Tangiers, Casablanca) for these insights. In reality this point is extremely tendentious in Morocco given the importance of History to nation-making. There is in fact no mention of Morocco's most illustrious Jewish history (Emily Gottreich and Daniel Schroeter. *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011; Emily Gottreich, *Jewish Morocco: A History from Pre-Islamic to Post-colonial Times* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2020) in Arabic school textbooks (see on this subject, Abdelelah Hmid, "Ṣawt al-yahūd fi an-nizām al-ta'limī al-maghribī," (Thèse de Doctorat, Université Mohammed V, Rabat, 2016).

14. Aomar Boum, *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

15. Interviews conducted in norther Morocco with famille Charrat: March 2011, September 2012.

16. "Protection by any means of our Moroccan subjects of the Jewish faith," (Laskier, Michael M. *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: the Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria*. New York: New York University Press, 1994) is the credo of the *Makhzan*. Similarly, popular Moroccan French language magazines such as *Zamane*; *Le Point Maroc* and the mainstream Moroccan dailies produce articles around the time of year when the pilgrimages occur maintaining the image of a certain Moroccan Jewish reality in the collective consciousness.

image of a Moroccan Judeo-Muslim fraternal unity<sup>17</sup> which was reflected in the preamble of the 2011 Moroccan constitution.<sup>18</sup>

Given this elite proximity, it is not without irony that Moroccan Jewish figures such as Abraham Serfaty, Edmond Amran El Maleh and more recently Simon (Sham'ūn) Lévy, who are in the process of being inserted into this Moroccan historiography of religious fraternity,<sup>19</sup> should be communist rebels who, albeit heroes of the anticolonial resistance,<sup>20</sup> were, at a social level, similar to those present-day Islamist political groups, holding little sympathy for an elite-driven centralized monarchy.<sup>21</sup> That contemporary Moroccan Jewish pride should transit through the memory of these revolutionary free thinkers, who, often atheist in outlook, did not identify with Morocco through a politically conservative religious prism, is a further paradox of a present in which Moroccan Judaism (through art, architecture and culture) is perhaps more visible than ever before in no small part thanks to the hugely significant efforts of André Azoulay.<sup>22</sup>

Reflecting on the issue of Moroccan Jewish internal and external representation this article will argue that the institutionalization of the organization of the *Hiloula* of Ouazzane – a festive/celebratory pilgrimage to the grave of Amran Ben Diwan similar to local Muslim *ziyārāt* – shows signs of a growing de-politicization in the Moroccan-Jewish relationship that is not in tune with (and often simply not cognizant of) on-the-ground political realities. At the same time, the symbolism behind the practice of *Hiloula* keeps affective Jewish proximity to the land of Morocco alive in addition to the less tangible cultural transmission of North African language and cuisine between generations within diaspora Maghribi Jewish households. Other forms of identification to Morocco, for example the socio-political relationships that these pilgrimages create, are contemporaneously moulded by the abstract reality of tourism played out to a background of the tensions created by Arab-Israeli relations. This abstraction and the diasporic reinterpretation of a

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17. André Levy, *Return to Casablanca: Jews, Muslims and an Israeli Anthropologist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

18. See second article of the 2011 Moroccan constitution preamble ([https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco\\_2011.pdf](https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Morocco_2011.pdf)): “The sovereign Muslim state (...) the Moroccan kingdom will preserve the plenitude of its diversity and its Arab-Islamic, Amazigh and Saharo-Hassani components *alimented and enriched by its African, Andalusian, Hebrew and Mediterranean tributaries* (author’s italics).

19. See for example the retrospective of Edmond Amran El Maleh at the Bibliothèque Nationale du Maroc (BNM) in 2015: <http://bnm.bnm.ma:86/Arabe/phototheque.aspx?IDc=938>.

20. Abdelaziz Belal, “Lutte du parti contre les repressions et pour la démocratie,” in *35 années de lutte. Etudes sur l’histoire du PCM*, eds. Abdesalam Bourquia, A. Layachi, Simon Lévy, & Abdelaziz Belal, 68-82 (Casablanca: Éditions Al Bayane, 1981).

