Revisiting Morocco from Israel and Argentina: Contrasting Narratives About the "Trip Back" Among Jewish Immigrants from Northern Morocco

Angy Cohen, Hebrew University of Jerusalem and
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid
Aviad Moreno, University of Michigan and Tel-Aviv University

Introduction

And now Muslim Moroccans are foreign to themselves,
the exile was created in their country because Morocco
without Jews is a Morocco in exile.

The epigraph comes from the novel *Gates to Tangier* by the Moroccan-Israeli poet, Moís Benarroch.[1] He immigrated to Israel from the city of Tetouan in northern Morocco in 1972. The novel tells the story of four siblings who went on a "trip back": from Israel to their former hometowns in northern Morocco, fulfilling the terms of their father's will. The above quote expresses the deep estrangement felt by these Jewish *homecomers*,[2] when faced with what they construed as a rupture between present-day Morocco and its Jewish past. These homecomers did not manage to find a "home" in their former hometowns. They perceived the Muslim inhabitants of Morocco, following the mass emigration of Jews, as "exiles in their own country." The characters in this novel interpret the absence of Jews in Morocco as a historical shift that has turned the country into an *unrecognizable* place, both for them as Jews who left and for those Muslim Moroccans who stayed behind.[3]

When first-generation immigrants speak about their visits to their former homeland they often go through an identitary experience that involves an evaluation of their pre-migration past vis-à-vis their post-migration present. Most often this comparison is supported by various narratives that have been created in the process of defining their new ethnic identities in their new places of residence. In other words, the "little journey" of the visit home is conducted

within the context of the "big journey" of immigration. When speaking about their trip back to their homeland, homecomers also tend to rationalize their trip—i.e., what happened, how it happened, why it happened the way it did—based on their broader experience of migration and integration into their new country. The social value that their place of origin has in their post-migration lives plays a central role in narratives about the re-encounter with their past.

The "trip back" to Morocco among Jewish Moroccan-born Israelis is not a new topic of research. Our perspective, however, adds to this story by going beyond the trip back per se, and focusing rather on narratives about the trip back to Morocco. Our research was gathered through interviews with (northern) Moroccan Jews who immigrated to Israel and Argentina between the 1950s and the late 1970s.

As will be shown in our analysis, there is a difference between the way these first-generation immigrants narrated and reflected upon their experiences during their trip back per se, and how they narrated and reflected upon their trip back in a formal interview setting, held mostly in their new country of residence.[4] The questions that have oriented this work were: Is there a fundamental difference between the contents of the narratives expressed by our interviewees (when in their new homes in Argentina and Israel) in relation to their trips back to Morocco? Since we found this was the case, we then posed the next question: Is there a relationship between those differences and the *social value* of being Moroccan in the post-migration scenarios, i.e., in their new homes in Israel and Argentina? The aim of this paper is to show the nature and evolution of that relationship.

We approach the "trip back" as a topic that is used as part of a wider strategy of self-representation in each setting. The trip back to Morocco as a topic within autobiographical narratives might trigger stories rich in evocative and colorful images of a re-encountered past in one's homeland, where traces of one's own childhood are uncovered. On the other hand, as we saw in Benarroch's novel, the trip back might also trigger narratives of alienation, disappointment, and a general feeling of discomfort or even fear.[5] We aim to show the differences, in both content and form, between Israeli and Argentine narratives and their dependence on the social scenarios in which they circulate.

The Jewish communities of northern Morocco, the former Spanish zone, have been underexplored in comparison to the Jewish communities from the former French zone. Our focus on the narratives of immigrants from northern Morocco (mainly Tetouan, Tangier, Larache, and Alcazarquivir) stems from our interest in showing the diversity of discursive practices in which Jewish-Moroccan immigrants participate when negotiating their identities in Israel. The comparison with the Argentine group of northern Moroccans will serve as an illustration of a different, almost opposite, identity trajectory that will shed light on the specificities of the process of negotiation and construction of Moroccan identity in Israel. This comparative analysis aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of Moroccan-Jewish history and the formation of Moroccan-Jewish identity in Israel.

The Interviews

Oral history constitutes a central methodology employed in the reconstruction of the past by calling on the voices of those who have rarely been included in hegemonic historiographies, whether colonial or national.[6] Basing our research agendas on this notion, we (separately at the beginning, but jointly as the research evolved) began our research by conducting interviews with first-generation immigrants. The interviews were part of the research we carried out for our PhD dissertations, which focus on the process of immigration and integration of northern Moroccan Jews in Israel and in Latin American countries, including Argentina and Venezuela. Aviad Moreno began his research in 2009 and Angy Cohen started hers in 2012. Both of us included questions about the "trip back" in our (separate) interview projects, which in turn made this joint study possible. Both of us designed our questions to lead to open-ended discussions.

Neither of us chose our interviewees according to predefined categories such as profession, gender, or place of residence. Rather, we followed interpersonal networks that eventually resulted in a web of interviewees that was sufficiently diverse, in terms of gender and place of residence. By 2015, we had conducted, separately, forty-eight interviews with people who had emigrated at different stages of their lives. Almost all of the interviewees were born during the 1930s and 1940s (the youngest was born in 1959), and had experienced the process of mass emigration in the 1950s and 1960s. Twenty-seven were women and twenty-one were men. Thirty-six interviews were conducted in Israel and twelve in Argentina.

The interviews were conducted in either Spanish or in Hebrew. Some Israeli interviewees switched between Spanish and Hebrew throughout the interview. The fact that one interviewer is Israeli (Moreno) and the other is Spanish (Cohen), and that both are of northern Moroccan descent, provided each with a general understanding of issues to be examined while also creating a certain sympathy between interviewer and interviewees. On the other hand, being rather young researchers, each interviewer most probably represented, in the eyes of the interviewees, the absorbing societies of Israel or Spain, respectively. We analyze the narratives in light of these specific contexts of interviewee–interviewer interaction and focused on aspects each group of interviewees accentuated.

Irrespective of whether individual interviewees knew each other personally or not, we found certain shared memories and similarities in the narratives we collected, across the network of northern Moroccans in both countries. The recurrence of certain memories in Israel and Argentina slowly revealed a structure of a shared collective memory that was deeply rooted in the process of ethnicity formation in each country.[7]

"Moroccanness-es" in Argentina and Israel

One of the core differences between northern Moroccan immigrants in Israel and Argentina lies in their social patterns of organization in their new communities after immigration. Jews who emigrated from northern Morocco to Argentina throughout the second half of the twentieth century encountered organized communal structures through which they could reestablish their lives after migration.[8] These communal structures had been established by the first waves of immigrants from Morocco to Argentina, between 1860 and 1930.[9] Therefore, the Moroccan-Jewish community had stable meeting places within organized institutions and social practices that encouraged social solidarity by keeping their specific Moroccan-Jewish habits and customs. These institutions included, among others, the community center, synagogue, cemetery, and social club,[10] all of which contributed to their identity formation. In the 1970s, however, the Jewish institutional infrastructure began to transform. Moroccans already living in Argentina, and those who had just arrived, underwent greater cultural assimilation into Argentine society. This included moving into new residential areas and becoming involved with non-Moroccan Jewish life, such as attending other synagogues and social clubs.[11]

In contrast, the first waves of Moroccan aliyah in the third quarter of the twentieth century were overwhelmingly represented by Jews from the former French Protectorate.[12] For this reason, immigrants from northern Morocco were agglomerated into the very large minority of "non-Spanish" (French as well as Judeo-Arabic-, Arabic-, and Berber-speaking) Moroccan immigrants and their descendants, which today constitute Israel's second largest immigrant group, after immigrants from the former Soviet Union. Immigrants of northern Moroccan origin were scattered across the country in a way that made it difficult to sustain continuity between their local identities as Jews from the Spanish-dominated zones of Morocco and their current reality in Israel.[13] This situation resulted in a fractured relationship with their ethnic and religious past and more generally with their identitary belongings, as we shall show.

