The Exodus of the Jews of Morocco in the Twentieth Century

Marc Elezam
Senior Honors Seminar
June, 1999

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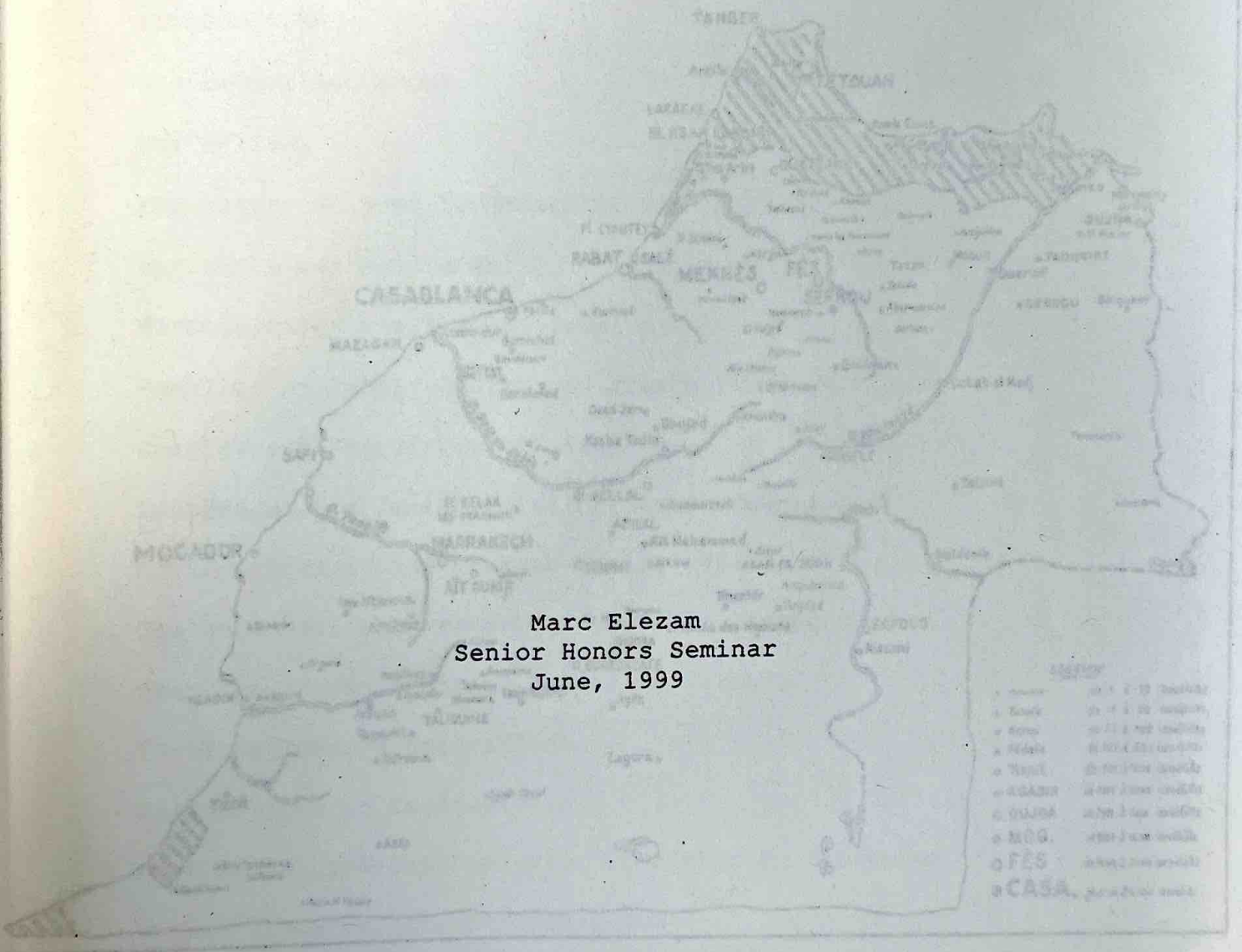

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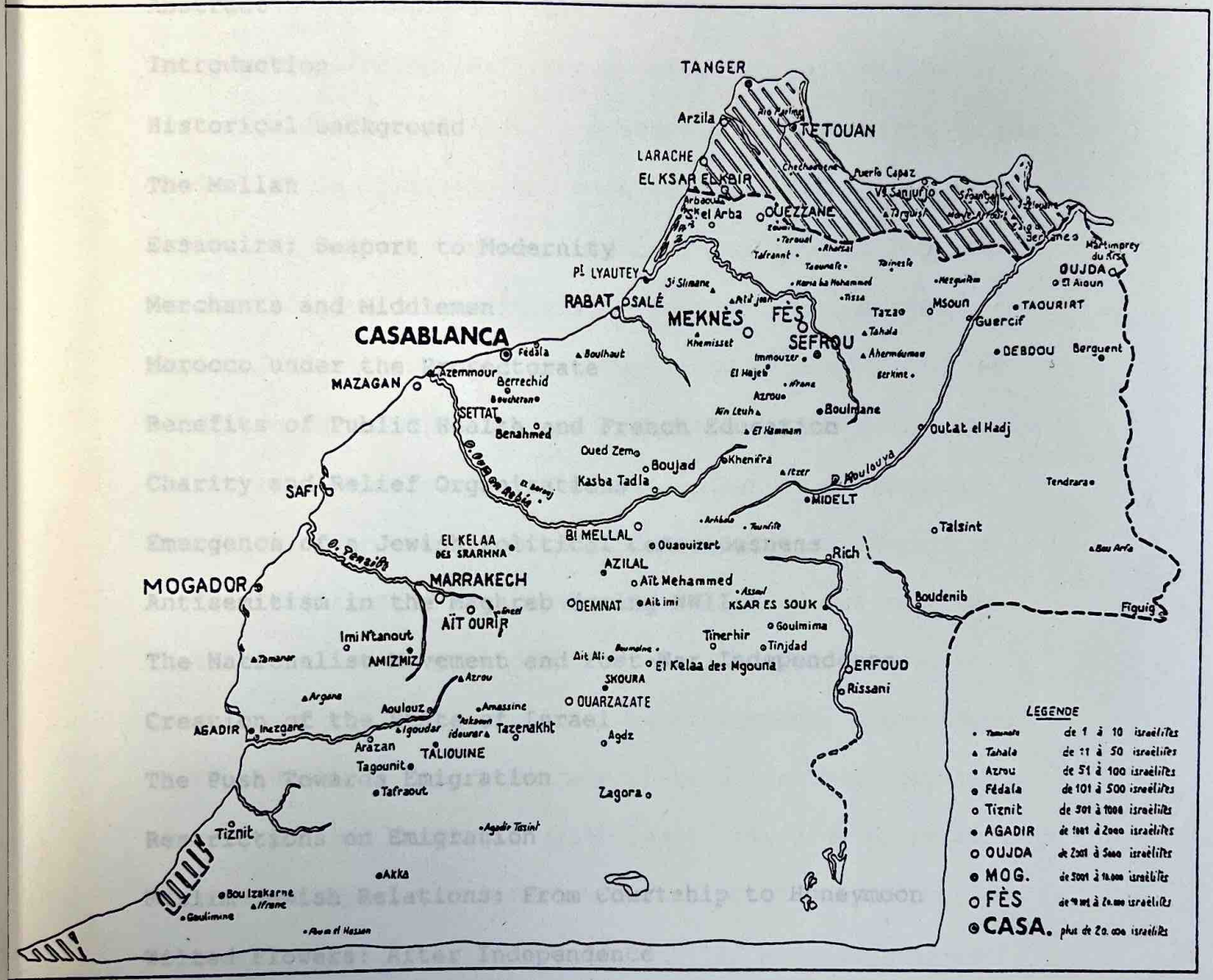
Jewish communities in Morocco in 1950
From Andre Chouraqui's Histoire des Juifs en Afrique du Nord)



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Preface

While contemplating research on the Jews of Morocco, I was pleased to find that others before me, not all of Moroccan origin, had been interested enough to write on the subject. I was perusing the book stacks at UCSB's Davidson library when I noticed two identical copies of a book on Morocco. Almost with conviction, I picked one. Ruffling the pages, I thought my eyes were deceiving me when I noticed something vaguely reminiscent of a green paper I had known, before returning to the University to resume my studies. Imagine my surprise at the sight of a crisp and smooth one hundred dollar bill neatly tucked into the pages of a book that had not been checked out of the library for four years. Inspired by this ominous encouragement, I proceeded to read on. I was quickly drawn in by a wealth of cultural, historical, and folkloric resources on the Jews of Morocco. Turning each page has been like the discovery of a veritable treasure trove. There is still much more to be learned and written about the Jews of Morocco. What follows are some conclusions based on my preliminary findings which I hope to further explore in the near future.

My interest in pursuing research on the Jews of Morocco is rooted in my membership in that community. As a Moroccan Jew, I had a personal and intellectual interest in understanding why the Jews left Morocco en masse in the 1950s and 60s. I was a Jewish Moroccan child whose parents felt compelled to emigrate by the same forces that uprooted a quarter of a million Jews from Morocco after the 1950s and 60s. Having grown up mostly outside of Morocco, I was never entirely satisfied with the reasons given to explain the mass emigration of Morocco's Jews. I therefore seized the opportunity, when it presented itself, to seek some answers of my own. The scope of this research project is intended to serve as a preliminary step to further exploration.

In conducting my research, I was often surprised by the commonalities and the prevalence of copacetic relationships that often existed between Jews and Muslims in Morocco and elsewhere in the Muslim world, until well into this century. One must be cautious not to exaggerate areas of commonalities, nor to minimize the abyss that generally divides Jews and Muslims. It is too easy however, although misleading, to succumb to the polarized and simplistic portrayals of Muslims and Muslim-Jewish relations, or lack thereof, that have emerged in the

popular media in the years since the Iranian revolution, the Intifada, the Gulf war and most recently the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Although in Morocco Jews and Arabs ultimately went their separate ways, there are valuable lessons to be gleaned from the options they had and the choices they made that led to their separation. In the case of Morocco, a number of factors, objective and subjective, contributed to the Jews' departure.

Within the United States, primary sources on Morocco are scant. The best and largest archival resources on Jewish life in Morocco are located in France, Israel and Morocco. Being unable to visit these for the project at hand, I have had to rely, perhaps unduly, upon the primary sources of others, such as Michael Laskier and André Chouraqui.

