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**Beacons of Peace and Tolerance:
The Politics of Memory in Judeo-Moroccan Cultural
and Historical Institutions**

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*In partial fulfillment of the requirements of SIT Morocco: Multiculturalism and
Human Rights Study Abroad*

Spring 2022

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Abstract

Bayt Dakira, a historical, religious, cultural, and academic institution located in the heart of Essaouira's old medina, seeks to conserve Jewish-Moroccan memory and promote values of peace and tolerance as exemplified by the city's history of Jewish-Muslim coexistence. As an institution dedicated to conserving the culture of a people that have all but virtually emigrated from Morocco, Bayt Dakira's purpose is initially unclear. This study uncovers the ways in which Bayt Dakira is an example of a seemingly apolitical institution being wielded to advance national and international political agendas. As an officially apolitical place of cultural and academic exchange, Bayt Dakira is ideal for developing ties with other nations, building trust with them, and laying the groundwork for the formation of joint economic and political initiatives. As an apolitical-presenting institution advancing values of global peace, Bayt Dakira is also a non-threatening stage from which Moroccan diplomats can criticize, from a seemingly high moral ground, conflict abroad. Bayt Dakira's celebration of Morocco's diversity also constructs a national identity—one that unites all Moroccans under the Constitution and the King.

Key Words: Political Science, History, Religion

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my Academic Director, Dr. Taieb Belghazi, for his wealth of knowledge, guidance, endless patience, and good humor. I would also like to express my gratitude to my Independent Study Advisor, Professor Mohamed Daoudi, for so thoughtfully and consistently pointing me down new paths of inquiry and towards illuminating resources.

I would also like to thank Ms. Zhor Rehilhil for taking the time to speak with me about her work as a curator for the Museum of Moroccan Judaism. While I was unable to include the majority of the content from our interview in this paper due to space constraints, the experiences that she shared with me greatly enriched my understanding of Judeo-Moroccan museums and the international politics of museums.

Much love and gratitude to the entire team of Bayt Dakira for their warmth and their willingness to take time from their busy schedules to speak with me. In particular, I would like to thank Ms. Ghita Rabouli, the Director of Bayt Dakira, who I had the honor of shadowing for a week and for whom I have the utmost admiration. She made me feel included and at home at Bayt Dakira, inviting me to events and introducing me to the many members of the Bayt Dakira community. Her passion and genuine love for Bayt Dakira's values of peace and hope are contagious.

I would like to thank the Moulines for hosting me for the first week of my independent research period and for being my second family in Morocco. Finally, I am grateful for my friends and family who shared in all the joyous moments of my time in Morocco and showed me unending love and support when I most needed it.

Introduction

On Friday, March 25th, I stood under the warm lamplight of Slatt Attia, the synagogue attached to Bayt Dakira—a cultural, academic, and historical museum-like institution aiming to conserve the memory and history of Essaouira’s previously majority Jewish population (Schroeter, “The Town of Mogador (Essaouira) and Aspects of Change in Pre-Colonial Morocco” 31)—listening to a mix of Sephardic, Ashkenazi, and Moroccan shabbat service prayers and songs offered by a delegation of New York University students and rabbis. Also present at the service was a group of Moroccan graduate students, the Mayor of the city, and André Azoulay, the Jewish advisor to King Mohammed VI of Morocco and before that to his father, King Hassan II. Partway through the event, one New York University rabbi offered a prayer for American Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita, who were that week meeting to discuss Moroccan-American relations and issues ranging from climate change to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (“Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita” 2022). These diplomats would also meet with representatives from Israel, Bahrain, Egypt, and United Arab Emirates later that week to discuss strategies for supporting the Palestinian Authority and for improving the lives of Palestinians (“Joint Press Statement” 2022) living under Israeli apartheid (Amnesty International 2022).

Bayt Dakira bills itself not as a museum but as a historic, cultural, and academic institution. It hosts academic conferences, musical performances, educational events for students, and religious services like this shabbat service. Tourists, many of them Moroccan-Jewish diaspora members looking to reconnect with their cultural heritage, frequent the space. Director Ghita Rabouli describes it as a “living space,” one that “takes inspiration from the past to project the future.” The meaning of Bayt Dakira’s name, “House of Memory,” is also a key to

understanding the space's purposes: Bayt Dakira aims to be a "house" that welcomes and shelters all—regardless of identity—under a shared roof, as well as to be a keeper of "memory."

At this shabbat service, I was intrigued by the collision of politics, religion, history, memory, and culture. As a mixed-race person with a multicultural heritage, I have always been interested in spaces where cultures meet and mix. It was for this reason that I selected SIT's Multiculturalism and Human Rights program in Morocco. My fascination with the shabbat service also stemmed from my own heritage as a secular Ashkenazi person and a desire to learn more about different Jewish cultures around the world. The potential use of culture to diplomatically navigate an issue as controversial as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict also fascinated me. This event prompted a desire to learn more about Moroccan-Israeli relations and Muslim Moroccans' perceptions of Israel—a state that oppresses their Muslim Palestinian compatriots. Furthermore, I've long been interested in the complicated ethical implications of museums—how they can be used to conserve or monopolize historical narratives. Relatedly, Bayt Dakira made me curious as to why, in a country with virtually no Jewish community left as a result of mass emigration to Israel, the Moroccan government had chosen to build an institution focused on preserving the Jewish-Moroccan experience (DellaPergola 69). In studying the political implications of Bayt Dakira, I saw an opportunity to immerse myself more fully in these interests. I thus developed the following research question: To what extent have Jewish-Moroccan cultural and historical institutions, in particular Essaouira's Bayt Dakira, been politicized for the purpose of building diplomatic ties with Israel?

Bayt Dakira's first objective is to share Essaouira's history of Jewish-Muslim peaceful coexistence with the world. From the passion, warmth, and enthusiasm of Bayt Dakira's spokespersons, it is apparent that the message of tolerance that they advance is genuinely felt.

From guestbook testimonies and my own surveying of visitors—domestic and international tourists, scholars, and students alike—we can also conclude that Bayt Dakira makes an overwhelmingly positive impression on those who visit it. Visitors of Moroccan-Jewish heritage to Bayt Dakira are among the many moved by its message and are also touched to find that their memories or their grandparents' memories of growing up in Morocco and Essaouira have been preserved.

But Bayt Dakira also advances Moroccan political agendas at the national and international level. Although memory and culture are manipulated at Bayt Dakira to advance political objectives as I initially suspected, I discovered that the purpose of these manipulations are broader than just building ties with Israel and the United States. Through the incorporation of memory and culture, Bayt Dakira not only enriches the historical narratives that it presents—making them more relatable and engaging for the viewer—but also distorts them, simplifying and sanitizing the history of Jews in Moroccan society.

