

THE MOROCCAN JEWS IN SOUTH AMERICA: an unknown migration

One of the most singular and unknown chapters of the migrations to South America is the one related to the JudeoMoroccan communities that arrived in the middle of the 19th century. This paper identifies the causes for this migration from the Maghreb, the different points of attraction and the destinations. Our attention is mainly oriented towards Brazil and Argentina. Brazil, for hosting the major immigratory group and for the temporal phases of the process. Argentina, as a case of a particular minority within the Jewish community. We analyze the role of institutions and social segments that acted like mobilizing agents. We also examine the communitarian organization and the integration strategies in both national societies. Furthermore, this work reflects the bonds of this community with its country of origin and the alauí monarchy. Finally, we review the sources and archives that could promote more exhaustive investigations.

Keywords: moroccan jews – migration – South America

Since the nineteenth century, the Moroccan Jewish emigration to South America has been a unique phenomenon, by the complexity of the migration process as well for the several identity strategies played by this group in their new scenario. From the west of the Arabic world, this community was several decades ahead to the massive flows from the Arab Machreq, as well as the Ashkenazi Jewish communities of central and eastern Europe, hencing the significance and originality of this approach . However, there are some records of sefaradi judaism and criptojudaism presence during the colonial period -theme that exceeds the expectations of this work-.

Even though the Moroccan Jewish migration issue received the attention of some specialists (Bengie, 1982; Vilar, 1985, and Segal, 1999; Epstein, 1993, 1995, 1997, Cohen, 2005; Leibovici, 1992, Veltman, 2005) there are still several shortcomings, by so this work constitutes a first attempt to further systematic research.

Our approach to this migration process starts from the perspective of "social networking" as conceived by Douglas Massey "as a social network we understand the ties that bind communities and specific destinations in the host societies, linking migrants and non migrants in complementary and interdependent social relations (Massey et al., 1991: 171)

According to Massey, it is possible to identify four types of networks that are focused on migrants: 1) kinship, 2) Friendship, 3) Common community origin, 4) Social organizations. Also, this network of social ties is held on an informal set of reciprocal expectations and behavior. In our case, these different types of networks are amalgamated, forming a dense network that affected the different stages of the migration process.

From the Maghreb to the Amazon

Throughout the nineteenth century, Morocco experienced various difficulties that affected its internal weakness and its dependence on foreign powers. The increasingly influential of the European powers, and the reforms of economic modernization and openness required by them to the allawi sovereign, produced a greater subordination and a perception of failure to progress against the West. Also, the permanent absence of the *cábilas* increased the natural tendency to the disintegration of state formation in Morocco. Thus, threatened both internally and externally, the Majzen faced his own

survival, testing several strategies for the conservation of power, which would not prevent the colonial subjugation in 1912.

In this scenario, the Jews of Morocco suffered the transformation of the old social order, which included its status as a *dhimmi* or protected-community, and the emergence of new intra- and inter-relationships. While some urbanized Jews were seduced and favored by the presence, fashion and cultural patterns of Western-society (that left them even more isolated from the majority-Muslim) others were plunged into higher levels of poverty, insecurity and exclusion. Both, however, for the first time opened their eyes to look beyond the borders of the country, where other Jewish communities had already established their own transnational networks in a world where the development of capitalism needed and favored the population mobility. It is in this context that we must place the Moroccan Jewish migration towards different destinations, including South America.

The first groups began to flow into the Amazon region in Brazil in the early nineteenth century, moved by the difficult economic situation and the opportunities in the country from the exploitation of rubber. Moreover, recurrent epidemics, and political insecurity served as a stimulus for his departure from the Maghreb:

o êxodo dos judeus marroquinos é explicado pelos diferentes fatores de expulsão: pobreza, fome, perseguição, discriminação, destruição de sinagogas, como de forças de atração e favorecimento, tanto de ordem política e econômica oferecidos pelo Brasil e Amazônia, como a abertura de portos, tratados de aliança e amizade, extinção da Inquisição, liberdade de culto, abertura do rio Amazonas à navegação exterior e outros elementos que contribuíram para buscar a Amazônia - a nova terra da Promissão, a Eretz Amazônia (Benchimol, 1996).

