



HAL
open science

Jews and Muslims in the Maghreb: Interactions, Representations, and Transformations

Karima Direche

► **To cite this version:**

Karima Direche. Jews and Muslims in the Maghreb: Interactions, Representations, and Transformations. Oxford University Press. Oxford Handbook of the Modern Mediterranean, “ Interreligiosity ” pour l’ “ ”, éd. Manuel Borutta, Malte Fuhrmann, Esther Möller, Nora Lafi et Joseph Viscomi, Oxford: [à paraître en 2025], Oxford University Press, In press. hal-04860773

HAL Id: hal-04860773

<https://hal.science/hal-04860773v1>

Submitted on 1 Jan 2025

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Jews and Muslims in the Maghreb: Interactions, Representations, and Transformations.

Karima Dirèche, Directrice de recherche CNRS/AMU

Introduction

This contribution outlines the evolution of Jewish-Muslim relations in the Maghreb across the entire 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. The shared history of the two communities and their development during this period, in a space where the Ottoman Empire, French colonial authority, and Cherifian kingdom coexisted, is emblematic of the profound transformations experienced by indigenous populations. In the 19th century, these relations were part of the melting pot of Ottoman and colonial Maghrebi societies, where social categories remained compartmentalised and hierarchical. The French colonial conquest imposed colonial legal statuses which, by their very nature, were unequal and unstable, impacting religious communities and eventually leading to the separation of Jews and Muslims.

In the Maghreb, the Jews are virtually the only indigenous non-Muslim religious group, with Christians representing only a demographic speck¹. The Jewish-Muslim relationship is therefore central, and the Jews, as a religious minority, are key players and witnesses to the profound political, social, cultural and economic changes that took place in the societies of the Maghreb throughout the 19th century². This religious coexistence resulted in ‘territories where Jewish-Muslim cultures and civilisations met’ (Zafrani, 1999), which saw the emergence of areas of convergence and dialogue between Jews and Muslims. Popular traditions and literature, poetry, Judeo-Berber and Judeo-Arabic languages, musical repertoires, cuisine, shared imaginaries, and many other cultural components shaped these Judeo-Maghrebi identities in their contacts with Islam and Muslims. Throughout their long history, Jews and Muslims have shared common experiences and social circles in which popular religiosity, the cult of saints (some of whom were shared), and beliefs were influenced by each other. They shared the same land, with similar statuses and living conditions. This shared history was not without its conflicts and violence³.

¹ Christianity in North Africa gradually diminished, overtaken by Islam from the seventh century onward. This decline was marked by a reduction in the number of bishops, leading to a decrease in Christian communities. These communities persisted into the thirteenth century as small enclaves, particularly in the Tunisian oases of Djerid and Nafzâwa. Until the early nineteenth century, Christianity maintained a minimal presence through trading posts established along the Mediterranean coast, which attracted craftsmen, traders, sailors, mercenaries, and consuls.

² Around 1820-1830, there were approximately 140,000 Jews in the Maghreb (just under 2% of the total population), of which likely about 10,000 in Libya, 30,000 in Tunisia, 25,000 to 30,000 in Algeria, and 70,000 or more in Morocco. Jacques Taieb, « Les juifs du Maghreb », *Encyclopédie berbère*, 26 | 2004, 3952-3962, <https://journals.openedition.org/encyclopedieberbere/949>

³ Abécassis Frédéric and Faï Jean-François, « Les Juifs dans le monde musulman à l'âge des nations (1840-1945) », in Antoine Germa, Benjamin Lellouch et Evelyne Patlagean (dir.), *Les Juifs dans l'histoire. De la naissance du judaïsme au monde contemporain*, Paris, Champ Vallon, 2011, p. 545-570.

Although Jews and Muslims shared the same languages and cultures for many centuries, their relations and collective destinies were turned upside down by colonial conquests. This led the European powers to administer diverse, heterogeneous indigenous populations with a concern for categorising minority groups in colonised territories and establishing their own legal status (Assan et al., 2019). The violent conquest of Algeria, followed by the protectorate of Tunisia (1881), Morocco (1912), and the Italian trusteeship of Libya (1911), transformed North African societies politically, economically, and culturally. At times, these changes brought Jews and Muslims closer together in a shared destiny, while at other times they separated them along various fault lines. Starting in 1830, the French colonial state significantly influenced the evolution of both communities. It encouraged the former to adopt French cultural norms and values, fostering a degree of integration or even assimilation, while simultaneously imposing discriminatory practices on the latter, effectively relegating them to the status of colonial subjects. This relationship, however, was complex and far from binary; indeed, 19th century France —enlightened and later republican—positioned itself as a liberator of North African Jews. With the conquest of Algiers in 1830, a prelude to the broader French colonisation of Algeria and Africa, France sought to cast off the Jews' *dhimmi*⁴ status, which was then viewed as a servile and inferior condition. This relationship is, of course, far from binary, since France in the 19th century also brought a new horizon of political, social, and cultural emancipation for North African Jews. Following the conquest of Algiers in 1830, which was to be a prelude to the French colonisation of Algeria and the rest of Africa, the "France of the Enlightenment", and later republican France, proclaimed itself protector of the Jews by emancipating them from their *dhimmi* status, considered at the time of being a lower form of servitude. Being freed from the status of a protected religious minority specific to Muslim societies also safeguarded against some of the religious anti-Judaism that existed in popular culture in the Maghreb. This explains in part the gradual support of a large number of Jews for the colonial authority⁵. European colonisation, therefore, profoundly transformed both the traditional equilibria of Jewish communities and the coexistence between Jewish and Muslim communities.

