

5 Maghrebi Jewish Migrations and Religious Marriage in Paris and Montréal, 1954–1980

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Responding to Nancy Green's invitation that migratory trajectories should be examined from a comparative perspective, this study examines, in both space and time, the religious marital practices among Sephardic Jews settled in Paris and Montréal who, in the post-colonial context, had been leaving their countries of birth (Green 2002, 23).¹ The statistical study of these religious marriages not only analyses relocation patterns, but also more broadly, reveals the repercussions of these migrations among host communities.² It demonstrates that both migrants and members of host social structures underwent wide-reaching cultural reconfiguration.

The early post-colonial period saw the almost complete disappearance of North African Jewish communities, be it in a brutal fashion as in Algeria, or in a more diffuse, yet just as an irreversible manner, as in the cases of Tunisia and Morocco. In 1954, about 500,000 Jews lived in North African French possessions; that number had shrunk to about 62,000 by the end of 1967 (Bensimon 1971, 1).³ Only a few thousand currently reside in North Africa. Because these communities maintained a long-standing French citizenship, and had acquired the national "habitus," the vast majority of Algerian Jews relocated in France, where they benefitted from legislation designed to facilitate the economic and social reintegration of repatriated colonials (Scioldo-Zürcher 2010). Tunisian and Moroccan Jews who had French citizenship were entitled to the same rights as the French. For their part, non-French citizens were considered by the national administration as regular migrants, as were "Muslims" who came to France in search of job opportunities during that era. A policy entailing quicker naturalization procedures for some Jews was established with the support of the local French Jewry.

Nonetheless, the paths to France and the permanent resettling of these migrants were neither automatic nor even obvious. Significant numbers relocated to Israel and Canada. More than 80 per cent of Moroccan Jews immigrated to Israel; 8,000 crossed the Atlantic to North America, where conditions of reception and citizenship were facilitated by the local Jewish communities.

This study relies on a cross-data comparison between, on the one hand, data taken from a quantitative study of *kétoubot* (religious marriage contracts), and on the other hand, marriage preparation records from synagogues in France and in Québec (in the latter case, including the publication of banns). This data provides a snapshot of a section of the North African Jewish community, which consisted largely of young adults, as it underwent its migrating process.⁴ Similarly, the comparison between the French and the Canadian contexts illuminates the diverse perspectives of these new communities with which the host countries had to deal. Even though the “Jewish marriage” has been a favoured topic in Jewish studies, comparing these marriages in migration remains a marginal subject of research and one that this article attempts to address. In the following pages, we will show the importance of those migration movements for the redefinition of the Jewish communities in diaspora. We will also explore how the migrants’ relations to public and private spaces have been modified by their rooting in a new environment. We want to show the importance of those migrants’ contribution to the renewal and even to the survival of the Jewish communities in both Paris and Montréal.

Comparing Community Organizations: Toward a Comparative Analysis of Jewish Practices

The proposed comparison is timeline-based. Both periods we chose to study correspond to the strong influx of North African Jewish populations. The scrutiny of French marriage records focuses on the 1954–1970 period.⁵ This period covers the era that saw the independence of both North Africa French protectorates (Tunisia and Morocco) and Algeria, as well as the anti-Jewish backlash in the same countries resulting from the 1967 Israel-Palestine conflict. In the case of Québec, the data covers the 1970s, a pivotal period in Canadian Jewish immigration. With 7,995 Moroccan Jews arriving between 1960 and 1991 (according to the 1991 Census), they rapidly constituted the most compact subgroup of the

Montréal Jewish community. The synagogues included in this study were selected to demonstrate, as widely as possible, the multifarious character of Judaism. Since 1808, mainstream Judaism in France – often qualified as “consistorial” Judaism (*judaïsme consistorial*) due to its administrative structure which contoured the institution of the consistory – had acted as the Jewish community’s traditional representative before the French state, though it coexisted with a minority liberal Judaism well-ensconced in the French capital. Both traditions have their own institutions.

Inaugurated in 1876, the monumental and prestigious *Synagogue des Tournelles* is located in Paris’ fourth *arrondissement*, within the *Pletzl*, the city’s historic Jewish neighbourhood and traditional destination for the Ashkenazi immigration (Jarassé 2003, 77–81). In 1958, consistorial authorities proposed, not without controversy, to make this temple available to all Jewish migrants from North Africa. This took place in the aftermath of the Second World War, when the reconstruction of the French Jewish community made it essential to integrate North African Judaism by granting it a symbolic place in one of Paris Judaism’s most elevated grounds. The temple became not only the focal point for Jews of Constantine (Algeria), Rabbi Feuerwerker having been replaced by Rabbi Chekroun, but also the focal point for all North African Jews, regardless of the cultural traditions they had left behind – at least until the building of synagogues specifically designed for their former regional rites, from the mid-1960s on (Scioldo-Zürcher and Bahoken 2009).

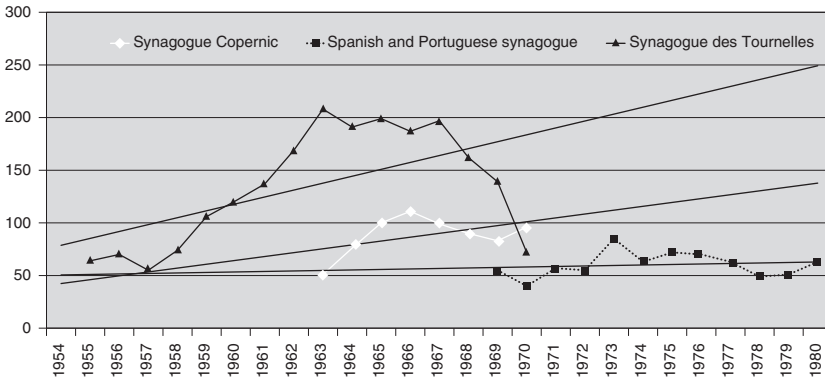
The ULIF Copernic, **Union** *Libérale Israélite* de France (hereinafter *Synagogue de l’Union libérale israélite*) had a different kind of background. Created in 1907, this hub of liberal Judaism never had a rabbi under consistorial authority. A world unto itself within French Judaism, this institution was, from the outset, accused of permissiveness by its detractors. However, this synagogue succeeded in imposing a modernized Jewish practice on the Parisian landscape, thus fulfilling the wishes of its founders to fashion a Judaism “adapted to the needs of the times” (Poujol 2007). The “liberal adventure” continued in the post-Second World War period, and the synagogue rapidly gathered an important number of adherents. They went from 125 in 1945 to more than 600 as the 1960s began (Meyer 1988, 347). Nonetheless, Rabbi Zaoui, a native of Oran and present at the *téba* (chair) since 1946, imposed a return to the Hebrew language and, for the religious celebration of marriages, requested the conversion of non-Jewish spouses.