21. Interviews Simon Lévy, Casablanca, July 2011.

22. André Azoulay, “Music Instead of Politics: The Remaining Answer to the Current Challenges of Coexistence?” Talk at St John’s Divinity School, University of Cambridge, 2020.

time-worn pilgrimage practice contributes to a process of Moroccan Jewish heritage creation. The desire to experience a *Hiloula* by persons outside of community bounds<sup>23</sup> heightens the disconnect between local and global that can be found at the *Hiloula* of Amran Ben Diwan.

In what follows, I will unpack the *Hiloula* historically, structurally and socially using material collected in multiple interviews, recordings and in particular drawing on observations conducted over an intensive three-day participant pilgrimage-ethnography to the *Hiloula* of Ouazzane (as it is commonly known) in 2011 undertaken with a friend and fellow interested observer, like myself of Algerian Jewish descent, with whom I travelled around northern Morocco.<sup>24</sup> Contemporary religious minority identification to Morocco will be analysed at the level of ideas in terms of Moroccan state-Jewish community interaction and approached affectively as a life event.

### Outline of Moroccan Jewish Immigration and Specificity of Hiloula

It is common in the Moroccan press and in academia for the words “2,000 years” or “bi-millennial” to immediately precede “the Jewish presence in Morocco.”<sup>25</sup> However, the demographic reality of the Jewish population in Morocco today represents a less substantive story. Behind the (habitually) grand chronological and cultural depth rightly attributed to Moroccan Jewish history lies the demographic fact that although stable over time (for the last twenty years) Jews represent perhaps the smallest Moroccan minority at just under 0.2% of the current population, most of whom are concentrated in Casablanca.<sup>26</sup> However, the demographic importance of *les israélites*<sup>27</sup> as a diaspora is inverted, representing the largest Moroccan religious minority.

The first waves of Jewish mass departures from Morocco in the 1940s and 1950s were primarily for reasons that are likely to have been socio-economic.<sup>28</sup> The not insignificant remaining Moroccan Jewish population

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23. On the importance of “the committee” in the construction of these community bounds, see: Levy, *Return to Casablanca*, 95-96.

24. My friend and I though introduced to the organising committee by Jewish Moroccan friends who are ‘in’ i.e. considered to form a part of the Moroccan community (however distant) were consistently referred to as *les journalistes* by the organizers thus emphasising the distance between us.

25. See for example the “best of” edition of *Zamane* 28 January 2013; Norma Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands: A History and Source Book* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979).

26. Ira Sheskin, Arnold Dashefsky, and Sergio DellaPergola, “Jewish population in the United States, 2011,” *Berman Institute-North American Jewish Data Bank* 4 (2011): 56.

27. “Israelites” is the colonial term for Jewish people in North Africa still used by older members of the community.

28. For those historical accounts refer to the works of Amran El Maleh and Simon Lévy: Marie Redonnet and Edmond Amran El-Maleh. *Entretiens avec Edmond Amran El Maleh*. 1 vol. Fondation Edmond Amran El Maleh (Grenoble: Éd. La Pensée sauvage, 2005); Simón Levy, *Parlers arabes des*



found itself in an epoch of political change as defined by 1968 in Europe and 1967<sup>29</sup> in the Near East. The increased migratory stream of Jews away from Morocco in the 1960s, notably to Israel, but also to Canada and France for the wealthier, slowed down and had drawn to a near halt by the end of the 1970s.<sup>30</sup> At this time, the contingent emergence of a more globally homogenized (albeit invariably divergent) religious identity politics was becoming a global reality.<sup>31</sup> Following the debacle of the 1976 *Marche Verte*,<sup>32</sup> in need of a positive image boost, the Moroccan state allowed Jews of Moroccan origin (including Israelis) to enter the country and attend *Hiloula* pilgrimages. This unofficial normalization of relations with Israel for the period of the *Hiloulot* has not changed since that time.