The archives of the AJJDC provided limited but useful general information on some of the economic and political support it offered the Jewish community. I am grateful to Amy Shuter, the assistant archivist at the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee in New York, for facilitating my archival research.

I would like to thank the University of California at Santa Barbara for a SPUR research grant making possible my archival research in New York and Washington D.C.

The National Archives in Washington D.C. contained State Department reports, newspaper and other periodical clippings on the precarious situation of the Jews of Morocco as events unfolded. Overall, they typically reveal a reluctance on the part of the American consulate and other U.S. officials in Morocco to intervene on behalf of the Jews or to bring pressure on the Moroccan government for humanitarian reasons.

I would like to thank Professors Harold Marcuse, Jon Glickstein, Nancy Gallagher and Albert Lindemann and others too numerous to mention in the History department at UC Santa Barbara. Their teaching was exemplary, and their guidance indispensable to the realization of this project. Ultimately, only I am accountable for any of its deficiencies.

I am grateful for the time generously provided by Sylvia Curtis and Sylvelin Edgerton, undoubtedly UC Santa Barbara's most dedicated librarians. I am especially indebted to Sylvia Curtis for her boundless patience, that can only be characterized as saintly. Her genuine warmth

and contagious optimism were a pleasant contribution to my intellectual adventure.

Abstract

For 2500 years, there has been a continual Jewish presence in Morocco since the arrival of the Phoenicians in the sixth century B.C.E. For 1200 years under Islamic rule, since the sixth century C.E., the Jews have lived under the protection of the Quranic law of the *dhimmi* as "people of the book." More recently they have benefited from a special relationship with the Sultans of the Sherifian dynasty since the 1600's.

From 1948 to the late 1960s, the majority of the 250,000 Jews of Morocco abandoned the country en masse. Unlike previously, there was no war, famine or disease, yet the community nearly disappeared overnight. I propose to examine the roots and causes of the exodus that brought an end to the unique 1200-year relationship between Moroccan Jews and Muslims and to the 2500 year-old presence of North African Jewry.

Introduction

At its zenith, the Jewish population in North Africa reached half a million. At the end of World War II, a little over 200,000 Jews were living in Morocco. This figure represented approximately 2.4% of a total population of 8.6 million. At the time, 325,000 Europeans were living in Morocco, of which 266,000 were French. The remaining 8 million people were Muslims (see table 1). The first scientific population census was conducted by the French in 1947. Consequently, researchers such as Andre Chouraqui consider population figures prior to 1947 to be tentative. What is certain, however, is that within a generation after World War II, the Jewish community of Morocco had virtually disappeared. By 1978 fewer than 20,000 Jews remained. Today, there are fewer than 3,000 Jews living in Morocco.

My aim has been to ascertain the roots of discontent and to isolate the internal and external causes leading to the dissolution of Moroccan Jewry in the decades following World War II. In the pages that follow, I will attempt to delineate some of the more salient features of Maghribi Jewry's history. It is my contention that a number of factors, sometimes but not always related, combined to

ultimately make the dissolution of Moroccan Jewry an inevitable outcome.

From the beginning of their relationship with the Muslim majority, since the seventh century, the Jews of Morocco found themselves in a difficult position which they sought to mitigate or entirely overcome. The 1,300 year-old status of *dhimmi* stigmatized the Jews as social inferiors who did not equally share in the political rights enjoyed by their Muslim compatriots. This reality created a mindset that persisted even after the abolition of the *dhimmi* status in the twentieth century. It was a contributing factor to Jewish emigration.

The establishment of the Protectorate by France in 1912 brought western culture in full force to the shores of Morocco. The event radically altered the fabric of Moroccan society and had long-term repercussions, creating tension between Jews, Muslims and European Christians.

World War II and French rule under the Vichy government accentuated Moroccan Jews' precarious position as scapegoats and victims of antisemitic legislation and occasional violence.

The creation of the State of Israel intensified tensions throughout the Muslim world including Morocco. It contributed to the desire of many Jews to leave Morocco by

providing a new destination for emigration. Until the emergence of the State of Israel, emigration was neither a viable nor desirable option for most.

The success of Morocco's struggle for independence in 1956 reshuffled the deck for Muslim-Jewish relations. It added a renewed urgency to the push towards emigration.

Restricted emigration as a result of Pan-Arabism and the anti-Zionism that emerged from it, further intensified the desire to emigrate.

What role did the influences of colonialism play in Morocco during and after the French Protectorate between 1912 and 1956? To what extent was Arab nationalism responsible for the ambivalence and malaise within the Jewish community? Did the Jewish community unwittingly play a role in its own dissolution? The creation of the State of Israel is only a partial answer which complicated Jewish-Muslim relations in Morocco.

A number of possible explanations have been offered for the dissolution of the Jewish communities of North Africa, known as the Maghrib (usually referring to Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, though the term is occasionally used to include Libya). Most remain inconclusive and conjectural. Until recently, much information and academic research was limited to the personal recollections of

members of this uprooted community. Some North African Jewish academics, particularly those working in France, made valiant but limited attempts to comprehensively synthesize either their experiences in Morocco or those of their coreligionists and compatriots. Their work has been hampered in part by their inability to access restricted but indispensable French archives. This is due to the French love of red tape and the emphatic "Non!". Whereas the British and Americans unclassify most government files after 30 years, the French sometimes require 50 years. Because the Maghrib was under French control, many but not all important archives remain under their tight control. The study of North African Jewry is a field that is still in its infancy.

Historical background

There is much speculation surrounding the origins of the Maghrib's earliest inhabitants. The recorded history of North Africa begins with the founding of Carthage in 813 B.C.E. "For 667 years , [un]till its fall in 146 B.C.E., Carthage came under the influence of Jews and Phoenician

traders who founded the city."[1] They spoke Punic, a Semitic language closely resembling Hebrew. Myths and legends envelop around the origins of the indigenous North African Berbers, a Mediterranean people, possibly of Asiatic descent, who also spoke Punic. "Scholars who tried to determine the racial affiliation of the Berbers by anthropological criteria did not come to a definite conclusion".[2]

In his *History of the Jews of North Africa*, André Chouraqui tells us that "nothing remains today of Punic writings on philosophy, history, literature or poetry. [Such information] might have allowed certain conjectures on the development of the Jewish communities."[3]

After the destruction of Jerusalem's Temple by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E., and again by the Romans in 70 C.E., the Jewish presence and religious influence in North Africa grew substantially. The Jews have been continuously in Morocco and North Africa longer than any other group except the Berbers. After living under ideal conditions of syncretism with the Phoenicians, the Jews witnessed a procession of conquerors, Romans, Goths and Muslims who,

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[1] Andre Chouraqui, *Between East and West: A History of the Jews in North Africa* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), 6.

[2] H.Z. Hischberg *A History of the Jews in North Africa Vol. I* (E. J. Brill, Leiden, Netherlands, 1974), 1.

for centuries, dominated North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, the Mediterranean, and Europe. Throughout the ages, they survived harassment, discrimination and often violent persecution. At specific times they thrived, as in some Muslim lands, serving as advisors, doctors, interpreters, financiers and diplomats at the courts of sultans and kings.

The fall of Carthage to Rome in 146 B.C.E. initially resulted in persecution of Jews in North Africa and throughout the Empire. After the Pax Romana, however, and the repeated but failed attempts to throw off the yoke of Roman domination, the Jews intermittently regained a measure of religious and cultural autonomy. This period witnessed the further development and spread of their culture and religion far beyond Carthage and throughout North Africa, reaching the northernmost points of parts of Black Africa.

Prior to Roman ascendance in 146 B.C.E., Jews enjoyed a similar autonomy in Palestine, where the establishment of a community Patriarch or *Nasi* (prince) communicated freely and easily with Diaspora communities. This period witnessed tremendous growth and the spread of Judaism's influence throughout North Africa.

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[3] Ibid., 6.

After the Romans, Vandals and Byzantines, Bedouin Arabs from Medina headed west, in 642 C.E., to conquer North Africa and convert its inhabitants to Islam. The slow process took over two and a half centuries to complete. Some Berber tribes, such as the Jerawa and Nefusa, are said to have professed Judaism in the seventh century.[4] As leader of the Jerawa, the priestess Kahena earned her legendary reputation as a fierce warrior by repelling the Islamic forces intent on her Berber tribes' conversion. Ultimately however, Islam succeeded in conquering all of North Africa.

The history of the Jews in North Africa, as elsewhere, oscillated between persecution and tolerance. This was also the case under Islam. Since 642 C.E. Jews lived as *dhimmi* (protected persons). This decree, based in the Quran, dictated their inferior status and the degree of tolerance and servitude which they would experience. As monotheists, they were tolerated as a subservient class and seen as misguided souls. That the Hebrew Bible provided the basic tenets and core of their conquerors' monotheism was not particularly appreciated by the Muslims. The Jews were expected to be grateful for having been allowed to retain their heads. Some yielded to the forced conversion imposed by those more adept at sword wielding than they were at a

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[4] Chouraqui, 6.

close reading of the Quran. Most lived up to their reputation as a "stiff-necked" people.

During the period known as the Golden Age of Sephardic culture, some of the brightest creative minds of Jewish philosophy and rabbinical exegesis lived and thrived in medieval Spain. The Spanish Inquisition of 1492 brought this age to an end. When they were chased out of Spain and Portugal by the late 15th century, Fez was a logical destination for many of the Jews. The Northern Moroccan city had long been an important religious center for both Jews and Muslims. For Jews, Fez was a center of rabbinic learning, notable Jewish scribes, poets and philosophers. In Fez, during the eleventh century, the reknown rabbi and scholar Isaac Al-Fasi compiled an authoritative code of Jewish law. When the Almohads launched their conquest of Spain in 1146, the Jewish theologian Maimonides fled to Fez, the site of an important ancient Jewish community. The Spanish born author of the *Guide to the Perplexed* was one of many to make a lasting contribution to this great center of medieval Jewish culture. Al-Fasi and Maimonides are only a few of the illustrious figures to seek refuge in Fez.