This perspective on how France's colonial legislation disrupted the longstanding equilibrium between Jews and Muslims (Katz & Mandel, 2017) helps to dismantle the stereotype of an ostensibly ancestral conflict and unveils the complex nature of this history. It thus distances itself from the narratives described by Mark Cohen, that of an 'interfaith utopia' or the 'neo-lachrymose'⁶ inherent Islamic persecution of Jews. Consequently, an analysis centred on the French colonial experience and its impact on the development of religious

⁴ A term used in Muslim law to designate non-Muslim subjects (Jews and Christians) under Muslim administration. The equivalent of the term "protected", this legal status required them to pay a special tax (*jizya*), a land tax (*kharâj*) and comply with a certain number of social restrictions. It also guaranteed their freedom of worship and the observance of their religious laws.

⁵ Similarly, Libyan Jews viewed Italian rule as an opportunity to enhance their economic and social standing. The Jewish elite became Europeanized, while the rural populations in the Sahara and the mountainous regions remained traditional, adhering to lifestyles closely aligned with those of their Muslim counterparts. Italy turned its attention to Libya following France's establishment of a protectorate in Tunisia in 1881. Italian influence expanded during the waning decades of the Ottoman Empire, and the Italo-Turkish War (1911-1912) culminated in the Italian conquest of all the Ottoman provinces of Tripolitania.

⁶ Mark R. Cohen, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994).

communities challenges the essentialist and teleological interpretations of an innate antagonism between Jews and Muslims.

Ottoman reforms, consular protection and colonial law

The *Tanzimat*⁷ reforms (1839-1876) and the 1856 proclamation of equality for all subjects of the Ottoman Empire had already significantly redefined relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, effectively ending the *dhimmi* status. The countries of the Maghreb, with Morocco as an exception, echoed these substantial transformations. Specifically, under the Regency of Tunis, the enactment of the Fundamental Pact in 1857 eliminated the *Ahl al-dhimma* status previously applied to Jews, a change further reinforced by the Organic Law of 1861. The abolition of the *dhimma* did not eliminate the notion of "protected" individuals in the Maghreb but rather transformed it into consular protection. This new form of protection was predominantly extended to the merchant elites, both Jewish and Muslim, who travelled the Mediterranean for business. This highlights the nuanced nature of North African societies, which cannot be accurately captured by the ethno-confessional labels commonly ascribed by European narratives. Many, especially those from the more affluent classes, sought protection patents from the influential European powers that were present in Tunisia. Although these individuals retained their Tunisian citizenship and remained subject to rabbinical and Muslim personal status laws, they also came under the jurisdiction of consular courts, effectively placing them on equal legal footing with foreign nationals. In this way, foreign powers, self-styled as protectors of minorities, enacted a "minority policy" that allowed them to amass a base of protected clients and meddle in Tunisia's internal matters (Kenbib, 1994).

The Act of Capitulation of July 1830 proclaimed the equality of all indigenous people and guaranteed their freedom of worship. With the collapse of the Regency of Algiers, the French military promptly abolished the *dhimmi* status in the summer of 1830, thereby granting equal rank to Jews and Muslims under the collective designation of "indigenous." The Jews' de facto integration into the common law and the creation in 1845 of Jewish consistories modelled after the French system (Assan, 2012) marked the end of the autonomy of their community. Following this, the *sénatus consulte* of 1865 opened the path for indigenous Jews and Muslims to acquire French nationality through naturalisation. While its impact on requests for naturalisation was very limited⁸, it opened the door to the collective granting of French citizenship by the Crémieux⁹ decree in 1870 to the Jewish population of the three *départements* of Algeria.

⁷ This term, signifying reforms in Ottoman Turkish, denotes the Ottoman era (1839-1876), characterized by extensive reforms that modernized legislation, the state apparatus, and the customs of the empire's societies. Among the 34,000 Algerian Jews in 1866, a mere 137 were granted citizenship between 1865 and 1870.

⁸ Of the 34,000 Algerian Jews in 1866, only 137 were naturalized between 1865 and 1870. Laure Blévis, « En marge du décret Crémieux. Les Juifs naturalisés français en Algérie (1865 - 1919) », *Archives Juives* 2012/2 (Vol. 45), pages 47 - 67

⁹ The Crémieux Decree collectively bestowed French citizenship upon the Jews of Northern Algeria. However, it was not extended to the Jews of the Mزاب region, as this area was still under military administration at the time. The Jews of Mزاب would only acquire French nationality on the eve of Algerian independence.