The new conditions in Brazil created an institutional framework for their arrival. First, the regulations that favored free trade, as the Charter Régia of 1808 that allowed the opening of ports to all "os navios estrangeiros das potências que se conservem em paz e harmonia com a minha Real Coroa", ending the regime of exclusive trade with the Lusitanian metropolis.

....a Carta-Régia de 1808 e o Decreto de 1814 fizeram inserir o Brasil no comércio internacional, com reflexos imediatos na Europa. Esse livre comércio e a abertura dos portos "às Nações amigas", criaram boas perspectivas para as judiarias marroquinas, especialmente Tetuan e Tanger, cidades portuárias, onde os judeus já estavam envolvidos no comércio de importação e exportação - além de falarem espanhol e hakitia (Veltman, 2005: 39)

At the same time, dispositions began to make a path for religious freedom in the country. Those were key receptive factors. Also the opening of a regular sea route between Tangier and Belém facilitated the movement of this population.

In this context we can understand the emergence of social networks as key factors for the Moroccan-Jewish migration to South America. First, the commercial orientation of some sectors of the Jewish community acted as a framework for structuring the social networks. A large minority of wealthy merchants was integrated into the transnational business circuits, taking advantage of the presence of Jewish communities in other countries. This kind of international commercial network was driven by international trade relations of kinship, friendship, paisanaje, cultural affinity and business opportunities (Castien Maestro, 2004: 10). Some of these families became major

distributors and promoters of mobility to America providing the migratory process a semi-organized status:

Na verdade, a atração da fortuna fácil deve ter sido um fator importante na vinda dos judeus marroquinos. Não foi a única, mas foi a principal. Por trás dessa emigração semi-organizada, estavam interesses comerciais ingleses, razoavelmente apoiados economicamente por algumas famílias estabelecidas em Belém e no Rio de Janeiro, que viram, no terreno fértil das agitações que sacudiam Tanger e Tetuan, mão de obra abundante, barata e de confiança (Veltman, 2005: 52).

The *Common community origin* networks were one of the main factors. As Massey states, the solidarity generated by the regional identity contribute to enhance unity through the practices, traditions and shared celebrations. In this case, the bulk of migrants headed to South America came from northern Morocco, Tangier and Tetuan mainly, but also of Asilah, Larache and other populations. In his work *Os Hebraicos da Amazônia*, Henrique Veltman recreates the time of departure of these people:

Este era o desafio que se oferecia aos judeus de Tanger e Tetuan: nas sinagogas de suas cidades norte-africanas; faziam o seu bar mitzvá, cerimônia de confirmação e maioridade, aos 13 anos, colocavam os "tefilin" (filactérios) e, dez ou quinze dias mais tarde, embarcavam nos vapores da Mala Real Inglesa. Muitos deles, imberbes mas recém-casados, outros, solteiros, apenas com a roupa do corpo. Muitos dos recém-casados deixando as jovens esposas entregues aos cuidados de suas famílias, por absoluta falta de recursos para levá-las imediatamente. Dezenas dessas moças foram esquecidas, quando seus jovens esposos, na Amazônia, morreram vítimas de enfermidades desconhecidas; outras, simplesmente foram "trocadas" pelas caboclas. A grande maioria, porém, foi chamada por seus noivos e esposos. Em muitos casos, a noiva era simplesmente "encomendada" para casamentos arranjados pelas famílias (Veltman, 2005).

The regional location was repeated in different moroccan-jews waves to the Southern Cone. This identity functioned as a unifying element that triggered the development of migration by the similarities with the host society. The judeo-spanish dominant culture in this group and the similarity of Moroccan-Jewish dialect the hakitía with the Spanish language spoken in America, in some way facilitated the transition into the New World. However it should be noted that the Moroccan-Jews arrived with their own differences and rivalries between Arabized, berberized and Spanish, as a legacy of centuries of coexistence in the Moroccan sun. We can observe for example in the founding of the earliest houses of worship in Belem, Brazil. The first, in 1823 is that of the Berbers: Essel Abraham and one year after the lifting of the Spaniards, *Shaar Hashamaim* (Gate of Heaven).