After the Inquisition, a great number of Jews from Spain and Portugal came to Morocco and Fez where they found safe haven. They and their descendants are known as the

Sephardim (Spanish) Jews. Shortly before their arrival, in 1465, an outburst of violence was unleashed by Islamic fanatics on the Jews of central Morocco. This was not to be the last pogrom unleashed against the Jews of Morocco. To obtain their demands that Jews convert en masse, they murdered those who resisted. This mass conversion may explain the preponderance of typically Jewish names among parts of the Muslim population today, notably in Fez. The Sephardim filled the void left in the communities in the wake of these acts of persecution. Their arrival had long-term repercussions for the social, cultural, economic and religious aspects of Jewish life. They brought with them the high level of literacy and European culture that had facilitated their rise to the top ranks of European society, before their expulsion. They quickly became the dominant element in most of the Jewish-Moroccan communities. The native Jews remained dominant in the southern part of the country, particularly in Marrakesh, though the Sephardim were also influential there.[5]

The Spanish Jews brought with them distinctly different Jewish customs and traditions. The newcomers are referred to, then as now, as the *megorashim* ("expellees") and were distinguished from the native Jews of Morocco

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[5] Shlomo Deshen, *The Mellah Society*, (Chicago and London, The University

known as *toshavim* ("the residents"). While the latter had retained many Palestinian traditions, they had been influenced by the Muslim culture surrounding them in different ways than had the Spanish Jews. The *toshavim* engaged in the worship of holy men and folkloric beliefs in magic which characterized the faith of their Muslim compatriots. The *megorashim* brought a Sephardic religious and social heritage whose impact was great and would prove durable.

> According to that heritage, primacy was attributed to aristocratic lineages that combined learning, dignity tradition--all elements far removed from maraboutic-type [holy man] miracle working, spontaneity, and disorder.[6]

While there were inital conflicts and resistance between the two cultures, these were soon mitigated by reasons of convenience and external force. Both groups understood, from the outset, that what they had in common was greater than their differences. The two groups soon grew to be complementary and mutually supportive.

The seeds of Sephardic learning and traditions, planted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, bore fruit by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Not until then do we witness the output of a vast and prodigious body of literary and *halkakhic* (religious law) texts and responsa (rabbinic commentaries) accompanied by the ascendancy of

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of Chicago Press), 9.

rule by the sages. The latter's authority was even respected, to a certain extent, by the Muslim community. Jewish and Muslim respect for each other's religious tradition and spiritual leaders was reciprocal. The following anecdote illustrates the quality of the relationship between a nineteenth century Imam and a Rabbi Refael Moshe Elbaz (1823-1897).

> [During times of famine] the great one of the Muslims used to ask him to pray much... for they regarded him as an angel. And sometimes, when the Imam used to ascend the tower of their house of prayer at dawn to welcome the day with songs of prayer, the rabbi also used to respond to him... from the window of his home with hymns... in Arabic. The Imam [then] used to be silent to hear him.[7]

Until the colonial era, much of the legal and juridical legislation affecting the Jews was left within the hands of the Jewish sages. The liturgy and melodic Sephardic chants of the religious services of this period have been preserved until the 20th century. Their beauty serves as testimony to the rich religio-cultural contributions of the *megorashim*.

Many descendants of the *megorashim* succeeded in retaining the Spanish language and culture of their ancestors. Some spoke Spanish while others spoke a form of Judeo-Spanish or Ladino. This was a mixture of Biblical

Hebrew and thirteenth century Spanish. Ladino was later spoken throughout the Mediterranean world and brought to the new world by descendants of the Sephardim. In Morocco, these *megorashim* (Sephardim) lived mostly in the north, in Spanish Morocco, in places like Tangier and Tetuan, but also in some of the coastal seaports of Casablanca, Essaouira, Mazagan and Safi. Some of the *megorashim* who did not settle in the north or who had migrated further inland mingled with the Judeo-Arabs or *toshavim*. Over time, this group forgot the Spanish language.[6]

The Mellah

For most of their history in Muslim Morocco, Jews were a marginal element entirely at the mercy of their Islamic hosts. They "had no power base. They were considered totally dependent upon their masters, for they could expect no sympathy among the Muslim masses."[7] The first *mellah* (Jewish quarter) was born out of these conditions in Fez as early as 1438. Most of the other *mellahs* of Morocco were constructed after 1550. "The *mellah* of Fez became the

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[6] Michael M. Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 1994), 16.
[7] Norman Stillman. *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 79.

prototype of the Moroccan ghetto"[8] . It was conceived of as a means for the Sultan to provide the Jews a measure of protection from the occasionally murderous violence and abuse of the Muslim mob or individual. This clearly failed in some cases, as in the May 14, 1465 pogrom which began in the *mellah* of Fez. Although the various *mellahs* may have been founded on good intentions, as reflected by their proximity to the seat of government, life in the *mellah* was in practice a sentence of isolation. There was, from the first, a stigma attached to the very name of the *mellah* which means "salt or salty". The word's origins has different interpretations. One source says it is purported to derive from the legendary "place where Jews originally salted the heads of executed criminals for public display [and] emphasizes the outcast connotation that was attached to it."[9] Other sources attribute its meaning to the salty, former marshlands on which the first *mellah* was built, "a term which came to designate all Jewish quarters throughout Morocco."[10]

Jews lived under the *dhimmi* for over a thousand years and in the *mellah* for five hundred years. The passage of

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[8] Ibid., 80
[9] Ibid., 81
[10] Kenneth L. Brown, "A Moroccan City and its Jewish Quarter," in Morag, Ben Ami, Stillman, eds., *Studies in Judaism and Islam* (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1981), 254.

time did not make life easier or even more tolerable. In addition to genuine concerns over Muslim animosity, squalid conditions in the *mellah* persisted. The Jewish population grew during the nineteenth centuries. Rampant poverty and overcrowding in the *mellahs* assured the rapid spread of diseases like typhoid. With the exception of a small Jewish elite, which was at times employed by the court in various diplomatic or mercantile capacities, life for the majority of the Jews of Morocco was an arduous struggle for economic and physical survival. Not until the late nineteenth century did hopeful signs of an improvement in the quality of life appear for the greater number of Jews.

Essaouira: 17th Century Seaport to Modernity

In the late 1700s, during the age of imperialism and the pre-colonial era, Europeans began a more active trade with Morocco. Most trade began on the coastal regions and ultimately spread inland. The port city of Essaouira in southern Morocco (also known by Europeans as Mogador) is fertile ground for considering the impact of the flow of European goods and ideas on Jewish-Moroccan life. Essaouira was situated on the Atlantic coast, west of Marrakesh. It was built from scratch in 1764 by the Sultan Sidi Muhammad

b. Aballah. It was envisioned as a way of shoring up an unstable pillar in the Sultan's political power base and as such it succeeded. The region had been dominated by warring tribal chieftains who posed a continuous threat to the Sultan's authority in southern Morocco, most importantly the outlying areas of Marrakesh. A physical presence in or near the area seemed the best solution for reproducing the military control enjoyed in the North. The notion of a prestigious "royal port town, closely administered by the sovereign, has been considered as quite exceptional among North African cities."[11] Essauoira was in a desolate, sand- and wind-swept region. The project was realized through sheer determination and an abundant outlay of money and manpower.

Essaouira never approached the level of grandeur envisioned by the Sultan. Less than ten years after its creation, however, Essauoira became "the principal maritime port of Morocco... a status it maintained for over a century" until it was displaced by the port city of Casablanca, beginning in the late nineteenth century.[12]

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[11] Daniel J. Schroeter *Merchants of Essaouira* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 9.
[12] Ibid., 7.

Merchants and Middlemen

The proven skills of some Jews as merchants and polyglots drew the attention of the Sultan. He hoped to attract such merchants to Essaouira through generous offers. They were awarded substantial loans on extremely favorable terms. They were also allowed to lease multiple select properties for their businesses and residences at very low cost and in prime locations. They could then legally sublet these properties for large profits. These merchants became known as *Tujjar as-Sultan* (official merchants of the Sultan).

> Much of the economic activity of the town revolved around their commercial transactions, and the prosperity of the town depended on the successful operation of their trading firms. It was through these merchants that the traders of southern Morocco marketed their goods for the European trade. European firms were compelled to deal with these privileged royal merchants since most of Morocco's foreign trade was in their hands.[13]

These merchants were an exception to the rule. They lived in their *makhzan* (Moroccan government) residences in the *Casbah* (among a class of wealthy Muslims) unlike their

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[13] Ibid., 20.

Jewish counterparts, who still lived in the *mellahs* of Marrakesh, Fez, Meknes and Essaouira. The Sultan's merchants were also the instruments of commerce and trade well inside the heart of the country. As Jews they were still considered "legally inferior."[14] They were thus extremely dependent on the Sultan and had no real political power.

In some subtle ways and in time, the nature of this predicament changed. Many European nations gave these merchants citizenship or diplomatic protection, thereby curtailing the Sultan's power over them. As the Sultan's Jewish merchants became increasingly exposed to Europeans, they opted for sending their children to British and other European schools. The story of Essaouira foreshadows Morocco's entry into the modern era. During that time a nascent lower middle class emerged. For these Jewish merchants, craftsmen and peddlers, the future seemed to hold the promise of brighter economic prospects.

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[14] Ibid., 21.

Morocco under the Protectorate

By the early twentieth century, European merchants and imperialist governments were no longer satisfied with the fruits of active trade and commerce in Morocco. The French in particular demanded both the tree which bore its fruit and the very soil in which it thrived. After much political posturing by the British, Germans and French, the latter gained a foothold in Morocco by 1907, when Europe was neither eager nor ready for war. On March 30, 1912 the French colonialists, seasoned by nearly a century of experience in Algeria, officially sanctioned their own presence in Morocco with a treaty establishing the Protectorate. The Sultan was too weak politically to do anything but acquiesce. The indigenous Muslims, frustrated by their powerlessness over the French who appropriated their destiny, unleashed their anger upon the Jews of the *mellah* in Fez. On April 17 and 18, 1912 "sixty Jews were killed, some fifty seriously injured, women were raped before being done to death, the entire mellah sacked...leaving ten thousand people homeless".[15]

The 1912 signing of the Protectorate treaty in Fez initiated uncertain and turbulent times in Morocco with

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[15] Chouraqui, 173.

long-term consequences for its citizens, Jewish and Muslim alike. The political, social, and economic situation ushered in by the Protectorate status of Morocco had a direct long-term impact on both the Jewish and Muslim communities. For Muslims, French rule and the Protectorate status created a movement towards national self-determination. The strain between Muslim and Jew created by the Protectorate pushed the Jews inexorably towards mass emigration by the end of Protectorate rule.

