

From Morocco to Latin America : Notes on the Path of Northern Moroccan Jews (1860-1980)"

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The migration and settlement of Jews from Northern Morocco must be understood within the wider context of worldwide diaspora studies. Moroccan Jewish communities have spread across Latin America, giving valuable insights into how historical processes, socioeconomic circumstances, and cultural exchanges interact to shape diasporic identities and community formations.

This research is particularly significant because it explains how Jews from Northern Morocco coped with a range of possibilities and challenges when they relocated to Latin American countries. It examines how they merged into broader Latin American cultures, conserved their cultural heritage, and enhanced local economies. We attempt to understand the historical trajectories and long-term repercussions on the cultural environment of Northern Moroccan Jews by looking at their movement patterns and settlement choices.

1. Historical Context

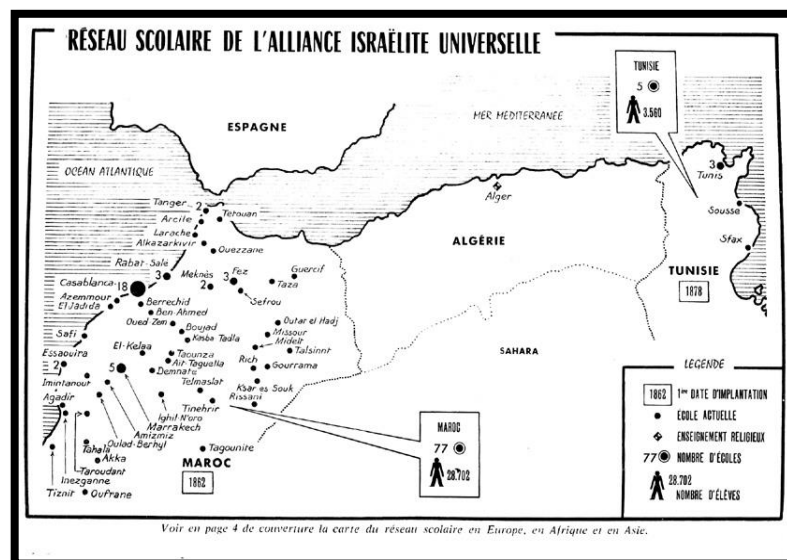
Jews from Northern Morocco, mostly from Tangier, Tetouan, Ceuta, and Chefchaouen, have a long and illustrious history dating back many centuries. Their notable contributions to trade, the arts, and communal life stem from the development of unique cultural customs derived from Sephardic Jewish ancestry, shaped by Moroccan and wider Mediterranean influences. After the French Revolution, opportunities in the West became significant "pull factors" in the liberation of Western Jews. The Industrial Revolution also brought forth global commercial potential. In Paris, London, Manchester, New York, and other important Western capitals, wealthy Moroccan Jews adopted the nationalities of their host countries. All Jewish immigrants from Morocco had better abilities after 1862 as a result of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* establishing an educational system¹.

As for the poorest emigrants, Jewish benevolent associations provided the cost of passage and supplied letters of recommendation. In fact, Morocco after 1860 had political unrest throughout its colonial era and during its post-independence transitions, which led to uncertainty and occasionally targeted discrimination against minority groups, including Jews. Jews from Northern Morocco were frequently driven by this volatility to look for safer and more stable homes elsewhere. Feelings of uneasiness were exacerbated by past acts of discrimination and sporadic acts of violence against Morocco's Jewish community, which led some families and individuals to leave for nations where minorities' rights and religious

¹ Juan Bautista Vilar, *Tetuán en el resurgimiento judío contemporáneo (1850-1870): Aproximación a la historia del Judaísmo Norteafricano*, Biblioteca popular sefardí, Vol. 2, Ediciones de la asociación israelita de Venezuela y del centro de estudios sefardíes de Caracas, 1985, p.18

liberties were more protected. In addition, Migration was significantly pushed by Northern Morocco's economic woes and lack of opportunity. In Latin American nations where trade, banking, and business provided fresh potential for success, many Jews from Northern Morocco went in search of improved economic prospects, employment opportunities, and stable financial situations.

