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# Moroccan Jewish Popular Belief

Joshua Lesser
*Dickinson College*

Bringing Morocco to Israel: Saint Veneration and its Meanings


by

Joshua Lesser


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Professor David Commins, Supervisor


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INTRODUCTION

Today the vast majority of Jews of Moroccan descent hail from Israel. In a 16-year

period between 1948 and 1964, 220,000 of Morocco's 250,000 Jews emigrated from the

country.[1] Most, but not all of these Jews settled in the newly established Jewish state, where

they faced various forms of discrimination. In order to combat this harsh reality, Moroccan

Israelis eliminated aspects of their identity including their unique practice of saint

veneration.[2] It is therefore, quite surprising that beginning in the 1970s, Moroccan Jewish

saint veneration has made a major comeback.[3] These days, thousands of Jews can be seen

participating in saint venerating practices once again, therefore bringing the attention of

scholars to the practice.

The main goal of this paper is to examine and interpret the practice of Moroccan

Jewish saint veneration in Israel as it has been performed since the 1970s. Chiefly, this paper

will examine the question of how the Moroccan Israeli immigrant community expresses its

relationship to its natal and new homelands through the veneration of saints. By exploring

this question, this research sets out to better understand how a religious practice, that is so

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[1] Michael Laskier, "Jewish Emigration from Morocco to Israel: Government Policies and the Position of International Jewish Organizations, 1949-56," *Middle Eastern Studies* 25, no. 3 (1989), 323.

[2] According to the scholar Ben-Ami, there were at least 656 Jewish saints within Morocco. This is a conservative estimate given the fact that almost every Jewish community would have had at least one patron saint. Issachar Ben-Ami, *Saint Veneration among the Jews in Morocco*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 13.

[3] Yoram Bilu, *The Saints' Impresarios: Dreamers, Healers, and Holy Men in Israel's Urban Periphery,* (Brighton Ma.: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 37.

rooted in the local geography of a people's natal homeland, begins to take on new meaning within the context of a new homeland.

Firstly, to accomplish this goal, a detailed description of the practice and history of Moroccan Jewish saint veneration will be provided. Once this is accomplished, a variety of ethnographic accounts, folk narratives, images and videos about Moroccan Israeli saint veneration will be analyzed and interpreted within the framework of Thomas Tweed's notion of transtemporal and translocative symbols. According to Tweed, these symbols can help one truly understand an immigrant group's relationship to both its natal and new homelands.[4] In the case of Israeli Moroccans a pattern emerges when examining these symbols. The 1970s marked a turning point in the history of Israeli Moroccans when they began to resist Ashkenazi hegemony and fully engage with Israeli society. This is evident in that decade's politics when they elevated the Likud party. It is also evident in the revival of the one-time agrarian religious practice of saint veneration, especially when interpreted as a diasporic religious practice that employed translocative but not transtemporal symbols.

PRACTICE AND HISTORY

In order to explore the topic of Moroccan Jewish saint veneration, we need a definition of "sainthood." To be a saint in any religion is to be a "person marked by divine favor, [and] holiness."[5] To a Moroccan Jew, a person who possesses this divine holiness is called a *saddiq*, which in Hebrew literally means a righteous one. Most of the Jews in Morocco who received this status did so through their acquiring the reputation of being a Torah scholar. After all, the Torah is the fundamental text within Judaism and it would come as no surprise that any person who masters it would obtain such a great status. In all

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[4] Thomas Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 12.

[5] B. Radtke 2004, "Saints," *Encyclopedia of the Qur'an*, Accessed October, 14, 2019.

religions, saints act as an intercessor between a person praying and God. For Moroccan Jews, this person is almost always dead by the time they are deemed a saint. Occasionally these saints were also legendary rabbis who had come from Palestine to collect alms before dying in Morocco. At the center of the saint's intercession with God lies the ability to miraculously heal people from various ailments. A saint's supernatural powers often went further than just healing and also included the ability to protect people from harm and grant material wealth. However, in order to achieve these favors, saints had to be treated with respect and honor.

In Morocco, people honored their saints in numerous ways, but the most prominent method was through celebrating their *hillula,* which in Aramaic means a wedding ceremony.[6] By no means was this event a typical wedding ceremony. Rather, it was a celebration that occurred on the anniversary of a specific saint's death and involved a pilgrimage to the tomb of the saint. In this sense, the *hillula* is strikingly similar to the Islamic Maghrebi practice of the *ziyara* in that both festivals honored holy men at their graves. While on their way to the tomb, pilgrims often entered a liminal state, which was caused by the remoteness of the grave itself. Tombs of Jewish saints were typically located in remote areas in the High Atlas Mountains, forcing pilgrims to travel far distances. These journeys to remote destinations typically separated the pilgrims from their daily profane lives, adding a level of enhanced spirituality. Once at the tomb, pilgrims partook in a number of rituals, such as "feast[ing] on slaughtered cattle, dr[inking] mahia (arak), danc[ing] and chant[ing], pray[ing], and lit[ing] candles."[7] These rituals were enacted by the pilgrims so that they may receive the saint's blessings and favors.

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[6] Linda Kay Davidson and David M. Gitlitz, "Praying at the Tzadiq's Tomb: Sephardic Pilgrimage," in *Pilgrimage and the Jews,* (Westport CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 131.

[7] Yoram Bilu, "Three, Moroccan Jews and the Shaping of Israel's Sacred Geography," In *Divergent Jewish Cultures: Israel and America,* ed. by Ilan Troen, (New Have: Yale University Press, 2001), 93.