Finally, the *Spanish and Portuguese synagogue (SPS)* was founded in Montréal in 1777 by British descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews. Canada’s oldest synagogue, this Sephardic institution today practises modern Sephardic orthodox rituals.⁶ Its building moved on several instances before settling in the Snowdon-Côte-des-Neiges neighbourhood in 1947. This area, where most new migrants settled, rapidly became a “Jewish neighbourhood.” Since the 1990s, it has housed the new “Jewish campus,” where all of Montréal’s major Jewish institutions are located (the YM-YWHA Jewish community centre, the Gelber Conference Center, the Segal Theatre, etc.). During the 1960s, this synagogue, of which 80 per cent of members were English-speaking Ashkenazi, also became a centre for numerous Moroccan Jews attracted by its Sephardic name.⁷

A Significant Community Renewal

From 1955 to 1970, a total of 8,910 weddings were registered in Paris’s consistorial synagogues, of which 2,151 took place at the *Synagogue des Tournelles*.⁸ Between 1963 and 1970, 706 weddings were celebrated at

Figure 5.1. Number of annual weddings held in the Synagogue des Tournelles, the *Synagogue de l’Union libérale israélite*, and the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Montréal, 1954–1980.



Sources: *Consistoire central* (central consistory), marriage preparation records of Paris synagogues; Archives de l’*Union libérale de France, Synagogue de l’Union libérale israélite*; publication of banns, *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, Montréal*.

the liberal *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*. For its part, Montréal's *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* saw 725 couples marrying between 1970 and 1981. From 1955 to 1969, the number of consistorial marriages in Paris increased annually by 6.14 per cent, while the *Synagogue des Tournelles* saw an annual increase of 5.31 per cent for the same period of time.⁹ Between 1963 and 1970, the number of weddings celebrated at the *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite* grew at the even faster pace of 8.23 per cent annually. For its part, with an average rate of only 1.14 per cent, Montréal's *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* had a weaker annual growth, though this temple remained significant to the renewal of Québec Judaism.

As seen here, weddings increased substantially in all three synagogues with the arrival of new migrants from North Africa. The 1965–1966 crest in the number of weddings held in both Paris synagogues, respectively

Table 5.1. Number of consistorial weddings in Paris and number of weddings held at the *Synagogue des Tournelles* in Paris, 1954–1970

Year	Total number of consistorial weddings	Total number of weddings held at the <i>Synagogue des Tournelles</i>	Percentage of weddings held at the <i>Synagogue des Tournelles</i>	Indexed fluctuation of consistorial weddings	Indexed fluctuation of weddings held at the <i>Synagogue des Tournelles</i>
1955	332	64	19%	100	100
1956	317	70	22%	95	109
1957	387	55	14%	117	86
1958	405	74	18%	122	116
1959	411	106	26%	124	166
1960	443	121	27%	133	189
1961	508	137	27%	153	214
1962	556	169	30%	167	264
1963	710	208	29%	214	325
1964	675	191	28%	203	298
1965	669	199	30%	202	311
1966	Missing data	187	Missing data	Missing data	292
1967	Missing data	197	Missing data	Missing data	308
1968	824	162	20%	248	253
1969	849	139	16%	256	217
1970	812	72	9%	245	113
Total	8910	2151	24%		

Source: *Kétoubot* and marriage preparation records, Paris Consistory Archives, 1954–1970

Table 5.2. Number of weddings held at the *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*, Copernic Street, Paris, 1963–1970

Year	Number of weddings	Annual percentage of weddings held	Annual growth rate	Indexed fluctuation
1963	51	7%		100
1964	76	11%	49%	149
1965	100	14%	32%	196
1966	111	16%	11%	218
1967	99	14%	-11%	194
1968	90	13%	-9%	176
1969	83	12%	-8%	163
1970	96	14%	16%	188
Total	706	100%		

Source: Marriage preparation records, *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*

Table 5.3. Number of weddings held at the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, Montréal, 1970–1981

Year	Number of weddings	Annual percentage of weddings held	Annual growth rate	Indexed related fluctuation
1969	55	8%		100
1970	40	6%	-27%	73
1971	57	8%	43%	104
1972	55	8%	-4%	100
1973	85	12%	55%	155
1974	63	9%	-26%	115
1975	72	10%	14%	131
1976	70	10%	-3%	127
1977	63	9%	-10%	115
1978	49	7%	-22%	89
1979	51	7%	4%	93
1980	63	9%	24%	115
1981	2	0.3%		
Total	725	100%		

Source: Publications of banns, *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, 1970–1980.

311 for the *Synagogue des Tournelles* and 111 for the *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*, shows the impact of a demographic reality, that is, that of baby-boom children coming to the age of marriage. Considering the impact of the Second World War genocide on the Ashkenazi population, the number of weddings was considerably cut back

by the demographic slump it caused.¹⁰ Thus, the increase was due to Jewish immigration and, in the specific case of the *Synagogue des Tournelles*, the arrival of North African Jews. Finally, in the case of the Montréal synagogue, the peak was reached in 1973, when 155 weddings were held. Still, the average age for marriage did not change. It was 27 years in 1955 and oscillated between 25 and 26 years in the following years.

In other words, all three synagogues underwent a major replenishment of their members, be they due-paying or not. Regardless of specific ritual practices and religious traditions, immigration accounted for the increase of their congregants and, indirectly, for the perpetuation of Judaism. This was the primary impact of postcolonial Jewish immigration; it repopulated French synagogues and prevented those of Montréal from emptying. It put together a new Judaism, blurring the ritual and ethnic frontiers which, until this time, were divisive, at least within the territorialized *imaginaires* of the colonial spaces and of the Jewish diaspora. The Sephardi and Ashkenazi spaces became similar. With this development, Jewish identity was led to redefine itself within the matrimonial context.