While initially proving disastrous for the Jews of Fez, the arrival of the French, at the dawn of the new century, would have mixed consequences for the Jews of Morocco. The centuries of inferior status as *dhimmis* with extremely limited political or legal rights under the Muslims was replaced by a similar predicament under the French Protectorate. Unlike the case in Algeria, the French in Morocco did not take the Jews under their protection.

> From the outset, the French administration committed the fatal error of allowing the separate development of the ethnic groups instead of striving for their cultural and economic fusion. The [delicate] equilibrium in which the Jews and Moslems had lived, for better or worse, for twelve centuries was upset by the introduction into Morocco of the third and henceforth most powerful force--the French.[16]

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[16] Ibid., 174.

In their vain attempts to at least appear even-handed and (ironically), non-interventionist, the French allowed the continuation of the separate Muslim and Jewish legal systems within Morocco. The preservation of the religious legal system served to appease Muslim sensibilities while preserving the fiction of Muslim juridic independence. Matters involving Muslims exclusively were tried in the religious courts of the Sherifian (dynasty) legal system. "All criminal cases [and those involving Europeans] were tried by the French authorities".[17] As previously, "suits involving a Jew and a Moslem were tried in the Moslem court."[18] Under the Protectorate, the Jews legal position was marginalized in relation to both the French and Muslim societies in which they lived.

Throughout the duration of the Protectorate, the Jews found themselves between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, a majority of the Jews had become enamored of the French and their culture; a majority wholeheartedly embraced and sought to emulate it. On the other hand, they could not easily disregard either their millennial coexistence with the Muslims of Morocco or the probable

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[17] Ibid., 175.
[18] Ibid., 175.

necessity of a future coexistence.[19] During the 44 years of the Protectorate, the Jews tried to strike a delicate balance in their allegiance to these opposing forces during Morocco's struggle for independence.

In their hopes for freedom from the destitution of the mellah and from their plight as subjugated citizens of *dhimmi* status, the Jews looked to the French. The Jews sought a new legal status which could protect them from injustice and occasionally murderous violence. They saw their salvation in the acquisition of French citizenship. While the French were pleasantly surprised at the speed with which the Jews imbibed their culture from the start, the French spurned Jewish advances to woo them. They doused with cold water Jews' aspirations for emancipation from Islamic law and the *dhimmi* status. Unlike the case in Algeria and Tunisia, French citizenship was categorically denied the Jews of Morocco. French citizenship would have symbolized Moroccan Jewry's wholehearted embrace of the foreign, French, Western civilization, at the expense of its traditional values and culture. For this reason, not all Moroccan Jews subscribed wholesale to the notion of French

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[19] Doris Bensimon-Donath, *Evolution Du Judaisme Marocain sous le*

citizenship. Dual French-Moroccan citizenship was not an option.

Any illusions Maghribi Jews may have entertained were shattered when they came forward in the hundreds, ready and willing to enlist in the French army at the beginning of World War II, prior to Vichy. The French government rewarded the Jewish volunteers' honorable intentions with rejection and scorn. It deemed the Jews of Morocco and Tunisia unworthy of carrying arms "*pour la Patrie*".

> The fear of Moslem discontent and the rise of anti-Jewish feelings within the European population settled the hesitancy of the French authorities, who were to reject the military help... even going as far as to censor newspaper articles that made mention of Jewish volunteers.[20]

For Morocco's Muslim majority, colonialism was a bitter pill to swallow for the loss of their sovereignty and dignity. For most Moroccan Jews, the sound of "La Marseillaise" on their native soil heralded both the promise and the reality of a new existence which was indeed music to their ears. Moroccan Muslims could sing to a different tune, if they so desired, but the majority of Jews were intent on fervently seizing this seemingly

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Protectorate francais 1912-1956 (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1968), 114.

[20] Michel Abitbol, *The Jews of North Africa during the Second World War* (Detroit: Wayne University Press, 1989), 40.

miraculous opportunity, at the dawn of the twentieth century, to emerge from their perpetually impoverished existence. Once and for all, they would reject their ancient *dhimmi* status with all the means at their disposal.

Given the nature of their long history, is it any wonder that Moroccan and other Maghribi Jews dashed headlong, almost blindly, in the direction of the French after their arrival? From the perspective of life as a *dhimmi* usually confined to a menial existence in the *mellah*, what mattered most was that the general direction of movement be forward and out. Forward, towards a new hope emerging from an intuitive sense of impending promise of progress, as yet inarticulated and undefined, and out of the fetid squalor of the *mellah*. If it did not deliver political or social *égalité* or *fraternité*, France did offer Moroccan Jews *liberté* from their former existence under the yoke of Muslim rule.

Benefits of Modern Medicine and French Education

The nineteenth-century European introduction of modern medicine and public health into the life of the Jews of the *mellah* radically transformed their existence. In the span of a generation, they were freed from the decimation of contagious diseases which for centuries had kept their numbers low. By the early twentieth century their numbers had increased. By mid-century the Jewish population of Morocco and the Maghrib (no longer confined by economic conditions to the *mellahs*) had grown to become the largest Jewish population in the Muslim world. In Morocco, the estimates vary between 250-280,000 in the mid-1950s, as compared to 100,000 in 1867. In the remainder of the Maghrib, the Jewish communities also thrived, ranking among the world's largest along with those in North America, the USSR, France, Argentina, South Africa and Britain. Their total numbers in the Maghrib hovered around 500,000 at their peak in mid-century.

Prior to France's arrival in Morocco, a beachhead for the dissemination of French culture was established and the groundwork layed for the eventual success of a widespread educational campaign. Even before the colonizing French arrived in their capacity as educators, great strides were made in the dissemination of their language and Western ways, through the efforts of the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU), a French-Jewish educational organization. The organization's main goal was to impart a French education to thousands of Jewish children of the *mellahs,* thereby bringing them into the sphere of the modern world. From the 1860's, the AIU had convinced Muslim rulers to allow the establishment of primary schools for the Jewish population. The first school opened in 1862 in the northern Moroccan city of Tetuan. At first only of a handful of students attended classes. Soon their numbers grew and the AIU made further inroads in opening other schools throughout Morocco and the Maghrib.

The curriculum consisted primarily of a secular education in the humanities similar to that taught in most European schools of the era. It included European History, French was especially stressed and all non language courses were taught in French. North African history was not taught. Along with the compulsory French, a few other

languages were also taught, such as Spanish in Spanish Morocco and Hebrew. Math and Sciences were also taught.

The AIU made inroads against illiteracy. However, the organization and its work were not free of detractors. Its curriculum was broad enough to ruffle the feathers of many members of the Moroccan community, Jewish and Muslim, as well as Europeans living in Morocco. The most vocal criticism came from members of the religious community. They claimed that the community's children were taught these new and disparate subjects at the expense of their traditional culture and in an exclusively secular setting. This would be inimical to their long-term traditional Jewish education and threaten their connection to the centuries-old community. In fact, by "frequenting the AIU schools, [the Jews] avoided becoming 'over assimilated' to French culture, given the Jewish character of these institutions".[21]

For many French, the perceived lack of cultural assimilation of the Jews was frustrating. The Jews, however, were not allowed to attend French public schools. "Wanting the Jews to progress in the path of French culture, the French nonetheless argued that the process should take place outside the framework of the *écoles*

européenes: through the AIU and other special institutions."[22] Wealthy Muslims and Jews attended the *écoles européenes* (which the poor could not attend) along with French and other Europeans.

The Muslims were sent to three-tiered modern Protectorate schools called *écoles franco-musulmanes*, in accordance with their socioeconomic class. "This *belle hiérarchie* [was] part of a plan of preserving the sociopolitical status quo in indigenous society, yet promoting French education."[23]

"The Jews managed to undergo social mobility to a greater degree than the Muslims owing to their avidity for educational progress."[24] This was to be an enduring source of Muslim resentment, particularly among the nationalist ranks before independence. Throughout the colonial period, the majority of Jews excelled economically, to find themselves in entirely new and different living conditions than those which had plagued them for centuries. The French unwittingly provided circumstances which made this possible. The Jews had to help themselves and did so, in spite of French discriminatory practices prevalent even before the Vichy government.

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[21] Laskier, 30.
[22] Ibid., 28.
[23] Ibid., 30.

Though Muslims were not faced with the many indignities of *dhimmi* status, they suffered equally from the poverty-stricken, near-medieval existence of their Jewish compatriots. Unlike the latter, they were unable to quickly take advantage of the educational opportunities afforded by the French presence. Partly as a result of their historical tradition of study in Biblical, Talmudic, and other religious texts, which accompanied their love of learning, the Jews were poised to capitalize on every opportunity to study the language and culture of the French liberators that they so deeply initially admired. "In the Maghreb were no memories of Christian persecution to affect these relations, and the Jew of the Maghreb was therefore more receptive to the new influences from Christian Europe."[25]

Charity and Relief Organizations

American Jewish welfare and relief agencies such as the American Joint Jewish Distribution Committee (alternately referred to as the AJDC, JDC or Joint), among others, provided invaluable support in their administering of basic food, medicine and clothing. After Morocco's

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[24] Ibid., 30.

independence in 1956, the Joint consistently played a delicate and indispensable role by applying sustained pressure on the Moroccan government to observe human rights and by negotiating the right of Jewish emigration.

In the realm of education, the French system heralded

> [t]he rise of a middle class [which] was more pronounced in Algeria and Tunisia than in Morocco… This… was an indicator of … new criteria of social mobility: modern learning, and more specifically French learning, came to be viewed by all as an absolutely new and total mean of social success… French education was lay and widespread in Algeria but it was offered only parsimoniously in [Morocco and Tunisia].
>
> In this domain as in others, the developmental gaps between the three communities [Muslims, Jews and French] were a function, on the one hand, of the length of French presence and on the other, of the nature of colonial policies toward the Jewish populations of the three countries.[26]

This combination of social solidarity and Western education facilitated the complex transition from a medieval, feudal, Oriental outlook, to a Western one steeped in the twentieth century. This revolutionary transformation of Moroccan Jewish life occurred over the span of one generation during the first half of the twentieth century. It is all the more remarkable, in light of the wide social and economic disparities between rural

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[25] Chouraqui, 208.
[26] Abitbol, 8.

and urban Jews and their differing levels of literacy. Still, progress did not reach all rural Jews.

The Emergence of a Jewish Political Consciousness

The Moroccan Jewish community had never been particularly political before the events of the 1940s. The Second World War, Vichy and the creation of the State of Israel, irrevocably changed this disposition to one of constant vigilance and participation.