Northern Moroccan Jews in Israel

Jews from Muslim lands, and from Arab-Muslim lands in particular, have been sorted, by Israeli popular and academic discourses, into the category of "Mizrahi," literally meaning "Oriental" or "Easterner."[14] Most of the popular and scholarly discourses on Mizrahi identities, which are still vibrant today, have been articulated within a wider political apology for historical circumstances. Mizrahi are viewed as having been reppressed, underestimated, patronized, and discriminated against by the Ashkenazi-dominated Israeli elites.[15] "Moroccans" in Israel became what Max Weber called an "ideal type,"[16] that is, the *par excellence* representatives of the broader Mizrahi population, with all the social prejudices that category entailed.[17]

Most immigrants from northern Morocco have been influenced by the ongoing stereotype that portrays Moroccans as the representatives of a backward ethnic group, Eastern in origin, and on the margins of the "Western" Israeli society. Thus, the immediate collective response of Spanish Moroccans was to create their own ethnic identity in order to distinguish themselves from "other" Moroccans. Many cast aside elements of their past that seemed to them contradictory and/or incompatible with Israel's "Western" hegemonic national ethos. More specifically, these diasporic elements among Moroccan Jews, in general, were linked with the Arab-Muslim characteristics of their pre-migration histories. This might be seen as part of a broader effort by Judeo-Spanish speaking Jews to highlight the European roots of their languages. In practice, this helped give them higher status than Judeo-Arabic speaking Jews on the Eurocentric Israeli social hierarchy.

Moshe, fifty-nine, who immigrated to Israel from Morocco at the age of thirteen and now lives in Jerusalem, put in rather clear terms the shifting importance and awareness of Sephardic origin among northern Moroccans:

> The history of the Inquisition, the Expulsion, and Sepharad were not that present in Tetouan. It was not something that people would speak about. I think in Israel people speak more about it, although not that much. But the fact that we came from Sepharad, that we were Sephardi, were not questions we would discuss or think about back then in Tetouan. Yes, people did use the word "Sephardi" but all the rest was not present. Well, we were very close to Spain, also geographically. It's as if Sepharad sort of extended herself to Tetouan. A few kilometers. It's a hundred and twenty kilometers from Spain, but we continued to live in that Sepharad that we were expelled from.

Moshe's interpretation is that being Sephardi was not a topic of reflection or discussion while in Tetouan because the city itself had never ceased to be connected with Spain, both through geographical proximity and preservation of Sephardic culture and life at the gates of the country that expelled them. Later, Moshe added, speaking of the northern Moroccan-Jewish community: "It must be the most Sephardic community in the world, maybe more than the Ottomans, or the Balkans, because they were so close to Spain. I always say that they were the most optimistic of all because they thought they'd be back soon, they were waiting for something to change and 'we'll be back soon.'"

The publications of the *émigré* association Mabat (from Mifgash Bnei Tangir) (Reunion of Tangier's Natives) might serve as an illustration of the institutionalized ethnic discourse used by a Spanish-Moroccan association established in Israel. Mabat's aim was to preserve contact among natives from the former Spanish zone in Morocco, by bringing to the fore specific cultural, religious, and folkloric heritages, including material culture and Haketia (the language spoken by Sephardim in northern Morocco).[18] The following excerpt illustrates the identity formation project carried out by both the Mabat founders and its members, who adopted the association's approach as Spanish-Moroccan Jews in Israel.[19]

> The state of Israel has yet to crystallize a culture that can be identified as her own. Hence, this is the reason for the significance of our [Mabat's] activity, which is to try to implant among the nation the notion that they ought to take into account our heritage, our history, our culture, our habits, our melodies, our *piyutim* [liturgical poems], our songs, etc. Many first signs are testifying that it is possible, and that our level of efforts will be a critical factor, of our ability to contribute to Israeli culture . . . . [20]

The alleged distinctiveness of the history and culture of northern Moroccans was explicitly stated in a Mabat circular, under the title *We Need Everybody!* It read: "We certainly have an obligation to increase the Israeli public's awareness of the fact that not all Jews of Moroccan origin come from a Maghrebi [North African] culture . . . ."[21] The Mabat publications represent a historical attempt, from an institutional framework, to create and express a specific Judeo-Spanish-Moroccan identity within the Israeli context while contributing to the creation of a more general national narrative in Israel in the late 1970s. This discourse was still apparent in Israel in the 2010s, long after Mabat stopped operating, in the early 1990s.

Some northern Moroccan immigrants connected themselves to a developing ethnic network among people whose aim was to contribute to the preservation of their history, and who in turn preferred to highlight their Judeo-Spanish, northern Moroccan heritage. These advocates highlighted the Sephardic[22] elements of their customs and way of life in contrast to the Judeo-Arabic-Moroccan elements of "other" Moroccans: those from the former French Protectorate, from whom they wanted to distinguish themselves.[23]

Within this context, those identifying as "Spanish Moroccans" in Israel emphasized aspects of their lives in Morocco that stemmed from a Moroccan-Jewish culture and tradition but was also very different from what they perceived to be commonly known within Israeli society. For instance, the celebration of Mimouna (a Moroccan-Jewish festivity celebrated at the end of Passover, when regular dietary rules are restored and leavened foods are brought into the house again),[24] was often recalled among northern Moroccan interviewees in Israel as singular and different, as the festivity was revitalized in the Israeli context. The reference to common Spanish-Moroccan-Jewish customs, such as using Haketian words and expressions, fulfilled this function of distinguishing themselves from other Moroccans.

Ruth and Rachel, who were seventy and seventy-four years old, respectively, when the interviews took place, are two siblings whose personal narratives illustrate quite eloquently this phenomenon. Ruth notes:

> When they [Israelis] speak about the Mimona[25] . . . I tell her [Rachel], "I don't remember the Mimona like this, I don't remember it like this," to which Rachel answers, "We had a very beautiful Mimona that Mom prepared and all that, but there was no music. Ms. María, who was a very old teacher, Catholic, would bring the brioche from the bakery La Española, to bring the chametz into the house again. And then the maid, the Moorish woman, prepared the *mufleta* [Moroccan pastry], but which *mufleta*? Here they made up the name

> *mufleta.* It's *terit* [Arabic term for *mufleta*]. It's in Arabic, and it's made of water and flour . . . . And we'd go up to my grandpa's and he'd give us bread and honey."[26]

Finally, Ruth summarizes, "it had such a *hiba* [dignity][27] . . . I don't see that in the Mimona here."

The excerpt draws a picture of a Mimouna that 1) reinforces the Spanish cultural elements, as represented by Ms. María and the pastries she once brought; 2) reclaims the misconceived Arabic influence on Jewish culture as noted by the phrase, "They made up the name *mufleta*. It's *terit*. It's in Arabic"; 3) reminds us of the high social level they had in Morocco, as pointed out by the reference to "the maid, the Moorish woman," using the word Spaniards once used to speak about Moroccans; and 4) marks the refinement of the festivity by using a Haketian term ("*hiba*"), therefore emphasizing their specificity as Spanish-Moroccan Jews, in contrast with the common conception about Moroccans in Israel.

Alongside discomfort with the social representation of Moroccans, and their alternative versions of their various Sephardic Moroccan customs, we also found a distinctive narrative tendency, most clearly in the interviews conducted by Cohen in Israel: Some interviewees went to great lengths to highlight their connection to the pre-migration, non-Jewish Spanish past as a way of distinguishing themselves from other Mizrahi Moroccans in Israel. As a matter of fact, many interviewees identified themselves as "Spaniards from Morocco" during the interview. Nina, a Moroccan-Israeli interviewee said: "Here [at home], Spain is lived and breathed." When asked about the folkloric objects that she had at home, such as the typical Manila shawl, castanets, and traditional hair combs, she replied, "We are more Spanish than the Spaniards." Then she and Spanish-Moroccan friends of hers who were present during the interview went on to recall all the things they missed about Spain: "pine nuts, *garrapiñadas* [caramel-coated almonds], *polvorones* [shortbread][28] . . . to which one of them clarified "*polvorones* not anymore because they're made with pork fat." The phrase "not anymore" seems to retrospectively restore their non-kosher past habits. After this impasse, one of them adds an utterly Christian element: "the Belem [nativity scene]."[29] Her friends laugh and another adds, "Do you remember the paper cornets with snails and a pin inside? We ate them like sunflower seeds!" The *polvorones*, nativity scene, and snails (as seafood, forbidden by Jewish law) are extra-ethnic, i.e., non-Jewish elements of their past that are brought up with Cohen, the Spanish interviewer, amidst laughter.[30] Thus there was an assumption of mutual understanding between them and the Spanish interviewer regarding "infractions" of dietary religious rules.