The Space and Time of Religious Marriages: A Considerable Jewish Maghrebi Migration

The figures below tabulate the birthplaces of spouses. They show the wide variability in the points of convergence among spouses-to-be in these three synagogues. The *Synagogue des Tournelles* quickly became a reference point for Paris' Maghrebi identity, which consisted of 17 per cent non-colonial French adherents. The *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite* and the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* in Montréal did not experience any change in ritual practices, and thus identity references, and drew more than two-fifths of Jews born respectively in France, Québec, or elsewhere in Canada. However, both institutions faced the task of integrating a large foreign-born population, the majority of which consisted of North African Jews. The countries of *Machrek*, which includes Israel and Egypt, are unrepresented, or, in the Canadian case, sparsely represented. Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco account for more than 78 per cent of the spouses brought together in matrimony at the *Synagogue des Tournelles* and 30 per cent of those who married at the two other synagogues. Moreover, all three synagogues were compelled not only to welcome the newcomers, but also to "open" their structures to them, a process which was made official

by consistorial authorities themselves in the case of the *Synagogue des Tournelles*.

Beyond the issue of ritual practices, this process involved granting “political” responsibilities to new migrants who welcomed the opportunity to exercise them. For instance, the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* saw both a renewal of its Administrative Council – several key positions were quickly filled by Iraqi Jews, who were among the first to arrive and settle – and the infusion in the rituals of Judeo-Moroccan cantillations. These changes are well-illustrated by the appointment, at the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, of the *hazzan* (cantor) Samy El Maghribi, a popular Moroccan singer also known as Salomon Amzallag,¹¹ and by the Ashkenazi Rabbi Howard Joseph in 1968.

It is noteworthy that these three synagogues welcomed people from a culturally varied Judaism that is as European and North American as North African, and mostly urban. However, the “Maghrebization” of all three synagogues took different forms: while both French synagogues regrouped people from various North African backgrounds, the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* became mostly a gathering point for Moroccan Jews.

Marriage Types

While the evidence indicates that all three synagogues established themselves as hubs for a vast Sephardic Judaism, the dynamics whereby various Jewish subcultures, local and Maghrebi, mixed with each other remained to be examined. To achieve this, several different “types” of marriages were identified according to the birthplaces of spouses. The marriage hereby categorized as “Maghrebi” involves the union of two persons born in North Africa. A Metropolitan marriage involves two people originating from mainland, non-colonial France. In this context, a “European” marriage denotes two fiancés from other countries of continental Europe, Russia included. These categories can be overlapped in order to reflect marriages between people of different origins. For instance, a “Metropolitan/European” marriage means the union of a person from France and a person from another continental European country. Furthermore, the intent is not to invest individuals with a static cultural essence, nor to claim that being born in Algeria or Tunisia turns a person into a representative of an entire Sephardic culture. On the contrary, the intent is simply to outline the geohistoric characteristics of unions.

Table 5.4. Main birthplaces of spouses marrying at the *Synagogue des Tournelles*, the *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*, Copernic Street, Paris, and the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, Montréal, 1954–1980

Country of birth	Spouses married at the <i>Synagogue des Tournelles</i>	Share of country of birth (percentage)	Spouses married at the <i>Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite</i>	Share of country of birth (percentage)	Spouses married at the <i>Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue</i>	Share of country of birth (percentage)
Algeria	1712	41.4%	194	13.8%	8	0.5%
Belgium	17	0.41%	18	1.3%	6	0.4%
Canada	0	/	0	/	568	39%
Egypt	36	0.9%	51	3.6%	39	2.7%
United States	4	0.1%	16	1.1%	57	3.9%
France	722	17.4%	669	47.4%	35	2.4%
Iraq	1	0.02%	0	0%	32	2.2%
Israel	11	0.3%	6	0.4%	55	3.8%
Lebanon	0	0	1	0.07%	26	2.8%
Morocco	337	8.1%	87	6.2%	413	28.4%
Poland	45	1.1%	9	0.6%	30	2.1%
Rumania	15	0.4%	11	0.8%	22	1.5%
Tunisia	1185	28.6%	143	10.1%	5	0.3%
USSR	5	0.1	7	0.5%	24	2.8%
Other	49	1.2%	197	14.1%	135	9.3%
Total	4139	100%	1410	100%	1455	100%

Sources: *Consistoire central* (central consistory), marriage preparation records of Paris synagogues; Archives de l'*Union libérale de France*, *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*; publication of banns, *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, Montréal

Table 5.5. Main types of marriages, *Synagogue des Tournelles*, 1954–1970

Type of marriage	Number	Percent
Maghrebi	1447	67%
Mainlander/Maghrebi	237	11%
Mainlander	204	9%
Maghrebi / European	48	2%
Maghrebi / Israeli	11	1%
European	11	1%
Other	5	0.2%
No indication	151	7%
Total	2151	100%

Table 5.6. Main types of marriages, *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*, Copernic Street, Paris, 1963–1970

Type of marriages	Number	Percent
Maghrebi / Mainlander	259	37%
Mainlander	174	25%
Maghrebi	75	11%
Mainlander / European	71	10%

Source: dossiers de préparation au mariage, *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*, 1963–1970.

Table 5.7. Main types of marriage, Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, 1970–1980

Type of marriages	Number	Percent
Maghrebi	134	18%
Canadian / Canadian	156	15%
Maghrebi / Canadian	113	15%
Canadian / European	51	7%
Maghrebi / Europeans	51	7%

Source: Publication of banns, *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, Montréal

It can be clearly seen here that the transmission of the Sephardic identity passes through various geographic and cultural spheres. While the “Maghrebi” marriage accounts for 67 per cent of all unions at the *Synagogue des Tournelles*, it respectively represents only 11 and 18 per cent of those in the two other synagogues. Eleven per cent of marriages celebrated at the *Synagogue des Tournelles*, 15 per cent of those held at the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, and 37 per cent of those at the *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*, involved a North African native and one from the host country. Also noticeable, at least in France, is the importance of “inter-Maghrebi” marriages, that is, involving spouses from two different North African countries. The specific case of Moroccan natives illustrates this phenomenon quite well.

The Case of Moroccan Natives

If one studies marriages between Moroccan natives and natives from another North African country, it clearly appears that the “Moroccan community” did not turn in on itself in terms of its national identity.