This concept of the saint's blessing, or *baraka,* is the last major aspect of Moroccan Jewish saint veneration that must be understood in order to truly grasp the nature of the practice. *Baraka* is a saint's force "manifested in acts of blessing, in spiritual guidance and in intercession with God." [8] *Baraka,* or as some Moroccan Jews called it *inaya*, is most easily transferred through touch or by honoring a saint.[9] Amongst Muslims in Morocco, who also venerated holy men, *baraka* served an important socio-political role as well as a religious one. According to the prominent sociologist Lahouri Addi, *baraka* for Muslim Moroccans meant political power.[10] That is because unlike Moroccan Jews, Muslims associated *baraka* with living people, and hence venerated those who wielded it. In other words, those endowed with *baraka* also wielded a large amount of power due to their following. This could not be further from the truth for Jews in Morocco, who typically venerated dead saints and could not usually obtain positions of political power due to their status as *dhimmis* under Islamic law. It is therefore safe to say, that while Jews and Muslims believed in this vastly important concept, its actual societal ramifications were different for both groups. Nonetheless, this crucial difference does not take away from the fact that *baraka* is the main invisible divine-force that allows for a saint's charisma to be spread and in many ways serves as the reason for venerating a saint.

Aside from describing Moroccan Jewish saint veneration, it is also important to have a grasp on its history. Moroccan Jewish saint veneration has long and old roots within

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[8] Norman Stillman, "Saddiq and Marabout in Morocco," in *Jews among Muslims: Communities in the Precolonial Middle East* edited by Shlomo Deshen and Walter P. Zenner, 121-130, (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 124.

[9] Stillman, 124.

According to Stillman, the word *baraka* is an Arabic term which was commonly used by both Muslims and Jews in Morocco. *Inaya* on the other hand, is a Judeo-Arabic word only used by the Jewish Moroccans. The word means "divine solicitude."

[10] Lahouri Addi, "Islam Re-Observed: Sanctity, Salafism and Islamism," *The Journal of North African Studies* 14, no. 3-4 (2009), 338.

Morocco. Nobody is truly sure when the practice began in Morocco, however it is worth noting that there are stories of a Jewish community in Morocco since the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E.[11] Despite these stories, there is no definitive proof of Moroccan Jewish saint veneration until the twelfth century when a reference to it appears in the prayer book of Rabbi Shelmonoh Ben Nathan of Sijilmassa.[12] Even so, it is widely believed that venerating saints only became popular starting in the sixteenth century with the spread of Jewish mystical beliefs, or Kabbalah.

Some scholars believe that Kabbalistic beliefs were so prominent in the Muslim world because much of it originated there. For example, Kabbalah expert Ronald C. Kiener states that "there was much Kabbalistic literature (some of it in Judeo-Arabic) in North Africa, Palestine, and Syria well into the eighteenth century," showing the sheer popularity of mystical Jewish beliefs in Muslim lands in pre-modern times.[13] It is suspected that in Morocco specifically, the practice of saint veneration really came into its own after these Kabbalistic beliefs merged with local Islamic holy men worship.[14]

It is in this local context of pre-modern Morocco that saint veneration could be viewed as an agrarian religious practice. The concept of an agrarian religion was put forth by

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[11] Corcos, David, Hayyim J. Cohen, and Michael M. Laskier. "Morocco." In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 493-507. Vol. 14. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. *Gale eBooks* (accessed February 16, 2020). https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/CX2587514209/GVRL?u=carl22017&sid=GVRL&xid=f1a74cb7.
[12] Ben-Ami, 183-184.
[13] Ronald C. Kiener, "Jewish Mysticism in the Land of the Ishmaelites: A Re-Orientation," in *The Convergence of Judaism and Islamic Religious, Scientific, and Cultural Dimensions* ed. By Michael M. Laskier, 147-167, (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2011), 164.
[14] Robert Cohn, "Sainthood on the Periphery: The Case of Judaism" in *Sainthood: Its Manifestations in World Religions,* edited by Richard Kieckhefer and George D. Bond, 43-68, (Los Angles: University of California Press, 1988), 53-56. See also:
Gil Daryn. "Moroccn Hassidism: The Chavrei Habakuk Community and Its Veneration of Saints," *Ethnology* 37, no. 4 (1998), 352.
Cohn's chapter covers how both Kaballah and Islam influenced saint venerating practices around the Muslim world whereas, Daryn notes how the Moroccan tradition is a mix of Jewish mysticism and Maraboutism.

the social historian James Grehan to better explain the phenomenon that many scholars refer to as popular religion. Grehan argues that pre-modern societies practiced religions that were in tune with the overall agrarian order of the day. In these pre-modern societies, where the majority of people were illiterate and relied upon a rural economy, religion functioned as an "expression of an entire social and economic order whose rhythms were tied to the slow turnings of the seasons, finely attuned vagaries of earth, sky, and environment."[15] In agrarian societies, belief systems were not rigid but flexible in order to meet the needs of everyday harsh realities. Grehan applied the concept of agrarian religion to the cult of saints and other popular practices in Ottoman Syria and Palestine. The same concept fits premodern Morocco, where an agrarian economy dominated societal interaction and modern medicine did not yet exist. It was in this type of society that Moroccan Jews and Muslims turned to saints for their everyday needs.

Furthermore, just as agrarian religion in the Ottoman lands showed signs of syncretism, so too did Judaism and Islam often blend together in the practice of Moroccan saint veneration. This idea of Jewish and Islamic syncretism is reinforced by the fact that in Morocco, it was typical for Muslims to venerate numerous Jewish saints and vice-a-versa. For example, anthropological research shows that Moroccan Jews and Muslims venerated at least 126 common saints.[16] Although most of these shared saints were of Jewish in origins, a minority were identified to be Muslims. This is strikingly similar to the agrarian religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine where "the partitions separating 'Muslim' from 'Christian' or 'Jewish' culture" were typically blurred.[17] In Morocco the haziness in the distinction of what

[15] James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 16.
[16] Ben-Ami, 131.
[17] Grehan, 13.

was considered Jewish or Muslim seemed to be slightly less obvious than in the Ottoman lands. Even with that being said, traditions often overlapped between the two religions and that is especially true within the realm of saint veneration.

One example of agrarian religious syncretism in Moroccan saint veneration was the Mimouna festival. Many Moroccans believe that Mimouna is the *hillula* of Maimonides's father *Maimon,* a saintly figure.[18] In particular, it is a popular belief that the Mimouna festival, which was celebrated the day after Passover, was a direct appeal to a fertile crop season within Morocco. It has been noted how back when the celebration was widespread within Morocco "Moslems welcomed Jews going into their gardens or onto their lands on the day of the mimuna."[19] While the deep meanings behind this harvest ritual are debated, most scholars generally agree that partaking in such a custom meant fertility and good rains for the year to come. The fact that this ritual was so integral to Moroccan crop yields, and occurred amongst both the rural and urban classes of Jews and Muslims, shows its agrarian syncretistic aspects.