There are three political purposes for advancing this distorted history. First, through narratives of peaceful Muslim-Jewish coexistence, Bayt Dakira promotes Morocco as model for the world. Second, in portraying Morocco as a pluralistic and democratically liberal society, Bayt Dakira advances a narrative of Moroccan exceptionalism, distinguishing it from other Arab-Muslim nations and moving it closer towards its democratic liberal allies like Israel and the United States. Third, by advancing Moroccan pluralism and religious coexistence, Bayt Dakira, a state-funded institution, legitimizes King Mohammed VI as the rightful spiritual leader of the nation and consolidates the monarch's power. In presenting itself as a politically neutral institution, Bayt Dakira also gives André Azoulay—the King's Moroccan-Jewish advisor and

Bayt Dakira's visionary—a non-threatening stage from which he can criticize Israel's oppression of Palestinians without jeopardizing Moroccan-Israeli political and economic relations.

First, I will contextualize my research with the theoretical discourses, historical background, and political context necessary to understand Bayt Dakira's position as a conserver of memory and distorter of history, as well as its uses as a tool for international diplomacy and for forming a national identity. Then, I will lay out my methodology for this research project, including my research methods, the limitations of my study, and the study's ethical considerations. After introducing my two research sites, Bayt Dakira (my case study) and the Museum for Moroccan Judaism (my control), I will present my findings and draw conclusions.

Literature Review

In this literature review, I will contextualize my findings with pre-existing discourse on the interactions between history and memory in knowledge-producing institutions, the role of pluralism in constructing national identity, and strategies for international soft-power and cultural diplomacy. As a counter to the sanitized historical narratives advanced by Bayt Dakira, I will also present a more nuanced history of Jewish-Muslim relations in Morocco. Next, I will outline the constitutional political powers of the Moroccan monarchy, as well as the ways in which the monarch's position as Commander of the Faithful and use of concessions to Moroccan ethnic groups has enabled it to avoid challenges to its authority. Finally, I will contextualize Moroccan-Israeli political and economic relations.

Collective Memory and History

Maurice Halbwachs was the first sociologist to explore the subject of memory (Vromen 2). He advanced a theory of "collective memory," arguing that not only are memories shaped by society and thus shared by groups of individuals, their recollection is also prompted by shared reference points in time and space (Halbwachs 1). In discussing the role of space in constructing and preserving collective memory, Halbwachs writes:

In an antique shop the various eras and classes of a society come face to face in the scattered assortment of household belongings. One naturally wonders who would have owned such an armchair, tapestry, dishes, or other necessities. Simultaneously ... , one thinks about the world recognizable in all this, as if the style of furniture, the manner of decor and arrangement, were some language to be interpreted... each object appropriately

placed in the whole recalls a way of life common to many men. To analyze its various facets is like dissecting a thought compounded by the contributions of many groups. (1) Halbwachs suggests here that spaces—and the objects in them—can remind us of our own experiences, help us recall the people who have passed through them, and connect us with people in identical spaces and with identical experiences. In this way, spaces are sites for the creation and sharing of memory. Halbwachs also argues that space shapes group identity and is in turn imbued with the memories and character of the group (2). He posits that groups maintain a shared sense of identity despite being separated from one another, because they all have shared recollections of the physical home that they left behind.

In contrast to Halbwachs, who suggests that memories can be re-experienced collectively, Funkenstein argues in his book *Perceptions of Jewish History* that no two people can ever remember a given event in the same way (Klein 133). Instead, he contends that collective memory is “characterized by a system of signs, symbols, and practices” (133) like memorial dates, the names of places, monuments, museums, and texts. Funkstein’s theory thus makes way for the theorizing of memory as an institutionally constructed phenomenon. Collective memory becomes tied to artifacts and no longer bound to individual psychological processes of memory retention. It becomes something for scholars to reconstruct in the form of historical narratives.

Pierre Nora contends that memory and history are incompatible. He argues that memory is created and conserved through the daily maintenance of connections to the past via cultural traditions, oral histories, and other social practices of “so-called archaic and primitive societies” (8). By contrast, history is a “problematic and incomplete” (8) reconstruction of the past. He also describes memory as “affective and magical” (8), whereas history is an “intellectual and secular production ... [belonging] to everyone and to no one, whence its claim to universal authority”

(9). Nora's theory of memory is in opposition to Halbach's: While Halbach suggests that memory can be objectively understood and reconstructed through monuments, museums, and artifacts, Nora suggests that, as a lived and living thing, memory cannot be understood or reconstructed by scholars.

Knowledge-generating institutions are able to position themselves as conservators of memory and of history. In doing so, they can use the language of memory and subjectivity to appeal to the pathos of learners, while also positioning themselves as objective knowledge producers with the sole authority to determine whose memories and histories are worthy of conservation. Kerwin Lee Klein critiques Nora's theory of collective memory, arguing that it is inaccurate to claim that true memory has disappeared along with the "so-called archaic and primitive" (Nora 8) cultural practices that Nora believes are the vehicle for collective memory. Klein argues instead that collective memory "survives" (Klein 137) among people of color and challenges "exclusionary" (137) collective histories. He goes on to suggest that the increased intertwining of history and memory in academic spaces is a "healthy result of decolonization" (137). Yifat Guttman coins the term "memory activism" (1) to refer to Palestinian and Palestinian-ally groups who challenge state narratives on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by collecting and disseminating the testimonies of Palestinian survivors of Israeli violence. The challenging of exclusionary histories can thus occur not only through cultural practices, but also through activism.

Pluralism and Nationalism

The extent to which different ethnic groups can and should be integrated into ethnically plural societies is a popular topic of discourse among scholars and politicians. Post-colonial

theorists argue that racial, ethnic, and cultural groups are defined along lines of inequality, namely economic inequality (Winter 34). In liberal theories of pluralism, political communities are not formed based on ethnic or cultural affiliation, but rather by “neutral procedures” that guarantee individuals their rights (46). Consequently, while liberal democratic systems may appear at the surface to be “neutral” (46) and to guarantee the rights of all, these procedures do not necessarily recognize the inequalities between—and that define—ethnic groups and ultimately reinforce those inequalities.

In his “Politics of Recognition,” Charles Taylor argues against difference-blind systems, arguing instead in favor of a “politics of difference” (39). In a politics of difference, Taylor contends that, while individual rights should still be upheld by institutions, institutions should also work to ensure the “survival” (40) of difference and of different cultures. Taylor believes that cultures that have “animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings” and should be preserved and celebrated.

Elke Winter explores the role that pluralism plays in the construction of national identity, advancing a Weberian theory of social cohesion in pluralistic societies (5). She argues that “the compromise between two, unequal, groups—‘us’ and ‘others’—becomes meaningful only through the presence of (real or constructed) outsiders (‘them’)” (5). In other words, in a pluralistic society, ethnic groups of unequal means can only coexist or even share a sense of identity if they are united against some outsider group. We can then infer that a pluralistic national identity can only be constructed if it is emphasized as a contrast to other national identities.

