Connecting the Disconnect: Music and its Agency in Moroccan Cinema’s Jewish-Muslim Interactions

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Music-making connects individuals and, in the case of Moroccan cinema, characters that would have otherwise been disconnected because of societal, political, or religious norms. This chapter will disentangle the multifaceted use of music as an embodied entity in the relationship of connection and disconnection in contemporary Moroccan cinema. I propose to explore the various ways in which music, and its role in Moroccan society, functions as an active third party in what is usually perceived as a binary relationship between Moroccan Muslims and Jews. I argue that music as a recurring central character in Moroccan cinema permits Jewish and Muslim men and women to connect across established communal divides. Current scholarship in the area of Moroccan film studies has not yet analysed the role and function of the representation of music in the Jewish-Muslim relationship in Moroccan films. This chapter will explore the issues concerning the lived reality of some of the few remaining Jews in Morocco, examining in particular the tension between the majority culture’s view of Jews as ‘foreigners’ or ‘outsiders’ vis-à-vis the recent preponderance of their appearance in film and public presentations.
'Ana el Maghribi' ['I am the Moroccan'] crooned the octogenarian Haim Botbol, otherwise known as Morocco's Jewish Frank Sinatra on the CD included in a special magazine edition of VH, 'the Moroccan men's magazine', in November 2013. Maxime Karoutchi, the currently popular Jewish music star, sings 'El Massira el Khadra' at practically every concert and television appearance. 'El Massira el Khadra', which means the Green March, is a song that celebrates Morocco's march in 1975 of 350,000 people into the Western Sahara to retake control from Spain and re-establish Morocco's 'territorial integrity' from the Strait of Gibraltar to Mauritania. Similarly, in the 1950s, Sami El Maghribi chose to record under the name Sami the Moroccan instead of his given name Samuel Amzallag, at the behest of a friend, establishing him, a Moroccan Jewish cantor and popular singer, as 'the first patriot' in the words of singer Maxime Karoutchi. In the 1960s and 1970s, other singers such as Felix El Maghribi, also known as le petit Felix (d. 2008) and Victor El Maghribi (le petit Victor) capitalized on this epithet around Sami's unquestioned Moroccanness, in an effort to legitimize their own Moroccanness for Muslim-majority Moroccan audiences, especially during moments of political tension with Israel. However, Felix El Maghribi's son, Victor Wizman, currently lives and performs in Tel Aviv. He continues the family's tradition of performing the Moroccan repertoire, but not in Morocco.

Morocco's Jewish public musicians seem indefatigably eager to confirm their loyalty to their inherent Moroccanness, their belonging to the post-independence state, and their unquestionable patriotism. Lawrence Rosen aptly describes Moroccan society when he writes, ' Territory is deeply intertwined with social identity, bled is not just physical territory, however regionalized, but a terrain of interaction, a domain of complex and crosscutting social relationships' (1984: 7). Jewish Moroccans today stress their belonging to the bled and the national narratives of territoriality through language and, most dramatically, through music.

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1 Even though readers might think that the 'Maghribi' reference is a connection to Jewish-Moroccan singer Sami El Maghribi, in this case, it may imply Moroccan male exemplarity, through the use of the definite article.
2 This term is often used in Morocco's national discourse, and is even part of the Constitution of 2011 (see below).
3 A description of this moment was expounded by Maxime Karoutchi in front of a group of Muslim Moroccans meeting for a 'tea of Friendship' at the SOC Simon Pinto organized by Association Marocains Pluriels in Casablanca to denounce recent attacks of antisemitism in France on Sunday 24 February 2019.
Before Morocco’s independence in 1956, there were 250,000 or more Jews throughout the country in urban and rural populations. Following various waves of emigration caused by multiple socio-political reasons – such as the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Moroccan Independence in 1956, the rise of pan-Arabism in the early 1960s, the tensions after 1967’s six-day war, decreasing economic opportunities for younger Jewish business owners after the year 2000, Moroccan taxation of foreign properties in 2014, and the Spanish and Portuguese offer of European passports to descendants of Sephardim in 2015 – the remaining population is at less than 1 per cent of what it was originally. Today less than 2,000 remain, concentrated predominantly in Casablanca, and one of the constant conversation topics for Moroccan Jewish families is the shrinking size of the community and the future of its survival. This reduced visibility in the national landscape exacerbates the general unspoken perception that to be fully Moroccan one must be Muslim. Indeed, in my interviews and conversations, and in my analysis of oral histories, concerts, and the written press, Moroccan Jewish musicians constantly reiterate something that it seems should go without saying, but that needs to be repeated: Ana el Maghribi (I am Moroccan). Further complicating matters, even though Jews strive for this acceptance as fully Moroccan in the eyes of the general population, when they themselves describe the Moroccan population, they say les feujs for Jews and les Marocains for Muslims, clearly separating themselves from a simple Moroccan descriptive and equating Muslim with Moroccan. Using the slang feujs for Jews is typical French Jewish jargon, which indexes Casaoui Jews with French Jewry, and thus the outside world. This linguistic importation is a natural consequence of the longstanding history of the relationship between Moroccan Jews and Parisian Jews, which most notably was cemented by the schools founded by the Alliance Israélite Universelle that initiated its Mediterranean-wide educational project to teach French social and cultural mores in Morocco in 1862.