Practices of this sort (non-kosher eating habits, for example) acquired a different meaning in the Israeli context, becoming "actuations of identification"[31] that defined them as *non-observant*, which does not have the same social nor religious meaning as secular. Interviewees brought these things up as a way of stating how different their past was—how Westernized, not limited to stringencies of Jewish religious observance—from commonly believed practices in

Israel. Both the aforementioned narrative tendencies (one that specifies itself as Judeo-Moroccan and another as modern-day, non-Jewish Spanish) share the same aim: to denounce or reduce North African origins vis-à-vis the general Mizrahi discourse in Israel over the past several decades.

Northern Moroccan Jews in Argentina

Beginning in the 1860s, Moroccan Jews were the first Jewish immigrant group to arrive in Argentina.[32] Moving to a new country while maintaining their ethnic identity challenged them too, as it did the Italians, Russians, Turks, and other immigrants that arrived there. Moroccans were nonetheless three times a minority:[33] as members of the Jewish minority group, within which they were also a minority as Sephardim, and finally, as a Moroccan minority within the Sephardi minority group. In contrast to other groups of immigrants, however, the Moroccans' native language was broadly similar to the local Argentine Spanish, which was per se an advantage for them as newly arrived immigrants.[34]

Sephardi communities in general tended to define the differences between their ethnicities according to specific rituals: burial, preparation of matzo for Passover, ritual baths, kosher meat, liturgical melodies.[35] Sephardic immigrants established four different community groups in Argentina: Moroccans; Ladino-speakers from Turkey, Greece, and the Balkans; Aleppans; and Damascenes. Because Moroccan Jews were the first Sephardic community to arrive in Argentina, and were integrated as a small ethnicity within the larger Jewish minority in the country, they had several generations of integration in this society. Within this context, their Moroccan origin was emphasized as the defining factor of their specific Jewishness in relation to other Jewish communities in general and among Sephardim in particular.[36]

Endogamy within the Moroccan community was still relatively high until the second half of the twentieth century,[37] although few people attended religious services (a situation that has not changed today) and, in general, the average community member lacked religious education. (They opened a school in 1964 but had to close it in 1971.) It should be noted, however, that there was already a concern about assimilation into general Argentine society, which was expressed in 1977 by Rabbi Saadia Ben-Zaquen. He declared in an interview that the community was mainly interested in the social aspects of communal life rather than in leading a religious life, which he attributed to the acculturation process and integration into Argentine society.[38]

On top of the Spanish they spoke as their mother tongue, Moroccans also went unnoticed because they were not even recognized as Jews by the general Argentine public but rather were seen as Spaniards of a higher educational level and culture.[39] Their surnames were not recognizable as Jewish in a society that was more acquainted with Ashkenazi family names, which were seen as the prototype of the Jew in Argentina. Jews with Moroccan surnames were thus socially "invisible."[40] This was the obverse of the situation in Israel, where

typical Moroccan surnames were quickly and easily detected, making an ethnic background completely visible. As a consequence of this, many Moroccan Jews in Israel, like other immigrant groups, changed their last names in order to make them sound more "Israeli"; that is, less Moroccan.[41] Thus the same surnames in these two different contexts resulted in opposite consequences: the invisibility of their ethnic background in Argentina, and the unmistakably recognizable Mizrahi ethnic background in Israel; both of which involved a reshaping of their previous ethnic identity as Jews in Morocco.

Upon their arrival in Argentina, Moroccan immigrants developed a communal infrastructure that catered to their needs. It is important to note the strong role of the Buenos Aires community as the integrative body of the Moroccan community, establishing links and relations with the small Moroccan communities dispersed in the interior of the country.[42]

Between the 1930s and the 1940s, there was a religious decline—a general disengagement from religious practice—among Sephardi communities in Argentina.[43] This was particularly prevalent in the local Moroccan community, which did not have a rabbi[44] until the 1950s.[45] Rabbi Ben-Zaquen, who served the community from the 1950s until 1986, took on the task of dealing with the lax customs of the community that were challenged by cultural acculturation. He reinvigorated the community religiously by confirming the ban against conversion that had been promulgated in 1927 by the Aleppan Rabbi Shaul Setton.[46] The hiring of Ben-Zaquen coincided with the growing wave of northern Morroccan-Jewish immigration to Argentina after 1950, and their settling in the same neighborhoods as other Moroccans.[47] The narratives that we analyze thus represent the common discourse of the members of a community that struggled to endure in light of ongoing assimilation trends.

When these Jews were identified as "Moroccans" in Argentina, the Arab-Muslim features of their Moroccan origin did not contrast with Argentine national identity as severely as they did with the hegemonic Israeli national ethos. Actually, as it has been shown in previous studies, there was intense commercial, economic, and political collaboration between Jews and, for example, the Syrian-Lebanese Muslim community. Ignacio Klich showed the deep impact of the Middle East conflict on these relations, re-signifying and preventing them from naturally evolving.[48]

When we asked our northern Moroccan interviewees to speak about their Sephardic origin specifically, they tended to evoke a historical, albeit at times mythical, reference to the "old Spain," that is medieval Spain. In the words of Joshua, eighty-one, who immigrated to Argentina at the age of twenty-two: "For me, Sepharad is the old Spain. Because for me the old Spain refers to that period of Spain, you know, the three golden centuries." Esther, sixty-five, who emigrated from Tetouan to Buenos Aires at the age of twenty, notes: "What happens is that when I say 'Sephardi' I actually mean 'Moroccan,' and it's wrong because 'Sephardi,' is more general, it means that you come from Spain, but Spain is out of reach for me, I only refer to my place of origin." Moroccans in Argentina, as Esther pointed out, tend to identify as Moroccan rather than as Sephardi. Joshua shows this distinction in very precise terms:

"So I arrive in Argentina and the first thing I do is get in touch with the Moroccan synagogue, not the Sephardic one—the Turkish one—no, no, but with the Moroccan community. The ethnicity . . . I was drawn there by the ethnicity, I looked for the Moroccan element, they oriented me, they welcomed me so well and that really impacts someone."

Therefore, in the context of the multiethnic Argentine society, these Jews, unlike those in Israel, use neither modern Spain nor the old Sepharad as a means to specify their religious, cultural, or ethnic origin; rather, they use Morocco itself. To put it differently, the general tendency among Jewish immigrants from northern Morocco in Buenos Aires was to identify themselves ethnically, culturally, and religiously simply as "Moroccans." That is the opposite of the general tendency in Israel, where immigrants from northern Morocco tended to identify themselves as Spanish, Sephardi, or "Spanish-Moroccans" vis-à-vis the Eurocentric discourse in Israel that downplayed Arabic cultures.

Until the 1970s, Moroccan Jews in Argentina had a rather cohesive community that enhanced solidarity among its members. Thereafter, their community started to witness a process of dispersal,[49] which became a growing concern among the most veteran members of the community. Its success was due to three main factors: the building of social networks, i.e., family and friends who encouraged Moroccans to move to Argentina and helped them resettle; relationships based on solidarity, ie., Moroccans who sought out other recently arrived Moroccans to provide them with whatever they needed; and the establishment of associations, including a synagogue, community center, cemetery, social club, and charity association.[50] Many members of the Moroccan community report Argentina giving them the opportunity to improve their financial position and thrive in society. Most of them became upwardly mobile and achieved middle- or upper-middle class status.[51] Many Moroccans reached very high professional ranks and worked in ministries, the Central Bank, the Supreme Court, etc.[52]

As we have already highlighted, being Moroccan in Argentina was relatively appreciated in social terms, and the northern Moroccan-Jewish community had, in general, an easy process of integration into local society. Our interviewees encountered a well-established community upon their arrival in Argentina that helped them settle in, find employment, and provided them with the social support they needed to be able to establish their new homes. The most important communal organizations were charitable associations, the religious element being one more aspect of community life.[53]

Today there are approximately 150 Moroccan families in Buenos Aires who are involved in the Moroccan community. In general, the children of the last wave of migration tend not to participate in the community's activities. It is quite representative of the dissolution of this community that, although there are still members who were born and raised in Morocco, the community leaders and managers currently are all descendants of Moroccans.[54]

As a community, their main concern today is the disappearance of their unique Moroccan heritage, which is viewed as very precious within the context of Argentine multiethnic society.[55] The community board issued a statement

on its website echoing this concern and expressing their will to reinvigorate the community: "it is our intention to achieve throughout this year significant community growth through activities that may answer to everyone's interests and that ACILBA (Asociación Comunidad Israelita Latina de Buenos Aires) will be alive again on a daily basis and not just sporadically. Our goal is that people will come to the community everyday and that it will establish itself as a dynamic Jewish community center."[56] This situation may serve to explain the narrative strategies adopted by interviewees who wished to preserve their Moroccan heritage in Argentina.