Kinship networks also operate as mobilizers factors. The review of lists of names reveals the dense web of family ties between the Moroccan-Jewish communities living in South America. However, these networks were diluted with the passage of generations. In the case of Brazil, the initial arrival of a large numbers of single men or awaiting the arrival of their wives or pledges, along with the geographic setting in the Amazon, favored free unions (as Portuguese did themselves). Thus, there were many unions with Indian, mestizas and also white catholic women. In Argentina, there was a growing assimilation, where mixed marriages were becoming increasingly common. In the early stages of migration to Brazil it is possible to detect the formation of a social organization network that favored the mobility and integration of travelers. New

migrants were received in Belem by the pioneer families -Nahon, Serfatty, Roffe or Israel- involved in the large scale trade, where they were provided with shelter, clothing and community support. The children were placed in a special accommodation, while receiving indications on how to behave in their new place to live.

Newcomers men, meanwhile, were prepared to develop the characteristic activity of migrants: trade. To do so, they joined immediately to a wholesale house, which were bound to perform all their purchases and sales. Then, they sail up rivers aboard in small boats with the goods on board, ready to begin their commercial work.

This linkage between communities over long distances, between migrants and immigrants, among differentiated social segments, and between capital and labor, shows the character of semi-organized migration that marked the arrival of the Moroccan-Jews to the Amazon.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, we saw the arrival of a new flow, which showed new ways of organizing social networks. After the Hispanic-Moroccan wars of 1860 and 1862, and the impact on the prosperity of Pará, a new wave of Moroccan-jews immigration occurred, promoted and financed largely by those already established in the country.

The bulk of the troops once again came to the northern cities and the factors that contributed to this movement were similar to those of the first flow, but the intervention of a social organization was added: the Alliance Israélite Universelle. This institution devoted to bringing science and developments in the European Jewish populations of Morocco and the Ottoman Empire, took a leading role in education and the integration of these communities to the modern world. In 1862 established its first school in Tetuan, thereby imposing an educational effort between the Moroccan-jews. The introduction of the French language and culture among the more educated and urbanized sectors altered the traditional way of life, extending its distance from the Muslim majority and encouraging them to try new horizons. According to Mario Cohen, over 40% of graduates from these schools went to Spanish territories, in Algeria and Portugal (Cohen, 2005) being the biggest migratory wave toward Latin America.

el emigrante [...] pasaba a Gibraltar, Algeciras o Cádiz, donde se embarcaba en los buques que hacían las rutas transatlánticas. Con frecuencia marchaban en una primera etapa a las islas Canarias y [...] tomaban alguno de los [...] mercantes que enlazaban el archipiélago con América (Vilar, 1985: 80)

Beginning in 1870, with the development of the exploitation of rubber, cocoa and sugar in northern Brazil, Belem and Manaus again focused the bulk of the emigrants. Then was Recife -Pernambuco's capital and site of the first American-Jewish community in America- and then the capital, Rio de Janeiro.

Since 1880, Hispanic America was a very attractive location for Moroccan-Jews. Thus did the immigration to Argentina to Venezuela, the Amazon jungle of Peru and Colon in Panama. Other groups settled in Paramaribo (Suriname) and in U.S. cities like New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. Iquitos in the Peruvian Amazon, was a popular destination and many of the new settlers were from Brazilian and European companies in the exploitation of rubber.

In Argentina, meanwhile, the Moroccans were the first group of Sephardic Jews arrived in the country and almost a decade ahead to the great wave ashkenazim. Says Diana Epstein, University of Buenos Aires:

La llegada a la Argentina de inmigrantes de la comunidad judeo- marroquí comenzó a mediados del siglo pasado. Aunque puede afirmarse que esta corriente

inmigratoria fue fluida y constante durante el período comprendido entre 1870 y 1930 -fecha en que las autoridades argentinas limitaron la inmigración-, es probable que el número anual de inmigrantes de este origen nunca haya superado los 200 (Epstein, 1995).