Soft Power and Cultural Diplomacy

Joseph Nye defines soft power as the ability to shape the preferences and interests of others (95) and contends that it arises from a nation's building of relationships with other countries through the communication of "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)" (96). Nye outlines three communication strategies that nations deploy to increase the effectiveness of their soft-power diplomacy (101-102). First, nations that live by their values, following them up with action, gain credibility and improve their image internationally. Second, countries that advance simple themes and narratives are better remembered and able to command more attention. Symbolic events can be particularly useful tools in this regard. Third, countries are more successful in garnering soft power when they work consistently to build lasting relationships with key figures through conferences, seminars, exchanges, access media channels, and other means. Nye argues that soft power is a tool for competition (100): It is wielded to improve a nation's image and position in the world and to erode the image and position of others. In working to develop a nation's soft power, it is crucial to consider the nation's target audience and to appeal to the specific culture of that audience (103). I would also add that tapping into emotion and shared experience are effective strategies that nations might employ to build soft power.

Kyriaki Oudatzi builds on ideas of soft power to advance a theory of cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy in Oudatzi's view is an alternative form of diplomacy in which culture is wielded to "[bring] people together" and "[break] down prejudices... leading to respect and acceptance of diversity [and] highlighting at the same time culture as a remarkable and certainly widely accepted solution." Cultural diplomacy can involve the export not only of a nation's

cultural heritage, but also of its contemporary popular culture. Through cultural diplomacy, nations work to build a “brand” for themselves and to distinguish themselves from others. Nations also engage in cultural diplomacy to familiarize others with their values and customs to build trust. Like Nye (103), Oudatzi describes cultural diplomacy as a “two-way communication process” in which a state shares its culture with other nations and also learns about other nations’ cultures in the process.

The History of Jews in Morocco

In the early 1900s, Moroccan Jews numbered approximately 250,000 and made up the largest Jewish population in any Muslim country (Laskier 323). In Essaouira, the Jewish population outnumbered the Muslim one (Schroeter, “The Town of Mogador (Essaouira) and Aspects of Change in Pre-Colonial Morocco” 31). Jewish presence in Morocco dated back to the Phoenician and Roman Empires, but swelled in the fifteenth century with the expulsion of Sephardic Jews from the Iberian Peninsula (Wyrzten 180-181).

The position of Jews in Moroccan society has been complex since their arrival. In pre-colonial Morocco, Jews—along with Christians—held the protected status of *dhimmi*. As *dhimmi*, they were required to pay a tax called *jizya* and were restricted in certain aspects of their economic and religious life (184). For example, they were not allowed to occupy administrative and judicial positions, build synagogues higher than mosques, or ride horses (Wynchank 146).

Despite this, Jews and Muslims generally lived in harmony. Jews often lived in *mellahs* or Jewish quarters, but interacted with Muslims in the *suq* or market place (Schroeter, “The Changing Landscape of Muslim-Jewish Relations” 47). One Moroccan proverb emphasizes the extent to which Moroccan Jews were integrated into the market place and Muslim community

there: “A *suq* without Jews ... is like bread without salt” (47). In the 7th and 8th centuries, Jews sometimes served as diplomats, leveraging their ties from the Jewish diaspora to Europe on behalf of sultans (47). In the nineteenth century, they also worked as royal business agents, managing the oligarchy’s agricultural and manufacturing monopolies and building economic relations with Europe. Music also brought together Jews and Muslims (59). Jewish professional musicians outnumbered Muslim ones and as a result, they often performed local genres in coffeehouses, for Muslim patrons, and in palaces. Some musical ensembles were also composed of a mix of Muslim and Jewish musicians.

Under the French protectorate, Moroccan Jews were labeled subjects of the sultan in an attempt by the French to reinforce the sultan’s power and maintain their own power through him (Wyrzten 205). The French protectorate also initiated education policies aimed at assimilating Jews into French culture, creating rifts between Moroccan nationalists and Jewish Moroccans (196). Leading up to World War II, the Jewish population became apprehensive about growing anti-semitic sentiments from French colonials and Moroccan nationalists (201). In Meknes, one of the “fascist strongholds” (201) of the French colonial population, anti-semitic graffiti was written on buildings throughout the city. In Tetouan, a group of Moroccan nationalists translated Nazi propaganda which made its way to and circulated in the Fes medina (200). Many Moroccan nationalists called on Jews to stand in solidarity with them in their resistance against the French and their fight for independence (193). In 1956, on the eve of independence, a new organization called al-Wifaq—an alliance of Jews and Muslims—publicly condemned the invasion of Egypt by France, Britain and Israel in the Second Arab-Israeli War (Schroeter, “The Changing Landscape of Muslim-Jewish Relations” 57).

Tensions increased between nationalists and Jews as awareness grew in nationalist circles of the increasing number of Jewish colonial settlements in Palestine (201). Muslim-Jewish relations were worsened by the 1937 water riots in Meknes in which Muslim protestors, in their anger and frustration with the municipal government, turned on the *mellah* and damaged forty-three storefronts. While then-sultan and future king Mohammed V privately exhorted Moroccan-Jewish leaders to stay loyal to their country, his public pan-Arabism and emphasis on Morocco's Muslim identity contributed to uncertainties concerning the position of Moroccan Jews (213). Mohammed V is often celebrated as a protector of the Jews under the Vichy regime, preventing their deportation to European concentration camps (Wagenhofer 2012). However, the accuracy of his role as a protector of Moroccan Jews during World War II is unclear.

With the place of Jews in the nationalist movement unclear and in reaction to the Zionist movement, several instances of Muslim-Jewish violence occurred between 1944 and the establishment of Israel in 1948 (Wyrzten 201). In 1944 in Sefrou, following an altercation between a Muslim colonial soldier ("goumier") and Jewish man, four hundred goumiers attacked Jewish residential areas of the city with stones and clubs. Afterwards, two hundred Jews were arrested, twenty-five of whom were condemned to prison sentences ranging from months to years. In the same year, homes in Meknes's *mellah* were systematically vandalized. On May 8th, 1945, altercations broke out between Muslims and Jews in both Casablanca and Marrakech. Following the announcement of the United Nations' plan to establish the state of Israel, the Istiqlal nationalist movement launched a boycott campaign of Jewish businesses suspected to have Zionist sympathies (213). After the declaration of Israel's independence in May of 1948, the King made a statement warning against violence and urging his subjects to keep the peace (214). But in June of 1948, in riots in Oujda, sparked by rumors that a Jew had killed a Muslim,

led to the deaths of five Jews and the destruction of 200 million francs worth of property (215). That same evening, violence erupted in the nearby mining town of Djerada. Rioters armed with sticks and mining axes pillaged Jewish establishments. Thirty-seven Jews were killed and twenty-seven injured. *Mellah* residents fled or sheltered with Muslim friends and neighbors.

Zionist propaganda increased in Morocco with the Alliance Israelite Universelle's establishment of schools and offices in Morocco (183). Following World War II, the Residency approved the establishment of a branch of the Zionist Federation which then rapidly facilitated Jewish emigration to Israel (213). From 1948 to 1954, 36,948 left Morocco for Israel (Laskier 332). The pace of emigration increased around the time of Moroccan independence. By the 1967 Six Day War, nearly all of Morocco's Jewish population had emigrated to Israel. In 2019, Morocco's Jewish population was estimated at 2,100 (DellaPergola 69).

