

## **Working Paper**

### **"The Jewish Community Association of Marrakech"**

*A case study by Gil Kenan*

#### **1. Museums, National archives, and Heritage centers**

Museums, National archives, and Heritage centers are considered as realms of memory (lieux de mémoire) (Nora 1993). They are conceived as transmitters striving to tell the story of nations. They are important in the construction of group identity and are the sites where the collective is on symbolic display. Their declared goal is to act as realms of memory and via that purpose they provide focal points for the construction of ethnic entities and provide the basis for new identities. As educational centers, mostly, outside the hegemonic culture they vie for a re-formulation of the cultural shared heritage (Nissimi 2014). As such, the practices of heritage centers and ethnic museum as well as their visitors might be considered 'heritage work' which serves social purposes in the present.

Israel is the promised land of Jewish immigrants who have a shared heritage. As a multi-cultural society, the Israel society demonstrates an unexpected richness and diversity of ethnic groups, a multiplicity of origins, and a wide range of different voices and cultural traditions. One of the visible and material appearances of this social phenomenon is the emerge and the presence of heritage centers and ethnic museums of each of those immigrant communities. In the context of Israel the pressure from historically marginalized groups for greater visibility for their histories and the emergence of heritage centers-cum-museums of communities from various designated origins, each dedicated to a specific group, each representing a specific identity, might be the proof that Israeli identity broke up into "several nations" (Stevens, Flinn, and Shepherd 2010).

#### **2. "The Jewish Community Association of Marrakech"**

In the 1950s, my father, David Ouaknine Kenan, immigrated to Israel at the age of fifteen from his hometown, Marrakech, Morocco.<sup>1</sup> On 1985 he founded "The Jewish community Association

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<sup>1</sup> Marrakesh Jewish Quarter; The Melah <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGJWulAQhIk>

of Marrakech" with the aim of preserving and representing the heritage of the Marrakech Jewish community, and other Jewish Moroccan communities.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Research questions

With regard to the topic of shared cultural heritage, my main research questions are:

- What were the motives, goals of establishing this specific association, and other heritage centers of the Jewish communities of Morocco?
- What were their political and ideological preconceptions?
- What were the practical visual means of preserving the cultural heritage?
- Do the heritage centers glorify the community's past, represent the homeland and the heritage that they left behind, or do they, - through exhibitions, collections, and public programs-, represent the heritage that has emerged and by which they are identified in Israel?

**As educational centers** (mostly) outside the hegemonic culture

- Do they vie for a re-formulation of collective culture and shared heritage?

### 4. Methodology

- **Visual analysis:** The visual analysis of the association digital site; material objects (religious, everyday), documents, videos<sup>3</sup>
- **Interviews:** Depth interviews and Photo - Elicitation Interviews will be conducted with the founder and with cultural and political figures of the Jewish Moroccan community.

### 5. Theoretical framework and Key concepts

- **Heritage, Community and Heritage centers**

The theories of Heritage, Community and Heritage centers will create a theoretical frame through which I will interpret the practices of the specific center. Shared heritage is a process that reinforces identities, values, and relationships in the present, and community as well as heritage are a multi-

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1857181881238068/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4WU2ZIEkNg>

layered and politically charged concepts that, with a change in context, alter in meaning and consequence. The concepts Heritage and Shared Heritage are key motivating forces which are evident in the gathering of antiquarian objects, preservation and conservation activity. They are present in the subjective engagement of cultural identity creation that is essential to senses of community. Through the consideration of example in Israel, the meaning of engagement and the community and heritage connection, will be explored with emphasis on motivations, issues of authority and the value of community-heritage engagement.(Mydland and Grahn 2012;Crooke 2010; Perkin 2010)

- **Moroccan Jewish heritage centers in Israel**

Heritage centers are an exemplar of the mutual dependence between heritage and history (Edson 2004). Most of the heritage centers in Israel take on the complementary roles of a traditional exhibit-based museum and a community institution. They curate the stories of local personalities, heroes, and the settings of events that frame regional history. Preserving the unique objects of daily life and presenting heritage narratives to visitors are some of the everyday practices taken on at these sites. Heritage narratives and material traces can serve not only as ‘authentic’ representations of the past, but as active players in heritage experiences.

- **Moreshet- The Preservation, Diffusion & Radiation of Moroccan Judaism<sup>4</sup>**

The site- Moreshet (heritage in Hebrew) of Moroccan Judaism tells the story of North African Jewry in general and of Moroccan Jewry in particular, from ancient times to the present day. Their goal is to spread the heritage and spread the customs, folklore, music, culture and way of life that were present among the Jews of North Africa to future generations and especially to the younger generation who did not know their homeland. The center exhibits the religious manuscripts of great Torah scholars, Rabbis, and sages and examines the status of the Jew under Islamic rule.

- **“The Jewish community Association of Marrakech”<sup>5</sup>**

## **6. References**

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<sup>4</sup> <https://moreshet-morocco.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.jmarrakech.org/t-en-us>

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**The Jewish community Association of Marrakech"**

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1857181881238068/>

The Jewish community Association of Marrakech" - **video conference**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4WU2ZIkNg>

Marrakesh Jewish Quarter; The Melah

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGJWuIAQhIk>

The Jewish community of Marrakech

<https://www.jmarrakech.org/t-en-us>

Moreshet- The Preservation, Diffusion & Radiation of Moroccan Judaism

<https://moreshet-morocco.com/>

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