Agrarian syncretistic practices persisted for centuries until modern conditions altered Moroccan society, including the veneration of saints. In 1912, when Morocco became a protectorate of France, the nation's economy, politics and social order began to change drastically.[20] Modernization and colonialism also had major impacts on religion. In the case of Muslims under colonial rule, according to Addi, "neither the saints with their omnipresent

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[18] Reuben Kashani, "Maimuna," In *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, 397. Vol. 13. Detroit, MI: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007. *Gale eBooks* (accessed April 11, 2020). https://envoy.dickinson.edu:8439/apps/doc/CX2587513048/GVRL?u=carl22017&sid=GVRL&xid=306a5847.

[19] Harvey Goldberg, "The Mimuna and the Minority Status of Moroccan Jews," *Ethnology* 17, no. 1 (1978), 79.

[20] Corcos, David, Hayyim J. Cohen, and Michael M. Laskier.

and deterrent baraka, nor the ulema with the secrets of divine power in their possession could prevent" the West from dominating.[21] This fact caused Muslims to turn to alternative global religious currents within Islam.[22] Perhaps another reason why Muslims turned away from saints and saint venerating practices is because many moved to big cities causing agrarian religious practices to fade. Regardless, Western domination and urbanization point to the fact that while many Muslims within Morocco still venerate saints, it lost much of its appeal and became less significant. In view of this fact, one would expect a similar result for the Jews of Morocco. However, this reality could not be further from the truth.

Colonialism actually caused Moroccan Jewish saint veneration to become more popular during the 20th century. Anthropologist Oren Kosansky claims that French authorities promoted Jewish saint veneration for political gain. This may sound odd, especially considering that French Jews looked down upon their coreligionists with disdain. More specifically, some French Jews believed these practices were the antithesis of monotheism. One French Jew working for the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* even called saint veneration the "pagan veneration of the dead," thus showing a condescending view of the practice.[23] Despite these attitudes, French authorities continued to promote saint veneration as an attempt to demonstrate what they saw as the "true Morocco," which was not Islamic, but rather Berber and pagan. France did this in order to undermine the Arab and Islamic sentiments within Morocco that were fueling nationalism.[24] It was under this effort of promoting Jewish saint veneration that modern infrastructure was added to the various

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[21] Addi, 40.

[22] Specifically, Addi makes the claim that many Moroccans turned to Salafism.

[23] Oren Kosansky, "The Real Morocco Itself: Jewish Saint Pilgrimage, Hybridity, and the Idea of the Moroccan Nation," In *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa,* ed. by Emily Benichou Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011), 355.

[24] Kosansky, 346.

pilgrimage sites to accommodate more pilgrims at *hillula* festivals. As a result of this new accessibility, investment, and promotion, by the 1940s more Jews were partaking in saint venerating pilgrimages than ever before. Moreover, Saint veneration remained popular until the exodus of Moroccan Jews from Morocco in the 1950s.

In the 1950s, most Moroccan Jews immigrated to Israel, where they were initially treated poorly and thus attempted to hide their identity. Upon immigrating the Israeli government placed Moroccan Jews in remote "development towns" that suffered economic neglect.[25] In addition, Israel's dominant Ashkenazi population discriminated against the immigrants. Ethnic discrimination had roots in three aspects of Zionism.

Firstly, Zionism is a European ideology that favored Ashkenazim over Jews from non-European societies. This is most evident in not just the actions of the early state of Israel, but also in its leaders. For example, the leader of the Jewish Agency and first Prime Minister of Israel, David Ben Gurion, disparaged Jews from North Africa claiming that the average North African immigrant "looks like a savage."[26] Secondly, Zionism put itself in opposition with Arab forms of nationalism and as a result looked down upon Arab culture. This meant that Jewish immigrants coming from the Middle East did not feel comfortable embracing forms of their Arab identity. This discomfort was so extreme that Jews often felt uncomfortable speaking their native language of Arabic out of fear of being mistaken for a Palestinian.[27] Lastly, Zionism was fundamentally opposed to diasporic life, thus demanding new immigrants to drop their old cultures. The reason Zionism adopted an anti-diasporic

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[25] David Lehman and Batia Siebzehner, "T'Shuva Meets Ethnicity: The Shas Religious Project" in *Remaking Israeli Judaism: The Challenge of Shas,* 42-73 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 67.

[26] Tom Segev, "Nameless People," in *1949, The First Israelis* 225-275, (New York: Henry Holt, 1998), 226.

[27] Karim Miské dir. Narratives at War (1945 to Present Day); Film Ideas, 2014. https://envoy.dickinson.edu:8090/watch/narratives-at-war-1945-to-present-day.

slant is because many Jewish nationalists felt that diaspora Jews were weak, a common trope

also shared amongst anti-Semites in Europe. This Ashkenazi-centric outlook internalized

European anti-Semitism and as a result urged Jews to disassociate themselves from the

diaspora, and build themselves anew, in order to overcome popularly held anti-Semitic

ideas.[28] In the process, Ashkenazi Jews also encouraged "other" non-Ashkenazi Jews to do

the same. This overall hostile atmosphere, did not allow for Moroccan Jews and their Israeli-

born descendants to easily carry their own culture into the new Jewish State and as a result

they largely suppressed cultural practices including saint veneration.