### Contemporary Moroccan Hiloula and Myths of the Past

The *Hiloula* (pl. *Hiloulot*, from the Aramaean “festivity”) to the tomb of the Amran Ben Diwan (from hereon RABD) is a North African Jewish traditionalist<sup>33</sup> occasion. Pilgrims go to Asjen either to observe the date of the *Tsedik's* (pious man's) birth or to exult in his existence during *Lag Ba'omer* (or *Lag La'omer* as it is pronounced in Morocco) observed 33 days after *Pessah* (Jewish Spring celebration). The period of *Hiloulot* in Morocco is, for many, a moment of rich symbolism in North African Jewish consciousness. The journey to Ouazzane or any other *Hiloula* occurring in the same period, the majority of which also venerate Judeo-Muslim communal saints,<sup>34</sup> is equally a chance to visit Morocco and thus a form of diaspora tourism.

These pilgrimages represent the confluence of a mirrored ambiguity: on the one hand Jews of Moroccan origin return to embrace their land and celebrate Moroccan rituals and on the other the Moroccan State positions itself as patron of this cultural and traditional phenomenon. Moroccan

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*Juifs du Maroc: Histoire, sociolinguistique et géographie dialectal* (Zaragoza: Instituto de Estudios Islámicos y del Oriente Próximo, 2009).

29. The year of the Israeli-Arab “Yom Kippur” war was perhaps, *a posteriori*, the more significant date, at least in terms of the impact of the situation in the Near East on local realities in Morocco.

30. Simon Lévy, “Les parlers arabes des juifs du Maroc,” *Langage et société* 143, 1 (2013): 41.

31. Yaacov Loupo, *Métamorphose ultra-orthodoxe chez les juifs du Maroc: Comment les séfarades sont devenus achkénazes*, trad. Tirtsa Krauders-Bing (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2006), 5.

32. When 350,000 Moroccans marched on the Saharan desert to rid the region of continued Spanish presence.

33. Jewish “Traditionalism” according to Erik H. Cohen, assigns importance to societal values linked with “authority: religious faith, founding a family, honouring ones' parents.” See, Erik Cohen et Maurice Ifergan, *Heureux comme juifs en France?: Étude sociologique* (Jérusalem: Éditions Elkana et Akadem, 2007), 138.

34. Issachar Ben-Ami, *Saint Veneration among the Jews in Morocco* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 131; idem., *Culte des saints et pèlerinages judéo-musulmans au Maroc* trans. Gabriel Barel (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1990).

state involvement in the *Hiloula* demonstrates, at the level of *Makhzan* an implication in security, a keen desire to maintain a tie and interact with Moroccan Jews – almost systematically via the intermediary of the Moroccan Jewish Casablanca-based consistory. The perpetuation of the *Hiloulot*, year on year, for the pilgrims themselves thus reveals a deep-seated ambiguous double-diasporicity.

However insular the phenomenon of *Hiloula* may be, by virtue of the distance of the Asjen village from the town of Ouazzane<sup>35</sup> and the height of the wall that has been erected around the encampment and the shrine, the event represents an albeit limited contemporary space of dialogic possibility. Interaction between Moroccan Jews and Muslims is both metaphysically implicit, since the site is predicated on spiritual unity and ritual commonalities in Moroccan saintly veneration, and physically explicit, via the practice of Arab song, dance and the consumption of Moroccan cuisine.

The sepulchre at the site of RABD is made up of a stack of stones indicating the site of his burial (Moroccan Jewish lore has it that RABD wanted no tombstone), upon which a fire is permanently alight beneath a great olive tree, which, by miracle, never burns (so legend has it). Historically, in Morocco and across North Africa, each community venerated their closest sepulchre, the grave of their local saint. However, since the mass departure of Morocco's Jews and thanks to cheaper and more efficient transportation, specific and enlarged pilgrimage sites re-group and re-unite people of a similar region. These progressively refurbished sites act as symbolic "hold all" locations for what was previously a more heterogeneous practice spanning across tens, if not hundreds, of *mouqabarat* (or *kivrei*, tombs).