According to the Council of Jewish communities of Morocco, the largest immigration period was the one from 1885-1900, until the twenties. A new wave of about a hundred families mostly from Tetouan, was supplemented to this population in the sixties. As in Brazil, the immigrants came from cities in northern Morocco, including Tangier and Tetouan, Larache and also Arzila. But in Argentina we can trace also some from Rabat.

According to Epstein, in addition to the spontaneous migration arrived a small group led by the Alliance Israelite Universelle composed of Moroccan teachers. The aim of this flow seems to have been teaching Spanish language to the Ashkenazi Jews in the interior.

Aunque algunos optaron por instalarse en la Capital, especialmente en la zona sur - en los alrededores de los barrios de San Telmo, Concepción y Montserrat-, la mayoría se dispersó hacia los centros urbanos del interior, para radicarse sobre todo en la zona del litoral (provincias de Santa Fe y Entre Ríos), o en Córdoba y el Chaco, hecho en el que reside otra característica que los diferencia del resto de las inmigraciones judías llegadas al país (Epstein, 1995).

At the community level, in 1891 they created its own capital in the institution called *Congregación Israelita Latina* (Latin Jewish Congregation), nowadays known as the *Asociación Comunidad Israelita Latina de Buenos Aires – ACILBA* (Latin Jewish Community Association of Buenos Aires). It was the first Jewish community organization in the country. They also have their own cemetery, opened in 1900 as the first Jewish cemetery in Buenos Aires.

The Moroccan-Jewish relations were often distant with the majority Ashkenazim lines. Geographical origins, cultural traditions, languages and even different religious rituals, were among the factors that contributed to a collective identity with respect to differential ashkenazim. Attitudes towards the Zionist movement were also one of the spots between the two groups. By 1920, for example, the Sephardic current favored devote efforts in both Palestine and the Galut (exile). Also, the participation of sefaradies Jews in the Zionist movement has always been characterized as inadequate by the Zionist organizations in the country (Brodsky, 2007).

As pointed out above, the use of Spanish language favored its faster integration into the Argentinean society and gave them a unique identity. As the Council of Jewish Communities of Morocco says: "Percussive Espagnols comme des plus que comme des Jews, enclins ils sont plus à s'assimiler à la société argentine quickly that the members of the community ashkénaze, majoritaire"

Currently, they would constitute the 10% of the sefaradi community, being 3500 people, approximately, according to sources from the Embassy of Morocco in Argentina. (However, these data appear to be limited to active members of this community in Buenos Aires, not including the families scattered throughout the country)

As in Brazil, this minority of a minority character, makes the survival of traditions a real challenge. Hence, the Community institutions should place its greater efforts to safeguard their customs and habits.

Furthermore, we must remember that the Moroccan Jewish elite, both within the Kingdom and in the diaspora, "keeps his feelings of patriotism towards Morocco and

loyalty to the crown, traditional protector of the community" (Hernando de Larramendi, 1997: 47). In this sense, the historian Haim Zafrani often speak of a dual loyalty of his people, to the Moroccan culture and to the Jewish world as a whole. Under this orientation toward the land of origin and their leaders, new mechanisms for dialogue between the diaspora and Moroccan representations in South America were born. The usual connection of Moroccan diplomacy with their Jewish communities abroad was also reflected in this part of the American continent. In recent years, the official visits for both, Argentina and in Brazil, were increased. We can mention the meeting with King Mohamed VI of the Chief Rabbi Shlomo Ben Hamu Argentina and representatives of the community during his 2004 visit, the visit of the ambassador in Brazil, Abdelmalek Cherkaoui Ghazouani, to the State of Pará, place for the wider Moroccan-jewish community in 2002, the participation of the ambassador to Argentina, Mohamed Mael- Ainin, during the month of Moroccan-jewish culture at the Center for Research and Dissemination of Cultural Sefardi (CIDICSEF) in Buenos Aires in 2005 or the presence of authorities during some celebrations and receptions at the Embassy of Morocco in Argentina.

Final thoughts

Moroccan-Jewish migration to South America has numerous singularities. They are the only significant population movements from North Africa and the first in the Arabic world to the Southern Cone. Besides, the homeland of this community is a distinctive feature that allows us to shed light to the primary forms of contact between Latin America and the Arabic world.