Table 5.8. Marriages involving Moroccan natives and other Maghrebi natives at the *Synagogue des Tournelles* (1954–1970), the *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite* (1963–1970), Copernic Street, Paris, and the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, Montréal (1970–1980)

Country of birth	<i>Synagogue des Tournelles</i>	<i>Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite</i> (1963–1970), Copernic Street	<i>Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue</i>
Morocco / Morocco	25%	63%	91%
Morocco / Algeria	57%	31%	3%
Morocco / Tunisia	16%	6%	3%
Morocco / Egypt	2%	/	3%
Total	100%	100%	100%

Of all the “Maghrebi weddings” held at the *Synagogue des Tournelles*, more than 75 per cent involved Moroccan natives marrying a person from Algeria or Tunisia, with, however, a very strong predominance from Algeria. At the *Union Libérale* on Copernic Street, which is not a synagogue following Algerian rituals, one notes an openness to weddings involving Jewish Moroccan natives with Jewish natives of Algeria and Tunisia in almost the two-fifths of the cases. In Montréal, in the absence of Tunisian and Algerian Jews, marriages between two Maghrebi natives involved only Moroccans, apart from a few rare cases.

Intermarriages and Conversions to Judaism

In all three synagogues, marriage preparation records also contain information pertaining to the spouses’ religion and include, when necessary, the request for the conversion of one spouse. The *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* and the *Union libérale* on Copernic Street offered accelerated conversions. Candidates needed to acquire elementary knowledge of Judaism, which came down to the basic rules of *Cacher-out* (ritual alimentary rules) and some knowledge of Jewish religious history. The *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite* sometimes accepted a mere promise of conversion.¹² Conversely, consistorial Judaism was far stricter on this issue. Conversions necessitated many years of preparation and were considerably more demanding in terms of knowledge requirements.¹³ We can find in these administrative and religious

procedures the central role of women in Judaism. All transmission of Judaism passes through women, and must be in conformity with religious rules: in the case of conversion or remarriage, the rabbi notes precisely the occasion at the *Mikvé*. When all this has been done, he grants the religious union. In addition, in order to tabulate all of the mixed marriages celebrated by the consistory, it was necessary to study the marriages in all the synagogues in order to extract cases in which one of the spouses, man or woman, was not of Jewish faith. Left aside were marriages in which the spouses, even if Jewish, were either divorced or widowed.

The data gathered on the three synagogues highlights an important religious divergence: the tendency to religious endogamy can be seen within consistorial Judaism, the proportion of mixed marriages not increasing with the arrival of North African Jews. However, the two other synagogues display a very marked tendency toward religious exogamy (that is a liaison with a non-Jewish person, even if she or he intends to convert to Judaism to get married). Intermarriages involving conversion to the Jewish religion of the non-Jewish spouse reveal that exogamy was practised by a third of those who married at the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, and half at the *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite* (respectively 30% and 50% of unions). Knowing that the conversion of the spouse was voluntary and that it marks his or her more-or-less exclusive commitment to the new religion, the authors wished to know more about what we perceived to be a genuine phenomenon.

Table 5.9. Number of marriages involving at least one converted spouse, Jewish central consistory, *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite* (1963–1970), Copernic Street, Paris, and the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, Montréal, 1954–1980

	Number of converted women	Number of converted men	Total number of conversions
Paris Consistory 1954–1970	345 (4%)	41 (0.5%)	386 (4%)
<i>Union libérale israélite</i> , <i>Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite</i> , 1963–1970	317 (45%)	47 (6.7%)	364 (51%)
Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, 1969–1980	182 (25%)	37 (5%)	219 (30%)

Sources: *Consistoire central* (central consistory), marriage preparation records of Paris synagogues; Archives de l'*Union libérale de France*, *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*; publication of banns, *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, Montréal

*A Religious Exogamy “Compensated” by Conversion to Judaism,
Mainly by Women*

In this context, we hypothesized that the initial stages of immigration were perhaps experienced as a unique moment of freedom leading some migrants to transgress the family and religious taboos to permit romantic love (*l'amour romantique*) (Berdugo-Cohen, Cohen, and Lévy 1987, 40). Or perhaps, more prosaically, exogamy simply accompanied migration. Life stories show that religious exogamy is tempered by conversion to Judaism, when permitted and authorized by rabbis. The gender of the individuals continues to be of fundamental importance in reference to the practice of conversion to the Jewish religion. As already noted by Sébastien Tank-Storper (2007, 31), the converted population was largely female, in a proportion oscillating between 70 per cent and 85 per cent.¹⁴ We found this female predominance in the data from both the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* and the *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*. In the former case, among 740 marriages, 219 involved a conversion to the Jewish religion, thus 30 per cent of couples, with women being the ones mostly undergoing conversion: we counted 182 instances (84% of couples involving a conversion) of which 50 per cent were born in Canada (the remainder being divided among 13 countries). Among these women, four converted with one or more children. Among 37 men (5%) who converted to Judaism for their marriage, 25 (66%) were born in Canada, the remainder coming from France, Great Britain, or the United States.

At the *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*, 317 (45%) women converted to Judaism upon their marriage with a Jewish man. Among these, 71 per cent were born in mainland France, the others coming from thirty different countries. As to the men, 7 per cent converted (47 persons out of 705) to Judaism and 77 per cent among them were born in mainland France (from a total of five countries represented). Proportions of women born in the host country who had converted to Judaism upon marrying were thus very important in both synagogues. Through migration we note a marked change in the marriage market: almost half of the men married spouses born in the host country. This went beyond the traditional explanation which attempts to link female conversion to the important traditional role women held in the transmission of Judaism.

The most common case involved a man born in Morocco who married a non-Jewish Québec woman, or a North African man who married a non-Jewish French woman as in the case of the *Synagogue de*

l'Union libérale israélite. The general pattern was that these young men married as soon as they arrived in Montréal and Paris with (most often) young Catholic women, and that they were eager to convert them to Judaism in order to get married. This appears to confirm the hypothesis of marriage structured by social homogamy rather than religion, even if the conversion indicated the wish of spouses to remain within Judaism. Recent studies in demography demonstrate that the matrimonial choices of couples increasingly tend to bring together partners from diverse geographical origins, creating marriages that are socially diverse (Bozon and Héran 2006, 16–17). In this context, conversion permits the reestablishment of a balance. As Sébastien Tank-Storper writes:

conversions within the marriage setting should be understood as a means of reconciling the two conflicting matrimonial lines of thought: social homogamy and religious endogamy. The conversion appears as a “gift” made to the Jewish spouse in response to the sacrifice which constitutes the exogamic marriage, a gift which is often the result of the constraints which Jewish institutions force upon mixed couples.¹⁵ (Tank-Storper 2007, 32)