Looking Back to Morocco from Israel and Argentina

Over the last decades, many Moroccan Israelis and Moroccan Argentines have made the "trip back" to their former homeland. The encountered homeland evoked two narratives: a narrative of belonging and a narrative of alienation. These narratives are mediated by several factors: the previously mentioned Mizrahi discourse in Israel, the social representation of Moroccans in Israel and Argentina, and the impact of the ongoing conflict between Israel and some Arab countries. These factors are fundamental to the social construction of the identities of interviewees as indicated by the discourses used among themselves and with others.

Looking Back from Israel: Narratives About a *Disrupted* Encounter

> *The most distant place for someone born in Morocco is Jerusalem.*
> Moís Benarroch

As previously mentioned, understanding ethnicity formation among the small group of northern Moroccans in Israel requires an analysis of their evolving relationship with the larger Moroccan populations in Israel. In concert with the "de-Arabizing" narratives that we heard from many Israeli interviewees, the trip back to Morocco mostly evoked anxiety, contempt, and disappointment with the current Moroccan nation state. It represented, in their eyes, the disappearance of their Moroccan past; that is, the confirmation of the disappearance of Spaniards and Jews as part of the common colonial places of their childhood and youth. Moshe phrased this notion as follows: "I went back in '96. I just arrived in the moment when the [Jewish] community was dissolving. The experience was to encounter the vacuum you had left; to see that you're not there anymore. Your absence." This is an experience that other Israeli interviewees wanted to avoid, and was the main reason they avoided going back. As Ruth noted: "I don't want to go back because I left very beautiful things, and I don't want to be let down and, more than anything . . . not finding the [Jewish] people I left." Miriam, seventy-five, who immigrated to Israel at the age of twenty-five, insisted: "I don't want to see today's Morocco."

The refusal to go back throughout the narratives was based on the awareness of the disappearance of Jewish life in Morocco that, from the perspective of the Jews who had left it, would turn the country that was once their home into a foreign country. Therefore, exile is now in the place where "home" used to be. Going back involves facing the deep imbalance between past and present and the disappearance of all the references of their childhood.

As Andre Levy found in his work about the trip back to Morocco of Moroccan-born Israelis, one of the most troubling experiences that our Israeli interviewees came up against was the awareness of how "common places" (places with a personal value) had become "landscapes" (mere physical pieces of land).[57] In other words, the most intimate spaces of their lives were now disconnected from childhood memories. In this context, space was revisited in order to revisit time,[58] since those "common places" were perceived as the last witnesses of their history. One example of this inability to "actually go back"[59] was the visit to the old, or childhood, home. Others, who did not belong in it, now inhabited the house. It was now just a space, part of a landscape. The experience of estrangement deriving from the visit to the family home is a constant in the narratives of our Israeli interviewees. It is a key part of their diasporic experience of going back to Morocco.

Moshe described this estrangement after his a visit to his childhood home:

> Where is the home? The home is not there. There is the building, but not the home, I mean . . . it's like seeing a corpse, it's there but it's not there, or a person with Alzheimer's . . . on the other hand, yes, it was Tetouan. I felt in my city, in my environment, yes. Speaking to the people I felt part of Tetouan, part of Morocco. Yes, it's my people . . . . I think they know you're a Jew that is coming back. They see it. Well, maybe they see it just to make business.

This excerpt shows the ambiguity felt by our Israeli interviewees. We must note that Moshe says "my city," "my environment," "my people," but does not say "my home." The encounter with his childhood home was therefore a disrupted one. The recognition of the last "common place" was accompanied by the estrangement of not finding any trace of what one left or, as Moshe put it, merely finding "one's absence."

The conflict between Israel and some Arab countries manifested in the perception of modern-day Morocco as being dangerous for Moroccan Jews who had once lived there. This fear appeared in the narratives about the experience of entering Morocco as Israeli nationals. Jose's account strengthened the relationship between his declared fear and his contempt toward the Moroccan nation state. He claimed that for many years he had avoided going back to Morocco, because he knew that all "the beautiful things" he remembered would have disappeared. Only in 2009 did he decide to go. This is how he related his experience: "I had gone there frightened to find complete destruction, and that is what I eventually found . . . . No light . . . the streets were filthy . . . everything that had not been ruined had caught a Moorish atmosphere . . . . I talk like a colonizer, but this is the truth . . . ."

Again, as we noted earlier in this article, he uses the word "Moorish" to refer to Moroccan Muslims. It is a word that Spaniards used and continue to use nowadays with a clear derogatory connotation. The use of this term brings Jose, at least rhetorically, closer to the Spanish realm than the Moroccan one. At one point Jose even mentioned how a "Hamasnik" (literally, a man who belongs to Hamas, the Islamist Palestinian organization), was tailing him. This description was meant to depict the man's appearance in Israeli terms, but in fact, through such an image, Jose was also implying a connection between present-day Morocco and present-day Arabs, in the context of the Israeli-Arab nationalist conflict, a conflict in which he sides with the "right wing."

Suspicion, fear, and disappointment dominate many of the narratives offered by our Israeli interviewees. Perla, who went back to see her hometown after twenty years, said: "I had this dream of coming back to Tetouan, but I always had this thing [image] that I cross the border and they take my [Israeli] passport . . . when I actually got there, I was frightened, I did not want to go any further, I just wanted to come back [to Israel]." The fear of symbols representing the current Arab-Muslim Moroccan nation state was accompanied by the fear of physically re-encountering modern-day Moroccans. Perla continued: "Ay, don't ask! [meaning, "you don't want to know."] So many Arabs! I was disappointed [by what I saw], because I was scared . . . first of all, the population density there compared with what had been when we left . . . . The masses of people, it is frightening . . . and the sounds . . . and you cannot walk for a minute without somebody touching you!"

Another example can be found in Nina's recollection of how, on her trip back to Morocco, she met with an old Jewish friend who was still living in Tangier. Nina's friend recommended that she and her travel companions stay at a good hotel, for security reasons. The friend's home demonstrated such security concerns, with a front door that "has bolts from top to bottom. You cannot see the door; you can only see bolts." Nina noted also that "When we finished dinner," the host's husband said, "So now I have to walk you to the hotel because I can't let you go on your own."

As we noted, one of the main fears that our Israeli interviewees reported was the fear of not finding any trace of their past, as they envision it today, as "Spanish-Moroccan" immigrants in the Israeli context. The main fear of re-encountering present-day Morocco was that it would distort their post-migration image of northern Morocco as a Sephardic, or mostly a Spanish, realm in general. The encounter with today's Morocco exposed all the Arab-Muslim aspects of their native country, after having gone out of their way to emphasize a Westernized image of Morocco following their migration to Israel. In a way, this re-encounter made them confront elements of their ethnic origin that they had suppressed for a long time. Their struggle to prove and show their unique characteristics as Spanish-Moroccan Jews in Israel made them unable to reconnect with today's Morocco.

In a similar vein, while referring to his hometown, Jose described the café where he ate on his visit—not out of choice but due to a lack of restaurants in the town, according to him—as "a sort of hovel, where a bunch of Moors

hang out . . . and talk for hours. We hardly understood each other; I know only a few [Arabic] words." Both by regarding Moroccans as "Moors," and noting the language barrier, Jose argues for an image of himself as someone closer to the Spanish cultural realm than to the Moroccan one. He could not find any continuity between his past in Morocco and the present of the country. Therefore, the encounter with today's Morocco was a disrupted one. This disruption is almost metaphorically represented by the language barrier; the inability to communicate in the country where he was born and raised.