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4 From 2009 to 2018 I lived in Casablanca and was actively part of its communal life through research, performance, and the eventual founding of KHOYA Sound Archive. In 2016, I became part of the Board of Trustees of one of its Jewish social institutions, ‘SOC Simon Pinto’, where I founded a lecture series, started a concert series, and held a Jewish film festival. My children attended the Ittihad Maroc (Alliance) schools until 2019 and my husband’s family is currently still living in Casablanca.

5 French back slang for Jew, feuj is an ‘inversion’ of the word juif.

6 French description of someone from Casablanca, correlating to the Arabic Bidaoui, which also means ‘from Casablanca’.
Most Muslim Moroccans do not come into contact with the remaining Jewish community, and this makes many of the remaining Jews feel out of touch with the national social and political dynamics. The younger generation has only seen Jews on television, as Israeli soldiers within the context of the Middle East conflict (Boum, 2013). Many Moroccans have heard their family’s stories of the Jewish neighbours or business partners who left. They try to piece together the stories of this shared life between Muslims and Jews in a Morocco that seems to appear more open, more tolerant, and more inclusive than the one that decades of pan-Arabism has created. In recent decades, the Moroccan *makhzen*\(^7\) has supported and stimulated public discourse about Morocco’s Jews through film, television, and the popular press. According to Kosansky and Boum,

> [the] recent treatments of Jewish themes and histories in Moroccan cinema reflect the shifting relationship between state and civil society in the postcolonial period [...] Film carves out relative autonomy from the state and, more specifically, with how Jewish subtexts of the Moroccan nation have suddenly become so vital in this space. (Kosansky and Boum, 2012: 423–24)

Jewish-themed films have become a way to negotiate not only the ‘Jewish Question’ in Morocco, but other societal and historical malaises that were suppressed during the *années de plomb* under the previous King Hassan II.\(^8\) Through music, these films weave together the emotional elements of Morocco’s connection to its Jewish population. Music appears in these films as character, backdrop, and shared emotional base between the Muslim and Jewish population.

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\(^7\) Literally means ‘warehouse’ in Maghribi Arabic (from *khazana* ‘to store up’ and ‘ma’, the prefix for places), where the King’s civil servants used to receive their wages; but this usage of the word became in Maghribi Arabic synonymous with the elite. It refers to the governing institution in Morocco, centred on the King and consisting of royal notables, top-ranking military personnel, landowners, security service bosses, civil servants, and other well-connected members of the establishment. The term ‘Makhzen’ is also popularly used in Morocco as a word meaning ‘State’ or ‘Government’ or indeed used more pejoratively to imply ‘system’ with all of its implications in a post-2011 context (the so-called Arab spring was also prominent in Morocco).

\(^8\) Period of political suppression in Morocco from the 1960s to the 1980s where dissidents and intellectuals were silenced.
Jews as ‘Outsiders’

I have seen Casaoui Jews, on many occasions, informing Moroccan Muslims of the antiquity of their ancestors’ presence in Morocco. Especially upon being greeted with the phrase *marhababikum* (welcome to Morocco), which is often said to Jewish Moroccans who have non-Muslim names. It represents the underlying perception that Jews are simply not Moroccan enough; their Jewishness marks them out as *outsiders* – *foreigners*. The way many younger Moroccans relate to them has the result of establishing that Jews are ‘outsiders’; previous generations’ intimate relationships have faded away. As Rosen states, ‘a fog of unremembrance had begun to cloud any specific way of recalling the Jews. They have become a phantom memory, the felt presence of an absent limb’ (2002: 103).

In this climate, one of the principal ways in which this layered identity is methodically integrated into Moroccans’ experience of their full ‘Moroccaness’ is through the representations of music as a tool for cultural diversity. Since 2007, I have seen the growth of the public presence of Jewish Moroccan music on a national level. After the historic declaration of diversity within the preamble of the 2011 Constitution, many government-sponsored festivals began including Jewish music as one of the obligatory elements in musical performances of the variety of national music. Recent Moroccan cinema that represents the Jewish community deals with the sensitive topic of Jewish emigration, evoking their inherent ‘foreignness’. However, music in these films has played a pivotal role in establishing their *marocanité*. It is often presented as the ‘glue’ that holds these old friends together, despite the larger political currents affecting their lives – and ultimately serves as the backbone for the supra-narrative, which is the close relationships between Jewish and Muslim Moroccans.

The concept of *bled* (land) is deeply rooted in Moroccan society. Anyone from the *bled* is part family and requires respect and protection. Anyone who is foreign, *barrani*, can be tricked or taken advantage of, without any major moral consequence. They are not part of the inner sanctum. As hinted at

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9 *Marocanité* can be defined as the combination of elements that confirms that you are truly Moroccan: your cooking, your music, the way you dress, the way you deal with medical issues, how you carry on a conversation, the weight you put on family relationships, etc.