Repeated promises of an improved legal status were given to the Jews in the event of an independent Morocco. The nationalist parties and even the Sultan, whom most Jews had every reason to trust, given his vigilance on behalf of the Jews during Vichy, promised the Jews equality and shared responsibility in a newly independent Morocco. The Jews of Morocco responded positively to these overtures but after independence most of the earlier promises remained unfulfilled. To the Sultan's credit, he appointed the Jewish physician, Leon Benzaquen, as minister to his first cabinet. This mostly symbolic gesture was short-lived, however, and before long it became evident to most of the Jews that they would not become full-fledged

citizens of Morocco on an equal footing with Moslems, as promised.

Benzaquen's appointment to the cabinet was not the first time a Jew had landed an important governmental position under Moslem rule in Morocco. Throughout the centuries, Jews had served the Sultan's court in various capacities. In 1286, the Jewish Kalifa ben Ragasa was appointed superintendent of the palace and possibly chamberlain by Ibn Yakub Yusof. This was one of the rare examples of real power ever accorded a Jew. The status of the Jew as *dhimmi* forever curtailed the possibility of his attainment of any real authority. The rare exception of ben Ragasa ended violently because of the extent of the Jew's historic portrayal as *dhimmi*. His appointment "so offended the Moslem nobility that the Sultan was eventually obliged, in 1302, to massacre [his favorite] ben Ragasa and his entire family."[27]

Other Jews suffered a fate similar to ben Ragasa's for lesser crimes than being the Sultan's favorite. Even in the twentieth century, the changing fortunes of the Jews of Morocco and their relative security and well-being depended almost entirely on

the king's vigilance and benevolence rather than on the rule of law. Mohammed V proved worthy of that challenge by his resistance to anti-Jewish measures during the Vichy regime. Consequently, he gained the respect and loyalty of his Jewish subjects. The precariousness of the Jews' position, however, was made evident especially near the end of Vichy rule in Morocco. On November 15, 1942 the Nazis planned to march into Morocco and presumably implement their murderous policies on its Jews. On November 8, 1942 the American-led Allies frustrated German plans, launching a successful assault on North Africa. Many of the Jews of Morocco felt they had been saved by providence. Most gave the Americans credit for saving them in the nick of time. Others felt increasing insecurity and vulnerability to external forces and were reluctant to continue such an existence after World War II, once the opportunity for emigration emerged.

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[27] Chouraqui, 48.

Antisemitism in the Maghreb during World War II

Even before World War II, no small measure of European antisemitism had flowed into Morocco and Tunisia. Both countries also gave "birth to [their own] similar movements of anti-Jewish xenophobia and, as in Algeria, these movements came out of the collusion of the French extreme right, Arab nationalism, and German and Italian propaganda."[28] Until the war, Moroccan antisemitism remained the purview of a small but vocal minority and thus relatively unthreatening. After France's signing of the Armistice, it became a malignant danger within the upper echelon of the Vichy government.

The *Statut des Juifs* and the repeal of the Cremiéux decree were the first of several increasingly punitive and restrictive measures imposed against Jews in North Africa. In Algeria, considered French territory, the *Statut* was applied in full force. In Tunisia it was usually reserved for French Jewish nationals. These measures were applied at different times in differing "degrees of stringency… in each of the three Maghrebian countries. Thus, the Jewish Statute was relatively less rigorously applied in Tunisia

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[28] Ibid., 35.

than in Algeria and Morocco."[29] The lighter application of the Statutes is partly explained by the tolerance and compassion of a few unique French and Muslim individuals in positions of authority. In Tunisia, Ahmad Pasha Bey, Moncef Bey, Admiral Estéva, and Vice Admiral Derrien (Estéva's second in command) were among those who retained considerable influence. As *Résident-General* (the governor and highest military officer), Admiral Estéva grappled with his conscience "torn between his loyalty to Marshal Pétain and his Christian faith, which forbade him from perpetrating the excesses required by the racial laws."[30]

The Jewish Statute in Algeria resulted in the application of a *numerus clausus* leading to the virtual elimination of Jews from most white collar jobs, from some blue collar jobs and vocational training, enrollment in secular or religious schools, and from graduation with the indispensable French diplomas. These and subsequent measures were intended incrementally to appropriate control over the social, political, economic and religious affairs of the Jews "with the more or less explicit intention of [railroading and] locking them into specific vocational activities."[31]

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[29] Ibid., 75.
[30] Ibid., 76.
[31] Ibid., 88.

Numerous internment camps dotted southern parts of the Maghrib. These were filled with some of the 30,000 European Jews and other non-Jewish Europeans who had avoided capture by the Nazis by fleeing to France before January 1940. They volunteered to enlist in the French army as the only way to escape internment. The Armistice agreement compelled France to disband this foreign legion. Those

> who held a French identity card, a job contract, or a pledge of shelter could be demobilized. The others, in fact almost all the Jewish and Spanish volunteers, were sent to work camps in the Moroccan and the Algerian south, where from the condition of soldier they passed to that of convict.[32]

North African Jews considered "political dissidents" were sent to the camps. Some of the prisoners were sent to concentration camps in Europe, never to return. The conditions of the North African camps varied depending on the location and personnel occupying them. The ones run by the French witnessed some of the more brutal treatment of prisoners. Others were run by Italians or Germans, as in Tunisia. Although the Jews of Morocco were generally spared the fate of Jews of Europe, they heard about the dangers that loomed in these camps. This underscored a feeling of insecurity which the Jews did not easily forget after the

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[32] Ibid., 91.

war. The memory of this precarious position must have additionally fueled the impetus to emigrate when tensions arose and opportunity beckoned after the war.

Surprisingly, the launching of Operation Torch on November 8, 1942 and the Allied landing on North Africa did not bring about an immediate end to either Vichy's rule in North Africa or to the internment camps and the deplorable conditions within them. Partly because of Eisenhower's need to maintain an intact French army to fight the Germans, Vichy was allowed to maintain much of the top echelon of its political and military configuration. It was feared that the introduction of Gaullist elements in North Africa would wreak havoc on the morale of anti-republican, anti-Gaullist Vichyist troops. Consequently, many prisoners were forced to remain in the camps in sometimes dangerous conditions for the crime of being Jewish, long after the Allies had landed on Africa's northern shores. Jewish relief organizations were concerned about undermining Eisenhower and Roosevelt's efforts in North Africa. Months passed before political conditions allowed the organizations' representatives to launch a successful press campaign, in tandem with the media, for the release of Jewish prisoners in the camps.

The predicament of Moroccan Jews during the war left an indelible impression upon them. Their vulnerability was accentuated and was another factor in tipping the balance towards emigration when the time and opportunity was right.

The Nationalist Movement and Post War Independence

A Moroccan nationalist movement had acquired momentum by the early 1930s, though it would require the catalyst of the second World War before gaining political muscle and recognition. The vicissitudes of the Moroccan nationalist movement had direct, profound, and sometimes dire implications for the Jews of Morocco.

The Jews felt deeply indebted and attached to the Sultan for the courageous stance he had taken to protect them against Vichy. Many took faith in his repeated affirmations, and those of other political agents, that in a newly independent Morocco, Jewish citizens would be full-fledged with all the rights this would entail.[33] Overtures were made for the Jews and Moslems to join forces in overthrowing the yoke of French domination. A minority of Jews joined the ranks of the nationalists as a result of their disillusion with the French and in the sincere belief

that an independent Morocco held promise. In their optimism they hoped for an improved coexistence between Jews and Moslems as equals. The majority of Jews thought it more prudent to take a position of neutrality while awaiting the outcome of the independence struggle.

The end of the war ushered in a new dawn throughout the world. Throughout Africa and Asia, the active participation of native soldiers from British and French colonies contributed to an increased self-confidence which preceded the demand for self-determination. The British saw the inevitable and quickly accepted India's demands for independence by 1947. Elsewhere, and while offering assurances to the contrary, neither the British nor French were prepared to abandon their (often) lucrative colonies quite as easily.

North Africa was no exception to strong native desires for independence. For Muslim, French and Jew after the war, a new phase began in the history, politics and economics of North Africa. In Algeria, the answer from France was a resounding *Non* before the question of independence was even asked. Algerians provided an alternative answer of their own: war. In 1962, Algeria won its independence after bringing the Fourth Republic to its knees.

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[33] Doris Bensimon-Donath, *Evolution Du Judaisme Marocain sous le*

In Morocco, and Tunisia the French were more ambiguous over the question of independence and attempted at all cost to avoid or delay the inevitable. After the Second World War, the Moroccan independence movement was rekindled as was the case for other nations throughout Africa and Asia.

As a precondition to their independence, the French required that Moroccans and Tunisians submit to a lengthy probationary period of apprenticeship, training and education in the ways of running a modern nation-- built, of course, on the French model. At the end of this probationary period, a thorough evaluation would be made to assess the soundness of the potential new ship of state. By the time the French began to contemplate the notion, some Moroccans had already implemented their own plans. Members of the Moroccan intellectual elite concluded that the wait since 1912 had been long enough. In a public speech on April 10 1947, Mohammed V declared his unequivocal support for the nationalist movement. With the king's blessing, the movement gained unstoppable momentum. The Sultan declared his desire to see an end to the Protectorate Treaty of 1912. The bold speech was incendiary. A rebellion against French rule broke out but was suppressed after fierce resistance. Subsequently, the French saw the king as

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Protectorate francais 1912-1956 (Paris: Mouton & Co., 1968), 114.

persona non grata. In 1953 they exiled the king to Madagascar. The move only stoked the fires of resentment and gave further impetus to the nationalist movement. France was obliged to respond to the national and international public outcry. On November 16, 1955, Mohammed was allowed to return. In 1956 Morocco obtained its independence.

Creation of the State of Israel

The creation of the State of Israel in May 1948 threw relations between the Jews and Moslems into disarray. The Jews of Morocco were themselves divided over their response to the event. The king took the first opportunity to remind his Jewish subjects that they were, first and foremost, Moroccans who had been living in the land since time immemorial. They had shown their deep devotion to the Moroccan throne, in which they had found the best defender of their interests.[34]

Some felt that peaceful coexistence between the Jews and Moslems of Morocco was the best solution while others felt the new reality of Israel would

henceforth make such coexistence impossible. In 1948, many of Morocco's Jews found the thought of leaving their ancestral homeland difficult to imagine. They wanted to hold out for the promise of a better tomorrow within a new Morocco in which they might realize the fruits of European culture but be free of European domination and Moslem subjugation. The years after independence would reveal that such ideals and desires were irreconcilable within the foreseable future, given the unstable social, political and economic conditions of the times.