The geographical, economic, and social mobility associated with naturalisation facilitated the Algerian urban Jewish communities' embrace of modernity as they progressively Europeanized and shed the longstanding traditions of Algerian Judaism. However, Jewish communities in the south (Mzab), east (Aurès), and rural areas generally remained on the periphery of the francisation process that affected mentalities and lifestyles. The Crémieux Decree established a legal distinction between "indigenous" Jews and Muslims within the French Maghreb Empire. By granting French citizenship collectively to thirty-five thousand Jews in Algeria, the decree intentionally excluded three million Muslims, whose status as "*indigènes*" with restricted civic and legal rights remained unchanged. This asymmetry relegated Muslims to a position of legal and civic subalternity, codified in the Code de l'Indigénat¹⁰, which is now viewed as the institutionalisation and validation of second-class citizenship. Until independence, this compelled them to negotiate their rights and status with the colonial state.

Algeria was a laboratory for colonial experimentation, particularly with the elevation of Algerian Jews to citizenship, confirming a process initiated in the mid-1830s to "regenerate" Algerian Judaism by assimilating it to the French model. This incited adverse reactions, primarily from Algerian Europeans who objected to the reconfiguration of the electoral map due to the arrival of thousands of new voters, thereby vehemently rekindling colonial antisemitism. Nonetheless, this distinction in status, as orchestrated by the colonial state in Algeria, did not apply to the Jewish and Muslim communities in Tunisia and Morocco, the regions where France established control in 1881 and 1912, respectively. In Tunisia and Morocco under French protectorate, Jews and Muslims remained '*indigènes*', legally differentiated from Europeans.

In the Cherifian kingdom, the application of the *dhimmi status* is considered to have been the most severe (Abitbol, 2016), making the condition of Jews, particularly in the interior of the country (*bled es siba*), harsher and more precarious than in coastal cities. This situation had been reported by Moïse Montefiori¹¹ who, during a trip to Morocco in 1864, had pleaded with Sultan Mohamed IV¹² for him to improve the condition of his Jewish subjects. Charles de Foucauld, who never concealed his visceral antisemitism, also described in his book, *Reconnaissance au Maroc, 1883-1884*, the Jewish communities living in deplorable conditions under relentless discrimination. This description also applies to Muslims under a corrupt and fragmented political system in which the sultan governs only a small portion of the territory (*bled al Makhzen*), struggling to negotiate his authority with the autonomous tribes of *bled es-siba*. The political vulnerability of Morocco's central power, exposed to external appetites, only emphasised the consular protection provided by France and Western powers, as well as European imperialist pressures.

¹⁰ Symbolizing discrimination and the disparate treatment between French settlers and local populations, the Code de l'indigénat was a set of regulations and sanctions (fines, imprisonment, forced labor) imposed without prior trials or judgments. Established beginning in 1875, it was not abolished until 1946.

¹¹ Moses Montefiori (1784-1885) was one of the leading figures of the emancipation of the Jews of Europe and the Muslim world. A patron and philanthropist, he worked with the Ottoman authorities and the Sultan of Morocco to improve the condition of the Jewish population.

¹² In February 1864, Sultan Mohammed IV (1859-1873) issued a dahir (decree) granting Jews equal rights with all Moroccans - a decree that was never respected by the caïds and pashas.

The shifting status of indigeneity

The French state, as it asserted itself through its colonial efforts within Maghrebi societies, thus played a pivotal role in altering the statuses and conditions of indigenous communities (Katz, 2019). French legal distinctions within the 'colonial laboratory' that was Algeria initially fabricated two distinct population groups: on the one hand, Muslims and Jews were defined along confessional lines; on the other, Europeans and French were defined by national and territorial considerations. The Sénatus-consulte of 1865 and the Crémieux Decree of 1870 would alter this distinction. The Crémieux Decree, by incorporating 30,000 Jews into the national fold, effectively excised the Jewish segment from the population designated as "indigenous." Consequently, the term "Muslim" no longer signified a religious affiliation but a legal status inherently inequitable—the *indigénat*: a Muslim could only be indigenous and Arab, replacing the term "Algerian",¹³ which was incongruous for that period. Furthermore, the effects of colonial law disrupted existing categories and obscured their boundaries.