As early as 1865 and 1873, a few Moroccan Jews traveled to Latin America, originally laboring as Amazonian river peddlers². The Jews of Tétouan, for instance, like other Jews, have known to travel and migrate from the very beginning of their presence in the city, whenever they are troubled, as part of their business activities, and when they are certain that there are other destinations that will stabilize them and live well. Between 1877 and 1879 there were one hundred and thirty-five male pupils who left the Mellah of Tetouan and emigrated in search of work. Not only did the migration of Jews to Latin American countries begin after the occupation of Tétouan, but some of them had already emigrated, particularly to America and Jamaica³. Jews had initially gone to Gibraltar (at the beginning of the 18th century), Algeria (1830), and Spain, but over time they had discovered that Latin American nations provided them with better employment opportunities. One of the factors that encouraged them to change their orientation towards these States was their good knowledge of Spanish and the subsequent establishment of the Community School. The most important countries that accounted for the migration of the city's Jews were Brazil, Argentina and Venezuela. And extensive research has been conducted on the Jews of Tetouan, America, and as far as current knowledge goes, the Richard study remains pivotal. Richard's work is considered the most significant in this field⁴.



The school network of the Alliance Israélite Universelle

² M. Mitchell Serels, *A History of the Jews of Tangier in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Sepher-Hermon, 1991), 29.

³ David Corcos, *Studies in the history of the Jews of Morocco*, Jerusalem, Rubin Mass, 1976, p.p. 117-120.

⁴ R. Ricard, « Notes sur l'émigration des israélites marocains en Amérique espagnole et au Brésil », in *RAF* 1-2, 1944.

For this reason, migration is one of the most important social changes of this communities that have led to clear shifts in the social composition of the population, not only at the social level, but also at the economic and political levels. At the end of the 19th century, migration had shifted from mere individual and limited movements to organized migrations to which Jewish shipping and navigation organizations and organizations had contributed. At a time when the inhabitants of the Tétouan were going through difficult events as a result of the geopolitical variables in the Mediterranean region, its Jews had prepared for themselves solid scenarios that needed only the opportunity to be implemented.

The intentions of the Jews were evident just before and during the Spanish-Moroccan skirmishes that preceded the occupation of Tétouan by the Spagniards in 1860, when more than 300 Jews received foreign protection in order to move easily to the other bank. Brazil was at the forefront of these States due to the presence of Jewish families since their colonization by the Netherlands in the 17th century, and thanks to the tolerant policies of the Emperor Pedro I (1834-1798) and his son Pedro II (1825-1891), who was passionate about the history, culture and language of the Jews⁵. As time passed, the Jews of Tétouan settled in the cities of Rio, Bahia, and Para in the north, and then San Paulo and Manaus later⁶. Since 1824, important Jewish groups have been established in Brazil, the majority of which are of Tétouan and Tangier's origin⁷. But the first organized Jewish community in Brazil appeared in 1648, and remained there throughout the Dutch colonization of Pernambuco⁸.

Among the families that have settled in Brazil, the family of Abicasis, Abouderham, Ibn Albaz, Farachi, Lévi, Marquiz and Serruya.⁹ Other groups have settled in Barcelona, east of Venezuela, since 1844 and established a Jewish cemetery in 1875 after obtaining permission from the governing authorities. The presidency of the Barcelona community was followed by Jewish faces from Tétouan and Tangiers, such as Ben Zakuri, Ben Assaraf, Ben-Arouch, Ben-Dayan, Pariente, Ben-Attar, Levi and Torrel.¹⁰ In 1890, two synagogues, the '*Synagogue of Samuel*' and the '*Synagogue of Jacob Pariente*,' were founded in Caracas. A document dating back to 1884 indicated that a Moroccan Jew named Simon Benjio was involved in several commercial activities in this city¹¹. In 1861, the '*Asociación Sinagoga Congregación Israelita Latina*' of Buenos Aires was founded.¹² But the most important catalyst for popularizing the phenomenon of migration among Jewish students from Northern Morocco at the end of the 19th century was their ambition to secure a future for their children in these countries and to return with substantial capital¹³. Modern school interventions have supported this process by

⁵ Vilar, *Tetuán en el resurgimiento judío*, p.23. See also William G. Clarence-Smith, « Moroccan Jews and the Lusophone World: Reciprocal Impact, 1774-1975 », in Martínez, Francisco Javier, éditeur. *Entangled Peripheries. New Contributions to the History of Portugal and Morocco*. Publicações do Cidehus, 2020.