The saintly (Rab) Ben Amrane Diwan, it was explained to me at the *Hiloula*, was a cleric from Palestine who died on a missionary trek through the Moroccan mountains in search of donations for the sacred town of Hebron.<sup>36</sup> So the legend goes, being at his tomb 33 days before the month of *Omer* brings luck and can heal the sick. Faith is therefore ubiquitous during the *Hiloula* – a spiritual belief in another world is performed, deeply-rooted in Moroccan soil and keenly practiced on the site of the saint's grave.

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35. Kosansky explains that the choice of Asjen relates to the sacred nature of Ouezzene as Islamic chorfa sites in which it is not permissible to have Jewish shrines, Oren Kosansky, "All dear unto God: Saints, Pilgrimage and Textual Practice in Jewish Morocco," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2003).

36. Different versions of the myth exist across religious interpretations which may indicate a certain, more contemporary, cementing of the relationship between biblical and Eretz Israel in the Jewish understanding of the figure of Amran Ben Diwan.

Shimon, the now adult orthodox son of a Jewish Moroccan family with whom we ate on each of the three nights of our stay, recounted a boyhood memory to us at the table in the central marquee dressed for Shabbat. He related that “when I was small, I broke my leg. For my parents and my wider family, I was therefore (considered to be) sick, my great uncle hoisted me up and held me like a baby in his arms, he crossed the hot coals of the fire running barefoot. It marked me greatly, it’s part of the faith that people have here.” Such is the strength of the myth that it touches people in the intersection of their systems of belief and the ways in which they act.

The veneration of these Moroccan saints coincides with an existent ritual in the Hebrew calendar: the commemoration of the death of Shimon Bar Yohaï for whom fires and candles are lit. However, the prayers to RABD, the requests made of him and the traditional song, are specifically culturally North African or as a participant told me, part of *le folklore*, as Shimon put it. On the evening of the *Hiloula* there was a sentiment of tranquillity about the camp, a quiet assurance that this was the right thing to do, albeit not necessarily aligned to the dominant practices of religious observation.<sup>37</sup> One interlocutor told me that he felt that such a symbiotic relationship with the almighty on the night of the *Hiloula*, practiced with such devotion, was doubtless influenced by the neighbouring directness of the North African Sufi Islamic connection to Allah.

Ben-Ami in his repertoire of saints in common lists Asjen as a site of mutual sainthood for both Muslims and Jews (1998: 210). The myths of the Rabbi, the story, the site and the landscape all contribute to an intensely Maghribi Judaism. However, *le folklore* is precisely the difference that makes this event so popular while it is paradoxically the institutionalized organization of the *Hiloula* as an experience that is slowly serving to make a commodity of this mixture of sentiments. The magic of the *Hiloula*, a complex practice of religion, folklore, superstition and communion to a land standing outside of an increasingly homogenized global religious normativity – both Jewish and Muslim – is what distinguishes the occasion for its participants.

### **Organisation-Interactions between Minority Community and State**

Contemporary *Hiloula* links the participants’ (sometimes wholly diasporic) experience of Morocco with an idealized Moroccan Jewish folklore

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37. While pilgrimage and saint veneration are cultural observances in Judaism dating back to at least the Middle Ages there have been tensions in Orthodox Judaism in the fact that *Hiloulot* can create an overlap or even confuse the veneration of men (albeit very pious and learned ones often with a direct connection) and the almighty (on this point see Jacques Eladan, “La Hiloula de Rabbi Amrane Ben Diwane A Ouezzane,” *Cahiers d’études juives* 2 (1991): 50-54.



and hardens an increasingly hyphenated Jewish-Moroccan community sentiment. The *Hiloula* event also intensifies the pre-existing ill feeling of conservative Islamist movements in Morocco towards Moroccan diaspora in its association with Israel which is highlighted by the arrangement between the State and those Israeli pilgrims, which is still in place. By extension, the distance between Moroccan-ness and Jewishness is concurrently furthered within the dominant Moroccan narrative, particularly in light of the contemporary regional conjuncture which continues to apply pressure for increased local political autonomy and representation. In parallel, the organization of the *Hiloulot* and their institutionalization as Moroccan heritage a cross between tourism and pilgrimage reflects a desire by the Moroccan Jewish community itself to shift the relationship with the Moroccan state from the previously, at least partially, politically engaged and socially active Moroccan involvement of actors such as Simon Levy, to a more commercial relationship.