The State of the Moroccan Monarchy

Until the late 1990s, scholars argued that the reforms granted to protest movements by Middle Eastern and North African governments indicated a linear evolution of these governments from authoritarian to liberal democratic regimes (Cavatorta 75). But Cavatorta argues that protest movements are "at best, ineffective in challenging authoritarianism [and], at worst, a mechanism that reproduces authoritarian rule" (76). The February 20th Movement, the Moroccan version of the Arab Spring, exemplifies the inability of protest movements to bring about radical change and the ability of authoritarian regimes to mutate into semi-liberal democratic ones. Unlike in other Middle Eastern and North African ("MENA") countries, the Moroccan monarchy was quick to make concessions to protestors and consequently avoided being ousted from power (Madani III). While protesters' demands for a new constitution were

met, the Palace was heavily involved in its creation: A royal commission spearheaded the Constitution's drafting and the Royal Cabinet approved the draft prior to its referendum (Madani et al. 7). Among other powers, the new Constitution grants the king the sole authority to revise the constitution, appoint the Head of Government and other cabinet members, and chair the Council of Ministers, which has veto power over the Council of Government. It therefore fails to impose checks and balances on the monarch and his allies.

The King of Morocco, putative descendent of the Prophet Mohammed, is also called the Commander of the Faithful and is seen as the religious leader of the Morocco's Muslim majority. As a result, he is perceived as a moral guide for the nation and is called upon to moderate conflicts. For example, in the early 2000s, feminist movement leaders called on King Mohammed VI to take a stance on and to moderate the controversy surrounding the conservative Family Code (Belhabib 2022). In 2003, King Hassan II announced a new Family Code, stating: "I cannot as Commander of the Faithful permit what God has forbidden and forbid what God has permitted." Here, we see him wielding his religious legitimacy and, with that, his political power.

Moroccans are not only united under the King in his role as religious leader, they are also united in their plural identity under the 2011 Constitution ("Moroccan Constitution," preamble). The Constitution's preamble enshrines the norms of plurality and unity:

With fidelity to its irreversible choice to construct a democratic State of Law, the Kingdom of Morocco resolutely pursues the process of consolidation and of reinforcement of the institutions of a modern State, having as its bases the principles of participation, of pluralism and of good governance...

The preamble outlines the liberal democratic principles that have shaped the Articles of the Constitution. In naming each ethnic and cultural component of the nation—including Morocco’s “Hebraic and Mediterranean influences,” it also emphasizes the importance of a united pluralist society, one in which all are guaranteed equal rights through democratic systems. Finally, the Constitution grounds values of tolerance in Islamic beliefs.

The State of Moroccan-Israeli Relations

The normalization of Moroccan-Israeli relations has significant implications for Morocco’s economy and its disputed Western Saharan territory. Moroccan-Israeli relations began tentatively after the signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1993 (Mejdoup 2022). Morocco broke diplomatic relations with Israel after the 2000 Intifada, resuming them again in 2020 by joining United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Sudan in signing the so-called Abraham Accords. In exchange for the signing of the Abraham Accords, the United States affirmed Morocco’s sovereignty over the Western Sahara (Cuevas 2022). Since signing their normalization agreement, Morocco and Israel have inked four agreements in the economic, commercial, and tourism fields. In 2021, the trade volume between the two nations reached \$131 million (Mejdoup 2022). Israel’s main exports to Morocco are raw materials like rubber, plastic, and chemical products. Moroccan exports to Israel tend to be textile, agricultural, and transportation products. Since the signing of the Abraham Accords, Israel and Morocco have launched educational exchange programs, direct flights from Israel to Morocco, and joint marketing initiatives to promote tourism. With the normalization of relations and these tourism initiatives, officials expect a significant increase in the number of Israeli tourists to Morocco, from 50,000 annually to 200,000 . Strong Moroccan-Israeli relations are

important thus important to Morocco's manufacturing and tourism industries. In March 2022, Israeli Foreign Minister Lapid also voiced Israel's support of Morocco's plan to offer Western Sahara autonomy within Morocco (Rabinovitch 2022).

Methodology

Research Methods

My methodology for this research had five components. First, I worked to gain the perspectives of Bayt Dakira’s spokespersons—those involved in its creation and management. I interviewed Ghita Rabouli, the Director of Bayt Dakira, as well as Abdellah Ouzitane, University of Bordeaux Professor and founder of Bayt Dakira’s Center for Studies and Research on Hebraic Rights. To understand his perspective on and vision for Bayt Dakira, I also observed several speeches and tours given by André Azoulay, the Jewish advisor to King Mohammed VI, who spearheaded the Bayt Dakira project.

The second step of my research was to interview visitors to gain a sense of their reasons for coming to Bayt Dakira and of the institution’s impact on them.

Third, I observed organized events and tours given at Bayt Dakira to better understand the scope of its uses. I attended a tour and musical performance organized for the Royal Motorcycle Club, as well as two days of a three-day conference on “Hebraic Culture and Rights: Mutations and Normativities” organized by the Center for Studies and Research on Hebraic Rights. I also observed two guided tours given to student groups and two tours given to tourists—one composed of Jewish-Americans and the other composed of Israeli mayors and deputy mayors.

Fourth, I analyzed Bayt Dakira’s exhibits and allocations of space to see what historical narratives were being constructed and what political symbolism was being produced.

Lastly, I visited the Museum for Moroccan Judaism and interviewed its director, Zhor Rehilhil, to gain another perspective on Judeo-Moroccan cultural and historical institutions in

Morocco. In doing so, I aimed to use the Museum of Moroccan Judaism as a control for my case study of Bayt Dakira.

Limitations

My study has a number of limitations. My first limitations were time and scope. For this research project, SIT students were allotted a one-month research period. While I accomplished a lot in that time, I would have liked to gain greater context for other ways in which Morocco garners soft power and particularly the ways in which it uses its other cultural and academic institutions to do this. In addition to interviewing the Museum of Moroccan Judaism's Director, Zhor Rehilhil, and visiting the Museum's exhibits, I would have also liked to spend several days doing participant observation at the Museum. Furthermore, I would have liked to speak with representatives from Association Essaouira-Mogador (which works to promote cultural events in Essaouira) and Association Mimouna (which works to preserve Moroccan-Jewish heritage) to gain insight into the relationship of these nonprofits to Bayt Dakira and the role that these they play in Morocco's soft-power diplomacy. My research would have also benefited from a greater diversity of perspectives. A weakness of my paper is the lack of Palestinian perspectives on Morocco's normalization of relations with Israel and its wielding of soft power to strengthen these relations.

Again, I could have done more to examine the interplay of tourism and cultural diplomacy at Bayt Dakira with the benefit of more time. My research would have also benefited from a closer look at the impacts of tourism on the Moroccan national economy and Souiri regional economy. It would have also been beneficial to quantitatively evaluate the nationalities and ethnicities of tourists entering Bayt Dakira and to compare these statistics with regional and

national statistics on tourism. It would have also been beneficial to survey visitors and attempt to quantitatively evaluate their perceptions of Bayt Dakira's messages.