10 I first encountered the changing relationship towards *barrani* when travelling in the Todra Gorge area in August 2012. When I stopped for a tea on the side of the road, the owner of the café asked me where I lived. Upon answering in Arabic, ‘Casablanca, I’m a *barrania* but please give me the local price’, he repeated...
above, Jews have occupied a complex and often contradictory position in relation to this concept of rootedness – while ‘of the land’, they are often demarcated as barrani because they may have additional allegiances to other lands (Israel, France, Canada, and Spain being the most common). By the 1930s, Moroccan Jews ‘forced questions about how the boundaries of the national community should be drawn’ (Wyrtzen, 2015: 217). In 1947, with the passing of the United Nations General Assembly’s Resolution establishing the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states, some Moroccan nationalists perceived Moroccan Jews as Zionists first and Moroccans second (Ben-Layashi and Maddy-Weitzman, 2010: 98). Since Morroccan independence in 1956, the government has been campaigning to establish the concept of a national belonging for all Moroccans, not just one that is connected to individual cities and local communities. Until then, most Moroccans’ affiliations were limited to their family, city, and at most, region. This creation of a Moroccan national identity, which brought all Moroccans under one banner, culminated with the post-Arab spring constitution that was ratified in 2011. In effect, it was as if the nationalistic debates in the 1950s could only be upheld in modern times by ratifying diversity within the Moroccan fabric. In the 2011 constitution, the diverse elements forming Moroccan identity-composition are thus specifically named and ratified.

On the official website of the House of Representatives, an excerpt from the constitution is put on display in English, establishing the importance of the plurality of Morocco as well as its priority towards human rights, obviously as a window for foreign readers. The Jewish Museum of Casablanca also has a marble plaque at its entrance in Arabic, English, and French, with the text inscribing Moroccan Judaism into the integral influences on national identity.

This constitutional text is repeatedly evoked at official events relating to Jewish contributions to Moroccan culture, as well as at musical events and in television programmes where multiple Moroccan musics are presented as part of the country’s rich heritage. It is the following core that constitutes the central piece: the key words that play over and over in Jewish circles are territorial integrity (relating to the Western Sahara); Hebraic influences; and values of openness, moderation, and tolerance. The constitutional text reads as follows:11

over and over, ‘oh you are not a barrania. Now all of the Maghreb is one, and there’s no more barrani from other villages or cities. Koulna Mgharba, we are all Maghrebi’.

11 I have italicized the key words that reiterate the governmental tropes that the Jewish community has reacted to positively.
Moroccan Cinema’s Jewish-Muslim Interactions

Etat musulman souverain, attaché à son unité nationale et à son intégrité territoriale, le Royaume du Maroc entend préserver, dans sa plénitude et sa diversité, son identité nationale une et indivisible. Son unité, forgé par la convergence de ses composantes arabo-islamique, amazighe et saharo-hassanie, s’est nourrie et enrichie de ses affluents africain, andalou, hébraïque et méditerranéen. La prééminence accordée à la religion musulmane dans ce référentiel national va de pair avec l’attachement du people marocain aux valeurs d’ouverture, de modération, de tolérance et de dialogue pour la compréhension mutuelle entre toutes les cultures et les civilisations du monde.\(^\text{12}\)

Even earlier than this, in 2007, the Mimouna Foundation was founded. The driving force of this association of young Moroccans was a handful of students from Al-Akhawayn University. They dedicate themselves to promoting and educating Moroccan Muslims on the secular component of Jewish Moroccan identity and have parrainage (patronage) from André Azoulay, the Counsellor to the King. In 2009, the Marocains Pluriels association was founded to promote events facilitating diversity and understanding, which in recent years have garnered a significant amount of press over an interfaith Ramadan breakfast called the ftour plurielle. Their events also carry a parrainage from André Azoulay, and often have Kaisse Ben Yahia, another Counsellor to the King, in attendance. These non-governmental associations that have discrete support from the palace demonstrate non-official efforts that are pushing forward the concept of plurality in the Moroccan societal fabric.

The fact that Moroccan cinema has so many recent examples of the performance of diversity in Morocco, and that this is expressed through music, demonstrates a key idea that I argue throughout this chapter: that music as a recurring central character in Moroccan cinema permits Jewish and Muslim men and women to connect across established communal divides. Current scholarship in the area of Moroccan film studies has not yet analysed the role and function of the representation of music in the Jewish-Muslim relationship in Moroccan films. Multiple Moroccan films on Jews after 2005 have used music as the main catalyst for connection when depicting the time before, during, and after Jewish emigration. Often counterpointed with love affairs across religious boundaries or the painful moments tearing Jewish Moroccans from the daily fabric of the country’s life from the 1950s to the 1970s, music appears repeatedly as a disembodied character whose presence changes and charges the plot. When placing these films in the context of their impact on contemporary social discourse, music’s central role is further understood.

Parallel to the cinematic conversation, public performances in contemporary Casablanca feature Jewish male singers performing humorous songs in Judeo-Arabic that mock common tensions in marriage. These performances use humour to break apart what is perceived as a solid unified front: the Jewish couple. Moreover, this use of humour connects the male Jewish singers to their Muslim audience solely on the basis of gender, regardless of their religious affiliation. The rupture between the solid societal unit of the Jewish couple created by interreligious love relationships appears as a leitmotif in Moroccan cinema and novels about Jews. In cinema, when these relationships appear, music is a close second, appearing to negotiate an added intimacy where intimacy is forbidden by society. It is in these circumstances that music acts as an added cinematic character and that its role is to propel the narrative through an unspoken ‘dialogue’ that is evident on the screen from the character’s interactions around music, rehearsal, and performance.