People come from far and wide to attend the *Hiloula*, arriving principally by plane from three ports: Rabat, Casablanca and Tangier, periodically, over the course of a week. In 2011, *Shabbat* (Sabbath) fell just before the *Hiloula* so the majority of participants arrived on Thursday or Friday morning in order to observe *Shabbat*. The organization of the event stems from an apparent total disorder thus compounding a residual authenticity. There has been a great deal of construction and investment on the RABD site in recent years. For example, the building of a new *Mikvah*,<sup>38</sup> serving as an indication of the ongoing scheme to structure symbolic sites of Moroccan Judaism protecting them both physically and conceptually as an iconographic testament to what today constitutes Moroccan *Judaïté*.<sup>39</sup>

When the *Hiloula* started again in 1976, the experience was still about a return to nature. People camped on the site and sacrificed animals for the RABD; tents and camp beds were provided by the State for the less wealthy participants. The event was therefore less “organised” than today

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38. Jewish baths for ritual immersion and purification.

39. *Judaïté* is a word coined by Jacques Derrida and Hélène Cixous to encompass the vast array of characteristics that make up Jewish identification (Hélène Cixous, *Judeïties*. Internet video, (2010): <https://vimeo.com/10964764>). Aside from the money collected by the community from food tickets, *Hiloula* participation, gifts being sold and the important amounts acquired through the sale of candles for the ritual of prayer and requests for healing at the grave site of the saint, various Moroccan foundations such as the Foundation Amran El Maleh exist in order to raise funds in order to reach the widest possible audience in terms of the dissemination of Moroccan Jewish culture (see the Arche special edition “*Hiloula*,” 1978; on the notion of *Hiloula* ‘expenditures’ *dépenses* in relation to external representations Moroccan Judaism), see also Oren Kosansky, “Tourism, Charity, and Profit: The Movement of Money in Moroccan Jewish Pilgrimage,” *Cultural Anthropology* 17, 3 (2002): 359-400.

i.e. notably less built up.<sup>40</sup> This was confirmed to me by what Moroccan Jewish interlocutors stated in their descriptions of the *Hiloula* of 1976.<sup>41</sup> Today camping and ritual slaughter is no longer *de rigueur*. At one end of approximately two square kilometres of terrain that make up the site, for an abiding place in RABD cemetery, wealthy families have constructed villas. At the other end of the site, a series of rapidly built bungalows, Moroccan in structure and style, house pilgrim families of four or more people. At the northern edge beside the compound's imposing wall is a makeshift police barracks where policemen discretely reside for the festivities often finding shade there and sipping tea. Most participants come in family groups and many younger people arrive together in friendship groups.

Though my fellow traveller and I stayed in a smaller villa with younger members of the Casablanca community, on the night of the *Hiloula* in the courts of the larger nearby houses, impromptu gatherings occurred and food and drink was laid out for people who walked from house to house saying prayers and psalms and singing Judeo-Arabic songs. A house of prayer (a synagogue) has been erected opposite the sepulchre of the Rabbi over the years, and a large adjacent congregation hall for the gathering of two hundred or more souls has been constructed to eat and commune. Behind the hall, there was a huge marquee for those who wished to eat outside in the evening or to breakfast. There was, almost inevitably, too much food. Communal mealtime was thus a celebration of wealth, hospitality and familial song and dance. Teenage youths sat together and sang psalms, banging the table when older members sang Arabic folk songs.

Instances of a communal solidarity and bonding are exemplified by the temporary re-constitution of an imagined past that takes form in the village community on the temporary Asjen site. The communing of different groups of people highlights *de facto*, the tendency towards self-organization predicated on trust and faith in others that occurs during the *Hiloula*. For example, the extension of invitations to us (as outsiders) were numerous, whilst instances of eating, singing, praying and general togetherness were transmitted by word of mouth, often by children running from house to house to spread the news.