This migration shows complex links between many social networks: the land of origin, the Moroccan Jewish Diaspora, the Jewish communities in different countries - especially Sephardim- as well as those of migrants already settled in the South American countries.

In the case of Brazil, these migrations were produced very early and went through different stages. Here, the cycle of rubber marked the rise and fall of this process as a factor of attraction and expulsion, modifying then the original settlement from inside the Amazon's main cities. It was a semi-organized migration, through networks and contacts between long-distance Jewish communities, between migrants and immigrants, social differentiation between segments and between capital and labor. In this case, the isolation in the forest and operated miscegenation acted as a diluents of identity and cultural and religious traditions of this group.

Meanwhile in Argentina, most of Moroccan-Jews arrived at the second running of the late nineteenth century, which spread to much of South America. However, there was a small resurgence in the fifties-sixties of the twentieth century, coinciding with the end of the French protectorate over Morocco and Spanish. Also, this immigration focused to urban centers. In this case there was no significant post-migration as it was in Brazil.

And a systematic involvement of a social organization is not perceived either, with the exception of the teachers brought by the Alliance Israelite Universal.

In parallel, we can find a number of common elements in both migrations. First, business cycles and political in Morocco, that served as factors of expulsion, affecting the volume and character of this migration. Moreover, most migrants were marked by the Judeo-Spanish, which became a distinctive element of their identity.

Also in both countries we observe, as in the rest of the Moroccan-Jewish diaspora (Canada, France or Israel), the propensity to fall into their own institutions, which were the main factor of preservation of cultural and religious traditions and customs.

The bonds of identity with Morocco and the Moroccan dynasty are a distinguishing feature that remains intact and does not presuppose any conflict of loyalty. The limited attachment to the Zionist cause lived with the devotion and respect for their home of origin.

Finally, we note that this preliminary review showed a lot of scattered resources that could reveal more consistent lines on the subject in South America. According to what was observed, there are numerous sources that have information on this topic. First of all, the Moroccan-Jews descendants that preserve memories, testimonies and materials of great importance for its study. And regarding local sources, community organizations, especially the Center for Research and Dissemination of Cultural Sefardi (CIDICSEF) from Buenos Aires are capital. In the Latin American sphere, the Center for the Study of Sephardic in Caracas and the mother entity of these organizations: FeSeLa, Federation Sefaradí Latinoamericana. Furthermore, a key site is the archive of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris. And finally we would have to plumb the archives of the various organizations of the diaspora in the Moroccan-Jewish world. These institutions could be an important source of data to help us to achieve a more vivid picture of the Moroccan-Jewish presence in America.

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Anexos

Sitios web sobre los judíos en Marruecos y en la diáspora

Dafina, le Net des Juifs du Maroc, <http://www.dafina.net/>

Darnna, forum des communautés originaires du Maroc, www.darnna.com

Jewish Moroccan Heritage, <http://www.judaisme-marocain.org/?sec=link>

Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/Brazil.html>

Mimouna, les juifs du maroc, tradition et modernité, Conseil des communautés israélites du Maroc, <http://www.mimouna.net/>

Musée du Judaïsme Marocain, Fondation du patrimoine culturel judéo-marocain
www.casajewishmuseum.com

Sitios web de los sefardíes en América Latina

Asociación Comunidad Israelita Latina de Buenos Aires (ACILBA),
<http://www.acilba.com.ar/>

Centro de Estudios Sefardíes de Caracas,
<http://www.centroestudiossefardies.org.ve/001.htm>

Centro de Investigación y Difusión de la cultura sefardí (Cidicsef), Buenos Aires.
www.cidicsef.org.ar

Judaica, Revista de Judaísmo e Cultura da Comunidade Israelita Brasileira,
www.judaica.com.br

La aljama sefardí de Brasil, <http://sephardic-brazil.blogspot.com/2007/08/to-be-sefardi.html>

Otras organizaciones relevantes

Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), <http://www.aiu.org/>
Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA),
<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/lajsa/>