13 Songs such as ‘Mara Kbiha’ [‘The Hard Woman’], ‘Tlata Shab’ [‘Three Brothers’], ‘Kunt Azri’ [‘When I Was Single’], and ‘Sidi Dayan’ [‘Mister Judge’] by Albert Suissa.

14 Mazaltob (Bendahan, 1930), Amor entró en la judería (Vega, 1944), Sortilège (Chimenti, 1964), En las puertas de Tanger (Benarroch, 2008), and Revoir Tanger (Toledano, 2015) are all novels in which Jews and non-Jews struggle with the personal, familial, and communal decisions surrounding interreligious love affairs.
Diegetic Sound in Moroccan Films

In order to explore these moments of connection and disconnection between Jewish and Muslim protagonists in Moroccan cinema, I now wish to move to an analysis of specific case studies focusing on the use of diegetic sound. David Neumeyer describes diegetic sound as

an onscreen character’s speech, an object’s naturalistic sound, or a character’s singing or playing a musical instrument on screen; and non-diegetic sound is clearest in voice-over narration by an absent narrator or in orchestral underscoring using an ensemble without any obvious connection to the story. (Neumeyer, 2009: 31)

In the process of moving the narrative, the diegetic model established is as follows: anchoring – diegesis – narration.

1. Anchoring establishes the ‘I’ of the viewer and of the protagonist.
2. Diegesis is the sound or music that is featured.
3. Narration is the concluding arrival point that allows for the anchored ‘I’s.

For the purpose of this chapter, I am interested exclusively in diegetic music (when the viewer sees the music played/interpreted on screen) and how these moments anchor the relationships between Muslims and Jews in post-colonial Morocco. The semiotic function of music in these films serves to confirm the unspoken Moroccan belief that one of the ways that Jews confirm their marocanité is through their interpretation of Moroccan music. I am inclined to take this a step further and say that it is not only the interpretation of music on the screen, but its discussion and the engagement of the characters around music that firmly establishes the true indigeneity of the Jewish characters. So, the very fact of having, for example, a whole movie based on the reconstitution of a mythical orchestra (as in the film L’Orchestre de minuit [‘The Midnight Orchestra’], 2015), and what this orchestra meant during post-independence Morocco, uses a diegetic model throughout the film, where music is an overarching presence and is the impetus for the narrative and the glue between the disparate characters.

I analyse four films where music is central in a diegetic manner, focusing on four key elements of national identity and history involving the Jewish population of Morocco. The first element is forbidden interreligious love, which appears in all but one of the films. The second is Jewish departure from Morocco. The third is the presentation of a mythical persona based on a famous Jewish Moroccan popular singer. The final element that appears is
Andalusi music and its shared cultural aspects between Jewish and Muslim Moroccans and their cultural intimacy.

*Marock (2005) – Forbidden Muslim-Jewish Love*

In 2005, Moroccan filmmaker Laïla Marrakchi released her film *Marock* about the upper-class youth of Casablanca, and opened the public discourse to a taboo subject: the forbidden teenage love between a Jewish boy and a Muslim girl. Her film, which carried political statements on Morocco’s difficult transition into modernity, used the story of this transgressive love affair as a way of pushing against rigid interpretations of Islamic practice. As a female Muslim filmmaker, who herself is married to a Sephardi Jew, in her film Marrakshi pushes the male Muslim establishment in various directions by addressing issues around sexuality, women’s freedom of expression, and Western-style lifestyles within Moroccan society. However, it was the taboo subject of sexuality between a Muslim woman and a Jewish man that brought about a backlash. In 2006, Marrakshi was accused of being a Zionist and anti-Moroccan (Hirchi, 2011: 93). In Morocco, Jews are sometimes conflated with Zionists, which consequentially makes them out to be traitors, since a double national allegiance is perceived as disloyalty. When a Moroccan Muslim is accused of being a Zionist, it is usually a tactic employed to destroy the reputation and legitimacy of the person under attack. This accusation comes about when someone makes a statement that might seem to be overly sympathetic to Jews to the detriment of the larger Muslim society. However, many times it is simply employed as a slur when someone expresses inordinate interest in Jewish culture or history.

Even though Marrakshi’s film does not speak specifically to traditional music shared by Muslims and Jews, her title indicates the shared musical culture of urbanite upper-class Casablanca youth and its consequences. *Marock* plays on the phrase ‘ma rock’ that presents rock music clearly while subtly implying its personalization through the use of a feminine possessive pronoun. It should read ‘mon rock’ to be grammatically correct, but could be understood by French speakers to imply a slang used by adolescents. Marrakshi’s film speaks to the shattering of communal boundaries around a forbidden musical culture in a society of traditional Islam. The youth connect around their love for rock music. In *Marock*, the Jew represents the harbinger of modernity and women’s liberty. The intimate presence of Youri, a Jewish man, in the life of upper-class young Casaouï women, functions as the male permission for unrestrained female behaviour that had not yet been presented in the cinematic sphere. Youri symbolizes the familiar-enough unfamiliar world of the ‘other’ – the Jew within Moroccan society, who
was traditionally allowed into Muslim homes as a peddler in Cherifian and Protectorate days. Because of an unspoken societal pact between Muslim men and Jewish merchants, Muslim women were off-limits, thus Jewish men were considered a non-threat to the sexuality of Muslim women. This was a de-facto feminization of the Jewish male in Morocco’s highly hierarchical patriarchal society.15