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40. L'Arche. Numéro spéciale 1978 *Hiloulot au Maroc*. Accessed Bibliothèque de l'alliance Israélite Universelle, Paris 2012.

41. Interviews conducted in Paris with Moroccan Jewish shopkeepers on la Goutte d'Or at various times 2011-2017.

During a reflection on the Torah conducted in Hebrew and French (simultaneously translated and interpreted) few paid much attention. However, when M. Alloul – one of the organising team – spoke about the preparations for the arrival of the Minister on the following day faces appeared much more alert. Towards the end of M. Alloul’s address the utmost attention was paid by all those present in the congregation hall with regard to the instructions given to all pilgrims concerning what protocol to adopt the next day. The image of the flag-waving Jewish community for Moroccan television cameras that we witnessed the next day appeared to resonate with the non-spiritual reasons for which people also attended the pilgrimage.

The presence of film cameras and elected officials underscore the Moroccan state apparatus participation and interest in the event in order to reinforce the imagined proximity of Moroccan Jews to the nation. In parallel, in light of the bombing in Marrakesh<sup>42</sup> the community seemed to pull together more tightly. Many conversations revolved around the determination to not be deterred from coming back to Morocco. Other conversations that I listened to or participated in centred upon Dominique Strauss Khan (himself of Moroccan origin) and theories surrounding *why* he should have got caught. People also spoke about their business often in a mock self-critical or self-aggrandizing way with an equal measure of satirical humour and derision. Over the course of the three days that we attended, there was a great deal of meeting and greeting, catching-up and discussing of business.

The *Hiloula*, to this extent, also acts as a social gathering in which news and business: commercial, personal and broader, can be shared and discussed. These transnational ties are actively encouraged by the State, particularly in commercial terms via tax breaks and other fiscal incentives –that apply to all diaspora Moroccans.<sup>43</sup> Negotiation at the *Hiloula* adds to the Moroccan nature of such agreements and transactions, it also points out the class-based disconnect with the surrounding Moroccan poor. The creation of a *Hiloula* commodity and the Moroccan-based site for commercial interaction and negotiation intersect with a symbolic complicity by the Jewish community – as defined by the participants of the *Hiloula* – and the Moroccan system, represented, to the public, by the flag-waving participants who appear on television.

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42. In which an Israeli-Moroccan couple were killed. Tragically, a relation of one of my interlocutors from Paris was among the victims.

43. See the section on “Le coin des MRE” which outlines the Moroccan governmental subsidy to encourage inward investment from Moroccan diaspora: <https://marocainsdumonde.gov.ma>.

**Conclusion: “Huwwa Ja’, Rabbi Amran, Huwwa Ja’ hidawina”<sup>44</sup>**

In local folklore *Sayyid* RABD is said to return on the night of *Hiloula*. As the pilgrimage reaches its apotheosis, accompanied by the sharp beats of the darbuka people sing intermittent bursts of *huwwa ja, Rabbi Amran, Ja’ hidawina* with more and more frequency until reaching an almost trans-like state. French-Darija code switching and the intensity of the chanting typify the North African specificities of the RABD pilgrimage. Moreover, the *Hiloula* is an important part of the Moroccan Jewish religious calendar as well as a focal point for community renewal and inter-relations. People come to pray, to commune, to take solace and to spend their holidays in Morocco. The site of the Rabbi’s tomb is thus a symbolic transit point through which Moroccan belonging is felt and experienced by Moroccan Jews. By perpetuating the tradition of the *Hiloula*, the conservation of a culture intimately connected to a land is upheld and re-instilled across generations. However, the relationships underlying this ideal image are somewhat more ambiguous.