A similar disrupted encounter can be found in Clarice's reference to her visit to Tangier, her hometown. She emphasized that it was "odd not to be able to talk with the police officer at the border crossing, because of language barriers." According to her story, the police officer knew French well enough, like most Moroccans do, but refused to use it, claiming that she had a Moroccan passport and thus she should be able to speak Arabic. In Clarice's story the Arabic language served as symbol for her developing sense of alienation in present-day Morocco, as a former Jewish resident of the country.

Stories such as those we have referred to seem to play a central role in discourse about the ethnicity formation of the narrators. The stories were shaped to highlight a contrast between Spanish-Moroccan-Jewish ethnicity and the present Moroccan nation state and its current Arab-Muslim cultures. This contrast is obtained through the discursive resources we have analyzed, which aim to disconnect northern Moroccans from the Arab-Muslim elements of their past as way of coping with Eurocentric Israeli hegemonic discourse. This discursive practice is most clearly present here: "I sometimes have the impression that everything I lived in Tetouan was like a dream and what I live now is the reality, and sometimes just the opposite: that everything I lived in Tetouan is the reality and what I live now is a dream, something fictional, like a novel. It's a very strong feeling, as if they were two worlds, two planets."

The disruption between the past in Morocco and the present life in Israel is stated differently by Nina, sixty-eight, who arrived in Israel at the age of fifteen. During the interview, she showed a number of notebooks where her mother, Rachel, recorded everything she remembered about her life prior to her immigration to Israel: poems by famous Spanish poets that she had learned at school, whole lessons on Spanish history, memories of childhood and youth, sayings, jokes, nicknames, proverbs, and recipes. "She lived on memories. Life in Israel didn't give her anything," Nina said. The rupture between Nina's mother's past in Spanish Morocco and her life in Israel resulted in a strong nostalgia for everything that was lost. Those notebooks were something more than the mere expression of nostalgia, however: they also represented Rachel's feeling of pride and vindication. Those notebooks became the proof of who she had been, the education she had received, and the culture she came from. She treasured through those notebooks the proof of her lost way of life, full of poetry and refined culture. This is in contrast with the precarious situation Rachel and her family experienced upon their arrival at the transit camp for new immigrants in Israel in the 1960s. The Spanish literature and history, the songs and sayings, represented Rachel's past and origins that

she relived over and over by writing all those notebooks. According to Nina's description of events, we can see that her mother *became* Spanish in Israel, more Spanish than she ever was in Morocco, when the Eurocentric Israeli hegemony defined her by the generalizing term "Moroccan," i.e., Mizrahi.

The experience of the "trip back" to Morocco of our Israeli interviewees could be summarized as a diasporic experience that contrasts Morocco's Jewish past with its "post-Jewish" present; that is, Morocco after the vast majority of Jews had left. The disrupted encounter with today's Morocco is expressed in the discomfort our Israeli interviewees recall feeling when they came up against the realization that the only traces of their past were the graves of their ancestors.

Looking Back from Argentina: Narratives of a Poetically *Fluent* Homecoming

Argentine Moroccans, unlike Israeli Moroccans, experienced some continuity in terms of communal life in the Moroccan-Jewish community in Argentina. Being Moroccan in Argentina involved no social stigma; quite the contrary: in general, our interviewees considered the "Oriental" image of Morocco as a valuable treasure that should be preserved within the multicultural Argentine (Jewish and non-Jewish) society. Their Moroccanness defined their specific Judaism vis-à-vis the rest of the Jewish communities. The following excerpt is an illustration of the sense of continuity between the Moroccan past and today's life in Argentina:

> I tried to pass EVERYTHING on to my children. Everything, everything, absolutely everything. My son was born here [in Argentina], and he is a perfect Moroccan. In all senses. Actually, last year we went to Morocco . . . he asked for it, he said "Mom, I need to go with you to Morocco, in a unique trip, then I'll go as many times I want just for the sake of traveling, but I need to go with you and that you tell me everything, this happened here, there, and there."
>
> And I went back. I went back with my two children. And . . . it was a wonderful trip. Just four, five days. He [her son] said, "Only the places where you lived, I'm not interested in anything else. The rest I'll do it with my wife at some point."

Esther said this while we were sitting in the living room of her apartment in Buenos Aires, surrounded by canvases on which she had painted the images of a childhood she treasured. She turned those images into beautiful paintings of the *noche de paños* (Jewish-Moroccan pre-nuptial ceremony), the *hamsa* (palm-shaped amulet), and a Moroccan Muslim carrying the *adafina* (stew)[60] to the oven, among many others. She spoke about the trip back to Morocco as a practice that was link to her passing on a "legacy." As she put it: "I passed it on. It's now in their hands."

Esther's narrative about the trip back presents the trip as a means for connecting herself and her children to a history that is both the history of their socio-religious group (Spanish- Moroccan Jews in Argentina) and their personal history. That is, the trip back is reflected upon as a means for creating continuity between Esther's past in Morocco and her children's present in Argentina. Esther's son and daughter received their mother's memories and integrated them within their personal histories. Those memories were the starting point of their belonging to the Spanish-Moroccan-Jewish community of Buenos Aires, a city where the family found a new home.

The continuity of their Moroccan identity through social networks and institutional conditions they encountered in Argentina, along with the high social value attributed to their Moroccan past, allowed their trip back to Morocco to be described as a "poetic homecoming." The main affective tone of their narratives was the feeling of belonging and recognition by Moroccan Muslims as part of Morocco. In general, they used the trip back in the context of the life narrative so as to make a point about the good relationship they maintained with the local Arab-Muslim population. They recalled in a highly emotional way that recognition of their belonging to the place was the key element of their feeling back at the "home" of their childhood. They report having been welcomed by locals and some came to a realization about themselves: when theylived in colonial Morocco, they had their own prejudices about, and distance from, local Muslims. Alicia, seventy-three, who emigrated from Morocco to Buenos Aires at the age of twenty-seven, said:

> We were with the Spaniards. We went to Spanish schools, everything, everything. And it was . . . they were colonialists. And we did the same.
>
> I mean, there were some Jews who did learn Arabic, who were kind of more . . . . And we didn't appreciate it . . . quite the opposite, "What's up with him, all day with the Arabs!" . . . How come, living there for so long, we never learned the language? Because we weren't interested!

Mario's account of his experience crossing the border between Spain and Morocco for the first time after his emigration contrasts in all senses with the narratives offered by Perla and Clarice. This is how he recalled that moment:

> When I was crossing the border between Spain and Morocco, I had [an] Argentine passport . . . and there it says "born in Tetouan." [He smiles and imitates the way the border guard points at the passport] "You're from here?" they asked me.
>
> "Yes, I was born here," and "Why did you leave?" [grimace, expressing "I have no idea"] . . .
>
> And he [border guard] says, "But you're from our people! You're from here! You were born here!"

> "Not only that, but I also know your language," I told him. "I speak Arabic like you."
>
> "What? You speak Arabic!?"
>
> And I started speaking Arabic with him. At the border, huh? At the border! There never was any problem.

Clarice, our Israeli interviewee, recalled her experience at the border as a disrupted and diasporic encounter with someone who made no effort to speak a language that she understood. Our Argentine interviewee's narrative, however, emphasized both the Moroccans' recognition of his belonging to the country and his being part of the culture today by reference to his knowledge of Arabic. His encounter with Moroccans upon his arrival in Tetouan is also worth highlighting, in contrast with the fear and suspicion that characterized the narratives of our Israeli interviewees. Mario described it:

> When we were on the ship, on the ferry that we took in Algeciras . . . I started to cry, I was so moved that I was coming back to a place that I madly loved. I never forgot Morocco, I never forgot it; and as soon as I came into Tetouan . . . I saw the first Arabs, we called them Moors back then, natives of Morocco, I started to cry, I was so moved.
>
> I went with my wife. I was already married. I felt this so intensely that I asked specially to see my old Arab friends from Morocco, we studied together at the academy, my classmates, and they welcomed me with all the honors. With all the honors! We even cried together.