However, in the 1970s, Moroccan Jews began to revive saint veneration.[29] One of the

most puzzling things about this development is that many of the saints' graves were in

Morocco, thus begging the question of how a practice rooted in the natal homeland could

undergo revival in a distant land. According to Yoram Bilu, a leading anthropologist who

specializes in Moroccan Jewish saint veneration, saints were able to be venerated within

Israel through six methods.[30] Moroccan Jews were primarily able to venerate saints within

Israel through: adopting locally revered rabbis as saints, having visitational dreams that

brought Moroccan saints to Israel, establishing local saintly figures through dreams, bringing

some saints' remains from Morocco, creating new saints from within their community, and

co-opting abandoned Palestinian tombs of important figures as their own. Today, hundreds of

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[28] Samuel Presner, "Clear Heads, Solid Stomachs, and Hard Muscels': Max Nordau and the Aesthetics of Jewish Regeneration," *Modernism/Modernity* 10, no. 2 (2003), 270.
This article notes how early Zionists such as Max Nordau believed in popular European beliefs that Jews were a weaker people. Nordau felt that Jews could change that by leaving the old "ghetto" ways behind. However, Nordau thought that if Jews did not separate themselves from the diaspora, they risked degenerating into an inferior "race."
[29] Alex Weingrod, *The Saint of Beersheba,* (Albany: State of New York Press, 1990) 75.
Weingrod notes how younger people and older people attended the *hillula* of Rabbi Chayim Chouri in Beersheba. He even notes how he doubts that most of the people there could remember their homeland, thus implying that most of the people were young immigrants or children to immigrants.
[30] Yoram Bilu, "Three, Moroccan Jews and the Shaping of Israel's Sacred Geography," 77.

thousands of Moroccan Jews celebrate their saints in a practice that has come to define

Moroccans as an ethnic group in the eyes of many Israelis.


MOROCCAN ISRAELI SAINT VENERATION'S DEBATED MEANINGS

Even with the revival of the practice being clear, many scholars debate the meanings

behind its comeback within Israel. Scholars appear to be divided into three main camps when

debating the meanings behind the revival of the practice in Israel. The first explanation

behind the practice's significance is best represented by Issachar Ben-Ami who notes how

saint veneration "is so deeply ingrained" within Moroccan Jews that it was bound to be

revived within Israel.[31] In fact, Moroccan Jews' inherent love for venerating saints is not just

what allowed the practice to be revived, but it is also why it looks the same as it did in

Morocco. Furthering his claim about the practice's continuity, Ben-Ami observes that "in

Israel saints continue to cure sick people and barren women by the same miraculous means

they used to abroad."[32] To Ben-Ami, the healing aspects of saint veneration is what proves

the practice is still the same, despite the circumstances being different. For example, much of

the healing that occurs today in Israel has to do with soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces,

something that obviously did not exist in Morocco.

The second opinion about the revival of saint veneration has more to do with the

immigration experience of Moroccan Jews. This viewpoint takes note of the direct

connection between Israeli development towns and the popularity of the practice. The

argument is that the practice itself is most popular within Israel's development towns, the

only places where new shrines have been established. Therefore, scholars such as Bilu have

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[31] Ben-Ami, 172.
[32] Ben-Ami 175.

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claimed that the practice is meant to establish a local sense of pride. Prior to the revival of saint veneration, "development towns were depicted derogatorily as ''residual communities'' or ''sinks'' for the less resourceful immigrants," but now that the practice has been revived people can point to their towns' sanctity with pride.[33] This argument is not mere conjecture, but it is rather reinforced by Bilu's use of socioeconomic statistics that show that over time the residents of these towns have begun to fare better, thus feeding their drive to establish something that they can point to with pride within these stigmatized communities.

Lastly, the third viewpoint about the revival of saint veneration comes from Alex Weingrod. His perspective is similar to Bilu's in that it is also centered around the concept of immigration absorption. Weingrod claims that the practice reflects what he calls an "ethnic renewal ceremony." These ceremonies are considered to be a "a class of events, or better, public occasions, during which members of a particular country or place of origin group join together to perform joint activities that celebrate their past and present," situations.[34] Through embracing a practice that was clearly celebrated in Morocco, while living within Israel, the Moroccan Israeli community has been able to create a sense of ethnic pride in a similar way that Italians in the Lower East Side of New York City have in their *San Gennaro* festival.[35] Celebrations and traditions such as these often showcase that an immigrant group has become comfortable in the society in which they are living, which is exactly why they are able to announce their heritage in public. In this sense, Weingrod is arguing that because

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[33] Yoram Bilu, "Three, Moroccan Jews and the Shaping of Israel's Sacred Geography," 82.
[34] Weingrod, *The Saint of Beersheba,* 101.
[35] The feast of San Gennaro was a revival of an earlier Italian celebration of St. Januarius. The celebration was started in 1925 by the Society of San Gennaro on Mulberry Street in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. It is still celebrated to this day by Italian New Yorkers, despite the fact that they are largely assimilated.

Moroccan Israelis are comfortable living within Israel, they partake in rituals that advertise their ethnicity.

A NEW INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK

While all three of these arguments about the meaning of the practice have value, they ignore the connection Moroccan Israelis make with the physical land of Morocco. A different interpretive framework is needed that considers the deep attachment Moroccan Jews have towards both their natal and new homelands. This is especially important given the fact that the practice clearly borrows symbols from Morocco, making their attachment to the country ever more obvious. Perhaps through using a framework that emphasizes Morocco just as much as Israel, one can understand how religion takes on novel meanings within the context of a new homeland.

Keeping this attachment to Morocco in mind, it is important to turn to the framework of diasporic religions developed by Thomas Tweed in *Our Lady of the Exile Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*.[36] This anthropological book was a groundbreaking study that investigated the Cuban American community in the 1990s. According to Tweed, Cuban Americans practiced "a diaspora religion" through their veneration of the Virgin Mary at the Shrine of Our Lady of Charity south of Miami.[37] Tweed's argument is that the Cuban American community forged and practiced symbols and rituals that pertained to their position as a diasporic immigrant community. Specifically, this religious practice of venerating Mary at the shrine in southern Florida contained translocative and transtemporal symbols.

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[36] Tweed, 12.
[37] Tweed, 5.