⁶ Vilar, *Tetuán en el resurgimiento judío*, p.381

⁷ Juan Bautista Vilar, *La emigración judeo-marroquí a la América latina en la fase preestadística (1830-1880)*, *Sefardica*, N. 11, 1996, p.54.

⁸ André Goldenberg, *Les juifs du Maroc, images et textes*, Paris 1992, pp.39-42.

⁹ Abdelaziz Chahbar, *Etudes sur les juifs de Tétouan*, Imprimerie Chwiyakh Despress Tetuan, 2000, p.52. (en arabe).

¹⁰ Chahbar, *Etudes sur les juifs de Tétouan*, p.58.

¹¹ André Goldenberg, *Les juifs du Maroc, images et textes*, Paris, 1992, p.42.

¹² Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, Editorial Galerna, 2006, p.50.

¹³ Ana María Álvarez López, *La comunidad judía de Tetuán*, Ed. Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y deporte, Dirección General de Bellas Artes y Bienes Culturales, Subdirección General de Museos Estatales, 2003, p.381.

encouraging community members, assisting males seeking new opportunities, and providing them with the necessary framework to achieve their goals.

On the flip side, community members who migrated to Latin American countries actively sought to reunite with their relatives by writing letters and recruiting others to join them. When direct contact wasn't feasible, they appealed to community leaders to facilitate the process. Elders and merchants within the community provided financial support for travel expenses, particularly for single males who met health requirements. Initially benefiting only a few, this initiative became crucial for all Jews in the city. In subsequent years, the demographic structure of the Jewish community underwent significant changes. Young and elderly alike became more acquainted with migration opportunities, transforming migration from a mere transit point into a stable settlement. This transformation also turned the "navigator" into a workshop for nurturing a skilled Jewish workforce through enhanced educational opportunities, thereby bolstering community stability and growth.

Anna Alvarez's study brings us closer to the migration of the this Jews, and provides us with a lot of important information in this area. After 1860, immigration became an obsession of all the city's Jews, especially among the educated young people and the graduates of modern school¹⁴. A 1884-1885 report by David Cazes on Union schools indicated that Tétouan's school had been prepared only for the export of graduates who wished to work outside the Mellah's walls, and that 95% of its students preferred to migrate instead of staying in the city¹⁵. This fact is borne out by statistics dating from that stage. Between the months of 1868 between November and December, one hundred and forty out of the three hundred and eighty pupils, most of whom were "sellers." ¹⁶Between 20 and 30 families in 1860 went to Ceuta for the purpose of commerce¹⁷, while many came to Spain despite the lack of documentary documentation, such as the Tétouanist Jew Ibrahim Ben Toulila, who had a small navigation company at ports in northern Morocco¹⁸. In spite of that, the early twentieth century saw the emergence of larger migratory waves, which were fueled by economic possibilities and political stability in host nations¹⁹, as well as global events such as World War I. Following waves in the mid-20th century were affected by Morocco's independence in 1956, driving Jews to seek stability.

¹⁴ Vilar, *La emigración*, p.54.

¹⁵Victor A. Mirelman, "Los sefardíes en Latinoamérica después de la independencia", en *Sefardica*, N.11, pp. 55-88

¹⁶ Vilar, *La emigración*, p.50.

¹⁷ Vilar, *Tetuán en el resurgimiento judío*, p.381

¹⁸ Vilar, *Tetuán en el resurgimiento judío*, p.381.

¹⁹ For instance, in 1905 Moroccan Jews created 'La Asociación de Beneficencia Mutual *Hesed Veernet*' with the objective of assisting Jewish immigrants of that origin. Adrián Jmelniczky, Ezequiel Erdei, *La población judía de Buenos Aires : estudio sociodemográfico*, AMIA, Editorial Milá, 2005, p.17. Isaac Caro, *Islam y judaísmo contemporáneo en América Latina*, RIL Editores, 2006, p.84.