Many others, however, considered the realization of the new State of Israel as providential and wanted to heed the call of Zionism. This was a new concept that had only come to the Jews of Morocco as a result of World War II. "The political events that preceded World War II intensified Maghribi Jewish political awareness."[35] While Moroccan Jews emerged virtually unscathed from the murders of the holocaust, they became more acutely aware of their dangerous predicament as citizens without guaranteed equal rights in their native land. For many, the return to Israel was simply the realization of a historical

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[34] Ibid., 114.

dream dating from the Biblical era. Ultimately, roughly fifty percent of Morocco's Jews emigrated to Israel though not all were religious Zionists. Some were secular Zionists.

In 1948 many Jews and non-Jews alike felt it was highly improbable that the French would concede Moroccan independence. By this time a generation of adult Jews had grown up under the Protectorate. These Jews were thoroughly assimilated. For many, French was their first language as opposed to the Judeo-Arab of their parents. Unlike their parents, they donned the fashionable clothing of the French conquerors who they increasingly saw as liberators. They were educated in French, thought in French, and many praised the French, their culture and their values in spite of the abundant French shortcomings. These Jews saw the French as saviors who had rescued them from a fate of menial existence in the *mellah*. They had thus been brought out of a feudal existence into the twentieth century and consequently felt forever indebted to the French. It is this group, in large part, consisting of thirty percent of Moroccan Jews, who later opted to emigrate to France after Morocco's independence.

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[35] Laskier, 84.

Although the majority of Jews of Morocco became Westernized within a generation, this did not come without certain costs. Migration, rapid urbanization, modernization and westernization would slowly undermine the structures of traditional Moroccan Jewry.[36]

Moslem discontent towards the Jews preceded the creation of the State of Israel. The Arab revolts in Palestine of 1936-39 triggered boycotts and some violence against the Jews of other Arab countries. In Morocco, cooler heads mostly prevailed in part because of its geographical location far removed from the Levant.

After the birth of Israel in May 1948, Moroccan Muslims sided with the Arab world in condemning the new state. At about the same time, the nationalist movement for Moroccan independence was gaining momentum. These two factors combined to create an increasingly dangerous and volatile atmosphere.

Three weeks after the birth of Israel, however, on June 7 and 8 1948, a pogrom was unleashed against the Jews of Oujda and Djerada, in which more than 47 Jews were killed and over 150 people wounded. Evidence

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[36] Ibid., 128.

suggests that French authorities were forewarned of such a possible occurrence but failed to respond. Many of the local indigenous Moroccan policemen were nationalist sympathizers who were nowhere to be found during the pogrom. The actions were preplanned by a group of nationalist extremists who capitalized on anti-Jewish sentiment resulting from the 1948 war launched against Israel by Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Iraq.

The pogrom reveals some of the subtleties and complexities characterizing relations among the French, Jews and Moslems of Morocco. The event strained relations among the three groups but also revealed the existence of some strong Muslim-Jewish ties. An investigation of the pogrom revealed its instigators to be those of a fringe extremist group who successfully fanned the flames of hatred. The investigation following the event revealed that some Moslems protected Jews by hiding them in their homes. The Muslim and Jewish communities in Oujda had long cohabited peacefully.

> For many years the two peoples coexisted in a most cordial environment until the Moroccan press began to ceaselessly accentuate their differences and to spread

> disinformation such as about the Jews selling Muslims poisonous meats and bread.[37]

Makhzan (government) officials were embarrassed by the turn of events. The pasha of Oujda, the Muslim governor Si Muhammad al-Hajawi, met with each victim's family in an attempt to console the survivors. Some among the Muslim population did not take well to this gesture, or his pro-French attitude. "On 11 June, when al-Hajawi attended Friday prayers at Oujda's Grand Mosque, an attempt was made on his life. Suffering stab wounds, he barely survived."[38]

The pogroms in Oujda and Djerada underlined increasing tensions among Jews and Muslims. Whatever the causes, the Jews had reason to fear for their lives. From this moment forward, Moroccan and Maghribi Jews seriously contemplated abandoning their ancestral homes. Though such occurences were relatively rare, they were once again vulnerable to external events beyond their control. Consequently, the desire to emigrate intensified after the pogroms in Oujda and Djerada. While it was probably inevitable that many Jews would have eventually left for Israel for religious reasons, the pogrom highlighted the

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[37] Laskier, 98.

increasing precariousness of the Jews' position in Morocco. Instead of turning inward, as they had so often done in the past, they increasingly looked to Israel.

The Push Towards Emigration

From 1948 until Morocco's independence in March 1956, the majority who made *aliya* (going up to Israel) was comprised of two groups: young idealist Zionists and quasi mystics impatiently awaiting the return of the Messiah.[39] After 1956, Jews left less for immediate economic reasons than because of their malaise over future prospects for their well-being, and their very survival.

Although a majority of Jews had known abject poverty in the *mellah* until the early twentieth century, life had improved dramatically for the majority of Morocco's Jews. By the 1950s there existed a vibrant Jewish Moroccan middle class, and even a small upper-middle class. These Jews owned property, including expensive American cars; they often had more

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[38] Ibid., 96.
[39] Victor Malka, *La Memoire Brisee des Juifs du Maroc,* (Paris: Editions Entente, 1978), 69.

than one maid working in their home; and they generally enjoyed a very comfortable existence. This segment of the Jewish Moroccan population was understandably the most reluctant to abandon its lifestyle and standard of living. It was this group that tried to hold on to life in Morocco and that emigrated later, in the 1960s, rather than sooner.

For some, economic factors provided the impetus for emigration. A series of economic and agricultural crises gripped Morocco in 1947-49 and again in 1953. The crises caused the unemployment or underemployment of many Jewish tradesmen and craftsmen— tailors, watchmakers, shoemakers, carpenters and goldsmiths. "Consequently [they were] determined to leave for Israel in order to escape the economic crisis plaguing the country."[40]

Many who went to Israel felt somewhat reassured that they were going to God's country and would heed the call to Zion as they awaited the messiah's return. Others did not share this depth of religious fervor nor the enthusiastic pioneering spirit of Zionists. Many were less certain of their prospects in Israel. After visiting, some held few illusions about the prospects of an easier life in Israel.

Others emigrated to Israel but quickly met dissilusionment there and either returned to Morocco or moved on elsewhere. This "phenomenon evident among urban Moroccan Jewry in the early 1950s was [called] *yerida*."[41] Between 1949 and 1953, nearly 2,500 Jews returned to Morocco after a brief sojourn in Israel (see table 2). Those who returned to Morocco or wrote from Israel brought back the message of a desolate undeveloped landscape of desert and rock, rather than a land flowing with milk and honey. Consequently, many later emigrated either to France, Canada and United States, or in smaller numbers to Venezuela, Brazil and Latin America.

Restrictions on Emigration

Once the difficult decision to emigrate had been made, emigrants generally faced a series of obstacles. From 1948 until the late 1960s, various restrictions on Jewish emigration were imposed, removed, and reimposed time and again by French and Muslim authorities. These restrictions later resulted in numerous attempts at clandestine and illegal emigration with sometimes disastrous consequences. In 1961, 43 Moroccan Jews drowned in a failed escape attempt when the small ship (the Pisces) they were sailing

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[40] Laskier, 102.

on sank. The event garnered world condemnation but was also seized upon by anti-Jewish Muslim extremists as proof of Moroccan Jews' disloyalty. The event further strained relations between the bereaved Jewish community and the offended Muslim community, highlighting an increasingly untenable situation for the Jews of Morocco.

Upon the creation of Israel and the ensuing Arab-Israeli war, Arab states demanded that Arab nations prevent Jewish emigration to Israel. The sultan made the argument that " Moroccan Jews were eager to leave Morocco in order to enlist in the Israel Defense Forces and fight the Arabs. Moroccan Muslims felt deeply aggrieved."[42] Consequently, they refused to allow the Jews' departure to participate in the struggle over Palestine.

The sultan probably voiced the genuine concerns of his Muslim population as well as his own in justifying his refusal to allow Jews to fight in Israel in 1948. He had, however, other important reasons for preventing Jewish emigration. The nationalist movement had gained momentum and by this time he could seriously envision an independent Morocco. The prospect of emigration of over a quarter of a million Jews from Morocco represented a tremendous loss of

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[41] Ibid., 124.
[42] Ibid., 106.

brain and brawn desperately needed for the construction of an independent Morocco.

After the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, Muslim and French authorities throughout the Maghrib temporarily turned a blind eye to semi-legal or illegal emigration. Along with the prospects for peace in the Middle East, a kind of fatigue or resignation to the inevitable (emigration) seems to have set in. "In December 1948 … it no longer seemed reasonable to claim that Jews were leaving in order to fight the Arabs."[43]

Muslim-Jewish Relations: From Courtship to Honeymoon

The year of Morocco's independence, 1956, ushered in what Victor Malka has referred to as the "honeymoon period" in Muslim-Jewish relations in Morocco. The Istiqlal party Congress courted the Jews and invited them to play an active role in an independent Morocco. The party's general secretary, Ahmed Balfrej, had declared that "in [an] independent Morocco, the Jews would be victims of no discrimination whatsoever".[44] After 1958, however, the Istiqlal would be responsible for the most venomous anti-Jewish disseminations under its leader Allal El Fassi.

Moroccan Jews responded positively and forcefully to the invitation for their political and social participation as well as for a national Muslim-Jewish dialogue. One of their responses was the initiation, by the Alliance Israelite Universelle, of an intensive immersion program in Arab language, culture and literature. This cultural exploration not only led to a heightened appreciation of Arab culture but also to the rediscovery of previous Jewish authors and religious luminaries of the Sephardic Golden Age, many of whose works were written in Arabic. The discovery and study of these authors' works stimulated an appreciation of the wealth of the Arab and Hebrew languages and culture and the commonalities that they shared.

Such a response was far from universal, however. Many Jews could not envision a future Morocco of either assimilation or mutual respect between the two cultures; or they simply did not have faith in the long-term viability of such a relationship. Many Moroccan Jews searched inwardly for an identity in an independent Morocco and turned more deeply to their own religious traditions.