In Algeria, the term "indigenous" came to refer almost exclusively to the Muslim population, with the exception of Mozabite Jews who were not granted French citizenship in 1870. In Morocco and Tunisia, depending on the region and time period, certain Jewish communities may have shifted toward the European side, even as France refused to grant them the citizenship accorded to their co-religionists in Algeria. Due to their social status, the economic and political roles they played, and their extensive Europeanisation, these communities shared the same lifestyles and spaces as the French and Europeans. Their indigeneity gradually diminished through their deep integration into the cultural and linguistic models of the latter. In Tunisia, for example, the *Grana* family, originally from Livorno, were Italian-speaking merchants who enjoyed a highly enviable position under the Regency of Tunis and the French Protectorate. Likewise, the descendants of the *Tujjar al Sultan* of Mogador¹⁴ (Abitbol, 1999; Kenbib, 1994) constituted an opulent class of international merchants whose business activities spread throughout the world. Although they were urban and economic exceptions in the nineteenth century, the emancipation and social and political advancement of these groups spread to the middle and upper classes in the early twentieth century, marking a profound break with the rural Jewish populations who remained on the periphery of these models and continued to share similar lifestyles to those of the Muslims.

The spread of French education through the Alliance Israélite Universelle (from the 1860s in Morocco) and then through republican schools (at the very end of the 19th century), along with the socio-economic changes that accompanied it, helped to widen this rural/urban inequality and gradually turned Jewish societies away from the Arab-Muslim culture in which they had lived for over a thousand years.

Together but different in colonial society

¹³ The term "Algerian" was first used by the settlers to distinguish themselves from the term "metropolitan".

¹⁴ A Jewish-Moroccan social group that played a leading role under the sultanate of Abderahmane ben Hicham and was part of the emerging bourgeoisie with close ties to political power. See Michel Abitbol, *Les commerçants du roi, Tujjar al sultan. Une élite économique judéo-marocaine au XIXème siècle*, Maisonneuve & Larose, 1999.

In urban centers, Jewish communities' attendance at French state schools and Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU)¹⁵ institutions spurred a subtle shift towards French cultural assimilation and Westernisation. This shift manifested in the adoption of novel family structures and a decline in orthodox religious observances among so-called progressive classes. School enrolment precipitated a gradual acculturation, marked by migration from traditional quarters—the hara in Tunisia or the mellah in Morocco—to new European districts, coupled with the embrace of French cultural practices and norms.

It should be noted that Marshal Lyautey, the first Resident-General of the Protectorate in 1912, opposed the activities of the Alliance Israélite, adhering to a policy aimed at maintaining Moroccan Jews within the indigenous category. Despite encountering resistance, the processes of francisation and assimilation into the republican paradigm led to the gradual elevation and acknowledgement of Jews within colonial European society. The francisation of first names, attire, and lifestyle, along with embracing an academic model of success, subtly distinguished them from the Muslim populations with whom they had previously shared similar conditions. Within the same socio-economic category, Jews and Muslims gradually drifted apart, creating a cultural and linguistic gap intensified by increasing francisation. Mentalities shifted; high literacy rates, associated with widespread schooling, access to respected professional roles, and the enjoyment of freedoms and rights denied to Muslims, further widened the divide between the two communities. Regardless of the forms of the political domination exercised by the colonial presence in the Maghreb, the destinies of Jewish communities and their modes of coexistence with Muslims were profoundly transformed. The dynamics of this transformation and emancipation did not uniformly reach all corners of the Maghreb, particularly in the rural and mountainous regions. Communities such as the Jews of the Algerian Sahara who remained outside the fold of naturalisation, the Berber Jews of the Middle Atlas, or the *Twansa*¹⁶ of Djerba and Zarzis, were not affected by these changes. Through legal measures in Algeria in 1870, and through a policy of integration through education and schooling in Tunisia and Morocco, supported by the Alliance Israélite Universelle and its network of schools, modelled after the French system, France's role as a self-proclaimed liberator facilitated early French acculturation. This has significantly benefited Jewish communities in terms of educational access and social promotion. The French principles of equality and these educational policies were not applied in the same way to the Muslim communities, who were initially excluded from this system designed to emancipate colonized populations. Unlike in Tunisia and Morocco, where traditional and French educational systems coexisted until independence, the colonial authorities in Algeria undermined religious education and the indigenous school system¹⁷, contributing to what Kateb (2001) terms the 'homelessness' of Algerian society. Schools for both Jews and Muslims were founded in Algiers as early as 1836, with French Muslim schools following in 1850, yet their enrolment remained

¹⁵ The opening of the first school of the Alliance Universelle Israélite (AUI) in Tetouan in 1862. In Tunisia, AUI schools were created in 1878, a few years before the French Protectorate. Morocco had the most developed school system. At its peak in 1955, there were 85 schools and 28,143 students.

¹⁶ The term *Twansa*, which designates the long-standing indigenous Jewish communities in Tunisia, differentiates them from the *Grana*, Sephardic Jews from Livorno who arrived in the 17th century.