Another potential limitation of my study is my personal biases. I am a person of Jewish heritage, but claim no emotional, political, or cultural ties to Israel. If anything, I came into this project sympathetic to Palestinian liberation. In my enthusiasm for uncovering Bayt Dakira's political agendas and its relevance to the Palestinian cause, I may have not explored enough in depth the positive messages and impacts of Bayt Dakira. My desire to offset the historical inaccuracies advanced by Bayt Dakira may have also led me to represent the history of Jewish-Muslim Moroccan relations inaccurately and as overly negative. As a secular person, I also cannot understand the experience of respecting a public figure for their inherited religious authority. Thus, it is possible that I speak more harshly and with less nuance about King Mohammed VI and his role as a religious leader than some Muslim Moroccan scholars might.

Language barriers are another limitation of my study. I conducted my interview with Ouzitane and Rabouli in French and then conducted interviews with museum visitors in both English and French. The speeches that I analyzed from the Conference on Hebraic Culture and Rights were also all in French or translated from Hebrew to French. In translating speeches and my interview notes into English, I sometimes ran into trouble translating the nuances of a speaker's meaning. In this sense, my research is limited by potential translation flaws. My research is also limited by my inability to fluently speak Hebrew, Darija, or Fus'ha, as a good number of visitors were Hebrew and Arabic speakers. Due to my inability to fluently speak these languages, I was only able to analyze the guestbook notes that had been written in French and English. To mitigate the Arabic language barrier, I created an online questionnaire with the questions that I asked English- and French-speaking visitors to Bayt Dakira. I managed to have

two Arabic speaking participants fill out the questionnaire. I then translated those responses with Google Translate and was able to gain some insight into their perspectives. But with the questionnaire format, I was unable to ask clarifying followup questions. With the written format, visitors also kept their answers short to minimize typing time. Google Translate is also not the most reliable translator. As a result, the translated questionnaire responses were mostly brief and unclear. The questionnaire format also had limited use, because illiterate visitors—of which I met one—were unable to complete it. I did not make a questionnaire for Hebrew speakers, because I did not have someone who could proofread the Google Translations of my questions.

Ethics

I was careful to follow the ethical safeguards that I outlined in my proposal to SIT's institutional review board. I made clear to all my interviewees that their participation in my research was optional, but that they would potentially be cited in my paper if they did choose to participate. For the recordings that I did record, I asked permission to do so. Finally, I took notes on public speeches made by Bayt Dakira's spokespersons and on presentations by speakers at the Conference on Hebraic Culture and Rights. Seeing as these speeches and presentations were public, I felt that taking notes on and analyzing them was ethical.

Introduction to the Research Sites

Bayt Dakira

Bayt Dakira's building, situated in Essaouira's old medina, dates back to the 19th century. It was originally the house and private synagogue of the Attias, a family of Souiri-Jewish merchants. In 1892, the building was given to the community, at which point the house's second floor was made the site of Essaouira's rabbinic court. The synagogue's last *bat mitzvah* was held in 1980, after which the building fell into disrepair. Renovations on the building began in 2016, spearheaded by André Azoulay and funded by both the Ministry of Culture and Association Essaouira-Mogador. The building was officially inaugurated in 2020 by King Mohammed VI.

Bayt Dakira's diverse daily functions distinguish it from a traditional museum. Its first floor focuses on conserving Souiri-Jewish memory and history. On this floor is displayed objects of religious and cultural significance: videos and photographs of the Jews and Muslims who lived in Essaouira's old medina; biographies of famous Souiri Jews; text and videos about past and current Jewish advisors to Moroccan kings and sultans; and royal addresses and historical timelines describing the status of Jews in Morocco.

In addition to preserving Jewish cultural heritage, Bayt Dakira fosters cultural exchange by hosting frequent live Andalous music performances—Andalous being a musical genre associated with the Jews and Muslims who fled the Iberian peninsula at the end of the fifteenth century. On occasion, Bayt Dakira also hosts Shabbat services, Hanukkah celebrations, and other religious gatherings in the synagogue named Slat Attia.

Bayt Dakira acts as an academic institution, hosting on its second floor the Haim and Célia Zafrani Center for Research, a media and technology center whose growing collection explores the history of Jewish-Muslim relations, and the Center for Studies and Research on

Hebraic Rights, a research center seeking to understand, among other things, the structures of rabbinic courts and the role of religion in the judicial interpretations of rabbis. The Center for Studies and Research on Hebraic Rights hosts international conferences at Bayt Dakira.

The Museum of Moroccan Judaism

Casablanca's Museum of Moroccan Judaism was founded in 1997 by the Foundation for Judeo-Moroccan Heritage and installed in what had formerly been an orphanage called Home d'Enfants Murdock Bengio. The Foundation's leaders were Serge Bergugo, Boris Toledano, Jacques Toledano, and Simon Levy. The Museum is privately funded, receiving no support from the National Museum Foundation. It is directed and curated by Zhor Rehilhil, the former student of Simon Levy.

In addition to their work on the museum, the Foundation initiated the renovation and preservation of Jewish synagogues, cemeteries, and holy sites around Morocco. The Museum's first and largest room exhibits the fruits of the Foundation's labor through before-and-after photographs of the renovated sites. These photographs are accompanied by various acknowledgements by King Mohammed VI of the renovations: a framed copy of his written address at the 2013 inauguration of the renovated Synagogue Ettedgui, a photograph of his visit to Synagogue Fassyne, and a Letter of Gratitude written to him by twenty-seven rabbis from all over the world, thanking him for his support of the renovations.

The Museum of Moroccan Judaism's collection is more extensive than Bayt Dakira's. It exhibits jewelry, clothing, circumcision tools, hanukkah lamps, synagogue lamps, *tzedakah* or charity-collection boxes, chairs for marriage celebrations, serving trays, Sefer Torahs, and other objects that capture various facets of Jewish-Moroccan religion and culture. A few art pieces by

Moroccan-Jewish artists also hang in the museum. This art and these objects are often sent on exhibit to other parts of Morocco. Information plaques in the museum seek to educate viewers on a diversity of topics including Jewish religious holidays, Judeo-Arabic language hybridity, the legacies of prominent Jewish-Moroccan rabbis, and the history of the building. While there is no synagogue attached to the building, one room holds a Torah ark—the ornamental piece of furniture in synagogues that holds the Torah, as well as a Torah reading table. The Museum also exhibits other pieces of synagogue furniture in two other rooms.

Compared to Bayt Dakira, the Museum of Moroccan Judaism displays fewer images of Moroccan Jews going about their daily lives. Bayt Dakira plays on repeat a compilation of black-and-white videos that capture the daily interactions of Muslims and Jews in Essaouira's marketplace. The Museum of Moroccan Judaism does not have the same audio-visual components. While the Museum of Moroccan Judaism is more holistic in its representation of Jewish religion and culture, it does not do as much to capture the quotidian lives of Moroccan Jews.

Like Bayt Dakira, the Museum of Moroccan Judaism hosts a mix of religious, cultural, and academic events. An example of a religious and cultural event organized by the museum is the Mimouna celebration, which follows Passover in Moroccan-Jewish traditions. The Museum also organizes academic and educational events like conferences, book signings, and film screenings to spread awareness and understanding of Moroccan-Judeo culture.