For the Moroccan State, the pilgrimage represents a moment to extricate symbolic capital and international cachet from their treatment of Moroccan (essentially diaspora) Jews, thus demonstrating to the exterior a policy of openness towards religious minorities. Though no doubt calculated, this policy is not without foundation and the Marrakesh declaration of 2016 on *The Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities*<sup>45</sup> builds on the specific *longue durée* Moroccan-Jewish relationship as exemplified by the *Hiloula*.<sup>46</sup> In addition, a significant amount of economic capital is acquired over the weeks that precede/follow the pilgrimage via the tourism that is conducted by those people having travelled to Morocco. From within the Moroccan Israelite Consistory, the success of the *Hiloula* enterprise serves to improve the inflow of money. This means that more work can be undertaken to further anchor sacred sites into the Moroccan landscape thus contributing to the process of Moroccan Jewish heritage-making. In parallel, the press and the state in the formalization and exceptionalisation of the event help to steer away any association of Moroccan Jews with local political struggles and anchors community-state relations in business interests. Such a deliberate separation is further reified by the somewhat voyeuristic Jewish and non-Jewish observers as noted by Maurice Elbaz.<sup>47</sup>

44. Rabbi Amran is coming, he is coming to cure us.

45. The full declaration can be downloaded: <http://www.marrakeshdeclaration.org/files/Bismilah-2-ENG.pdf>.

46. Though the spirit of Moroccan law is to consider Moroccan Jewry as entirely equal to Muslims i.e. not a minority.

47. Maurice Elbaz, *The Hilloullah of Rabbi Amram Ben Diwan*, Talk at the Centre for the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Cambridge, 2019.

For its participants, the *Hiloula* experience uncovers a deep-seated ambiguity that calibrates an intense feeling of Moroccan solidarity manifested in enjoyment and a sentiment of belonging to the country and the culture of Morocco and a simultaneous fear of the Other. The silent participants of the *Hiloula* are those forgotten Moroccans on the ground who are either considered to be socially inferior, as demonstrated by their disproportionate interactions with Muslim serving staff, or simply marginalized like the poor Arabic only speaking members of the Jewish community. Other actors who contributed to the event, such as the itinerant taxi drivers waiting by the gates or the discreet policemen within the compound were further distanced from the *Hiloula* via an abstract, fearful sentiment of insecurity and distrust. This emanation of double-diasporicity was demonstrated in many Moroccan Jewish attitudes over the course of the *Hiloula*: the fear created by geo-political affiliations are mitigated by the sentiment of cultural proximity in culture and cuisine, language and hospitality, shared by the neighbouring Moroccan Muslims.

The double-diaspora bind means that Moroccan Jews form a part of an accepted transnational diaspora. However, the particular marginality of the Moroccan Jewish position is complicated by the fear of a globalized religiosity and the ethno-politics of the near East encroaching on its specificities. Consequently, the position of Moroccan Jewish political radicals established by Lévy, El Maleh and Serfaty seems ill-suited as the face of contemporary Moroccan Jewry particularly when the alterity of events such as the *Hiloula* tend to steer a cautious line between non-conformist religious observance in North African Judaism and dominant forms of contemporary orthodoxy. The security concerns and the conservative fear of radicalism in all its forms; religious, political, and social are channelled politically both by the *Makhzan* and, perhaps in an act of self-preservation, by the Moroccan organising structures of the Jewish community, in its acquiescence to the multiple guises in which the event is systematized to form a uniform commercial logic. This is evident in the mechanism by which the *Hiloula* amplifies Moroccan-ness whilst not allowing for the connection to be made with the social realities of contemporary Morocco. The experience of the event is essentially insular, following elitist patterns of Moroccan social conduct, self-secluding from the masses.

The institutionalised organisation of the event responds to the needs and socio-economic desiderata of its participants, pushing them away from the dominant historiography that has paradoxically adopted anti-regime figures to represent Muslim-Jewish Moroccan solidarity. The Moroccan Jewish community is encouraged to commoditize the experience and the experience

in turn has become a site for tourism that is de-coupled from Morocco in any broader potential political affiliation. It is therefore probable that future Moroccan administrations, under the auspices of Islamic principles, will continue to endorse the practice of pilgrimage as a symbol for peaceful Moroccan Judeo-Muslim relations that translates into political gains and for which the majority of the *Hiloula* participants can only be thankful.