Moreover, Tweed claims that translocative and transtemporal symbols can help explain an immigrant group's attachment to their natal and new homelands. According to Tweed, translocative symbols serve to bridge a community "between here and there," meaning that this particular religious practice points to connecting an immigrant group to their natal homeland.[38] An example of this fact within Tweed's observations is the way in which the Cuban American pilgrims at the shrine in southern Miami organized traditional Cuban picnics as part of the practice. To Tweed, these picnics serve as nostalgic reminders of the physical natal homeland, and what it felt like to be a part of it. Unlike translocative symbols, transtemporal symbols are different in that they relate to time. Transtemporal symbols relate to an imagined future based upon an imagined past. These symbols are not just about how life existed within the natal homeland, but they also look towards how things will once again become better. In this regard transtemporal symbols are "retrospective and prospective, moving followers back in forth in time."[39] Tweed, claims that while at the Shrine of Our Lady of Charity, Cuban Americans often pray for a free Cuba and even broadcast these messages over to the island in the hope that one day it will become so.[40] It is through these two symbols that Cuban Americans express themselves as a diasporic religion. One could argue that Israeli Moroccan Jews by definition do not practice a diasporic religion because they are now living in their religion's historic homeland. Nevertheless, Tweed's framework can still shed light on Moroccan Israelis' connection to both Morocco and Israel, and perhaps even challenges the notion that Moroccan Jews are no longer residing within a diaspora because they now live in Israel. After all, saint veneration is a religious expression with its spiritual basis rooted in the Moroccan landscape and not the land of Israel.

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[38] Tweed, 94.
[39] Tweed, 117.
[40] Tweed, 127.

TRANSLOCATIVE SYMBOLS

With the application of Tweed's framework to the practice of Moroccan Jewish saint veneration, it becomes clear that Moroccan Israelis are able to create their own space that bridges the physical divides between their natal and new homelands. This ability for Moroccan Israelis to express attachment to their natal land, while sanctifying their new homeland, through the veneration of saints becomes abundantly clear by the use of a number of translocative symbols. Specifically, these translocative symbols appear to be unique to the Moroccan Israeli context and when read together display an immigrant community that is deeply attached to Morocco.

The attachment forged between Moroccan Israelis and Morocco is best observed through a number of key developments within the practice of Moroccan Jewish saint veneration as it has changed since its revival in the 1970s. These developments relate to a wide range of symbols that are rooted in the practice's narratives, art, and rituals. While the practice is still vastly similar to the original one from Morocco, the new aspects and their meanings cannot be ignored. It is these new translocative symbols that will be explored below.

Primarily, the most noticeable translocative aspect of the entire revived practice of Moroccan Jewish saint veneration is the methods by which saints have been moved to Israel. As stated above, the scholar Bilu highlighted six ways in which Moroccan Israelis have been able to move their saints to Israel, thus allowing them to revive the practice. When looked at more closely, two of the six aforementioned methods involved either a real or symbolic transfer of saints from Morocco: visitational dreams and bringing saints' remains from Morocco. The narratives that surround these two methods show how Moroccan Israelis

connect saint veneration from Morocco to Israel, by spiritually transplanting a saint from one

homeland to another.

One such example of this attempt involves visitational dreams. Bilu notes how one of

the first Moroccan saints to be brought from Morocco to Israel was Rabbi David u-Moshe in

1973.[41] The narrative behind this symbolic transfer occurred in a peculiar way that directly

bridged Morocco to Israel. To be more exact, u-Moshe was transferred from Morocco to

Israel in the dreams of Avraham Ben Haim, a Moroccan resident of a development

neighborhood in Safed.[42] Leading up to his encounter with u-Moshe, Ben Haim had a

number of dreams where his rabbi grandfather, who still lived in Morocco, appeared to him

alongside Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai, a prominent rabbi from second century Palestine.

According to Bilu, it was these dreams that caused the "transition from Morocco to Israel."[43]

During later dreams u-Moshe eventually appeared, alongside the other two rabbis, and

berated Ben Haim for "forsaking" him in Morocco. Instead u-Moshe urged him to venerate

him within Israel.[44] It was this vision that justified establishing a shrine for u-Moshe in

Safed. It is also this narrative that demonstrates how Moroccan Jews are able to bridge the

physical divide between their natal and new homelands, all the while sanctifying Israel

through bringing and including Morocco in to their revived practice's founding stories.

Another noticeable translocative symbol that can be observed in Israel is the

architecture that relates to the practice of Moroccan Jewish saint veneration. The architecture

that can be found at some of the more developed saint shrines, and the buildings relating to

them, point directly to the attempt to connect Israel with Morocco. In the case of the tomb of

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[41] Yoram Bilu, "Chapter 13: A Moroccan Jewish Shrine in Israel," in *The Life of Judaism* ed. by
Harvey Goldberg 195-211, (Berkley: University of California Press, 2001), 197.
[42] Yoram Bilu, "Chapter 13: A Moroccan Jewish Shrine in Israel," 198.
[43] Yoram Bilu, "Chapter 13: A Moroccan Jewish Shrine in Israel," 199.
[44] Yoram Bilu, "Chapter 13: A Moroccan Jewish Shrine in Israel," 203.

Rabbi Israel Abouhatzeira, a Moroccan who immigrated to Israel in the 1970s, this fact has never been clearer. Rabbi Israel Abouhatzeira, also known as the Baba Sali, is typically seen as Israel's national saint by a large number of the country's Jews. The Baba Sali, "was famous for blessing bottles of water or other liquids that then were believed to possess healing power[s]."[45] Unlike many other saints however, the Baba Sali was venerated even when he was alive. After his death in 1984, the Baba Sali was buried in the small development town of Netivot, which is where he lived. Originally his tomb bore all the hallmarks of a translocative symbol due to it being built in the style of a traditional Maghrebi *qubba*, meaning that the structure that covered the tomb, included a peeking white dome that sat on top of a perfectly symmetrical arched square.[46] However, this architectural choice is baffling when one considers that in Morocco, Muslim holy-men's tombs were built with a *qubba*, while Jewish tombs "were always more modest.".[47] Therefore, this fact begs the question of why the Baba Sali's tomb would ever be constructed in such a way? Scholars have yet to address this but regardless of the reasons, it is clearly meant to induce feelings of its Moroccan character to spectators.