In Marock, the Jewish man becomes a sexual threat to the integrity of traditional Muslim society, turning the tables of accepted societal tropes about Jewish men and the sexuality of Muslim women. Youri might also have been more easily sexually active with a Muslim girl than the strictly controlled Jewish girls of his generation, and Leila’s friend implies this possibility in one of their dialogues. Music is less of a central character in the plot than in the films to come after 2007, but it is important enough to be featured in its title, permeating the audience’s understanding of the whole film. In Marock, music is a character and a backdrop to the story of sexual openness and the breach of traditional restraints. All boundaries appear to crack through these adolescents’ way of life in contemporary Casablanca. However, Youri, the Jewish boy, dies in an accident towards the end of the film, exposing the impossibility of such a relationship in a society where family continuity and traditions are of utmost importance (Chreiteh, 2018). Rock culture, sexual openness, and interreligious love finish tragically for this couple.


In 2007, Où vas-tu, Moshe? ['Where Are You Going, Moshe?'] brought the story of Moroccan Jews’ departure and the new problem of a Morocco emptied of its Jews to the silver screen. The main character, Shlomo, appears to be torn between allegiance to his ‘people’, the Jewish community, and his other people, his majority-Muslim musical community from the bar of Boujad, a small city in central Morocco. Shlomo comes to run the bar of Boujad after the emigration of the rest of the Jews from the city, because the liquor licence must be held by a non-Muslim according to law. In a scene towards the beginning of the film, the city council meets with the owner of the bar and sternly reminds him of the impending fate of his business

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15 Assia Bensalah Alaoui, itinerant ambassador for King Mohammed VI, spoke about this in her presentation of her memories of interaction with Jewish men when she was a child. As the daughter of the Caïd of the region, they had a Jewish tailor, dressmaker, jeweller, etc. They were the only non-family males allowed in the household. TALIM April Seminar, Tangier, 2 April 2019.
were all the Jews to leave. The hypocrisy of the system is highlighted as a group of traditionally dressed men sit around a table, drinking Moroccan tea and with long faces, discussing the gravity of the loss of the liquor licence. Shlomo, the character who will eventually save the fate of their gathering place, teaches ‘oud, which establishes his complete indigeneity, and is portrayed as ‘pious, musical and humble’ (Kosansky and Boum, 2012: 432). One of his music students is in love with Shlomo’s daughter, connecting this young Jewish woman to the future of her father’s musical tradition. However, she eventually leaves for Israel with her mother, the ultimate rupture between a Moroccan man and a Jewish woman. Often in post-independence Morocco, young Jewish women who were being courted by Muslim men were quickly shipped off to Israel to avoid an interreligious marriage, which is seen as catastrophic to both sides, but specifically for the Jewish woman because her children, although Jewish according to Jewish law, would not be raised as such in Morocco with a Muslim father.

Even though Shlomo’s daughter and wife leave the city along with the rest of the Jews of Boujad, Shlomo remains: he becomes the sole Jewish inhabitant of the village. When the whole Jewish community leaves, Shlomo – the character played by French-Moroccan actor Simon Elbaz, himself born in Boujad – decides to stay behind to continue the neighbourhood evenings of chaâbi music\textsuperscript{16} and mahia.\textsuperscript{17} His decision seems to be foreshadowed when he is mournfully playing the ‘oud at home while his wife, who is portrayed as strident and angry, is packing their bags with family photos, clothes, and jewellery. The simple Shlomo chooses to actively rebel against the constraints of his society and break free to a world of shared music and revelry with his Muslim compatriots. The night that the Jews leave in the bus for Casablanca the scene cuts to Shlomo, in the bar that has been renamed Shlomo’s. He is playing ‘oud and singing ‘Kaftanek Mahloul’, a hit song written by Sami El Maghribi, while patrons sing and dance. This song has become a classic song of chgoury repertoire in contemporary Morocco, and it reiterates the position of the Jewish singer as one that will push the boundaries of the forbidden within Moroccan society. In its text, the singer tells the woman, your kaftan, your dress, is open – in the scene there is drinking and dancing, all forbidden by orthodox Islam, and the implication through the song’s text of a man’s desire for the woman he serenades. In the film, the song is used as a moment of social glue between Muslims and the remaining Jew, as well

\textsuperscript{16} The music of the chaab, the people – in this case, contemporary popular Moroccan music.

\textsuperscript{17} Literally ‘Water of Life’, an alcoholic beverage prepared by Jewish women from figs or cherries. It is comparable to arak and ouzo, clear and high proof.
as subconsciously reiterating for the viewers the Jewish performativity of the forbidden in Moroccan society through sex, liquor, and music.

The option of staying behind in a Muslim city without the rest of the Jewish community was easier for men. When women decided to break from their community, they usually did so because of marriage to a Muslim, and even conversion to Islam. Shlomo remains in Morocco and never leaves for Israel, unlike all the other Jewish members of his city. A later scene shows Shlomo teaching 'oud to his daughter's former boyfriend, and during the lesson the scene cuts to images of the Boujadi Jews at the port, leaving Morocco, carrying their heavy baggage and falling to the ground in exhaustion. His choice seems to have been the better one. Shlomo is transmitting his knowledge to the younger generation in the comfort of his own home. The Jews that left are struggling, burdened, and walking past a setting sun, a symbol for darkness and finality.