Findings

As stated above in the Introduction, Bayt Dakira and to a lesser extent the Museum of Moroccan Judaism present a sanitized and simplified version of Moroccan-Jewish history. This distorted history serves at least three purposes: (1) boosting Morocco's soft power internationally by promoting Morocco as a model for how to construct a tolerant pluralistic democracy; (2) moving Morocco closer to democratic liberal allies like Israel and the United States by advancing a narrative of Moroccan exceptionalism that distinguishes it from other Arab-Muslim nations; and (3) legitimizing the monarch as the nation's rightful spiritual leader of the nation and thus consolidating King Mohammed VI's power. At the same time, Bayt Dakira gives André Azoulay—the latest in a line of Jewish royal advisors and Bayt Dakira's visionary—a non-threatening stage from which he can be critical of Israel's oppression of Palestinians without jeopardizing Moroccan-Israeli political and economic relations.

I examine the impact of each of these distorting influences below.

Soft-Power Diplomacy through the Distortion of Historical Narratives

According to Nye's theory of soft power, the spreading of a nation's political values is a facet of soft-power diplomacy. To retain credibility while serving the soft-power objective, Bayt Dakira and the Museum for Moroccan Judaism must portray themselves as non-political institutions that promote universal values. Thus, Bayt Dakira positions itself as making humanistic appeals to the public and not political ones. In Rabouli's presentations on Bayt Dakira and in her opening speech at the Conference on Hebraic Culture and Rights, she repeatedly used the language of "tolerance" and "co-existence." She also repeatedly used the imagery of Bayt Dakira planting "seeds of love." In their presentations to tour groups, Rabouli

and Azoulay called on visitors to Bayt Dakira to leave as “ambassadors of peace.” These values of tolerance, co-existence, love, and peace transcend borders and appeal to all. In advancing them, Bayt Dakira avoids advancing an overt political agenda, striving instead to appear to be advancing an agenda of humanity.

Thus, when presenting Bayt Dakira to a tour group, Rabouli stated: “Culture says that we’re all united, but politics does what it does.” In his opening speech of the Conference for Hebraic Culture and Rights, Ouzitane warned that “fracturing, violence, and the denigration of others is never far off [when we forget our common humanity]” and urged that “in this difficult time, [we must keep trying].” Using universal values, Bayt Dakira’s spokespersons can make vague political critiques without arousing suspicion that Bayt Dakira is a political institution.

Both Bayt Dakira and the Museum of Moroccan Judaism position their institutions as historical, righting the amnesia of the past and transmitting Jewish-Muslim history to the next generation. Through her curation, Rehilhil, Director of the Museum of Moroccan Judaism, aims to tell history accurately and to “repair” the “neglect and erasure” of shared Jewish-Muslim history. She attributes this “neglect” to the prevalence of pan-Arabism post-independence, the emigration of Morocco’s Jewish population, and the Moroccan government prioritizing economic and political policies over cultural ones. Azoulay likewise celebrated the fact that objects preserving Jewish history and heritage can now be found at Bayt Dakira and that “we [can now] find our own history on a website!” In his speech, Ouzitane added that we have a “duty to transmit memory” to the next generation. The Museum of Moroccan Judaism’s and Bayt Dakira’s positioning as historical institutions associates the historical narratives that they present with the credibility, objectivity, and political neutrality assumed of intellectual institutions.

Bayt Dakira's spokespersons accordingly deny that Bayt Dakira advances political agendas. When asked whether Bayt Dakira is a political institution in addition to being a historical, cultural, and academic one, Rabouli stated that she did not see Bayt Dakira as a political institution but rather as a "confirmation of a plural country." Ouzitane rejected the possibility that Bayt Dakira advances a political agenda: "If some people interpret it as political, they can. But we don't have a political agenda." In his speech at the Conference on Hebraic Culture and Rights, Azoulay distanced Bayt Dakira's message of peace and tolerance from politics, stating "I don't want to make politics here ... Not a political plan. [It's] an ethical, moral, and philosophical one. Morocco is proud to be spreading this message." Bayt Dakira's spokespersons do not perceive or do not publicly admit to perceiving Bayt Dakira as a political institution. Thus, they create and maintain a politically neutral image of Bayt Dakira.

While Bayt Dakira's aim of preserving Moroccan-Jewish memory and experience may appear to be in pursuit of objective truth, its decision to leave out particular elements of Moroccan-Jewish history calls into question its objectivity and political neutrality as an institution. The historical narratives advanced by Bayt Dakira center on Essaouira and the experiences of Souiri Jews. In focusing on regional history, Bayt Dakira manages to avoid discussions of the complicated citizenship status of Jews in Morocco across time—of their previous second-class *dhimmi* legal status or of the *jizya* tax that they paid—and presents a more sanitized history of the Jewish-Moroccan experience (Wytzen 184). Centering its historical narratives around Essaouira also enables Bayt Dakira to avoid discussing international politics—namely the creation of Israel in 1948. Bayt Dakira's atrium, the central and largest space in the building, displays biographies of prominent Souiri Jews of the diaspora like Lord Leslie Hore Belisha, David Yulee Levy, and Ronit Elkabetz. Highlighting the accomplishments

of Souiri Jews is beneficial for improving Jewish representation and for combatting Morocco's post-independence historical and cultural amnesia surrounding Jewish life. But these biographies are not given sufficient national or international context. While the Souiri-diaspora Jews highlighted in the exhibit are celebrated for their accomplishments abroad, Bayt Dakira fails to explain their departure from Morocco, thereby circumventing discussions of the complex and changing citizenship status of Moroccan-Jews across time, anti-Jewish violence, and the controversial establishment of Israel. Even in its regional Jewish-Moroccan history, Bayt Dakira leaves out discussion of Essaouira's *mellah*, presenting the viewer with a politically non-controversial and entirely positive historical account of Moroccan Jewish life.

For its part, the Museum of Moroccan Judaism aims to do "historical justice" by telling the whole truth of Jewish-Moroccan history, religion, and culture. While no historical institution can ever fully capture history or tell it in an unbiased manner, the Museum of Moroccan Judaism conveys a more holistic and politically neutral Moroccan-Jewish history to visitors than Bayt Dakira. In her guided tours, Rehilhil starts by explaining the history of Jews in Morocco "since the beginning," discussing their varied positions in Moroccan society across different political regimes and regions. While the exhibits at the Museum of Moroccan Judaism don't discuss, much less explain, the emigration of Jews from Morocco, that subject is discussed in guided tours. The Museum plans to include a section on Jewish emigration in its soon-to-be renovated space and revamped exhibit. Following her outline of Moroccan-Jewish history, Rehilhil introduces Moroccan-Jewish religious and cultural traditions to viewers. The Museum of Moroccan Judaism thus seems to convey to viewers the diversity of Moroccan-Jewish experiences across time and space, acknowledging the political contexts that shaped these experiences.