In addition to the original tomb of the Baba Sali, the new proposed renovations for his burial complex also seem to function as a potential translocative symbol. In 2017, Ynet News, the English version of the Israeli daily newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, reported that the Baba Sali's tomb was set for renovations. According to the article, which displays a model image of the proposed complex, these new renovations are even more exuberant. The façade's use of rounded arches and geometric patterns is meant to be a direct reference to

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[45] Weingrod, *The Saint of Beersheba*, 99.
[46] Alex Weingrod, "Changing Israeli Landscapes: Buildings and the Uses of the Past," *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 3, (1993), 371.
[47] Ben-Ami, 162.

some of Morocco's most magnificent buildings, causing the Israeli news sources to hail its

"distinctly Moroccan style."[48] However, the people behind the project claim that it is meant

to mimic Baba Sali's old living quarters within Morocco. Based off of a video which shows

what the Baba Sali's wall surrounding his old living quarters looked like, this claim does not

seem so outlandish.[49] Even so, the renovated tomb would definitely come off as far more

extravagant than the original living quarters. Either way, this style of building is meant to

break down the physical divide between Israel and Morocco, thus bringing people closer to

their natal homeland from afar. This is especially important given the fact that most

Moroccan Jews born in Israel do not have a realistic image of what life in Morocco was like,

and instead rely on their own imagined version of the country. In this sense, a structure built

in such an extravagant manner would be more likely to meet these expectations, regardless of

how accurate it is to the architectural layout of Moroccan tombs in the past.

Another way in which the physical divides between Morocco and Israel are being

blurred is through the buildings surrounding the Baba Sali's tomb. After the Baba Sali's

death, his son, the Baba Baruch, built multiple Yeshiva buildings, a synagogue and parks

around his tomb.[50] These buildings and parks are meant to provoke nostalgia within the

Moroccan Israeli visitor. That is because the buildings are erected in a clear Maghrebi style.

For example, it is clear that these buildings, with façades that are painted in maroon and

white and use distinctly Maghrebi shapes, are meant to directly bring Morocco to Israel.[51]

Aside from the Hebrew written on them one would not expect that these buildings were built

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[48] Hilla Shemer, "Tomb of the Baba Sali to Be Renovated," *Ynetnews,* Ynetnews, 3 Apr. 2017, www.ynetnew.com/articles/0,7340,l-4944346,00.html.

[49] DiarnaInfo, "Baba Sali Home in Rissani (Morocco)," YouTube video, 2:51, June 13, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0FC9qcaO6EE&feature=emb_title.

[50] Alex Weingrod, "Changing Israeli Landscapes: Buildings and the Uses of the Past," 371.

[51] Google Maps, Street View Images. The address is as followed: 9 Hazon Ish St. Netivot, South District, Israel and its surrounding buildings.

in an Ashkenazi dominated society. This distinct style has led some young Moroccan

onlookers to say "this what my parents told us about," upon seeing these buildings.[52] It is

clear from testimony and stories such as this that these buildings are meant to express a clear

Moroccan identity and a yearning for the feeling of Morocco. In this sense, these buildings

are like the Cuban American picnics observed by Tweed, in that they both serve to connect

people to their natal homeland.

Moving beyond architecture, Moroccan Israeli saint venerating rituals and festivals

also contain translocative aspects. Such rituals include Mimouna and feasts, known as a

*seudat,* that occur during different rabbis' *hillulout*. As previously stated, it was once

ordinary for feasts to occur during a *hillula.* Today in Israel, this is once again occurring.

While in many ways the meals in Israel are practiced no differently than in Morocco, they

have now begun to take on translocative symbols. For instance, while looking through

several photographs of *hillulout* from the 1980s in Israel, it becomes clear that people dressed

in traditional clothing during these meals. Specifically, it is commonplace to see the men

donning the fez as a way to express their "Moroccaness."[53] This fact is in stark contrast with

photographs and videos taken during *hillulout* from the late 20th and early 21st centuries in

Morocco, where the festivals are still celebrated amongst the country's small remaining

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[52] Weingrod, "Changing Israeli Landscapes: Buildings and the Uses of the Past," 376.

[53] Danny Lev, "Baba Sali Centenary," Digital Image, nli.org.il 1990, Accessed April 12, 2020, https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_ARCHIVE_AL004029050/NLI. And for another see:
Danny Lev, "Moroccan Tradition," Digital Image, nli.org.il 1990, Accessed April 12, 2020, https://www.nli.org.il/en/archives/NNL_ARCHIVE_AL004029048/NLI. And for another see:
Yael Schwartz, "A Man Clad in Traditional Moroccan *Jelabiyah* and Fez, at the *Hillula* of the Babi Sali, Netivot," Photograph, 1997, in *To the Tombs of the Righteous: Pilgrimage in Contemporary Israel,* ed. by Rivka Gonen (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1999), 39.

Jewish community. In these images and videos not one man can be seen wearing a fez.[54] The

only reasonable explanation for wearing the fez in Israel today, and not Morocco, is because

it is meant to once again bridge a divide between the two homelands. Perhaps Jews in Israel

feel like they have to compensate for the fact that they are not in Morocco, which is why they

chose to wear it. Regardless, when other people see men dressed in fezzes they cannot help

but be reminded of Morocco, even if this is not the practice in Morocco today.