However, Shlomo's deeper connection to his Muslim compatriots distances him from his own family, exemplified by the scene where he receives a letter announcing his daughter's marriage in Israel. Since he does not know how to read, it is read to him by someone from Boujad who, reading ahead in the letter that she is to marry, omits that information when reading out loud to Shlomo. The townspeople are afraid that if he left for her wedding, he might not return, and their bar would close. The film finishes with the conclusion that at least one Jew was required in the village to hold the town's centre of alcohol and music, because of the law that the liquor licence must be held by a non-Muslim. This figure of 'the last Jew' recurs throughout international mainstream media and literature, such as in Noah Gordon's *The Last Jew: A Novel of the Spanish Inquisition* (1992), Miguel Angel Nieto's documentary film *El ultimo Sefardi* ['The Last Sephardic Jew'] (2004), and the iconic photograph *The Last Jew in Vinnitsa* that was circulated in 1961 by United Press (UPI) during the trial of Adolf Eichmann.

Ultimately, Shlomo's connection to the celebrative aspects of Moroccan music in his hometown disconnects him from his daughter, his wife, and the line of transmission being created in their new homeland. Similarly to *Marock*, the choice of connection across communal boundaries proves to disconnect him from his own family and self; in connecting to Moroccan nationalism, his affiliation to his own ethnic group becomes more tenuous.

As Thomas Hylland Eriksen explains,

> Depending on the social context, then, nationalism may have socio-cultural integrating as well as disintegrating effects; it sometimes serves to identify a large number of people as outsiders, but it may also define an ever-increasing number of people as insiders and thereby encourage social
integration on a higher level than that which is current. (Hylland Eriksen 1991: 266)

By completely integrating socially to an *insider* group of Moroccan Muslims, Shlomo disintegrates the bonds to his own ethnic group of *outsiders*. Jewish law maintains that the Jewish line is passed through the mother, since she will transmit the culture no matter what to her children. Here we see that Shlomo’s continued connection to Judaism is through the women in his family, while his male connections are his Muslim friends at the bar. Towards the end of the movie, when he finally decides to leave to join his wife and daughter, he finds a mentally unstable Jew that was purposely left behind in Casablanca by the Israeli immigration officers, who then becomes the holder of the liquor licence and the saviour of Boujad’s bar. The final scene is a rousing party at the bar with the remaining mentally unstable Jew dressed as a military officer and sitting, smiling, and saluting the dancing crowd. This cuts to various statements: one about Israel’s 2006 bombing of Lebanon, another reiterating the fact that many of these immigrants became soldiers and officers in the Israeli army, and finally questioning the decision that Arab nations made in encouraging their Jews to leave.

**L’Orchestre de minuit (2015) – Myth of Moroccan Jewish Performer**

In this film, director Jérôme Cohen-Olivar tells a story concerning the mythical figure of Botbol. When Botbol’s son Michael arrives at the Casablanca airport at his father’s behest, after many years of absence, he is taken aside by the immigration officer. Much to his surprise, the reason is that the head of immigration is a fan of his father’s music. He has an old vinyl record in his office of Botbol and he asks Michael to ask his father to autograph it. The autograph is the last thing that his father does in his hotel room before dying in his sleep. This is the only film analysed here that does not involve a forbidden interreligious love affair, but that focuses on the profound relationships between a man and his colleagues, and the broken relationship he had with his son. It is only after his father’s death while lying with violin in hand, that Botbol’s son – played by Avishai Benezra, himself a Moroccan Jew from the diaspora – realizes the giant that his father was and, consequently, who he is himself, as the heir to this valuable cultural and musical legacy. He is aided in this quest by Aziz, a taxi driver, who becomes his confidante, guide, and alter-ego throughout the film.

In this example, the broken transmission of knowledge between a father and his son should be whole, as expected in a patriarchal society. As Jan
Bengualid told me in 2007, ‘ése no sabe nada, no sabe sino lo que está en el libro’. Bengualid went on to explain that those who know something of local Jewish liturgy or traditional knowledge are those who learned it through their father’s transmission, not just from reading the prayer book. In L’Orc斯特re de minuit [‘The Midnight Orchestra’], Michael, physically deaf to sound and only rarely able to hear music, is finally slowly reviving his memory and repairing the trauma of his family’s departure from Morocco after the 1967 war. Cohen-Olivar presents Michael’s deafness as complete, except for when he is wearing his hearing aid.

Towards the middle of the film, Aziz, his taxi-driver sidekick, takes Michael as the surprise gift to his niece’s wedding; Michael, the heir of the famous Botbol, must perform as a gift to the newly-wed couple. He stands on the stage, and all sound comes flooding back as he makes music, as if his inner brokenness was suddenly repaired. During this symbolic moment, at a Muslim wedding, his hearing comes back. It is perhaps because of the ‘completeness’ alluded to in the moment when a couple gets married, and its centrality in Moroccan celebratory culture, that this is the moment chosen to embody his healing through music performed at the celebration of the public acceptance of a couple’s union. It is important to note that this is not an interreligious union but one between two Muslim Moroccans. The ‘real-life’ Botbol, during the 1960s and 1970s, was the wedding singer par excellence at Muslim Moroccan weddings, so the fact that Cohen-Olivar chooses this moment as a semiotic climax is no coincidence. The unity of tradition, and the family’s history with those celebrations, can be seen as a crucial catalyst that would permit the sound healing for Michael’s inner brokenness.