He used the trip back to recount the great coexistence between Arabs and Jews during the time of the Protectorate and how that showed itself in the fact that locals saw him as a sort of lost brother. He used the word "Moor" with quotation marks, that is, when referring to what they once called the local Muslims, but when he spoke about today's Moroccan Muslims he said "Arabs." He did not distance himself rhetorically by using a Spanish derogatory nickname (*moros*) but rather used the term he would use for any citizen of an Arab country.

Esther spoke about a day when she and her husband walked the streets of Tetouan, stopping at little stands where all types of different things were for sale. She saw various objects that were very similar to things that she had at home when she was little.

> I loved it because there were so many memories there, things that I had at home and MANY things of the Jewish life, *chanukiot* [menorah] of specific styles, stuff that made me sad, I had those things at home and then I was telling my husband about that: "Look, this was like this and like this, we did this with this" out loud.

> The owner, who was at the door, an Arab . . . asked my husband, "Sir, what are you doing here?" and he said, "Why do you ask me that?" and he said, "Today is Friday and you should be at synagogue," but he said it seriously, huh?
>
> It was in the evening . . . . he realized he [my husband] was Jewish because of the stuff we were looking at. My husband, who was never too diligent with religion . . . the style of your dad and all that generation in which it started vanishing . . . he got a little uncomfortable and said, "Well, the truth is that I don't go [to synagogue] that much, but my son does!"
>
> See the answer he gave . . . . "No, the truth is that I don't always go, but my son does!" (Laughs) You see; they know what the obligations of the Jews are.

This anecdote is an example of a narrative based on a perceived continuity between past and present. Esther finds traces of her past and comes across people who, according to her account, still grant Jews a place in Morocco.

The recognition of today's Moroccans is universally brought up in the narratives as part of the experience of going back home that Argentines had. Feeling that Moroccan Muslims recognized them as part of the history of the country is in turn expressed in relation to the nature of coexistence with Arabs. In contrast to the Israelis' experience, the encounter with Moroccan Muslims is represented in the narratives of our Argentine interviewees as the key to their feeling of belonging, in spite of the encounter with the disappearance of Jewish life in Morocco, which were represented by the Judaic objects being sold at the market in Esther's narrative.

Mario has gone back to Morocco many times and insists on delegitimizing the idea that Morocco is a dangerous place for Jews:

> I brought my daughter so that she'd see my house. MY HOUSE! And let me tell you when I walked into my house I cried like a child . . . to see the house where I grew up.
>
> The owners, who were Arabs, told me "Don't leave, stay here with us. If this was your house, stay! Stay for some days. We welcome you with open arms."
>
> My wife and daughter when they heard that said, "They love you so much!" "Why wouldn't they love me?"'

The encounter with the new owners of his old house is presented as warm and even familiar. This narrative stands in sharp contrast with the narrative of discomfort and alienation that Israelis displayed.

Esther had a similar narrative about her visit to her old house:

> I've already gone back three times. The first time I went back was very moving. I went to my house, I cried like the condemned, because I'm telling you, I left everything, I came [to Argentina] to study, to travel, I left my family

> and well, I don't know, I didn't leave because I was persecuted or anything. I went to my school, I went everywhere and I don't know why but it was very moving, very, very moving.
>
> Then I went back, I wanted to show my house to my children and I couldn't because it was closed, they [new owners] were on vacation. The neighbor next door invited us to come in, "My aunt lived there," I told her. "My aunt lived here."
>
> "Come, come in," she invited us, she wanted us to stay for lunch, she showed us everything. I say "My aunt slept here, my cousin slept there, here this . . . ."
>
> Because we were neighbors, and she tells me, with that generosity they have, she says, "You no hotel anymore, when you come, come here, here to my house" these type of things . . . they [her children] couldn't believe their ears."

Esther took her children with her so as to show them where they came from and she decided to go to the places that were relevant to her, places she could use as the last witnesses of her own life story. The topic of the trip back itself is brought up so as to speak about the good life that Jews had among Muslims in Morocco, represented in the affectionate way in which the neighbor next door welcomed them.

Esther continued to relate how she encountered Moroccan Muslims who had been friends of her family and who knew their whole history. She took her children to the neighborhood where her father once had a store and asked a local shopkeeper, in Spanish, if he knew her father's store.

> There was a store here called "El Metro."
>
> "El Metro! Of course! It belonged to Mr. Joseph Bentata! Who worked with Jacob's nephew!"
>
> We are talking about fifty years ago! My children were listening and couldn't believe their ears, "and upstairs there was his brother's office," the whole story he knew. "And the grandchildren, the sons of the revered Yossi Bentata . . . ."
>
> A man in the street told them the story of my life! They [her children] were shocked. They were used to Buenos Aires, where nobody knows you but in the neighborhood, in your street, the greengrocer, the newspaper seller, we're talking about fifty years before!

Esther's emphasis on being recognized by locals who even remembered her father's name and the story of the family shows a more general feeling of belonging in the place, finding a familiar recognition that almost does not exist in Buenos Aires. This narrative is coherent with the sense of continuity between Esther's past in Morocco and her present in Argentina. Just as her Moroccan past is part of her "legacy" for her children, her family's presence

in Morocco is represented as still present, in the memory of those who stayed behind, that is, the local Muslim population. Also, her narrative about the trip back implies a comparison between two ways of life, two sets of values: life in Morocco is represented as being based on contact, proximity, loving friendships, and values that cannot be exchanged, in contrast with the modern way of life in Buenos Aires, organized around abstract bonds (citizenship, nation, and democracy) in an anonymous society: "they were used to Buenos Aires, where nobody knows you but in the neighborhood."

The trip back was in turn used by Esther to reflect upon the differences between Moroccans and other collectives who do not keep affective bonds to their places of origin, leading to the eventual disappearance of all traces of their common history. Esther then reflected on the reasons why Spanish-Moroccan Jews still keep their memories and customs alive. Of Morocco, she says:

> It's the only country [of origin] from which those who emigrated still keep affective bonds, still feel like visiting, still have nostalgia, while [those from] other countries have set up a wall, they don't want to even set foot in Germany, Poland, nor to tell their story . . . and it gets lost, you know, that history gets lost?
>
> I realize, among Ashkenazim, I want to search, but I can't, there is a barrier, No, my parents didn't tell me anything, what are they going to tell me? Sorrows? . . . so a lot of history has been lost. When I want to know about customs, things, it's lost . . . . even the Syrians, I have a lot of contact with Syrians, not Sephardim, and for them Syria does not exist . . . they don't have nostalgia, nor longing to go back, nothing, they preserve the meals, they preserve this, but nothing about Syria interests them.

She summarizes the aim of the trip back saying that her son and daughter "needed this to zip up the history." Thus the trip back is a "zipper" that pulls together a history that is still alive, that has continuity in the Argentine scenario.

Our Argentine interviewees made efforts to become more Moroccan than ever,[61] after their migration. Their Moroccan past defined them as Jews vis-à-vis the rest of the Jewish communities in Argentina. Part of their construction of identity as a Jewish minority was organized by their careful cultivation of their Moroccan past in their present in Argentina. Their Moroccan past distinguished them from other Sephardim, whereas the Spanish element did not define their Judaism, which they are afraid of losing nowadays.

Conclusions

In this study we presented two identitary tendencies of local "Jewish-Moroccan" identities expressed through two different ethnic-oriented narratives within different moral and political contexts. We analyzed the processes of ethnic identity formation among Moroccan Jews within a wider framework of

analysis than usual: a comparison between Israeli and Argentine social contexts.

The reason we chose to focus on the "trip back" as a topic of discussion is because it brings to the fore a range of topics related to the construction of Moroccan-Jewish identity from past and present. On the one hand, the trip back to Morroco is a topic that triggers reflection about the encounter with a land that Spaniards and Jews left, that is, without the "Westernizing" elements that dominated our interviewees' childhood and youth. Also, it is connected to our interviewees' understanding of the process of re-signification of Muslim Moroccans[62] in light of the ongoing conflict between Israel and some Arab countries. Finally, as we showed, the topic of the trip back triggers a narrative construction of identity that aims at reinforcing either the continuity or disruption between their past "there" and their present "here." Those continuities and disruptions are in turn connected to the role of their ethnic origin in shaping their post-migration belongings.