¹⁷ The rabbinical schools (*midrashims*) that taught Hebrew and sacred texts were also suppressed in 1870, just after the promulgation of the Crémieux decree while they were maintained in the Tunisia Protectorate.

scant and they achieved little success. These schools were closed in 1871, and it wasn't until 1892 that a policy of public education and mandatory schooling¹⁸ was implemented in Algeria. However, the education system's inherent inequality, which created a divide between indigenous and European students, resulted in segregated schools and a pronounced educational deficiency¹⁹. This scholastic disadvantage for Muslims (excluding a small number of indigenous notables) was a trait shared by all North African societies, and widened the disparity in trajectories towards social progression and emancipation. Although Jews were no longer a protected class, they were not spared by the waves of European antisemitism exported by France. Their electoral participation (just under 10% of the electorate) as a result of the Crémieux decree fanned the flames of antisemitic hatred, which reached a climax in Algeria with the Dreyfus affair. It was expressed in the very serious antisemitic riots in Oran and Constantine²⁰. Widely shared by all social strata of French and European Algerians (of all political persuasions), this antisemitic culture²¹ opposed the integration of Jews into the national community and pushed for the repeal of the Crémieux decree, called for by the French far right (Abitbol, 1999). Antisemitic attitudes were widespread in the colony, and they became a powerful component of political life. The antisemitic violence drew Algerian Jews closer to left-wing French republicans. The support of the latter fuelled republican patriotism among the Jewish population which grew stronger, not least during the Dreyfus affair.

Antisemitic violence in Algeria in the 1930s put the colonial assimilationist model to the test (and revealed its limitations). This challenge was also associated with the rise of Arab nationalism in the anti-colonial struggle and of independence movements in countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. These movements called into question the assimilationist model, which was designed to keep the colonies within the Republic. This was also when Zionism (born at the end of the 19th century) emerged as a significant political force in the 1920s and 1930s (Tsur 2012).

This endemic antisemitism, expressed recurrently throughout the countries of the Maghreb, engulfs both Jews and Muslims in a violent and racist French anti-indigenism in Algeria and, increasingly, in Tunisia and Morocco. These changes contributed to the emergence of a new segment of the population, the French Oriental (Stora, 2006), heirs to a long history in Arab-Berber and Muslim lands, who remained deeply attached to the countries to which they belonged.

1914-1939, participating in the French imperial project

¹⁸ Mandatory schooling imposed in France by the Jules Ferry laws of 1882.

¹⁹ In 1930-31 the enrolment rate for indigenous children was 5.4 per cent and in 1954 it was 14.6 per cent. See Kamel Kateb, « Les séparations scolaires dans l'Algérie coloniale », *Insaniyat / إنسانيات*, 25-26 | 2004, 65-100.

²⁰ Following the Dreyfus Affair, from 1895 to 1902, the "anti-Jewish crisis" (Demerdjian, 2018) in Algeria spread to the point of the settlers' demanding autonomy. In anti-Semite-ruled municipalities such as Algiers and Oran, violent demonstrations against Jews were part of political life.

²¹ "Far from being a bunch of outcasts or frustrated, the militants of the dozens of antisemitic leagues that have spread to all the cities of Algeria come from the most dynamic and modern urban circles of the country: liberal professions, shopkeepers, workers, civil servants, settlers, etc., not to mention the women who entered public life thanks to the anti-Jewish demonstrations organized at the call of Max Régis and of his Algiers friends" in Michel Abitbol « L'antisémitisme colonial dans l'affaire Dreyfus » in Gilles Manceron, Emmanuel Naquet, (Dir), *Être dreyfusard hier et aujourd'hui*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2009, pages 361-370.

World War I led to different forms of military mobilisation. Indigenous Muslims were subject to compulsory conscription, while Algerian Jews were de facto mobilised because they had been French citizens since 1870. For Moroccan and Tunisian Jews, France gradually became an inevitable horizon of expectation in light of Algerian Jews' experience of mass naturalisation. The interwar period confirmed the Algerian Jews' feeling of being "truly" French, and confirmed the desire of the vast majority of Tunisian and Moroccan Jews to become French, despite the virulent antisemitism that pervaded the colonial Maghreb, particularly Algeria. The Great War triggered a large-scale emigration of workers to France. Between 1921 and 1939, almost 400,000 people from the Maghreb (mostly Algerians) crossed the Mediterranean to work in the mines in the North and in the Paris and Lyon regions. Confronting war, the price of bloodshed, and subsequently, the experience of working as a wage earner opened up new perspectives despite the precariousness and xenophobia associated with their migratory status. The experience of the war also confirmed the inequality of treatment between Muslim and French combatants despite the fraternity of arms. The sacrifices made during the war were not experienced in quite the same way. In view of the scale of the mobilisation of colonial troops (almost 300,000 soldiers from the Maghreb) and the considerable number of Muslim victims, the Jonnart Law of 1919 brought some legal improvements in Algeria but did not go so far as to grant full citizenship. The interwar period provided the colonised peoples of the Maghreb with unprecedented political alternatives to assert their anti-colonial rights. The great Arab revolt in Palestine under the Mandate in 1936, the sharp rise of Zionism, and the nationalist awakenings in the Arab world widened the gap between Muslims and Jews. The creation of the Republic of Turkey in 1923, Egypt's independence in 1924, the creation of the Destour Movement in Tunisia in 1919, and the fallout from the Rif War fuelled political activism inspired by Muslim reformism, pan-Arabism, the Congress of Tours, and the values of the French Revolution. In France, the inauguration of the Paris mosque in 1926, with great fanfare, had no impact on the way North Africans in France were represented, but an association of Muslim students from North Africa (*étudiants musulmans d'Afrique du Nord* "EMNA") was founded in 1927 by several hundred North African students, a year after Messali Hadj's²² *Étoile nord-africaine* (North African Star), an offshoot of the French Communist Party. The end of the war undoubtedly accelerated the integration of North African Jews into French society and the emergence of new expressions of patriotism. Overall (and despite widely contrasting situations), their level of education and command of the French language was higher than that of Muslims. Whilst a small Muslim elite, most of whom lived in towns and cities, had attended French schools and earned degrees, and made their mark on colonial society through exceptional promotion²³, their political and social weight remained insignificant. This elite remains a rare manifestation of the common and shared culture acquired in French schools. The legacy of a shared Judeo-Muslim history is still evident in the arts. Judeo-Arab music embodies the symbiosis of this history. From Arabo-Andalusian²⁴ music to *Chaâbi* (popular Algerian music), great masters (*maâlem*) and Jewish artists have enriched and safeguarded the Maghreb's