A new form of nationalism was ebullient in the Moroccan street in the post-independence years. To add complexity, following the six-day war, as Cohen-Olivar shows in his film, Jews were faced with anti-Zionist marches on the streets, in addition to other societal tensions that are not all depicted in the film. The visit of the then president of Egypt, Gamal Abdel Nasser, to Morocco in 1961 was a shock to many Moroccan Jews because of the public and official display of support of pan-Arabism, which seemed to propose a new Morocco with no place in it for its Jewish minority. The nationalist and pan-Arabist climate that was fomented during those years are what forced Michael’s father to leave Morocco, his orchestra, and his rooted identity.

18 ‘That guy knows nothing; he only knows that which is in the book’. Interview with Jan Bengualid, Tangier, November 2007.
19 Youness Laghrari’s documentary film Marocains Juifs, des destins contrariés (2015) shows many of these previously unspoken tensions surrounding the aftermath of the 1967 war.
It was a moment in Moroccan nationalism in which a uniformity in the perception of the citizen was taking hold and, in the words of Eriksen,

Nationalism – as the ideology which holds that the boundaries of the state should be coterminous with the boundaries of the cultural community – requires cultural uniformity in certain respects. (Eriksen 1991: 275)

The dis-uniformity of Moroccan Jews was just enough for many of them to be edged out of positions of institutional bureaucracy or, in the case of Michael’s father, to be edged out of his position as leader of a popular and lucrative orchestra at a nightclub.

It is thanks to the reconstitution of his father’s orchestra and their performance at his funeral in Casablanca that Michael’s fractured memory of his painful departure from Morocco stirs and he is able to heal and reintegrate his truncated Judeo-Moroccan identity. It is the act of healing the ruptured orchestra, and their performance at Botbol’s funeral in Casablanca, that rights a wrong that existed for decades. Cohen-Olivar’s film, which began production only a few years after the new Moroccan Constitution of 2011, performs the musical healing of the previous radical break within Moroccan pan-Arabist nationalism. The Constitution wrote in a pluralistic identity to Morocco’s nationalism that effectively eradicates the possibility of focusing on any opposing binary, such as Jewish-Muslim, in Moroccan identity.

*Aïda (2015) – Andalusi Music*

Director Driss Mrini is the former director of the RTM (Radio et Television Marocaine) and uses the tropes of Andalusi music to embed the complex story of Jewish departure, pain, and a truncated forbidden relationship in his 2015 film *Aïda*. Through Aïda’s return to Morocco for a concert, she is able to reconnect to the forgotten traditional lifestyle that Moroccan Jews continue to this day. Throughout the movie, Aïda is haunted by images of her own death, and her fear at being buried alive. She wakes up from nightmares of having tarantulas walking on her body, seeing her body plunging into dark, deep waters, and knocking from within a casket as she sees the men bury her during her funeral. These death and fear scenes are immediately countered with scenes that show the ubiquity of live music that permeates her visit in Morocco, in the synagogue, in Essaouira with Gnawa musicians and Andalusian musicians, or in Rabat during rehearsals for her planned charity concert. These musical scenes represent her vitality and eventually lead her back to health.

Aïda, an expert of Andalusi music and a professor in Paris, returns to Rabat with an incurable brain cancer that is apparently caused by her deep
discontent in being rootless. This film is the only one out of the four here analysed that portrays Jewish rituals in the synagogue and in the home around a Shabbat table in various scenes when Aïda returns to Rabat and visits her sister’s home and their family synagogue. This seems to imply that Moroccan Judaism and religious ritual are interconnected for Mrini. During her visit to the synagogue, while the men are singing the traditional Hebrew prayers, Aïda confesses to her sister that she has never been happy, and she believes this is the cause of her cancer. She concludes by saying, ‘Tu as de la chance d’être restée au Maroc’. The image immediately cuts to the men’s voices and their Hebrew song, as the viewer is left with her bitterness at having chosen education and emancipation in France over tradition and marriage in Morocco.

In the same manner, Mrini’s cinematic representation shows traditional Moroccan life as interconnected with Andalusi music and its public and private performance. Not only does the main character connect with the lost traditions of Moroccan Judaism, but when in Rabat, she seeks out her former Muslim boyfriend and reconnects with him, while always remembering the words of admonition from the women in her family about staying away from the Muslim boy. There is no romantic intention, just a deep human need to heal her past.