Israeli interviewees developed their ethnic identity within the context of the categorization of Moroccans as Mizrahim, and their main goal was to highlight their unique Spanish-Moroccan identity as a means for distinguishing themselves from other Moroccans. Indeed, distinctiveness may be anchored in historical occurrences in the region. Nonetheless, the trip back to current Arab-Muslim Morocco by our Israeli interviewees was mostly recalled as a disrupted diasporic experience, one that was not to be passed on to others, as far as their self-representative narrative strategies were concerned. Current-day Morocco was perceived by many northern Moroccan Israelis as a contrast to the pre-migration past they attempted to cultivate in Israel, as being highly Hispanized, European, and economically and socially developed, in opposition to the most common images of Morocco in Israel. This may account for the fact that many of them did not report an emotional experience with their childhood landscapes when recounting their impressions of the trip back in retrospect, aside from the feelings of loss, contempt, and bitter nostalgia that we demonstrated above. Our Israeli interviewees, unlike Argentines, as we saw, came across their absence, their vacuum, not their traces. Where Argentines found home in Morocco, Israelis found diaspora or exile.

On the other hand, the Argentine case illustrated rather clearly how this form of representation was strongly related to the context of narration in Israel. The case shows an alternative, non-adversarial relationship with the Arab-Muslim aspects of Moroccan identity among northern Moroccans who speak about their country of origin. It is worth highlighting the lack of expressions of fear uttered by our Argentine interviewees when recalling their trip back to Morocco as Jews, in contrast to the most commonly found attitude among Israelis, who did tend to feel they were in a potentially dangerous situation as Israelis (not just Jews) in Morocco.

Many of our Argentine interviewees recall their trip back to Morocco with their families as a practice whose purpose was to pass on their legacy, to show their origins to their children through current-day Morocco. In short, they perceived and confirmed a continuity between their Moroccan origin and today's

Moroccan nation state. The children of our Argentine interviewees went back and received the stories of their parents, which in turn became part of their own history as members of an ethnic group in Argentina. Our Argentine interviewees, as we said at the beginning of this article, found traces of their past that were to be collected in Morocco and passed on to the next generations. Moreover, in the Argentine context, the possible disappearance of the Moroccan community became a source of preoccupation among our interviewees. In the words of one: "we need to mobilize the community so that they will contribute, as far as they can and want, to the preservation of this. But the tendency is to disappear."

This comparative study reveals aspects of the social construction of ethnicity formation in Israel and Argentina. The social category that Moroccans represent, mostly in the politically-oriented ethnic arena in Israel, has overshadowed the historical diversity within Morocco, as well as among Moroccan émigrés; often making it relatively difficult to think about multiple Moroccanness-es and the dialectical nature of each way of being Moroccan. We have attempted to show the "others" of these multiple Moroccanness-es, how tightly linked with time and space these different ways of being Moroccan are, and the impact that the different politics of identity in Israel and in Argentina have had on the ability of Moroccans to cultivate and pass on their "Moroccan memories" in the new scenarios they encountered after their migration.

Notes

1 Moís Benarroch, *En las puertas de Tánger* (Barcelona: Destino, 2008), 42. Benarroch is an Israeli poet and writer of northern Moroccan origin. He was born in Tetouan, Morocco and came to Israel at the age of thirteen. A great part of his literary production revolves around the alienation, confusion, and feeling of being unsettled that characterized the immigration experience of Moroccan Jews in Israel.

2 Our terminology follows that of Alfred Schuetz's, in Alfred Schuetz, "The Homecomer," *American Journal of Sociology* 50, no. 5 (1945): 369–76. It is also suggested by Anders H. Stefansson in his "Homecomings to the Future: From Diasporic Mythographies to Social Projects of Return" in *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return*, eds. Fran Markowitz and Andres H. Stefansson (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), 2–20. Stefansson speaks about *homecomers* instead of *returnees* as an analytical category that emphasizes the importance of localized homelands in the construction of identity. The use of this analytical category represents an alternative to the postmodern theoretical enthusiasm for fluid identities, transnational citizens, global mobility, hybrid phenomena, and other aspects of the analysis of the constant movement and border-crossing that seem to characterize contemporary life in the so-called Western world.

3 The Jewish population in Morocco by 2013 was estimated at around 2,400. See Sergio Della Pergola, "World Jewish Population, 2013," in Arnold Dashefsky and Ira M. Sheskin, eds., *The American Jewish Year Book, 2013* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2013), 113, 279–358.

4 In previous work, Moreno revealed a tension between two forms of narration: the "ready-made," "expected" narration among northern Moroccan Jewish individuals who traveled together as members of their Israel-based émigré association, and other narratives, encompassing contrasting "unplanned" recollections from their childhood in Morocco. He did so by comparing "freestyle"—oral audio sources from the trip recorded in 1987—with related printed/edited narratives, written by the émigré association before and immediately after their tour. See Aviad Moreno, "'Inappropriate' Voices from the Past: Contextualizing Nar-

ratives from the First Group Tour of Olim from Northern Morocco to Their Former Hometowns," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 9 (1): 52–68. Also, this is a recurrent topic of memory studies as shown by the classic works of Maurice Halbwachs, who delved into the way individuals remember events of their past according to shared frameworks of reference that define their belonging to certain groups. See, for example, chapter 3 of his *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

5 For a comprehensive account of state-of-the-art studies on return migration and different examples of the "homecomer," see the compilation by Fran Markowitz and Anders H. Stefansson, eds., *Homecomings: Unsettling Paths of Return* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2004), in which different authors reflect upon diverse homecomings and trips back to their native land. It is worth noting as well the compilation by Lynellyn D. Long and Ellen Oxfeld, eds., *Coming Home? Refugees, Migrants and Those Who Stayed Behind* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004). In relation the idea of home, which is a fundamental part of the analysis of return or homecoming, see, Arien Mack, ed., *Home: A Place in the World* (New York: New York University Press, 1993). For further explanation of the idea of the trip back as an identity practice, see Lomsky-Feder and Rapoport, "Seeking a Place to Rest," 233–234.

6 Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 7; Gary Y. Okihiro, "Oral History and the Writing of Ethnic History," in *Oral History: An Interdisciplinary Anthology*, eds. David K. Dunaway and Willa K. Baum (Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 1996), 199, 210–211; Ilana Rosen, "Personal Historical Narrative Shaping the Past and the Present," *European Journal of Jewish Studies* 3 (2009): 103–104.

7 Aviad Moreno, *Ethnicity in Motion: Social Networks in the Emigration of Jews from Northern Morocco to Venezuela and Israel, 1860–2010* (PhD diss., Ben-Gurion University, 2015), 51–52, 257–291.

8 Diana Epstein, "Marroquíes de origen judío en Argentina. Cohesión y dispersión comunitaria," *Revista de Historia* 12 (2011): 57–69.

9 For an in-depth analysis of the period prior to 1930, see Victor Mirelman, *En Búsqueda de una identidad. Los inmigrantes judíos en Buenos Aires, 1890–1930* (Buenos Aires: Mila, 1988).

10 See Adriana Brodsky "Re-configurando comunidades. Judíos sefardíes/árabes en Argentina (1900–1950)" in Árabes y judíos en Iberoamérica. Similitudes, *diferencias y tensiones*, ed. Natalia Arce (Sevilla: Tres Culturas del Mediterráneo, 2008), 119–136. See also Epstein, "Marroquíes de origen judío."

11 Diana Epstein, "La presencia marroquí judía en el interior del territorio argentino," *Diversidad Cultural.Net* 1 (2010): 70–89, accessed October 7, 2015, http://www.diversidadcultural.net/numero0001.html.

12 Today's Moroccans (from both the former Spanish and French zones) constitute the second largest group of immigrants from a specific country in Israel. *CBS*, *Statistical Abstract of Israel* (2012), Table 2.24, 158, accessed November 16, 2016, http://www.cbs.gov.il/shnaton63/st02_24x.pdf.