Date	Numbers of students		
	<i>Females</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Total</i>
1863	0	157	157
1865	60	100	160
1867	107	160	267
1868	133	251	374
1869	Unknown	170	Unknown
1876	Unknown	200	
1880	Unknown	Unknown	265 new students
1882	200 new students	Unknown	Unknown
1889	205	170 ²⁰	375
1899	450	280	730

Evolution of student numbers (between 1863 and 1889).²¹

In general, the Jewish diaspora in Latin America, which includes Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico, exemplifies diverse migratory experiences and settlement methods affected by historical, social, and political conditions. Jewish migration to Argentina increased significantly in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as Jews fled Eastern European pogroms and the Holocaust. Settlement began in agricultural colonies funded by the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), eventually moving to metropolitan centers such as Buenos Aires, which currently has the biggest Jewish community in Latin America²². Integration attempts have struck a balance between retaining cultural uniqueness and embracing the greater Argentine population. Brazil's Jewish colonization extends back to the 16th century, with substantial waves of immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Middle East arriving in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, fueled by Nazi persecution during World War II. Settlement patterns were marked by urban concentration in areas like Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, with Jews playing a significant role in Brazil's economy. Cultural integration efforts have effectively preserved Jewish identity while embracing Brazilian culture.

Jewish migration to Mexico began in earnest in the early twentieth century, with arrivals from Eastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and, subsequently, Nazi-occupied Europe. Economic prospects in commerce and trade drew Jewish immigrants, who started successful firms in textiles, jewelry, and retail. The organized Jewish community in Mexico City emphasizes both cultural preservation and absorption into Mexican culture.

²⁰ Leven spoke of 375 pupils in 1889, while Sarah Libovici spoke of 170 males, and in an arithmetical process the number of females is 205. Narcisse Leven, *Cinquante ans d'histoire : L'Alliance Israelite Universelle (1860-1910)*, T2, Librairie Félix Alcan, 1920, p.74.

²¹ Mouliéras Auguste, *Le Maroc inconnu : Etudes géographiques et sociologiques*, Vol.2, Imprimerie Fouqué, Oran, 1895, 1899, Fès-Paris, 1902, p.234. Eugène Aubin, *Le Maroc d'aujourd'hui*, A. Colin, Paris, 1904, pp.358-359.

²² Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, Editorial Galerna, 2006, p.50. Adrián Jmelnizky, Ezequiel Erdei, *La población judía de Buenos Aires : estudio sociodemográfico*, AMIA, Editorial Milá, 2005.

In comparison, Argentina and Brazil witnessed major Jewish immigration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, primarily from Eastern Europe, whereas Mexico saw a more concentrated influx in the early twentieth century and post-World War II. Settlement patterns differed, with Argentina first focused on agricultural colonies before urban migration²³, whereas Brazil and Mexico saw instant urbanization. Economically, Jewish immigrants in Argentina migrated from agriculture to commerce and professions, which helped to drive urban growth²⁴. In Brazil, Jews had important positions in business and manufacturing, whereas in Mexico, they excelled in specialized retail. Community organization in all three nations focuses on strong community institutions that protect cultural history and identity. Argentina and Mexico place a strong focus on cultural preservation, but Brazil incorporates its Jewish identity within larger socioeconomic frameworks²⁵.

As previously noted, many Jews from Northern Morocco first settled in cities like Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and Mexico City, where there were already established Jewish communities. They chose areas that offered both a sense of security and economic opportunity. Their assimilation was aided by learning the language and customs of the area, and they made use of the Sephardic Jewish networks already in place to smooth the move. It was essential to establish communal networks. In order to uphold their religious customs and rituals, they established synagogues and religious schools. In order to preserve their cultural history and feeling of community, they also established social organizations and cultural institutes. In addition, they created unofficial networks for information and resource sharing and mutual aid organizations to provide incoming immigrants with homes, jobs, and financial support. Cultural institutions were essential to their attempts at integration. To teach Hebrew, religious studies, and Jewish history, they established Jewish day schools and supplemental education programs. They placed a strong focus on bilingual education in order to strike a compromise between cultural preservation and integration. In addition to publishing books, newsletters, and other media in Ladino, Arabic, and Spanish, organizing cultural events like festivals, talks, and exhibitions promoted Moroccan Jewish history and preserved linguistic and cultural links.