Additionally, the *hillula* festival of Mimouna also serves to sever the divide between

Morocco and Israel through establishing a Moroccan aesthetic. Just like the other *hillulout*

and saint venerating practices, Mimouna also became hidden and less popular in the years

following Moroccan immigration to Israel. However, at this point, it appears to be one of

Israel's most popular holidays, right alongside the other important Jewish festivals. The

festival is often celebrated with major Moroccan undertones, as shown in the video "Flavors

of Israel- Mimouna Festival" on Israel's channel 10 YouTube page.[55] Within the video one

can immediately spot that there are a variety of objects that appear to literally bring Morocco

to Israel. The most noticeable Moroccan object is the tablecloth from Morocco. The video

states how this tablecloth belonged to the hostess' mother, and thus functions as a reminder

of her natal homeland. The hostess also mentions the nostalgia she has for all the "wonderful

smells" that existed back in Morocco, further showcasing her ability to be transferred into a

translocative realm. Through partaking in such a celebration, this Moroccan Israeli

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[54] "Serving Refreshments during the Hillula R. Amram ben Diouane," Digital Image, dbs.bg.org.il 1995, Accessed April 12, 2020, https://dbs.bh.org.il/image/serving-refreshments-during-the-hillula-r-amram-ben-diouane. And for another see:
AP Archives, "Largest Jewish Pilgrimage Starts in Morocco," YouTube video, 4:56, Nov. 16, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=miYQalzq95g. And for another see:
Jewish Learning Channel, "Jewish Saints of Morocco: Song at the Grave of Tzadik Rabbi David Hacohen," YouTube video, 27:08, Dec 18, 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xoP7eLWtQU
[55] ILTV Israel News, "Flavors of Israel- Mimouna Festival," YouTube video, 4:45, May 21, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wXnJwl89RR4.

immigrant community is transferring themselves between a space that is in Israel, but is also in Morocco. In this vein, they are recreating Morocco inside of Israel through the use of symbols during a ritual.

After examining how Moroccan Israelis constructed a variety of translocative symbols while venerating saints, it becomes clear that they are affirming their own unique identity within an Ashkenazi assimilationist society. Just about every translocative symbol mentioned in this paper reaffirms a deep connection to the land of Morocco. In fact, each one builds, or justifies building Morocco, and or Moroccan traditions within Israel, thus clearly allowing this immigrant group's identity to stay intact. This is significant because Israel is an Ashkenazi assimilationist society, that sought to put pressure on Moroccan Jews to abandon their traditions. Therefore, asserting Moroccan identity may be seen as a form of resistance to Ashkenazi hegemony. This seems all the more likely when one considers Israeli politics during the 1970s and 1980s.

MOROCCAN INVOLVEMENT IN ISRAELI POLITICS

The 1970s marked a time when Moroccan Israelis were able to assert themselves as an ethnic group in Israeli politics. Bilu notes how "more than any other ethnic group, the public identified the Moroccans with the political upset of 1977," that brought the Likud to power.[56] This shocking upset, that brought years of Labor rule to an end, can be seen as a watershed moment in Moroccan involvement in Israeli politics. After this victory, Likud became the official party of the *Mizrahim*, and Moroccan Jews began to establish their own political parties as well, such as Shas and Tami. It is through Likud's political success that Moroccan Jews began to push back against Ashkenazi dominance and assimilationist

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[56] Yoram Bilu, *The Saints' Impresarios: Dreamers, Healers, and Holy Men in Israel's Urban Periphery,* 33.

discourse.[57] That is because the Labor party was largely seen as the party of the Ashkenazim. After all, it was the Labor party who was in power during the years of Moroccan immigrant absorption in Israel. Therefore, through elevating the Likud party, Moroccan Jews were officially engaging with Israeli society and in doing so, they challenged what it meant to be Israeli. Although this paradigm shift is clearly evident from the political level within Israel, this paper argues it could be demonstrated through looking at the lack of transtemporal symbols in Moroccan Jewish saint veneration.

ENGAGING WITH ISRAELI SOCIETY

Despite forging symbols that spatially connect Moroccan Israelis with Morocco, the practice of saint veneration also promotes engagement with Israeli society. Unlike Cuban Americans in Tweed's book whose religious practice expresses transtemporal symbols that suggest a yearning for a different reality, Moroccan Israelis do not. They do not focus on some sort of idealized Morocco that is not too far off in the distant future, nor do they wish for some alternative reality, as many diasporic groups do. Rather, through saint veneration they are participating with Israeli society in the present. This fact becomes obvious when one notices a few features about the practice that suggests engagement with Israeli society.

Firstly, Moroccan Israelis have been able to adopt the Israeli nationalistic-warrior ethos within their religious practice. It is no secret that in Israel military service and national security are major social values. The roots of this fact lie in Israel's tense security situation and are expressed by concepts that are rooted in Zionism's central narratives such as Max Nordau's "muscle Jew."[58] As a result of these circumstances, it is not uncommon in Israeli

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[57] Yoram Bilu, *The Saints' Impresarios: Dreamers, Healers, and Holy Men in Israel's Urban Periphery,* 34.

[58] See article from above by Presner.

society to worship a macho type warrior ethos. This fact can be extended to Moroccan Jewish saint veneration where "today's saint carries a gun, defends borders, [and] informs his disciples when war is about to break out."[59] In one dream narrative that is set during the October 1973 War, we can observe this warrior-patriotic undertone.

> When she came, she said to me: "I dreamt of two sages. One stands by Hazor and the other by Rosh Pina, and they bear rifles and stand." She asked them: "What are you old men doing here?" They said: "This is Hanina [Honi] the Circle-Drawer. He stands by Hazor, and this is Rabbi David u-Moshe, he stands on this side, so that the enemy will not pass."[60]

This story presents u-Moshe and Honi the Circle Drawer, a first century B.C.E. sage, as protectors of Israel against the Syrian army. It is clearly about safeguarding the nation—the saints themselves are the warriors taking on the role of soldiers. Myths and stories such as this not only reinforce the idea that saints serve as protectors, but also confirm the fact that Moroccan Israelis have been able to re-work their saint venerating narratives to fit mainstream national priorities.

Another example of Moroccan Jews using saints in order to express participation in the Israeli state is when they use them to pray for the country. In one such case, a pilgrim at the *hillula* of the Baba Sali can be heard claiming that she hopes he "guards all of Israel."[61] This sentiment is vastly different than the Cuban Americans recorded by Tweed. When Tweed observed the transtemporal symbols at the Shrine of Our Lady of Charity, he noticed how the pilgrims there prayed for Cuba, rather than the United States. Through praying for

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[59] Ben-Ami 175.

[60] Eli Yassif, "Legends of the Saints and Israeli Society," in *The Hebrew Folktale: History, Genre, Meaning* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 417.

[61] I24 News English, "Israelis Mark the Passing of Mystical Rabbi 'Baba Sali'" YouTube video, 2:23, Feb, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7j5HqjBOx_0&t=1s.