The mutual interest in a broader understanding of Morocco's two cultures was not limited to academia but applied to other realms, including politics. The king's

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[43] Ibid., 108.

appointment of Leon Benzaquen to his cabinet was understood by Jews to be a token gesture rather than a selection truly representative of the Jewish community. Nevertheless, the gesture symbolized the end of the Moroccan Jews' status as *dhimmi*. By royal decree, he was no longer a second class citizen. Jews were even invited to enlist in the king's army, a prospect about which they were less than enthusiastic.

Wilted Flowers: After Independence

The "honeymoon" lasted until mid-1958. Before independence, the situation for the Jews in Morocco had generally remained tolerable. Discreet and clandestine emigration of small numbers had been tolerated. After 1958 however, the tide began to turn when Morocco began "rapidly moving into the radical Arab camp of … Nasser of Egypt. Morocco joined the Arab League [in October 1958] and began issuing virulent anti-Israel statements."[45] This led to widespread alarm among the Jewish population.

The restriction of passports and exit visas was a clear violation of the "king's and the government's repeated declarations that the Jews were equal citizens,

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[44] Malka, 15.

and … a breach of the United Nations-sponsored Universal Declaration of Human Rights."[46] The next years proved to be difficult times for the Jews in Morocco and emigration was even more severely restricted. "The general situation of the Jews deteriorated drastically from the summer of 1959".[47]

Until then, there had been contacts between the Moroccan government and representatives of Jewish organizations outside of Morocco, notably the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. The AJDC was a worldwide refugee relief organization that had provided much assistance to the Jewish communities of Morocco and throughout the world. As long as there had been a dialogue between its representatives and those of the Moroccan government, there was hope for resolution of the difficulties increasingly plaguing the Jews. The breakdown of talks signaled a new period of extremism within the Moroccan government and increasing uncertainty on the part of the Jews of Morocco regarding their future status. In view of the increasing restrictions on emigration, the notion of an independent Morocco with equality for all its citizens lost all plausability.

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[45] Laskier, 192.
[46] Ibid., 192.
[47] Ibid., 196.

Mohammed V's flirtation with Pan-Arabism was a short-lived anomaly, born out of political expediency, in an otherwise relatively moderate reign. It is difficult to conceive of Morocco's king as harboring the kind of virulent resentment towards the Jews espoused by many Pan-Arabists. He had, after all, shown genuine concern for his Jewish subjects by strongly resisting the Vichy government's anti-Jewish measures during World War II. Since then, he had, more often than not, demonstrated his true colors of moderation towards the Jews. The pressures emanating from the Pan-Arabists to resist the West were great. However, "Muhammad V had realized late in 1960 or early 1961 that he had made a mistake in closely identifying with the Nasser regime, but he did not know how to go about distancing himself from Egypt."[48]

Three weeks before his death in February 1961, Mohammed V agreed to a meeting with a Jewish delegation (the Conseil des Communautés Israélite du Maroc) who came to discuss the stringent emigration restrictions then in force. The Sultan reassured them that these would soon be lifted and that passports would be issued freely to Jews and Muslims alike.[49] He also used the occasion to reassure the Jews of Morocco and to underscore his political

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[48] Ibid., 209.

independence by saying that he, not Nasser, ruled in Morocco.

Conclusion

New and ever-changing post-war conditions led Jews living in Morocco, and throughout the Arab world, to reassess their predicament and prospects as Jews in Muslim nations. Important factors contributed to the eventual mass emigration of the Jews of Morocco after its independence. Memories of the Jew's *dhimmi* status as an inferior citizen were still vivid upon France's arrival, as were those of life in the *mellah*. For most, the promise of escape from these conditions, heralded by the French presence, its culture and educational system, proved irresistible. The nullification of the *dhimmi* status upon France's entry into Morocco freed the Jews from previous social and economic restrictions. This allowed many to seize the educational opportunities that afforded them a new social mobility. With the departure of the French, Maghribi Jews increasingly faced the danger of losing many of the opportunities and economic advances made possible by the French. After the war, many Moroccan Jews were drawn to

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[49] Ibid., 208.

Eretz Israel (the land of Israel) for religious reasons, as soon as political conditions made their departure possible. By 1961, 100,000 Moroccan Jews had emigrated to Israel. Many more soon followed. For others, who had been educated and dazzled by the culture of the French, the logical step was to pursue their teachers and their ways in metropolitan France, following the example of most of their Algerian coreligionists. After colonialism, pent-up frustrations and a residual resentment remained among Moroccan Muslims which were sometimes vented on the minority community of Jews, though, in fact, it was the French who had exploited the land and people of Morocco. This resentment, occasionally released with murderous consequences, also stemmed from the improvement of the Jews' economic status that was visible in the emergence of a new *petite bourgeoisie*. This was an improvement which had no parallel in the Muslim community at the time France quit Morocco.[50] Prior to, and after independence, the king's repeated assurances of economic, and political security were insufficient to stem the rising tide of mass emigration. Some of the draconian anti-Jewish measures taken by the Moroccan government after 1958, sometimes disavowed by the king himself, also heightened the desire for a speedy emigration. Some of these measures

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[50] David Bibas, *The Ethnicization of Immigrants: Moroccan Jews in the*

were, among others, legislation threatening to close or limit exclusively Jewish schools, and the withdrawal of travel documents and the right to emigrate. The creation of the State of Israel was clearly a factor leading to tensions between Jews and Muslims, as was Morocco's rapprochement with an anti-Zionist Arab world and the communist Soviet Union.

After independence, efforts by the Jewish community to expand cultural and linguistic ties with the Arab community were seen by some Muslims as overtures that were too little too late in coming. After 1959, a majority of Morocco's Jews saw progress and emancipation not only in Western ways but in Western nations. Israel, France and Canada became increasingly attractive destinations of choice with the rising unpredictability of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Ultimately, the tutelary disposition of the Moroccan monarch towards the Jews could not prevent the mass exodus of the Jews of Morocco.

The dismantling of traditional societies was the price the Jews and Muslims of Morocco had to pay for the fruits of modernity. This was the case throughout Africa and Asia and wherever France's Tricolor or Britain's Union Jack flew in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In retrospect,

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United States. (1984 PhD. Dissertation at UCLA), 42.

it seems that Morocco's Muslim and Jewish inhabitants had little choice but to emulate the ways of their conquerors (generally considered liberators by Jews). They had to adapt to the ever-changing world in which they were unexpectedly thrust. Shortly after the mid-twentieth century, the Jewish and Muslim communities of Morocco reached a fork in the road where they felt compelled to part ways after a 1,200-year history of relatively harmonious coexistence. Muslim and Jew in Morocco, as throughout the Arab world, shared a millenial past, generally peaceful, at times turbulent. Rarely however, in the long history of their coexistence, did their differences remotely approach the scale and fever pitch of the murderous hatred and violence which Jews suffered in Christian Europe in the modern era.

The lack of a strong Muslim fundamentalist movement made Morocco a uniquely strong candidate for the continuation of a long-term interaction between its Muslim and Jewish communities. Was it inevitable that Morocco's Jews and Muslims reach an insurmountable impasse in their millenial coexistence? Not necessarily. The relationship was complex and it had its problems but these might have been overcome with greater efforts on the part of both the Muslim and Jewish communities. Was it inevitable that they

emigrate? If not inevitable, it appears that by 1960s the obstacles before the majority of Jews became too numerous to overcome. Perhaps more than in other Muslim nations, Jews and Muslims in Morocco came closest to overcoming their differences and surmounting the challenges that faced their respective communitites. If they had continued to live the isolated existence they knew in pre-modern times, Jews and Muslims may well have lived together for centuries to come. By the mid-twentieth century, the invasiveness of modernity made Jewish-Muslim coexistence no longer possible.

Mint tea in Brooklyn- a personal note.

By a fortuitous coincidence, I was in N.Y. in the winter of 1998, conducting archival research for this project, and was invited to a Jewish Moroccan party in Crown Heights on a cold and snowy Saturday evening in December. Reaching my destination, I heard the warm strains of a delectable Arabic music that immediately thawed the winter cold. Throughout the evening, I was enveloped by the sounds of a melodious Oud, that oscillated between melancholy and burning exuberance, occasionally accompanied by a tambourine, tarbouka and fierce table-drumming.

Carrusso's and Nijinsky's brothers sang and danced deftly to a Judéo-Arabic song that transported one and all to a timeless Morocco. In this room, in a house in Brooklyn, in America, far removed in time and space from the Moroccan shores of Fédala and Casablanca, Jews from Morocco gathered to play music, sing lyrics and dance to an Arabic tune called "*Ha oua za!*" meaning "Here he comes!" The song was an ecstatic heartfelt supplication for, and affirmation of, the messiah's prompt return. I savored this aural, and visual feast while imbibing the traditional aromatic, sweet Moroccan mint tea, sprinkled with orange-blossom water and served in delicate, colorful, gild glasses. The sensory experience triggered a childhood memory of running through wide open fields of mimosa that Moroccan Jews picked each year at the end of Passover to usher out the holiday. In a warm and familiar atmosphere, I savored the sights, sounds and scents of music, mint tea and the memory of golden fields of mimosa and wondered about the land of my ancestors, my native land, and the transplantion of our people and culture. I went to New York to conduct archival research on the Jews of Morocco. I found them alive and well, praying in Hebrew in a synagogue, gathered around an illuminated Shabbat (Sabbath) table conversing in French and English or singing and dancing ancestral or popular

songs in Arabic. How long will the Jews of Morocco continue to celebrate their culture, far from their homeland? What will be their future when only memories remain of the Morocco that was home for 25 centuries? If the present is any indication, they will continue to adapt well to their new environment and circumstances. The younger generation may forget the Arabic language their parents spoke. Hopefully they will likely know and continue to remember that they are Jews living in the Diaspora.