²² A politician and anti-colonialist activist, he was a pioneer in the process that led to Algerian independence.

²³ In Algeria, the Association of Indigenous Teachers was created in 1920. These tiny elites will play a major role in the anti-colonial struggle like Ferhat Abbas and Salah Bendjelloul.

²⁴ The *El Moutribia orchestra* (founded in 1909) with Edmond Yafil and Mahieddine Bachtarzi, the future founder of the Algerian theatre), Saoud Medioni, Sassi Labrati, Cheikh Raymond, virtuoso of the *maalouf*, (Constantinese school of Arab-Andalusian music).

musical heritage²⁵. From the 1930s onwards, the Maghreb record industry bore witness to the common Mediterranean and Arab-Berber roots of Jewish and Muslim culture.

The second world war

The Second World War considerably weakened the old and new equilibria of the Maghreb's Jews. The installation of the Vichy regime on 10 July 1940 was accompanied by a policy of collaboration with the German occupying forces. The anti-Jewish laws passed in October 1940, which initially targeted the 300,000 French Jews under the authority of a Commissariat Général aux Questions Juives (General Commissariat for Jewish Issues) created in March 1941²⁶, were also applicable in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco²⁷. Like French Jews, Jewish civil servants who lost their jobs were banned from many professions (real estate, lending, banking, and journalism), and a numerus clausus of 2% was applied to Jewish lawyers and doctors. The Jews of Algeria who had been collectively naturalised in 1870 under the Crémieux decree were stripped of their French nationality²⁸. The brutal way in which the decree was applied meant that they were demoted to the indigenous category on the same footing as the Muslims. Tunisia was occupied by Axis forces from November 1942 to May 1943²⁹. This occupation came at a high price for Tunisian Jews, who were treated as enemies and subjected to a wide range of abuses, including hostage-taking, the enrolment of 3,000 men in compulsory labour camps, exorbitant collective fines, deportation to concentration camps in Europe and the removal of the management of their businesses, which were entrusted to "Aryan" provisional administrators. Morocco was also forced to apply the Vichy anti-Jewish measures. Although the official historiography of the Moroccan kingdom presents Mohammed V as the protector and saviour of his Jewish subjects³⁰, three anti-Jewish *dahirs*³¹ (royal decrees) were imposed by the Vichy authorities and nevertheless signed by Sultan Mohamed V. However, no Moroccan Jews were deported from Morocco, which paradoxically became a destination for European Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazi regime. Furthermore, the 22 July 1941 law on the Aryanization of the economy was never applied. Although the Americans landed in Morocco on 8 November 1942, it was not until General de Gaulle took control of North Africa in the summer of 1943 that the Vichy laws were abolished.

At the end of the war, the number of Jews in the Maghreb was estimated to be more than 500,000 (250,000 in Morocco, 130,000 in Algeria, 90,000 in Tunisia, and 36,000 in Libya). At the time, Moroccan Jews made up half of the Jewish community in the Arab world, making it the largest Jewish community in the Maghreb and the Arab world. After the war, the political

²⁵ See the website Gharamophone.com, an online archive dedicated to the preservation of North Africa's Jewish musical heritage, created by Chis Silver, Assistant Professor of Jewish History and Culture in the Department of Jewish Studies at McGill University in Montreal.

²⁶ French Jewish citizens were excluded from the civil service, the army, education, the press, radio and cinema. In July 1941, the Jews had to cede their rights over companies to "Aryans".

²⁷ The Jews of Libya were imprisoned and then deported after Italy adopted the racial laws of 1938.