We can suppose that, attracted by the ease with which they established relationships with young women they met in public places or at work, and charmed by the prospect of following their inclination rather than tradition or the wishes of their parents, these young men chose to marry young women, with little consideration for the woman’s social-economic or familial background. This type of marriage reinforced their idea of fitting into their new host country. They later attempted to compensate for what could appear as a transgression from their community by resorting to conversion. Whereas it remains difficult to know whether they lived in the context of secular Judaism, which would have predisposed them to marrying a non-Jew,¹⁶ the fact remains that they saw as possible the idea of marrying for love all the while remaining within the community and within Judaism. An interview that we conducted with two male respondents who married fiancées who had converted, and with the rabbi who presided over the conversions and the marriages, revealed that in the first years after arriving, the men felt relatively sheltered from a sense of transgression since the marriages were celebrated at a synagogue, with the rabbi’s blessing. Their marriages of love became, through the ritual consecration by the rabbi, marriages of reason, in conformity with the idea they had of themselves, and which

permitted them de facto to remain within the Jewish community. In interviews conducted during the 1980s by Marie Berdugo-Cohen, a Moroccan Jew tells how he met his future wife (a non-Jewish French woman) in Montréal and the difficulties which this marriage, celebrated at the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue*, entailed for his family:

When I arrived in Canada, I met friends, mostly boys. I did not know Moroccan girls, or very few. Everything changed the day when I met a young lady who was about twenty years old, and who, like me, was also from another country, from France. She was in Montréal for a very short stay, two or three months to improve her English, and then was to return to her parents. Of Catholic background, she was single daughter and worked au pair. Her father worked in aviation, and she was thinking of becoming an air hostess. She was very pretty and I liked her a lot. She had everything to please me, nice with a good education. ... How was it that a guy like me, brought up in Jewish traditions, could decide on his own to marry a non-Jew? I always had a high regard for religion and I lived in a very Jewish house, as we all did in Morocco. I knew that marrying a non-Jew was the thing you shouldn't do, and I still believe this to be true. Finally, I decided that she was the girl who suited me more than all others. That she wasn't Jewish was a big hassle, I did not know how to tell my parents, my family. I introduced the idea little by little ... For a year, I repeated to my future wife that I would not marry her, since she wasn't Jewish ... what I found the most consoling was that she didn't have any relative here. She was alone, she was a single daughter. Her conversion was therefore total. (quoted in Berdugo-Cohen, Cohen, and Lévy 1987, 146–150)

We can see in this interview how this man, who met a non-Jewish French woman in a context where he did not socialize with Moroccan Jewish women of his age, outlines the constraints that their marriage constituted for him and his family. It is also interesting to see that the constraint of this marriage with a convert was somehow compensated by the fact that this woman did not have a Catholic religious loyalty and was far from her family. Therefore we can see, in this interview excerpt, the assertion by this young man of his individuality through the choice of a young woman who suited him as a future spouse; we also note that this assertion derives from a generational behaviour common among many young people who wish to embrace modernity, even though traditional family requirements weighed strongly on them. But does this appeal of modernity play itself out in the same manner for young girls?

It is difficult to know with certainty, since these young girls could also choose to marry non-Jews: very few among them did so in the three synagogues here studied, but we cannot gauge this phenomenon for those who married in a civil celebration. The contrast between genders is noticeable, and one could affirm that the predominance of converted women constitutes one of the effects of the masculine domination that imposes the religion of the men (migrants) onto the women (natives) who wish to marry. In this regard, the modernity of the men's behaviour is a screen covering traditional and unequal attitudes in gender relationships. This double bind seems to be at the heart of the Jewish community reconfiguration in Montréal.

Jewish and Francophone in Québec

French language proficiency constituted an important factor in migratory projects as well as in the selection of potential migrants by the Canadian and Québec state administrations. Most of those whom we interviewed were men and women who studied in the French language, either in the schools of *l'Alliance israélite universelle*, or in the lyceums and schools of the *Mission française*. Their parents tended to speak Judeo-Arabic or Judeo-Spanish, sometimes French but not always. They had the opportunity to migrate due to family reuniting policies sustained at the time by the Canadian government. As a result, the bond with French, the language of colonization but also of their emancipation, found an echo in Québec, where it determined to a large degree Québec identity, which at the time, was being strongly asserted. We clearly see the extent to which the studies that have been devoted to this new wave of Jewish immigration used to their own ends the arrival of these newcomers, who were thrown from the outset into the linguistic battle. After a first wave of studies dedicated to the socio-economic integration of those migrants within the mainly English-speaking Jewish community,¹⁷ a second wave of studies in contrast tried to assimilate them into the francophone majority,¹⁸ which eventually led to genuine studies of their presence in Québec and in the Jewish diaspora.¹⁹

In a context where French was establishing itself as the main language of Québécois "citizenship," the fact that these new immigrants were mostly French-speaking contributed to changing the terms in the relation between Jews and non-Jews, but also the relationship of these newcomers with the mostly English-speaking Ashkenazi majority.

The linguistic cohesion of Québec's various Jewish Ashkenazi groups around English – Yiddish being little more than a reminiscence – seemed compromised. Hence, the arrival of Sephardic Jews reinforced the multinational and plural character of Montréal's Jewish community by adding totally new linguistic and cultural characteristics, all the while laying out new parameters for Judaism. As a result, language and ethnic origin, **much more than** religious practice, were to become powerful markers of a recomposed identity.

This identity was to crystallize around the way Sephardic Jews presented themselves both to the Jewish community and the Québec society at large. Processes of identity reconstruction which implied a return to former references, references sometimes mythic (the Sephardic Golden Age), grouped themselves around a reinterpretation of Sephardic traditions in light of new Québécois identity parameters, of which language was the main vector. Thus there came to be an equation between Sephardic and francophone. Due to the quick economic integration of some Sephardics, and the community commitment of others, they were to contribute to the renewal of community structures through the creation of new institutional apparatuses around Sephardic identity (the *Communauté Sépharade du Québec*, which became the *Communauté Sépharade Unifiée du Québec*, the Maimonides Schools, the publishing of the journal *La voix sépharade*, etc.).²⁰ This complex identification with Sephardic Judaism has been, in all, beneficial for Moroccan Jews in Montréal. On the one hand, it blurred in part the postcolonial character of this immigration and instituted a not-always fortunate confrontation with the mostly-Anglophone Jewish Ashkenazi community. On the other hand, it allowed those Jewish Moroccans who appropriated this identification to constitute themselves into an interest group and a cultural community. In this sense, it fit into the Québec political landscape that favoured belonging to the francophone cultural world, all the while benefiting from policies – and state sponsorship – which favoured the emergence of Canadian multiculturalism in a cosmopolitan city such as Montréal. As newcomers, they found in Montréal enough space to establish themselves within the traditional Jewish quarters, as well as to create enclaves in the general francophone culture (the *festival sefarad* being one case in point). In effect, the Sephardic's geographic, religious, and social outlook placed them from the beginning at the heart of the wider Jewish community of Montréal, even if the practices of some of them diverged from traditional endogamic expectations placed upon them. The community therefore became increasingly diverse.