13 Moreno, "Ethnicity in Motion," 263.

14 This category replaced earlier terminologies as "*edot ha-mizrah*." One pioneer in shaping Mizrahi terminology was sociologist Shlomo Swirski; see for instance his *Israel: The Oriental Majority* (London: Zed, 1989). Although the category has been contested by many scholars, we employ it as an analytical tool that helps us explain the debate over the "Spanish" character of the Jews from northern Morocco, as we shall continue to explain. For further discussion about the evolution of the Mizrahi category, see Sami Shalom-Chetrit, *ha-Ma'avak ḥa-mizrahi be-Yisra'el : ben dikui le-shihrur, ben hizdahut le-alternativah, 1948–2003* (Tel-Aviv: Am-Oved 2004), 43–45; Gil Eyal, *The Disenchantment of the Orient: Expertise in Arab Affairs and the Israeli State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Yaron Tsur, "The Israeli Historiography and the Ethnic Problem" in *Making Israel*, ed. B. Morris (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 231–277. See for example, Moshe Lissak, *ha-'Aliyah ha-gedolah bi-shenot ha-hamishim : kishlono shel kur ha-hitukh* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik,1999).

15 Lissak, *ha-'Aliyah ha-gedolah bi-shenot ha-hamishim.*

16 An ideal type is a conceptual construct that is supposed to capture what is essential about a phenomenon. For further explanation of Max Weber's terminology, see Richard Swedberg, *The Max Weber Dictionary: Key Words and Central Concepts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

17 See, for example, Yaron Tsur, "Carnival Fears: Moroccan Immigrants and the Ethnic Problem in the Young State of Israel," Journal of Israeli History 18.1 (1997): 73–103.
18 Haketia is a vernacular Judeo-Spanish language used by Sephardim from northern Morocco.
19 For an in-depth analysis of Mabat's construction of an ethnic discourse, see Moreno "'Inappropriate' Voices from the Past": 52–68, and also, Aviad Moreno "De-Westernizing Morocco: Pre-Migration Colonial History and the Ethnic-Oriented Self-Representation of Tangier's Natives in Israel," *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History* 4 (2012): 67–85.
20 *Mabat Revista* 1989–1990, vol.1, 8–9, 40, an unpublished document from a private collection, Bat Yam Israel.
21 Ibid., 5.
22 By Sephardic we mean Jews of Hispanic (Iberian Peninsula) origin; not to be mistaken to include, as is popularly believed in Israel, those of Mizrahi or Asian origin.
23 Moreno, "De-Westernizing Morocco."
24 Mimouna is a Moroccan-Jewish festivity celebrated at the end of Passover, when regular dietary rules are restored and leavened foods, including bread and pastries, are brought into the house again.
25 We have kept the spelling "Mimona" in the dialogue so as to preserve the pronunciation of this word among northern Moroccan Jews. It is pronounced with a Spanish accent, in contrast to the French pronunciation that is generally used in Israel to refer to this festivity.
26 *Mufleta* is a thin dough made with flour, water, and oil, and cooked in a clay pot. It is eaten with butter and honey during the festivity of Mimouna, representing a sweet return to eating chametz. *Mufleta* is known as *terit* in southern Morocco.
27 *Hiba* might also be translated as subtlety or decorum.
28 Polvorón is a kind of heavy, soft and very crumbly Spanish shortbread made of flour, sugar, milk, nuts, and often, pork fat.
29 Belén is a nativity scene set up as a reproduction of the city of Belem. It is a very popular tradition in Spain.
30 Previous research shows, on the one hand, a tendency among northern Moroccan immigrants in Israel to conceal their extra-ethnic habits when referring to their past in northern Morocco. This tendency is related to their efforts to highlight their singular Judeo-Spanish ethnic identity vis-à-vis the broader Moroccan/Mizrahi collective in Israel. On the other hand, we have found, in our present research, a tendency to identify with the modern (non-Jewish) Spanish cultural milieu as a means of distancing from the Arab-Muslim elements of Morocco. These two tendencies not only do not contradict each other but actually account for subtleties in the process of identity construction that northern Moroccan Jews have undergone in Israel. For further reading about the first tendency, see Moreno, "'Inappropriate' Voices from the Past," and "De-Westernizing Morocco."
31 Alberto Rosa and Florentino Blanco, "Actuations of Identification in the Games of Identity," in *Social Practice / Psychological Theorizing*, accessed November 15, 2016, http://europhd.eu/html/_onda02/07/PDF/12th_lab_scientificmaterial/rosa/actuations_of_identification.pdf.
32 Raanan Rein and Molly Lewis, "Judíos, árabes, sefardíes, sionistas y argentinos: el caso del periódico *Israel*," in Árabes Y Judíos en Iberoamérica: Similitudes, *Diferencias y Tensiones*, ed. Raanan Rein (Sevilla: Fundación Tres Culturas del Mediterráneo, 2008), 95.
33 Epstein, "Marroquíes de origen judío," 58.
34 For an in-depth analysis of this process see the work of Margalit Bejarano, "Between Law and Reality: Conversions, Mixed Marriages and Sephardim in Buenos Aires," *Judaica Latinoamericana: Estudios Históricos, Sociales Y Literarios* VII (2016): 327–50.
35 Brodsky, "Re-configurando comunidades," 31.
36 For an illustrative account of the history of this community, see Iaacov Rubel, ed., *Presencia Sefaradi en la Argentina* (Buenos Aires: Centro Educativo Sefaradí, 1992), 43–54.
37 Diana Epstein, "Los judeo-marroquíes en Buenos Aires: pautas matrimoniales 1875–1910," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina y el Caribe* 6, no. 1 (1995).
38 Interview with Saadia Ben Zaken by Haim Avni, (112) 23, Archives of the Oral History Division, Institute of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.
39 Epstein, "La presencia marroquí," 75.
40 Interestingly enough, the slang word for "Jew" in Argentina is "Russian." On the other hand, the slang word amongst Jews for Sephardim is "Turco."

41 For example, Dahan became Dayan, Bendahan became Ben Dan, Bentolila became Tal, Benarroch became Ben Asher, Benichou became Ben Yishay, Abitan became Beitan. A famous case was Gadi Azancot, Chief of the General Staff of the Israel Defense Forces, who changed his name to Ayzenkot. Changing names does not always follow a logical or systematic process of Hebraization, since someone called Bentata may change it into Barel or Harel or any other "Hebrew" name as long as it does not leave a trace of the Moroccan or Mizrahi origin since the purpose of the change, in general, is to go unnoticed.
42 Epstein "La presencia marroquí," 77.
43 Bejarano, "Between Law and Reality," 343.
44 It needs to be noted, however, that there had been a religious authority figure who people called Rabbi Benlolo. He was a community leader and took care, amongs other things, of the liturgy.
45 Bejarano, "Between Law and Reality," 343.
46 Ibid.
47 See Epstein, "Marroquíes de origen judío."
48 For further information about the evolution of Jewish-Arab relations before and after the establishment of the State of Israel see Ignacio Klich, ed. *Árabes y judíos en América Latina: historia, representaciones y desafíos* (Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI, 2006).
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Interview with Saadia Ben Zaken by Haim Avni, ibid.; Rein and Lewis, "Judíos, árabes, sefardíes, sionistas y argentines," 95–96.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Epstein, "Marroquies de origen judío," 68.
55 Raanan Rein, *Argentine Jews or Jewish Argentines? Essays on Ethnicity, Identity, and Diaspora* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010).
56 "Carta de la Comisión Directiva," ACILBA, accessed June 14, 2016, http://www.acilba.com.ar/acilba/carta-comision-directiva.
57 Levy, "Homecoming to the Diaspora," 93.
58 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space: The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Places*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston, Beacon Press, 1994), 15.
59 Levy, "Homecoming to the Diaspora," 94.
60 *Adafina* is a typical Moroccan Jewish stew made of chickpeas, lamb, eggs, potatoes, garlic, onion, and various spices. It was the typical meal of Shabbat.
61 Angy Cohen, "The Reference to the Folkloristic Elements of Jewish Life in Spanish-Morocco: Differences between Émigrés to Argentina and Israel," (paper presented at the 34th Inter-university Congress of Folklore Research, Tel Aviv, Israel, May 10–11, 2015).
62 The idea of how the "other" is re-signified in light of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is developed by Aomar Boum in *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2013).