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### عن الشتات المزدوج: ملاحظات إثنوغرافية عن الزيارات إلى قبر الصديق عمران بن ديوان

ملخص: في نهاية فصل الربيع، يقوم العديد من اليهود المغاربة بأداء طقوس الهيلولة، ويتعلق الأمر برحلات احتفالية شبيهة بالزيارات إلى قبور الولي المحلي (أو التساديكيم، القديسين). وتقام طقوس هذه الزيارة ذات الأبعاد الدينية بالقرب من مدينة وزان في قرية أسجن حيث يوجد مدفن عمران بن ديوان. وبينما يدعي البعض أن عمران بن ديوان، الذي يبجله المغاربة المسلمون واليهود على حد سواء، كان حاكمًا من الأرض المقدسة، ذكر آخرون أنه كان يقدم العلاج محليًا للمرضى. وفي خضم موجة الاحتجاجات التي شهدتها سنة 2011، وعلى الرغم من حادثة التفجير في مراكش، انعقدت هيلولة وزان لعام 2011 وسط حضور ملحوظ للزوار. وفي العام نفسه، شكل تعيين حكومة إسلامية معتدلة إحدى العلامات المؤشرة على بداية حدوث تحول في اتجاه التغيير الديمقراطي الذي طالبت الاحتجاجات المستمرة في المغرب بتحقيقه. وعلى أساس مقارنة إثنوغرافية لزيارات ضريح بن ديوان (2011)، والبحث في هذا الموضوع على امتداد سنوات العقد الماضي، وذلك بالاستناد أيضا إلى حصيلة المقابلات مع عديد من المحاورين، وفي مقدمتهم الباحث والناشط الراحل سيمون ليثي، تلقي هذه الورقة نظرة على بعض التوترات بين الأقليات والنظام السياسي المغربي المتغير. ومن منظور الهيلولة، حيث يتعلق الأمر بمحطة تاريخية رمزية لها أهميتها سواء عند يهود الشتات المغاربة أو بالنسبة للسكان اليهود المحليين، تناقش هذه الورقة ضرورات التأريخ المغربي وعلاقة الشتات بالمكان والناس والثقافة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الانتفاء، التنوع، التراث، الزيارة، القديسون، السياحة.

### Sur la double-diasporicité: Notes d'un pèlerinage-ethnographique à la tombe d'Amran Ben Diwan

Résumé: Chaque année, vers la fin du printemps, de nombreux Juifs marocains entreprennent des Hiloulot (pèlerinages festifs similaires au *ziyārāt*) vers les tombes des *Sayyid* locaux (ou *Tsadikim*, saints). Un de ces pèlerinages a lieu près d'Ouazzane dans un douar (village) appelé Asjen, où se trouve la tombe d'Amran Ben Diwan. Alors que certains affirment qu'Amran Ben Diwan, qui est vénéré par les musulmans et les juifs, était un rabbin de la terre sainte, d'autres rapportent qu'il était un guérisseur local. Au milieu des manifestations marocaines de 2011 et malgré les bombardements de Marrakech, la Hiloula de Ouazzane pour 2011 a attiré beaucoup de monde. La même année, la nomination d'un gouvernement islamiste modéré a indiqué un changement vers un changement démocratique pour lequel les protestations en cours au Maroc ont fait appel. Sur la base d'une ethnographie de la tombe de Ben Diwan (2011), des recherches sur le sujet au cours de la dernière décennie, et de l'inspiration d'entretiens avec plusieurs interlocuteurs parmi lesquels le savant et activiste Simon Lévy, cet article se penche sur les tensions entre minorités et l'évolution du système politique marocain. À travers le prisme de la Hiloula – une date symbolique importante pour la diaspora juive marocaine et les résidents juifs locaux – cet article traite des impératifs de l'historiographie marocaine et de la relation de la diaspora avec le lieu, les gens et la culture.

Mots-clés: Appartenance, diversité, patrimoine, pèlerinage, saints, tourisme.