Cuba and partaking in certain rituals, Cuban Americans were able to set themselves "in a time before [their] displacement and after [their imagined] 'liberation'" from the Castro regime.[62] This is totally unlike Moroccan Israelis, who seem to be firmly placed within Israeli society even while they participate in their own religious practice that brings them to Morocco.

Further evidence that Moroccan Israelis are actively participating within Israeli society while venerating saints includes how they have incorporated politics into their practice. It is common for politicians to come to a *hillula* in order to ask a saint for the blessing of their constituents and Israel. The Baba Baruch is a perfect example of this fact because "he is an active player in… the right-wing Shas party" and has even been known to have the party speak at his father's *hillula.*[63] Other lesser known members of the Abouhatzeira family have been known to use their relation with their famed saintly relative and establish short lived political parties in his name. In 1981 one of these parties even got three seats voted into Israeli parliament, thus demonstrating that this trend has been going on since at least the early 1980s.[64] This trend has even continued into contemporary times. As recently as the March 2020 elections, Shas has been accused of handing out amulets for protection against Covid-19 that bear the face of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, the political party's late spiritual leader who has gained saint-like status. The amulets read that they will provide "protection against plagues: Corona-and all evils," thus showing how saint belief has

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[62] Tweed, 117.
[63] Linda Kay et al., 154.
[64] Harvey Goldberg, "Potential Polities: Jewish Saints in the Moroccan Countryside and in Israel," in *Faith and Polity: Essays on Religion and Politics,* edited by Mart Bax, Peter Kloos and Adrianus Koster, 235-250, (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1992), 243

transcended its normal healing characteristics by merging with the political realm.[65] The connection between saint veneration and Israeli politics showcases an immigrant community that is willing to use religious practice to engage Israeli society.

This willingness to engage Israeli society in the moment suggests that Moroccan Israelis are challenging and negotiating what it means to be Israeli through their practice of saint veneration. While Moroccan Israelis are establishing and affirming their own unique identity through saint veneration, as shown through their use of translocative symbols, they are also participating clearly within the boundaries of Jewish Israeli society. In many ways this practice does not represent the Zionistic Ashkenazi normative narrative of what it means to be Israeli, but it most definitely engages with it. Moroccans are clearly participating in Israeli society through venerating saints. This fact has clearly been documented with the warrior-like narratives that surround the practice as well as with the political aspects that go along with it. In this sense, through the revival of saint veneration Moroccan Israelis are expressing a willingness to be a part of the Israeli system, while also challenging hegemonic Zionistic societal norms by including symbols of Morocco in their participation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, through examining symbols associated with Moroccan Israeli saint veneration in relation to both Morocco and Israel, it becomes clear that this one-time agrarian religious practice has taken on new meanings. What was at one point a religious tradition that reflected Morocco's rural economic, political, and social pre-modern realities, has become a practice that allows for Moroccan Israelis to maintain their own unique identity within an

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[65] Jeremy Sharon, "Shas Fined for Giving Out Charms to Protect From Coronavirus," *The Jerusalem Post,* Jpost, 2 March. 2020, https://www.jpost.com/israel-elections/shas-fined-for-giving-out-charms-to-protect-from-coronavirus-619516

Ashkenazi assimilationist society. Through using Tweed's framework, it becomes clear that translocative symbols appear throughout the modern Moroccan Israeli religious practice and serve to move people between both Israel and Morocco. These symbols appear in the practice's narratives, art, and rituals and function in a way that constantly brings Morocco to Israel. For example, buildings in and around the shrine of a famous saint's tomb have been purposefully constructed in a North African architectural manner to invoke feelings of Morocco. Symbols such as this have the ability to remind their onlookers of a different place and in doing so allows Moroccan Israelis to hold onto their ethnic identity by keeping them close to their natal homeland. On top of this, Moroccan Israelis are able to sanctify Israel through planting sacred aspects of Morocco into the Israeli landscape. This is most noticeable in the actions that allow for the practice to be transferred to Israel in the first place. Such actions include dreams that transplant holy Moroccan saint figures into Israel.

Overall, even in the face of translocative symbols that reaffirm Moroccan Jews' connection to Morocco, and their "Moroccaness," they still end up engaging with Israeli society. Thus, what is essentially occurring is that a non-Ashkenazi immigrant/ethnic group is choosing to hang onto its identity, while still maintaining a stake within Israeli society at large. It can therefore be said that Moroccan Israelis are challenging and negotiating what it means to be Israeli because they are willing to engage with society, but on their terms. While this is clearly evident on a political level, this paper has laid out this challenge to Ashkenazi hegemony by arguing it can also be seen through their practice of Moroccan Jewish saint veneration. That is because through examining the practice, it becomes clear that Moroccan Israelis engage with Zionism and Israel. This is obvious when one looks to how Moroccan Israelis have incorporated warrior narratives that fit into Zionism's concern with Israel's

national security into their saint venerating practices, as well how they have merged politics with it. This is in stark contrast to what Tweed found with Cuban Americans who used transtemporal symbols as a way to interact with an imagined idealized Cuba.

Finally, after examining translocative symbols and the lack of transtemporal symbols within Moroccan Israeli saint veneration, it is apparent that while Moroccan Jews have a unique ethnic identity within Israeli society they choose to remain proud Israelis. Yet, this does not necessarily mean they are not practicing a type of Moroccan diasporic religion, as made evident from their continual striving to hold onto their natal homeland. After all, it is Morocco that serves as the spiritual basis for this religious practice and it is the physical yearning for Morocco that is being expressed. Indeed, this diasporic religion is vastly different than the one that Cuban Americans follow because Moroccan Israelis do not employ transtemporal symbols in their practice. Therefore, this paper has put forth a modified example of Tweed's definition of diasporic religion, one that employs translocative symbols but not transtemporal, and in doing so, displays how Moroccan Israelis are attempting to resist Israel as an assimilationist society through engaging with it on their own terms. Given this, it is reasonable to suggest that perhaps Moroccan Israelis are now vying for a nation that is more of a cultural mosaic, or even one that allows for their own hegemony.

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