Part of the soft power cultivated by Bayt Dakira and the Museum is deployed to gently criticize, and presumably influence, Israeli treatment of both Palestinians and of Mizrahi Jews. Thus, in the presence of an Israeli delegation to the Conference, generic messages of peace took on a different and a more pointed meaning. Dr. Haliwa argued in his presentation that “you can’t make justice for yourself. You need reciprocity to establish peace.” In the context of a rare meeting of Jewish Israelis and Muslim Moroccans, this idea of reciprocal justice recalls the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the mind of the viewer and is easily understood as a reproach of the injustices perpetrated there. Similarly, Dr. Haliwa criticized Israeli law as not having sufficiently integrated rabbinic rights and values. He suggested a need to transform Israel’s justice system and policy approaches to conflict resolution, stating “If we create a situation of peace, we don’t need courts.” Finally, he drew a distinction between European and Hebraic definitions of peace, subtly critiquing the values guiding European politics: “Europe talks about the goal being no war. In Hebraic law, the goal is peace.”

In the same vein, Moroccan-Israeli poet Erez Bitton criticized the discrimination against Mizrahi Jews living in Israel. He noted that, while Arabic is considered the “language of the enemy” in Israel, poetry allows Moroccan Jews to affirm their “legitimacy” in speaking Arabic. Bitton also praised Moroccan-Jewish values of moderation, tolerance, family, and accepting others. The Conference on Hebraic Culture and Rights thus gave Bitton a platform to make a political statement through culture—to affirm his Moroccan identity, criticize anti-Mizrahi discrimination in Israel, and promote Moroccan values.

Royal advisor Azoulay is explicit in his criticism of Israel and about Bayt Dakira’s political objectives. In a guided tour provided to a group of Jewish-American tourists, he shared his belief that “Moroccan Judaism can help the two people [Israelis and Palestians] to live in

serenity and safety... We are helping Israel to bridge the gap by sharing our legacy.” He referenced the Israeli-Palestinian conflict explicitly and placed the burden of resolving it on Israel’s shoulders. At the Conference, he recalled the Israeli-Palestinian Casablanca peace talks of 1990s, in which he participated. He passionately expressed regret at the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and at the peace talks’ failure. He then went on to urge Conference attendees to advocate for the “dignity,” “liberty,” and “citizenship” of “those before us,” because “if the person before you doesn’t have, you don’t have.” By using the phrase “the person before you,” Azoulay was not being entirely explicit about whose rights need protecting: He leaned on generalizations to make his message easier to swallow. However, given the context of a rare gathering of Israeli Jews and Moroccan Muslims, his meaning was clear: “Israeli delegates, look at and see the humanity of the Moroccan Muslims before you. Return to Israel and see your shared humanity with the Palestinians there. Then, fight for them as you would want them to fight for you.”

Azoulay boldly used the language of militancy to stress how urgently peace between Jews and Muslims must be brought about and to make clear his loyalties. In his opening speech of the Conference, Azoulay called himself “militant [in support of] this Morocco in which Judaism was stigmatized and mistreated,” implying that, despite the discrimination he had faced as a Moroccan Jew, his loyalties lie with Morocco and its people. The word “militant” is also particularly charged in this context, as Muslims are often portrayed as militant, extremist, and violent (Farid 213, Ramon 13). In calling himself a “militant” Moroccan before an audience of Israeli delegates, Azoulay seemed to place himself in solidarity with Muslim Palestinians who are labeled as militant extremists but who in reality are fighting for justice. Azoulay’s speech also celebrated in the fact that Bayt Dakira’s Director is a Muslim woman, and followed this with

a critique of the misogyny and anti-Muslim sentiment present in Orthodox Judaism, stating, “Sorry if you’re orthodox, but we need to say things with radicalism in the other direction so we find reason.” Azoulay thus turned the charge of “radicalism” back against the Jewish communities that would write Palestinians off as radical extremists, calling these communities out for their hypocrisy and criticizing their dehumanization of women and Muslims.

Liberal Democratic Values and Moroccan Exceptionalism

In promoting Moroccan pluralism and liberal democratic values, Bayt Dakira also reinforces existing notions that, in the Arab-Muslim world, Morocco is an exception for its democratic liberal values. The label “Moroccan exceptionalism” is frequently used by Moroccan government officials and many political analysts and commentators (Hashas 2). To complicate the notions of this exceptionalism, Mohammed Hashas evaluates the historical successes and failures of Moroccan constitutions to create liberal democratic systems. He concludes that Moroccan exceptionalism exists in the form of King Mohammed VI’s “democratic spirit” and willingness to pass reforms (10). But Morocco is not the “exception” that it is frequently made out to be, as the 2011 Constitution fails to construct a true parliamentary monarchy where the King’s powers are limited by the separation of powers. Paul Silverstein echoes Hashas’s disillusionment with the 2011 Constitution, suggesting that it benefits Morocco’s image abroad more than its citizens at home:

While the new constitution certainly adopts the rhetoric of rights of the February 20th movement and promises many of the political reforms and job creation mechanisms demanded by the protesters, its ultimate audience may actually be an international

community prone to question the future of officially Islamic states in a putatively secular world. (138)

Both Silverstein and Hashas argue that Moroccan exceptionalism exists in the country's evolution towards a pluralist and liberal democracy. Silverstein argues that the Amazigh's Hirak protest movement in Morocco—in contrast to war in Libya, the refugee crisis, governmental instability and authoritarian regimes in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen, and the threat of terrorist groups like al-Qaeda—is a conflict that will have a positive impact by increasing Moroccan pluralism (130). He argues that solidarity between different ethnic protest movements in Morocco is also a sign of positive, pluralist change in the Middle East. However, from Cavatorta's perspective, protest movements rarely bring about radical change and usually only lead to reforms (76). By this logic, Morocco's protest movements can be interpreted as signs that ethnic communities and other groups of citizens are treated unequally under Morocco's system of government. While on the international stage Moroccan reforms are a symbol of its "exceptionalism," Morocco does not in fact uphold the normative values of liberal democracies. It must thus use soft-power strategies to create an image for itself of a liberal democracy.

To combat global Islamophobia, Morocco uses soft-power institutions like Bayt Dakira to distinguish it from other Arab-Muslim nations and cultures, and to help it build diplomatic ties with the United States and Israel. Grosfoguel outlines four types of Islamophobia: racism in a world-historical perspective (racism predicated on the "Christian-centric religious hierarchy of the world-system" beginning at the end of the 15th century), cultural racism (the idea that Islamic cultures are backwards, barbaric, and violent), Orientalism (the notion that patriarchal fundamentalism exists only in Islamic nations and not also in Western cultures), and epistemic racism (the portrayal of Islamic cultures as frozen in time) (11-18). Part of Morocco's urgency in

promoting itself as a liberal democratic nation stems from its need to counter racist ideas promulgated by the West about Islam and Muslim-majority countries.

Morocco must maintain an image as a democratically liberal nation through soft-power strategies to pursue beneficial economic and political agreements with Israel and the United State—nations that also advance democratic liberal values. As previously outlined in the literature review, Morocco has become increasingly politically and economically intertwined with the United States and Israel. It seeks to garner the United States' (Cuevas 2022) and Israel's support in its struggle to control the Western Sahara (Rabinovitch 2022). It also seeks to deepen its economic ties with Israel, particularly in the realm of tourism (Mejdoup 2022). To accomplish its political and economic interests, Morocco uses soft-power institutions like Bayt Dakira to portray the nation as a democratically liberal one and bring it closer to the United States and Israel.