The efforts to integrate the economy were varied. Using their customary networks and abilities, many Jews from Northern Morocco participated in small-scale entrepreneurship, trading, and import-export operations, frequently in the food, jewelry, and textile sectors. As educational prospects grew, they eventually entered professions including academics, law, medicine, and networking within the Jewish community to obtain employment chances. As educational prospects grew, they eventually entered professions like medicine, law, and academia, networking within the Jewish community to get employment and enhance their careers. Their active involvement in local economies aided in the development of cities and the expansion of businesses, and their charitable and community service contributions improved the economics of their new nations as a whole. In order to ensure both cultural preservation and assimilation into Latin American communities, these initiatives provide a balanced approach to preserving cultural identity while adjusting to new circumstances.

2- Socioeconomic Integration and Cultural Preservation Among Northern Moroccan Jewish Communities in Latin America

²³ Isaac Caro, *Islam y judaísmo contemporáneo en América Latina*, RIL Editores, 2006, p.85.

²⁴ Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los judíos argentinos*, Editorial Galerna, 2006, p.50.

²⁵ Martin A. Cohen, Abraham J. Peck, *Sephardim in the Americas: Studies in Culture and History*, University of Alabama Press, 2003, pp.241-242.

Jews from Northern Morocco who settled in Latin America have achieved significant socioeconomic integration. Compared to the general population, they are prominently engaged in self-employment and entrepreneurship, especially in professions like education, law, and medicine. This financial success stems from their career advancements and profitable ventures, leading to higher average family incomes than the overall average. Younger generations exhibit high levels of educational attainment, supported by Jewish day schools and supplementary educational programs that ensure both academic success and cultural education. The majority of Northern Moroccan Jews reside in middle to upper-middle-class urban neighborhoods, characterized by economic stability and expansion through real estate investments and property ownership. Case studies further illustrate their business successes and community engagement :

- The Sasson family in Buenos Aires established a prosperous textile import-export company, significantly contributing to the local economy and supporting community initiatives.
- The Toledano brothers in São Paulo founded a renowned jewelry manufacturing business, combining traditional craftsmanship with modern marketing strategies, actively supporting the establishment of a Jewish cultural center and other community projects.
- The Amar family in Caracas opened a chain of kosher supermarkets in the 1980s, central to the Jewish community, and supported community programs, including a clinic providing affordable healthcare to underserved populations.
- Dr. Rachel Benatar, a Northern Moroccan Jewish immigrant, became a renowned cardiologist in Mexico City, where her clinic established a foundation focused on medical research and education.

These cases demonstrate how Jews from Morocco have successfully integrated socioeconomically into Latin American society, contributing both to their own prosperity and to the growth of their new communities. On the other hand, these Communities Maintaining Their Cultural Legacy The importance of preserving cultural customs Cultural preservation is essential for preserving a distinct collective identity, encouraging a sense of belonging, and guaranteeing continuity across generations. It makes sure that values, beliefs, and rituals are passed along and helps the next generation recognize and be proud of their heritage. Preserving cultural traditions and rituals fosters a sense of purpose and support within the community, so fortifying the bonds among its members. Celebration, friendship, and community involvement can be centered around institutions and cultural events. By maintaining their own cultural heritage, Jewish communities in Northern Morocco contribute to the diversity of Latin America and encourage tolerance and understanding of other civilizations.

The cultural resilience and identity preservation of Northern Moroccan Jewish communities in Latin America hinge significantly on safeguarding customs, dialects, and religious practices. Celebrating Jewish festivals such as *Rosh Hashanah*, *Yom Kippur*, *Passover*, and *Sukkot* with distinct Moroccan traditions fosters continuity and community cohesion. Special occasions like *Mimouna* reinforce cultural bonds through traditional meals and communal gatherings. Major life events like circumcisions, bar and bat mitzvahs, and weddings incorporate Moroccan rituals, including dance, music, and traditional attire.