In this film, Mrini is able to capture the dichotomy between a profound identification with Moroccan culture and the social imperatives of the community towards their women to stay apart from the ‘other’. Aïda heeded the women’s advice, knowing that, when it could lead towards marriage and children born from an interreligious couple, it would be better to leave the country. The clash between the perfect communion through music and the breakdown of this communion with love is the irony evident throughout the film. Alexandra Chreiteh writes,

The promise of resurrecting a past of convivencia largely operates in Aïda through the trope of Andalusian music. In her French classroom, Aïda lectures that Muslim, Jewish, and Christian harmony was transported to Morocco after the Inquisition of 1492. We are constantly reminded that Aïda and Youssef’s musician fathers performed together for the affective community of Essaouira neighbours. In an effort to reconnect with Youssef, Aïda encourages him to play with an Andalusian troupe that performs in Arabic and Hebrew […]. As Aïda shows, the affective nature of aural cohabitation might momentarily succeed in building alternative spaces. (Chreiteh 2018: 270)

20 ‘You are lucky to have stayed in Morocco.’
It is worth noting that it is Mrini, a filmmaker who represents the makhzen because of his previous government post, who uses the tropes of Andalusi music around the themes of convivencia that the Moroccan state has been espousing in the last ten years through music, film, festivals, and the written press. He also uses a play on the word Aïda, which in Arabic (aidah) means the returning one, as the title for the film (Bellarabi, 2018: 14); Aïda is the one who returns - to Morocco, to herself, to her previous relationships and lifestyle. However, at the end of the film, after her cancer has been miraculously healed by her reintegration into her truncated Moroccan life, she dies in a sudden traffic accident, while the orchestra she had sponsored and prepared in rehearsal is performing at the National Mohammed V Theatre. She, like the young Youri in Marock, is not allowed to live out her fulfilment. Death appears as the only alternative.

To summarize, in Marock, rock’s connection to forbidden interreligious love and the death of a Jewish protagonist demonstrate the dangers of too intimate a connection between young Muslims and Jews. Où vas-tu Moshé? uses Andalusi music and chaâbi to present forbidden interreligious love and emigration from Morocco, alongside the issues of both connection and disconnection between Jews and Muslims and within their communal groups. L’Orchestre de minuit employs chaâbi music to elucidate the issues around emigration from Morocco and return to Morocco after years of exile, using the catalyst of the death of a Jewish protagonist. Finally, Aïda presents all four thematic elements: forbidden interfaith love, emigration from Morocco, return to Morocco after years of exile, and the death of a Jewish protagonist surrounded by the sounds, experiences, and performances of Andalusi music, in a bittersweet evocation of the rupture in Moroccan convivencia.

Conclusion

The four films analysed above use diegetic music as an additional character in order to highlight the uncomfortable negotiation around the connection and disconnection of Jewish and Muslim Moroccans during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The dance between marocanité and the ‘outsider’ character of many contemporary Moroccan Jews is addressed in varying ways in these films. Aïda and L’Orchestre de Minuit present Jews who have spent so many years outside of Morocco that they are torn between their new persona and their original and ‘true’ essence. Youri and Shlomo have never left, but are also considered outsiders in their own country. Solomon explains that ‘music is an especially powerful tool for articulating diasporic consciousness’ (2015: 214). Aïda and L’Orchestre de Minuit play on the primordial impetus of music as a call of return to the bled for healing. Youri and Shlomo find
their place surrounded by their friends and moments of musical exchange and encounter.

Daniel Schroeter's statement that 'scholarship has all but ignored new patterns of coexistence, modern developments that enabled new encounters and a common ground to develop between Jews and Muslims in the period before the mass exodus that began in the late 1940s' (2016: 43‒44) has been addressed with this study. Showing how music is portrayed in these films as 'glue' in the encounters between Muslim and Jewish characters demonstrates these alternate patterns of coexistence, outside the marketplace and the legal political realm, which have been the usual areas of scholarly focus. Through the use of traditional, popular, and contemporary music (Andalusi, chaâbi, and rock), the cinematic audiences are presented with a variety of musical situations in which Muslim and Jewish characters interact with music as the recurrent connecting element between them. Within these films, music acts as a connection between Jews and Muslims regarding the forbidden, such as interreligious relationships and alcohol consumption by Muslims. However, it is not so much the sound of this music that creates the connection as the very embodiment of music, its quasi-corporeality: the songs themselves, the tangibility of the spaces and experiences created while performing music on screen. Music represents vitality, health, happiness, and the non-fractured state of their lives pre-emigration. This embodied music is what drives the common supra-narrative of these different films. It is the entity of music itself that lives in the spaces and moments inhabited by Jews in Morocco. This very entity continues to exist even after the quasi-disappearance of the Moroccan Jewish community – the phantom limb. Both Cohen-Olivar and Mrini, whose films were produced in the aftermath of the 2011 Constitution, stress their characters’ recurring memories of shared musical moments that can be reclaimed in contemporary Morocco. Both of their returning Jewish characters have a debilitating physical illness (deafness and cancer, respectively) that this shared music-making heals during the course of the film. The new national reality of institutional pluralism and post-Constitutional reform allows these filmmakers to present not only Jews living in Morocco (as do Marrakshi and Benjelloun pre-2011), but also those who emigrated during the years after the 1967 war that were the most difficult years in Moroccan-Jewish relations.

The 'social glue' of music (Solomon, 2015) operates between these populations that are disconnected either by social and religious laws (Marock, Aïda), by moments in history (Où vas-tu Moshé?, L'Orchestre de minuit), or by exile (L'Orchestre de minuit, Aïda). What I have demonstrated in this chapter is that, in its repeated appearances as a character or as the force connecting the disconnected (or potentially disconnected) Muslim and Jew
in recent Moroccan filmmaking on Muslim-Jewish interactions in Morocco, music is the most fundamental character in the casting of a film. These filmmakers demonstrate through their choices of diegetic music that the contemporary fractures between Jews and Muslims – caused by emigration, religious practice, or Middle Eastern politics – are healed and erased through embodied music.

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