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		Population	*Pour 100 Européens*	*Pour 100 du total*
Européens	Français	266 133	81,80	2,70
	Espagnols	28 055	8,60	0,37
	Italiens	11 369	4,40	0,18
	Portugais	5 016	1,50	0,20
	Britanniques	2 034	0,62	
	Suisses	1 591	0,48	
	Allemands	341	0,10	
	Belges	807	0,24	
	Grecs	1 002	0,30	
	Polonais	537	0,16	
	Russes	655	0,20	
	Tchécoslovaques	449	0,13	
	Turcs	457	0,14	
	U.S.A.	276	0,08	
	Divers	3 271	1	
		324 997	100	
Marocains	musulmans . 8 088 600			94,20
	israélites ... 203 800			2,35
		8 292 400		
	Population totale	8 617 397		100

Morocco's Population according to the 1947 census.
From Andre Chouraqui's Histoire des Juifs en Afrique du Nord)

Table 8. Data on *Yerīda*, June 1949–31 December 1953

Year	*Jan.*	*Feb.*	*Mar.*	*Apr.*	*May*	*June*	*Jul.*	*Aug.*	*Sept.*	*Oct.*	*Nov.*	*Dec.*	*Yearly Total*
1949	—	—	—	—	—	17	69	99	10	63	88	33	379
1950	100	—	30	11	13	24	12	5	48	12	21	31	307
1951	33	19	20	29	46	40	31	36	60	18	45	53	430
1952	53	30	44	55	54	37	55	53	40	104	48	32	605
1953	39	23	95	31	15	69	80	53	43	117	89	91	745
Total	225	72	189	126	128	187	247	246	201	314	291	240	2,466

Source: Note au sujet des émigrants israélites marocains revenus au Maroc après un séjour en Israël, Rabat, 21 décembre 1954, AAE-Nantes, DI/Section Politique.

Jews who returned to Morocco after a sojourn in Israel
From Michael M. Laskier's North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century

Quarante années de ʿāliyyāh du Maghreb en Israël.

	Maroc	Algérie	Tunisie	total
1930-1939	825	70	150	1.045
1940-1947	675	180	285	1.140
1948-1949	13.920		6.000	19.920
1950-1951	10.810	3.525	8.343	22.678
1952-1954	14.345	385	5.973	20.703
1955-1957	61.585	1.835	15.336	78.756
1958-1960	10.200	1.595	2.260	14.055
1961-1963	74.720	5.500	4.597	84.817
1964	15.843	1.500	816	18.159
1965-1971	50.000*	1.500*	7.857	59.357
total	252.923	16.090	51.617	320.630

* estimation

40 years of Maghribi-Jewry emigration to Israel
From Joseph Toledano's Les Juifs Maghrébins)

Table 3. The Jewish Population of French Morocco in Accordance with a French Protectorate Census of 1 January 1943*

A. *Jews According to Region* (Atlas Mountains Included)	
Casablanca	68,336
Fez	21,260
Marrakesh	52,439
Meknès	20,237
Oudjda	9,807
Rabat	17,255
Agadir	5,220
Total:	194,554
B. *Jews According to Cities*	
Casablanca	55,817
Fedala	297
Oudjda	5,804
Azemmour	420
Sefrou	5,460
Mazagan	3,750
Settat	1,720
Rabat	10,257
Taza	320
Salé	3,181
Port Lyautey	1,028
Ouezzan	2,102
Marrakesh	17,043
Safi	4,076
Essaouira	5,702
Agadir	850
Meknès	12,000
Fez	13,352

Source: AAE-Nantes, DI/809.

*According to the census, out of 194,554 Jews in French Morocco, 178,500 were Moroccan subjects, 12,000 were French nationals, and 4,000 were foreigners (420 Englishmen, 315 Russians, 76 Germans and Austrians, while the rest were stateless).

The Jewish Population in 1943
From Michael M. Laskier's North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century

Table 9. Official French Statistics on *'Aliya* from Morocco via Casablanca and France, 17 March 1949–April 1956

Month	*1949*	*1950*	*1951*	*1952*	*1953*	*1954*	*1955*	*1956*[a]
January	—	414	180	157	160	146	1,469	2,544
February	—	225	547	219	288	—	1,910	3,359
March	41	240	368	38	442	136	2,320	2,904
April	35	200	495	350	193	75	1,092	4,073
May	—	229	197	591	—	149	718	
June	117	314	588	571	302	176	2,008	
July	—	206	831	925	289	475	2,329	
August	395	491	1,171	526	159	1,167	2,527	
September	529	127	1,515	575	—	1,757	2,748	
October	864	493	405	—	217	1,276	3,990	
November	320	244	119	470	130	2,430	3,144	
December	406	259	261	210	181	2,190	2,299	
Total	2,707	3,442	6,677	4,632	2,361	9,977	26,554	12,880

All in all 69,230 emigrants.[b]

Source: AAE-Nantes, DI/809, 811, 813; CZA,S42/256.

[a]According to Jewish Agency sources, between May and December 1956, another 23,427 Moroccan Jews emigrated to Israel. This would suggest that as many as 92,657 Moroccan Jews came to Israel in 1949–56.

[b]The data published by the Jewish Agency differ to an extent from the French figures. (It is not altogether impossible that the French authorities kept an inaccurate account on emigration). The figures in parenthesis are those of the Jewish Agency: 2,707 French for 1949 (no specific data for 1949 in Jewish Agency figures, but 8,000 for 1948–49); 3,442 French for 1950 (4,980 Jewish Agency); 6,677 French for 1951 (7,770 Jewish Agency); 4,632 French for 1952 (5,031 Jewish Agency); 2,361 French for 1953 (2,996 Jewish Agency); 9,977 French for 1954 (8,171 Jewish Agency); 26,554 French for 1955 (24,994 Jewish Agency); the French data for 1956 are incomplete and stop in April 1956, one month after France granted Morocco independence. They amount to 12,880 (Jewish Agency data for 1956 are estimated at 36,301).

Aliya from Morocco 1949-1956
From Michael M. Laskier's North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century

Table 15. Changes in the Jewish Map of Morocco, 26 November 1961–31 June 1963

Region	*Number of Jews 27.11.61*	*Number of Jews 31.6.63*	*Emigrants*	
			Number of Emigrants	*% of Emigrants*
Ksar Es Souk	4,859	1,340	3,519	72.4
Agadir	2,810	1,147	1,663	59.2
Quarzazate	4,007	2,360	1,647	41.1
Marrakesh	16,818	8,542	8,276	49.2
Rabat	11,008	6,410	4,598	41.8
Tétuan	5,674	5,202	472	8.3
Oudjda	2,655	2,069	586	22.1
Meknès	10,692	6,708	4,265	38.9
Tangier	6,246	5,402	844	13.5
Nador	72	72	—	—
Fez	12,194	7,976	4,227	34.7
Casablanca	86,149	56,794	29,355	34.1
Taza	713	647	66	9.3
Alhucemas	49	49	—	—
Ceuta	—	—	510	0.3
Total	163,946	104,718	60,028	36.6%

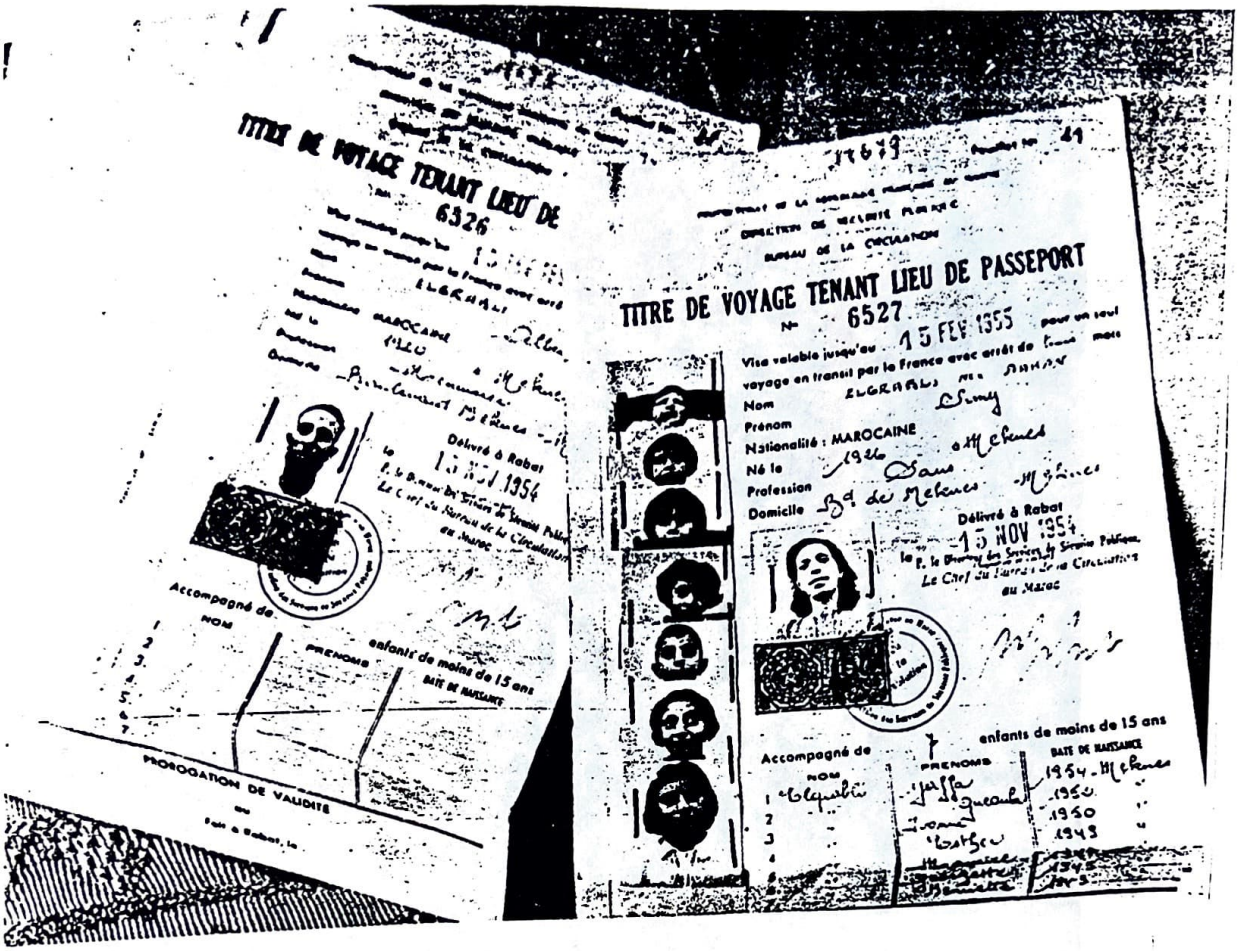
Source: The Files of the Jewish Agency Office in Paris, CZA. L10.

Dissolution of Moroccan Jewry 1961-1963

From Michael M. Laskier's North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century

Sultan (Later King) Muḥammad V (1909–1961) (author's personal collection).

Sultan Muhammad V
From Michael M. Laskier's North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century



Rights of Passage
From Andre Chouraqui's Histoire des Juifs en Afrique du Nord

King Hassan II
From Insight Guides- Morocco)