Efforts to preserve Judeo-Arabic and Ladino (Judeo-Spanish) languages are active through language classes, cultural events, and literary publications. Bilingual education

programs, teaching Spanish or Portuguese alongside Hebrew, further ensure linguistic and cultural retention. Religiously, Sephardic-rite synagogues with Moroccan liturgy and music serve as spiritual hubs, while religious schools (yeshivas and Talmud Torahs) educate on Torah, Talmud, and Jewish law, emphasizing Sephardic customs and rituals like piyyutim and dietary laws. Cultural institutions such as museums and centers play a vital role in preserving Moroccan Jewish history, art, and culture. They organize lectures, workshops, and exhibitions to educate both the public and community members on Moroccan Jewish heritage. Modernization initiatives adapt traditional practices to contemporary lifestyles, leveraging social media and technology to engage younger generations in cultural preservation efforts.

3- Impact of Northern Moroccan Jewish Migration on Latin American Jewish Communities

Jews from Northern Morocco immigrated to Latin America, adding a great deal of diversity to the region's previously established Ashkenazi Jewish populations. By bringing a distinctive cultural legacy that includes Sephardic traditions, customs, and particular food, these Sephardic Jews enhanced the demographic landscape and added to the rich cultural mosaic of Judaism in Latin America. Due to their propensity for entrepreneurship, a large number of Jews from Northern Morocco contributed significantly to the local economy by starting enterprises and generating employment. Moroccan Jewish literature, art, and music were introduced, and these cultural contributions represented the rich history of Moroccan Jews. In exchange, Latin America had vibrant cross-cultural relations, especially during shared Jewish holidays and festivities like Hanukkah, Purim, and Passover seders, which promoted cross-cultural exchanges between Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities.

Religious diversity was enhanced by the construction of Sephardic synagogues alongside Ashkenazi ones, providing a wider variety of Jewish liturgical experiences within the communities. Additionally, the presence of Sephardic rabbis in positions of community leadership offered a variety of viewpoints on Jewish law and religious practice, which promoted cooperation on matters of communal concern and religious instruction between Ashkenazi and Sephardic religious authorities. More solidarity and collaboration amongst the various Jewish ethnic groupings bolstered community dynamics. Within Latin American Jewish communities, collaborative efforts in education, social services, and cultural projects fostered harmony and respect for one another.

These exchanges weren't without difficulties, though. There were times when it was difficult for the Jews of Northern Morocco to integrate while maintaining their own cultural identity, particularly when there were generational changes brought about by modernization and assimilation. To guarantee the continued transfer of cultural legacy, efforts were undertaken to include young people in community service and cultural preservation. In short, the social, cultural, and economic fabric of Latin American Jewish communities was greatly enhanced by the immigration of Jews from Northern Morocco. Their varied efforts promoted greater understanding amongst people in general as well as bolstered the religious and cultural fabric of Judaism in Latin America.

Jews moved from Northern Morocco to Latin America at the end of the 19th century because to political turmoil, economic opportunities, and a desire to blend into existing Jewish communities. These immigrants exploited their entrepreneurial drive to establish themselves in the commercial sector. They generally landed in the cities of Venezuela, Brazil, and Argentina. The construction of synagogues, cultural hubs, and educational institutions was crucial to maintaining their religious and cultural identity in addition to assisting in their

integration into society at large. Because of their multiple identities, they were able to overcome the challenges of assimilation and preserve their unique customs.

Gaining insight into the lives of these Jews in Latin America enables us to better comprehend global migration trends and the dynamics of diaspora communities. The complex interplay between social, political, and economic factors that affect human movement is illustrated by their migration. The accomplishments of these migrants in terms of community building and integration serve as a reminder of the importance of economic adaptability, urbanization, and the establishment of strong community institutions. These narratives shed insight on the ways diaspora groups can relocate while preserving their cultural identity, which broadens our understanding of the complex patterns of migration and diaspora networks throughout the world.

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