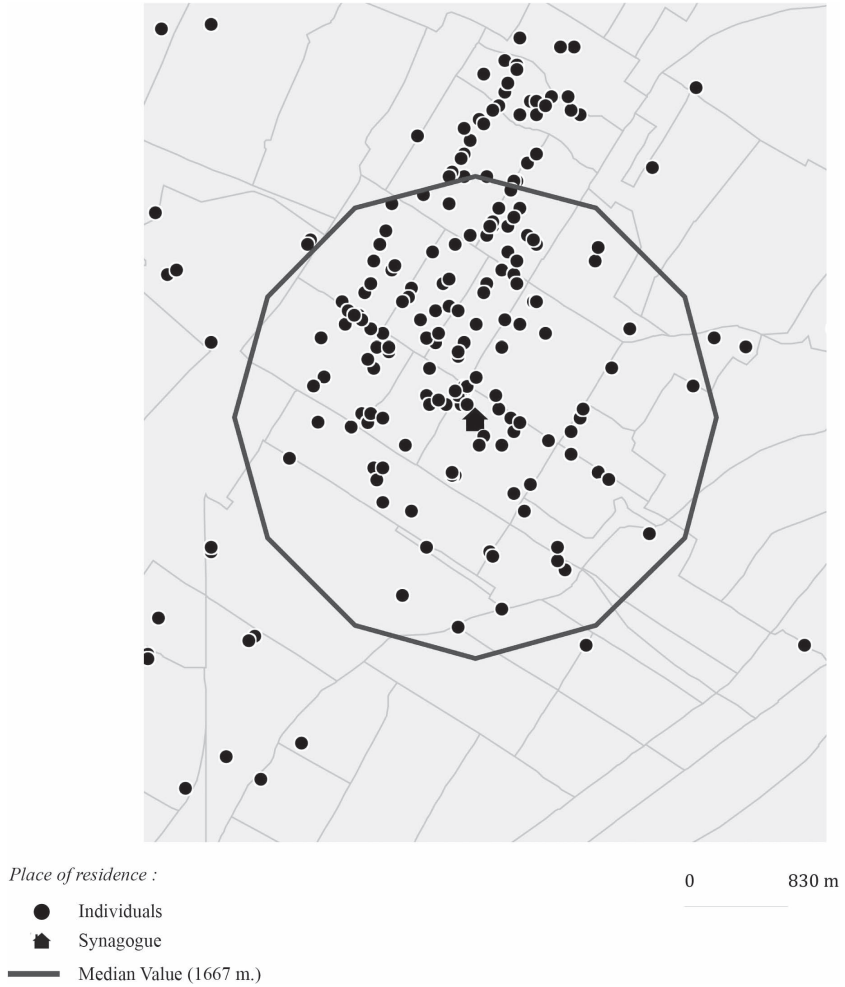
The Use of Public Spaces by Jewish Moroccans

The Moroccan Jewish migration flow deeply marked Montréal's Jewish Community through the incorporation of new religious and linguistic practices, and *in fine*, a new social restructuration of Québec's Jewry. Upon their arrival, these migrants mainly settled in the Anglophone, middle-class area of Snowdon, in Montréal, where Jews already made up a significant part of the population and where communitarian structures had already been established (social centres, hospitals, Anglophone schools which were, before the late laicization of teaching, the only ones who accepted Jewish children).

The Jewish Moroccan population became an integral part of the Jewish community. The spatial distribution of married couples attending the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* during the seventies clearly showed that more than 50 per cent of the population originating from Morocco used to live within a 1.6 kilometer radius of the synagogue. Many migrants saw this site as a meeting place, where they could reunite with other Moroccan families.

Nevertheless, more than 30 years later, it is interesting to note that the area of Snowdon is no longer a place where cultural and ethnic Jewish heterogeneity is visible. Modern, non-distinct, semi-detached buildings now take precedence. There is nothing unusual to see, except a few discreet *mezouzot*, showing that the area is now occupied by a few practicing Jewish families.²¹ Only a few community and religious shops are located in the area. On the streets lining Mackenzie Park, where the *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* is located, Montréal's Jewish public *mise en scène* clearly appears: a Jewish campus, including the Gelber Centre, the Segal Cultural Complex, and the Jewish Community Centre with its various sport and education associations. All of these are located not far from the imposing Jewish General Hospital. The Jewish Community Centre, previously named the YMHA, groups together a nursery, a primary school, and a *Talmud Torah*. Listed on the front door, in French, English, and Hebrew, is the religious denomination of the place. But, in spite of the signs of appropriation of this space, there are no reminders of the multiple origins of the community and in particular, no mention of the Moroccan origins of the local inhabitants. In other words, if identity is perceived as a "reflecting construction," Grégoire Chelkoff reminds us that visibility in the public space is achieved by revealing oneself to the Other and to oneself. (Rozenholz 2010, 22)

Figure 5.2. Map of the Snowdon area, compiled from archives of The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue publications of bans for the marriages of its members.



Sources: Publication of bans, Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, 1969–1980, Montréal, Canada. (Céline Bergeron, Yolande Cohen, Linda Guerry, Yann Scioldo-Zürcher, © Migrinter, 2011.)

In certain streets, the homogeneous Jewish composition is foregrounded whilst the diversity of the Montréal Jewish Community is completely overlooked. The geographer Emmanuel Ma Mung has shown that the Chinese in diaspora have created peculiar urban public spaces, labeled by him as “Own World” (“*monde propre*”), which are easily recognized by any observer (Ma Mung 1999). These symbolic spaces are associated with a genealogy and a shared vision, which facilitates the coming together of new migrants and the descendants of migrants. In downtown Montréal, four red traditional *porticos* have recently been installed.²² Nonetheless, even before the addition of these covered walkways, the area was already seen as a predominantly Chinese quarter. The Chinese are by no means obliged to live there, but the district is both a symbol and a resource for the diaspora to develop a particular type of solidarity. In the case of the Jews, this urban phenomenon of “Own World” is similar, but more subtle. Just like the Chinese are seen in Montréal as a homogeneous group, the Jews present themselves as a very uniform entity. The area is therefore constructed as both a “resource space” that gives material and religious means to the group (Godelier 1984), but also as an appropriated place by the Jewish community where the inhabitants are clearly identified by the whole population of the city (Di Méo, Castings, and Ducrounau 1993). Nowadays, most of the Moroccan migrants no longer live in the district, but the synagogue is still an important reference for the community, especially for family and community celebrations (hosting 120 to 150 events every year).