Consolidating the Monarch's Power as Commander of the Faithful

In January 2020, King Mohammed VI traveled to Essaouira for the inauguration of Bayt Dakira. His visit to Bayt Dakira and the television coverage of this event worked to cement his power as Commander of the Faithful. Chief Rabbi David Pinto and Chief Rabbi Joseph Israel were present at the event, as was royal advisor André Azoulay. At the event, Mohammed VI explored Bayt Dakira's exhibits, admired the Torahs in Slat Attia, prayed in the synagogue, and offered two Sefer Torahs to Bayt Dakira as a gift. In his speech, Azoulay thanked His Majesty for his presence at Bayt Dakira. He praised Mohammed VI for his leadership in the world and his conservation of Moroccan values of peace: "The world needs this Moroccan compass—a world in need of repair. A world that turns its back on all the values that are those of our country under

the leadership of your Majesty” (Bayt Dakira 2020). Azoulay portrayed Mohammed VI as a wise and moral leader and suggested that other nations should learn from his example.

This high praise benefits Mohammed VI’s image. In an Middle East Online article, Chief Rabbi Pinto was equally complimentary of the King, stating that “if we are here today, it’s because of King Mohammed VI. He is the best king in the world” (Gerraoui 2020). A statement like this from a rabbi—a representative of the Moroccan-Jewish community—solidifies Mohammed VI’s legitimacy as king and as Commander of the Faithful—of Jews and Moroccans alike. Chief Rabbi Pinto also offered Mohammed VI a blessing which again symbolically marked the Jewish community’s approval of and enthusiasm for the monarchy (Bayt Dakira 2020). In television coverage of the inauguration, Jewish and Muslim attendees are also shown enthusiastically bending to kiss the King’s hand upon his entry into Bayt Dakira and following the prayers and speeches. This visual also shows Mohammed VI to be not only a friend to the Moroccan-Jewish community but also a benevolent ruler of all Moroccans, regardless of their religion, ethnicity, culture, or creed.

Bayt Dakira’s exhibits create a historical narrative of a benevolent Moroccan royalty that has protected its Jewish subjects over time. As such, they work to reinforce the monarchy’s legitimacy. The Museum of Moroccan Judaism displays photographs of Mohammed VI visiting Synagogue Fassyne after its renovation by the Foundation for Judeo-Moroccan Heritage, a written address from Mohammed VI from the inauguration of Synagogue Etedgui, and a Letter of Gratitude from the international Jewish rabbinical community thanking the king for supporting the renovations of Jewish heritage sites.

Bayt Dakira further bolsters the narrative of a benevolent Moroccan monarchy by highlighting the harmonious relationships of a series of royals with the Moroccan-Jewish

community. An entire room of Bayt Dakira presents information about the Jewish royal advisors to past kings and sultans, starting from Samuel Sumbal, advisor to Sultan Mohammed Ben Abdallah in the 1700s, to André Azoulay, present-day advisor to Mohammed VI. In the atrium are also three large information plaques with quotes from the two Moroccan kings preceding Mohammed VI—Mohammed V and Hassan II—demonstrating their embrace of Moroccan Jews. In a 1956 address to the Israelite committee of Casablanca, Mohammed V is cited as saying, “We must always act in the national framework and not the confessional [religious] one. All Moroccans, Muslims, and Israelites are subjects of the same country.” Next to an image of King Hassan II and then-Crown Prince Mohammed VI welcoming a Grand Rabbi are displayed excerpts from Hassan II’s book *The Genius of Moderation: Reflections on the Truths of Islam*. These excerpts read in part: “If Arabs on one side and Jews on the other put together their ingenuity and their intellectual faculties in common ... we are convinced that the descendants of Abraham ... will find, each on their side, what could guarantee dignity, liberty and sovereignty.” In highlighting these statements by Mohammed V and Hassan II, as well as the history of royal Jewish advisors, Bayt Dakira creates a narrative of a lineage of royal benevolence which is now embodied by His Majesty Mohammed VI.

Through displays of photographs and visual symbolism, Bayt Dakira keeps Mohammed VI omnipresent in the visitor’s mind, ensuring that any positive feelings that the visitor might feel towards Bayt Dakira are also felt towards the monarchy. At special events like conferences and musical performances, a 4x3-foot portrait of Mohammed VI as well as a Moroccan flag are set up in the atrium next to speakers and performers. This portrait emphasizes the King’s centrality to every element of Bayt Dakira. As visitors enter Bayt Dakira, the first things that they see are a Torah and Quran displayed side by side, and behind and above these texts, a video

recording of King Mohammed VI's visit to Bayt Dakira. This striking visual underscores Mohammed VI's position as Commander of the Faithful, keeping him at the center of Bayt Dakira and the viewer's mind.

Conclusion

Through the distortion of history and memory, Bayt Dakira spreads Moroccan political values abroad, portraying the nation as a pluralist, liberal democracy to the world. In doing so, it brings Morocco closer to the United States and Israel, its political and economic allies.

Advancing Morocco's image as a united pluralist nation also serves to consolidate Morocco's diversity of religious and ethnic communities under King Mohammed VI. This study also demonstrates the ways in which cultural and academic diplomacy can provide a neutral platform from which nations can subtly critique Israel.

Bayt Dakira is just one example of an outwardly apolitical Moroccan institution being wielded to build the nation's soft power and cement the monarch's power. More research into the diplomatic functions of these other institutions and comparisons between these institutions is necessary. The field would also benefit from further research into the differences between state-funded and private organizations that advance Morocco's diplomatic goals abroad and build a national identity at home. This research could also be built upon through studies examining the extent to which Moroccan-Jewish culture maintains its authenticity when wielded for the purposes of cultural diplomacy. Lastly, Bayt Dakira deserves significantly more attention from researchers than this single, undergraduate independent study. To fully understand the ways in which Bayt Dakira builds Morocco's soft power, each of its functions—as a museum, religious space, research center, educational space, and tourist attraction—deserves individual attention.

The impact of Bayt Dakira on its visitors also deserves its own study. Some visitors come into Bayt Dakira more interested in learning about Jewish culture than about Jewish-Muslim co-existence. Others already hold too many biases against Muslims to be convinced by Bayt Dakira's messages of peace and tolerance. But for what seems like the vast majority of the site's

visitors, Bayt Dakira's emphasis on subjective memory over historical objectivity helps them to connect emotionally with Essaouira's history of Jewish-Muslim co-existence and to internalize the values of peace and tolerance promoted by Bayt Dakira. Bayt Dakira's emphasis on memory also allows visitors of Moroccan-Jewish heritage to project their family's memories onto the space and to see themselves represented. We need to better understand the benefits and disadvantages of advancing distorted historical narratives and incorporating memory into history. Doing so will teach us how to spread messages of tolerance and peace without sacrificing our direct critiques and confrontations of injustice.

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