²⁸ Law repealing the Crémieux decree of October 7, 1940 which made the Jews of Algeria "indigenous Israelites". See also Claire Zalc, *Dénaturalisés. Les retraits de nationalité sous Vichy*, Le Seuil, 2016.

²⁹ Fayçal Cherif, *La Tunisie pendant la seconde guerre mondiale*, Centre de la publication universitaire, 2014.

³⁰ Many historians, including Georges Bensoussan, have spoken out against this version, which is considered to be the nationalist expression of royal propaganda.

³¹ The Dahir of October 13, 1940 (only 10 days after the adoption of the first "Statute of the Jews"), the Dahir of August 5, 1941, and finally the one of August 19, 1941.

emancipation of Jews also took the form of Zionism, with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948. The massive emigration to Israel after the Second World War had been partly prepared by the very dynamic actions of the Jewish Agency³², which had already travelled throughout Tunisia and Morocco in the 1930s and 1940s to convince, or even compel, Jews to emigrate to the new Zionist state (Saadoun, 2012). The Jewish Agency, which was particularly aware of the settlement potential of Moroccan Jews, especially those from the Kingdom's most disadvantaged regions, was very active in Morocco. Between 1955 and 1956, almost 60,000 of them left for Israel. These emigrations, which were more or less tolerated by colonial authorities, were authorised by Hassan II in 1961, a year in which 80,000 Moroccan Jews migrated to Israel.

Independence

Independence³³ sparked a climate of insecurity for Jewish populations who found little reassurance in the new national identities centred on Arab-Muslim exclusivism. The Tunisian Constitution of 1959, the Moroccan Constitution of 1962, and the Algerian Constitution of 1963 all affirmed the Muslim identity of the new states, while the policies that were introduced heightened concerns about the position of Jews within them - for example, the dismantling of the Jewish Community Council in Tunisia in 1958 and the nationalisation of Jewish institutions and schools in Morocco in 1960. Generally speaking, nationalism never spares religious and ethnic-linguistic minorities, and the shockwaves of successive conflicts between Israel and Arab countries reverberated through public opinion in the Maghreb. While some Jewish activists, mainly members of the Communist Party, were involved in the independence movements³⁴, the majority of Maghrebi Jews remained in a wait-and-see position, worried as they were about the uncertainties surrounding their treatment by the future independent regimes. Caught between Arab-Muslim nationalism that was not inclusive and Jewish-Zionist nationalism that superimposed religious affiliation and national identification, and anxious about the uncertainty of independence, the idea of leaving became inescapable. Algerian Jews headed for France, which offered the guarantee of republican equality, while a large number of Tunisian and Moroccan Jews headed for Israel, and to a lesser extent, Canada.

The first decades of independence (the 1950s and the 1960s) were marked by massive and permanent departures, depriving North African societies of their Jewish dimension. While independence was followed by significant waves of Jewish departures, it was the development of the Arab-Israeli conflict, particularly the Six-Day War in 1967, that put an end to the Jewish presence. The Israeli victory over the armies of Arab countries provoked violent demonstrations. In Tunisia, for example, Jewish shops were looted and the Great Synagogue was set on fire on 5 June 1967, by a crowd left to its own devices by a national police force that

³² These departures had begun as early as the 1940s, driven by the Jewish Agency. Established under the British Mandate, the Jewish Agency is a Zionist organization originally charged with the administration of the Jewish community in Palestine. Its role was decisive in the departure of the Jews from the Maghreb.

³³ 1956 for Tunisia and Morocco and 1962 for Algeria.

³⁴ Like Abraham Serfaty in Morocco, Georges Adda in Tunisia or Daniel Timsit in Algeria.

had no control over the rioters. The anti-Jewish incidents that had already occurred at the time of the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, the Six-Day War (1967), and the Arab-Israeli War of 1973 led to the departure of several thousand Jews from waves of immigration to France and Canada. By the mid-1970s, there were only 20,000 Jews in Morocco, 7,000 in Tunisia and less than a thousand in Algeria³⁵. In Algeria, 120,000 of the 130,000 Jews living there had left the country by 1962, the overwhelming majority of them heading for France.

Although colonial rule significantly influenced the fate of Jewish communities³⁶ and separated them from their Muslim counterparts, albeit in very contrasting situations, independence and the Arab-Israeli geopolitical context of the 1950s and 1960s contributed to emptying Maghreb societies of their Jewish elements. Jewish populations have certainly been religious minorities in Muslim lands, but they nevertheless represent the main reality of ethno-religious and cultural diversity in the history and space of the Maghreb.

³⁵ Historians Michel Abitbol for Morocco and Olfa Ben Achour for Tunisia have demonstrated that 125,000 of the 160,000 Moroccan Jews on the one hand, and 48,000 of the 55,000 Tunisian Jews on the other, had left the country in the 1960s, in close connection with the international situation.

³⁶ Particularly in Algeria where the politics of communal division have been the most radical.