When taking a closer look at the internal organization of the institution, it becomes apparent that certain identities are firmly established. Except for the two minority groups who organize their ceremonies outdoors, the Loubavitch and Hassidic rituals and a couple of celebrations in the park (the president of the synagogue remembers celebrating the *Chavouaot* festival there), the majority of the celebrations take place inside the synagogue in allocated rooms, thus requiring significant planning. There is a “Sefarad Chapel” in the synagogue which gathers together all Moroccans who want to maintain their specific rituals.

Consequently, in the Snowdon district, there is a very specific *mise en scène* of Montréal’s Jewish population. This *mise en scène* erases all references to the national origins and the numerous identities of the Sefarad World in the public space to ultimately create a general Jewish reference. Public tensions are thus neutralized, and the area is therefore viewed as a place of national heritage for all Jews in Montréal, regardless of their

language, time spent in the country, religious background, generation, and degree of affiliation. The *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* therefore underlines its patrimonial function which allegedly encompasses all Jews in Montréal. Its letterhead proclaims that it has been “at the service of the community since 1768,” insisting on a shared history conceptualized as a uniting factor. In addition it states that 80 per cent of the celebrations are organized by non-members of the synagogue.

Conversely, in the neighbouring suburbs of Montréal, where an important part of the Moroccan Jewish migration flow has settled since the 1980s, we find a truly public representation of the Moroccan Jewry. Côte-Saint-Luc, Ville-Saint-Laurent, Dollard-des-Ormeaux developed a strong Jewish demographic component after their recent urbanization. This current population exhibits a strong affiliation to both Jewish and Moroccan origins in the public space. This is clearly illustrated by the noticeable Maïmonide School’s Mohamed V pavilion (located in 1969 in Cote-Saint-Luc, with a second campus opened later) in Ville-Saint-Laurent, or in the Sephardic synagogues *Ora Haïm* and *Petah Tikva* which still gather the practising Jewish Moroccans of **this town**.

Finally, two different Jewish public spaces are recognizable. In Montréal, the Moroccan Jewish origins of some of the inhabitants are not readily discernible to others except for in the semi-private space of a synagogue. A “co-presence” in the Jewish community exists, but it’s clearly minimal.

However, in the suburbs, Moroccan influence is much more identifiable and ownership affiliation is proudly claimed. There is thus a truly historic meaning to the place constructed over a long period of time which attributes the idea of a “melting-pot” to the central public space of the **town**. This idea is characteristic of North American countries with a high rate of immigration. Simultaneously, on the periphery of the town, a Moroccan identity, constructed by a new generation of migrants, is highly visible and easily identifiable. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the places are in competition with one another.

Even though each synagogue is financed by contributions from its members, some of the faithful do not hesitate in using both places, despite directions from the management which opposes this practice. They choose the synagogue based on the type of meaning they wish to attribute to their celebrations. The *Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue* is used to celebrate important events whereas the other synagogues, closer to their places of residence, are generally used for daily or weekly rituals.

In Paris, the same phenomenon is observed. When the history and the prestige of a synagogue is well-known, such as in the case of the *Synagogue des Tournelles*, the general Jewish or Sephardic nature of the rituals is privileged over the origins of particular rituals. In the *Synagogue de l'Union libérale israélite*, the public space is not committed to any specific use. The memory of the bomb attack (on 3 October 1980) is engraved in history and the religious authorities are clearly looking for discretion in the public sphere. On the other hand, like in Montréal's case and in the Parisian suburbs, the number of ethnic synagogues is increasing (in Le Pré-Saint-Gervais, Pantin, Aubervilliers, Les-Lilas) with a much more explicit spatial marking of the origins.

Conclusion

The comparison of the marriages celebrated in these three synagogues reveals two main tendencies in the face of mass migration. The Jewish consistory, reinforced by its position as the representative of French Judaism, consolidated its stranglehold on newcomers, without any significant preoccupation concerning other types of faith. It saw in the arrival of Maghrebi Jews a means of reconstructing the community and, at the same time, felt obliged to keep them within the parameters of Orthodox Judaism, to the point of neglecting the consequences of the weakening of a good number of constraints which weighed on young Jews when they were residing in their home countries. Modern Montréal Orthodox Judaism as well as Liberal Parisian Judaism, have not hesitated to "manufacture Jews," to the point of soliciting conversions, in order to make up for those who were perhaps on the point of leaving Judaism.

These North African Jewish migrations have, without a doubt, had an influence on matrimonial strategies; migrant men and women easily entered into exogamic marriages. Conversions do not seem to be a way to experience upward social mobility. Rather, they are an entrée into "Western modernity," which makes room for the notion of individuality and romantic love.

While host communities and home countries were considerably entangled, this nonetheless remained a short-term phenomenon that immediately followed the migrations. A decade after these arrivals in France and in Québec, international Jewish institutions were eager to redefine who was a Jew; in effect it put an end to the community openness they had previously exhibited. At the same time, during the 1980s,

the construction in France and Québec of an independent Sephardic community that granted itself schools (Maimonides in particular) and synagogues or reappropriated old ones, reinforced the religious dimension of endogamic marriage. The arrival of more orthodox rabbis who promoted a traditionalist, or even ultra-orthodox Judaism, similarly found many followers in the Jewish community. Conversions came to be understood as so many ruptures with this tradition, and were closely monitored and limited to a few cases. One can ask oneself if this return to the norm is not due to the fact that Jewish North African migrations toward France and Québec had withered, which entailed a certain return to a matrimonial norm understood as “traditional,” but which neglected the role of availability toward the Other which is part of the Jewish tradition as well.

In conclusion, our data pushes us to reflect upon Sephardic identity. If this identity revolves around a Maghrebi reference, it is also in about one-quarter of the cases a synthesis of Jewish Ashkenazi and Sephardic traditions and identities constructed in mainland France and Québec. In other words, whereas the Sephardic imagination sometimes discerns a mythic Neverland in the form of Maghrebi landscapes, the postcolonial Jewish migration, in France and in Canada, has shown capability of opening itself to the world, all the while retaining a sense of its own centre. This illustrates well the manner in which Judaism passes through historical time and the space of migration. It does so by the adaptation of some of its members to the modernity of the host community, all the while keeping in mind a strict Orthodox Judaism. This religious and community referent shows to the group a direction that gives it the illusion of having always remained within the rules of religious orthodoxy.