Bibliographie

- Abdelkrim ALLAGUI, *Juifs et musulmans en Tunisie : des origines à nos jours*, Paris, Tallandier, 2016.
- Michel ABITBOL, *Les commerçants du roi, Tujjar al sultan. Une élite économique judéo-marocaine au XIX^{ème} siècle*, Maisonneuve & Larose, 1999.
- Michel ABITBOL, “De la tradition à la modernité : les juifs du Maroc”, *Diasporas*, 27 | 2016, 19-30.
- Joëlle ALLOUCHE-BENAYOUN et Geneviève DERMENJIAN (dir.), *Les Juifs d’Algérie. Une histoire de ruptures*, Aix-en-Provence, Presses universitaires de Provence, 2015.
- Valérie ASSAN, Bernard HEYBERGER et Jakob VOGEL, *Minorités en Méditerranée au XIX^e siècle. Identités, identifications, circulations*, Rennes, Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2019.
- Valérie ASSAN, *Les consistoires israélites d’Algérie au XIX^e siècle. L’alliance de la civilisation et de la religion*, Paris, A. Colin, 2012.
- Olfa BEN ACHOUR, *L’émigration des juifs de Tunisie de 1943 à 1967*, Paris, Publishroom, 2019.
- Laure BLEVIS, « En marge du décret Crémieux. Les Juifs naturalisés français en Algérie (1865 - 1919) », *Archives Juives* 2012/2 (Vol. 45), pages 47 à 67.
- Mark R. COHEN, *Under Crescent and Cross: The Jews in the Middle Ages*, Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Geneviève DEMERDJIAN, *Antijudaïsme et antisémitisme en Algérie coloniale : 1830-1964*, Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2018.
- Karima DIRECHE, Mathias DREYFUS, Benjamin STORA, *Juifs et musulmans de la France coloniale à nos jours*, Le Seuil, 2022.
- Fayçal CHERIF, *La Tunisie pendant la seconde guerre mondiale*, Centre de la publication universitaire, 2014.
- Kamel KATEB, 2001, « Européens, « indigènes » et juifs en Algérie (1830-1962) » Paris, *l’Ined/PUF*, 2001.
- Kamel KATEB, « Les séparations scolaires dans l’Algérie coloniale », *Insaniyat / إنسانيات*, 25-26 | 2004, 65-100.
- Ethan B. KATZ, *Juifs et musulmans en France. Le poids de la fraternité*, Belin, 2018.
- Ethan B. Katz, Lisa Moses Leff, Maud S. Mandel (Dir), *Colonialism and the Jews*, Indiana University Press, 2017.
- Mohammed KENBIB, *Juifs et musulmans au Maroc, 1859-1948. Contribution à l’histoire des relations intercommunautaires en terre d’islam*, Université Mohammed V, Faculté des lettres et des sciences humaines, Rabat, 1994.
- Gilles MANCERON, Emmanuel NAQUET (dir.), *Être dreyfusard hier et aujourd’hui*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, pages 361-370, 2009.
- Jessica M. MARGLIN, « A New Language of Equality: Jews and the State in Nineteenth Century Morocco », *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2016.

Jessica MARGLIN, "Written and Oral in Islamic Law: Documentary Evidence and Non-Muslims in Moroccan Shari'a Courts", in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 59, n. 4, 2017;

Jessica MARGLIN, *Across Legal Lines. Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2016, 336 p.

Haïm SAADOUN, "Histoire familiale, parcours individuel et mémoire collective. Le rabbin Joseph Messas témoin des vagues d'émigration des juifs du Maroc", in Frederic Abécassis, Karima Dirèche, Rita Aouad (dir), *La bienvenue et l'adieu. Migrants juifs et musulmans au Maghreb, XVème-XXème siècle*, 2012, <https://books.openedition.org/cjb/124>.

Benjamin STORA, *Les trois exils. Juifs d'Algérie*, Paris, Stock, 2006.

Jacques TAIEB, « Les juifs du Maghreb », *Encyclopédie berbère*, 26 | 2004, 3952-3962, <https://journals.openedition.org/encyclopedieberbere/949>

Yaron TSUR, « Moroccan Jewry and Decolonization. A Modern History of Collective Social Boundaries », in Judith Frishman, David J. Wertheim, Ido de Haan, Joël Cahen (dir.), *Borders and Boundaries in and around Dutch Jewish History*, Amsterdam, Aksant, 2011, p. 193-200.

Yaron TSUR, L'exode de Fès. Sur les origines de l'émigration sioniste du Maroc, in Frédéric Abécassis, Karima Dirèche, Rita Aouad (dir), *La bienvenue et l'adieu. Migrants juifs et musulmans au Maghreb, XVème-XXème siècle*, 2012, <https://books.openedition.org/cjb/153?>

Haïm Zafrani, *Deux mille ans de vie juive au Maroc*, Maisonneuve Larose, 1999.

Claire ZALC, *Dénaturalisés. Les retraits de nationalité sous Vichy*, Le Seuil, 2016.