NOTES

- 1 This chapter (80% of the content) was previously published as Yolande Cohen and Yann Sciolodo-Zürcher, “Migrations juives maghrébines à Paris et Montréal, approche quantitative du mariage religieux en migration, 1954–1980,” in *La bienvenue et l’adieu, migrants juifs et musulmans au Maghreb*, edited by Frédéric Abassis, Karima Dirèche, and Rita Aouad (Paris: La Croisée des chemins à Casablanca et aux éditions Karthala, 2012). **This chapter** was also previously published as Yolande Cohen and Yann Sciolodo-Zürcher, “Migrations juives maghrébines à Paris et Montréal, approche quantitative du mariage religieux en migration, 1954–1980,” Collections électroniques du Centre

Jacques Berque (2013, <http://cjb.revues.org/>). It has been reproduced here with the permission of Frédéric Abessis, scientific editor.

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- 2 This study is part of a comparative research on contemporary Jewish immigration in Paris and Montréal conducted by Yolande Cohen and Yann Scioldo-Zürcher. For the Paris case, see Scioldo-Zürcher and Bahoken (2009). For the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue case, see Cohen and Guerry (2011). See also Cohen (2011).
- 3 In 1967, 53,000 Jews resided in Morocco, 8,000 in Tunisia, and only 1,000 in Algeria (Bensimon 1971, 1).
- 4 The *kéboutot* are notarized marriage certificates that **had only a symbolic** value during that period. However, marriage preparation records have a specific administrative and religious function, as they attest to both spouses' compliance of religious rules pertaining to marriage; notably, they include data on the religion of the engaged couple, be they members of the Jewish community or not. They also include information on the couple's birthplaces (and those of their parents), their profession, and, in some cases, their nationality. In Canada, the publications of banns contain further information. In contrast to France, where only civil marriage acts have legal value in accordance to the principles of Church-State separation, synagogue banns in Canada are sent **to** the rabbi, who, just like every minister of major religions, also **handles matters pertaining to the civil status of spouses**. As a result, the rabbi should inform public authorities as to the levels of education and languages spoken among households.
- 5 Unfortunately, following the loss of many archives, the files from the Synagogue de la rue Copernic that could be studied only covered the years from 1963 to 1970.
- 6 On this synagogue's history, see Blaustein, Esar, and Miller (1971).
- 7 During these years, this synagogue was important to Moroccan Jews, though many also married at the Shomrin Laboker congregation, according to Rabbi Joseph, who took office in 1970.
- 8 Part of the data for the years 1966 and 1967 is missing.
- 9 The year 1970 was not taken into account in this latter case. The smaller number of weddings resulted from building restoration works and not from any disaffection from the part of congregants.
- 10 More than 79,000 people were deported from France, including 11,400 children. See Klarsfeld (1985, 180).

- 11 He kept this position until 1984. Upon his departure, another Morocco-born cantor, Yehuda Abitan, was hired by the synagogue.
- 12 An examination of a conversion case in one of the synagogue's marriage records clearly reveals the elementary aspect of the procedure. It should be noted that the mention "*à convertir*" ("to be converted") can sometimes be found beside the names of a spouse's parents who were married at the liberal synagogue, but who did not officially complete their Jewish conversion, even after a few decades.
- 13 Furthermore, the consistorial administration kept in a separate register all unions in which the woman was not officially Jewish (which happened when the mother, or both parents, did not belong to Judaism). The same register also contains a list of marriages involving a divorced or widowed Jewish woman. Conversely, when a man is divorced, widowed, or has non-Jewish mother or parents, the *kétouba* of the marriage will be registered as an endogamic Jewish union.
- 14 In the stricter orthodox ritual practice, the woman's conversion (often done in a more liberal or modern orthodox ritual) is not always, nor everywhere, recognized. This might result in a difficult situation, including for the children of these converted women.
- 15 "(...) les conversions par alliance doivent se comprendre comme le moyen de réconcilier deux logiques matrimoniales conflictuelles: l'homogamie sociale et l'endogamie religieuse, et la conversion apparaît comme un « don » fait au conjoint juif en réponse au sacrifice que constitue le mariage exogame, don bien souvent forcé par les contraintes que font peser les institutions juives sur ces couples mixtes." (Tank-Storper 2007, 32).
- 16 Marilyn Bernard noted in her research on Jewish women in Québec City that those who married non-Jews had generally been raised in a secular Jewish context (Bernard 2008, 86).
- 17 The first works published on Moroccan Jews in Montréal addressed the problems experienced by these migrants pertaining to adaptation and integration. These works came primarily from McGill University's School of Social Work and approached this topic mainly from the Jewish Anglophone perspective, predominant at the time. See Amber and Lipper (1968), Berman, Nahmiash, and Osmer (1970), and Batshaw and Lowe (1971).
- 18 Then, the very fact that these Moroccan immigrants were French-speaking made them an object of interest (Anctil and Caldwell 1984).
- 19 Ethno-sociological works came afterward. See notably Filion (1979), Dinelle and Barnette-Dalphonnd (1985), Berdugo-Cohen, Cohen, and Lévy (1987), and Elbaz (1989, 1993). Finally, the more recent work of Anctil and Robison (2010) attempt to reinterpret their history within Québec's Jewish community.

- 20 Different models of integration were studied. The successful economic integration of North African Jews was demonstrated by economist Naomi Moldofsky (1968) and psycho-sociologist Jean-Claude Lasry (1989), both of whom showed that members of the community, for the most part, managed to reach the same professional status they had in their native countries. Several among them found employment opportunities in so-called “ethnic” enterprises, either Sephardic or Ashkenazi. Moreover, their geographic integration was also attested by their establishment in traditionally Jewish neighborhoods (in downtown Montréal), or more recently Jewish (Côte Saint-Luc), and the creation of their own points of identity reference at the crossroads of Judaism, *La Francophonie*, and Sephardim.
- 21 The *eruv* leading to the synagogue are practically invisible. They are small signs located in the streets near the synagogue that show the recommended route that the faithful can take during their rest days, without transgressing the religious rules. In Paris, these do not exist.
- 22 They were installed in 1999 by Beijing’s authorities.

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