

Introduction

Historically, Morocco had one of the largest and oldest populations of Jews in the Arab world, their presence stretching back to the pre-Islamic period.¹ At its peak before World War II, Morocco's Jewish community numbered about 240,000 (2.7 percent of the total population), living predominantly in urban centers in the French and Spanish colonial zones.² Called "people of the book" (*dhimmi*) by Muslims, the majority of Jews lived under the protection of the Moroccan king in return for submission and the payment of a tax known as *jizya*.³ In areas outside the king's control, such as Akka, Berber chieftains ensured Jewish security.⁴

The Jews had ambivalent relations with their Muslim neighbors. Although Jewish communities resembled Muslim ones in language and custom, Jews faced occupational and social restrictions, such as in farming,⁵ and were mainly artisans, peddlers, and merchants.⁶ Rabbis and wealthy leaders who enjoyed special ties with Muslim authorities administered the Jewish community's internal social, legal, and religious affairs. Around 1862, the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) built schools in the coastal cities and later in the hinterland, enabling many Jews to integrate into the wider world beyond Morocco.⁷ Around the same time, however, political Zionism began to make inroads among the Jews of Morocco,⁸ and a century later, in 1956 after Moroccan independence, Jews were affected by the new government's Arab-Islamic policies and a widely celebrated national Arabization program.⁹ Zionist movements began to encourage Jews to move to Israel, and many people of Jewish descent left Morocco for Israel, Europe, and the Americas. Today, fewer than 3,000 Jews reside in Morocco, principally in major urban areas such as Casablanca and Rabat.

In the 1950s and 1960s, North African scholarship in general and Moroccan historiographical writing in particular had been mainly focused on issues of nationalism, pan-Arabism, and the Islamic character of North African societies.¹⁰ Although a few scholars have begun to revisit and reexamine the histories and lives of ethnic and religious minorities in the region,¹¹ the place of religious

minorities and of Jews in particular in this history has largely been ignored. Especially for native Muslim anthropologists, research on Middle Eastern Jewry and Judaism is still taboo. The reasons are obvious: scholars can be labeled (and stigmatized) as pro-Zionist just for conducting research on the Jews of the Arab world, and this labeling can have serious professional and personal consequences.

I am a native of a southeastern Moroccan oasis, perhaps a slightly uncommon native.¹² I was born and raised in Lamhamid, an oasis north of Akka at the foot of the Anti-Atlas Mountains. I left my village early to finish my primary, secondary, and, later, university studies. My parents are illiterate; my oldest brother was one of the first villagers to attend a secular public school, not only in my extended family but also in the whole province of Tata. My father is from the Haratine social group, which, unlike the maraboutic families (*shurfa*), do not claim descent from the Prophet Mohammed's family lineage,¹³ and their purportedly inferior status limits their social mobility and economic improvement. Until independence, the Haratine were farmers working as day laborers mainly in lands owned by the *shurfa*. Very few owned property, which made the majority largely servants in the traditional subsistence oasis agriculture.¹⁴ After independence, the Haratine and their descendants began to challenge both the inherited religious status and authority of the *shurfa* and their economic position by sending their children to modern schools.¹⁵ It was through his attendance at these new secular schools that my brother was able to break away from the social hierarchies imposed on my father and other Haratine.¹⁶ As a teacher with an independent income, my brother could sever any future ties of dependency on the political and economic system based on the religious authority of the *shurfa*.

Until I began studying the generational differences in Muslims' narratives and memories about their erstwhile Jewish neighbors, I had never ventured deep into the Sahara. As a native ethnographer, I had easy access to these Saharan communities. However, my personal ties to the region and my anthropological knowledge and vantage point were usually challenged because of my research topic. On numerous occasions, just being black earned me the label of a Falashi (Ethiopian) Jew. "The only thing you need is a Jewish yarmulke and you will be one of them. You would be mistaken for a Falashi even in Israel," one of my consultants remarked when he heard that I was studying Moroccan Jews. It

was said in jest, but jokes bear bitter truths. In this part of Morocco, blacks and Jews have historically been relegated to a lower status in the community. Thus, members of the white clans sometimes invoke the appellation *Falashi* to remind blacks of their supposedly degrading origins. During my daily encounters, it was clear that the study of Jews by a local Muslim anthropologist remains a taboo in the minds of many of my interviewees. For instance, a Moroccan historian from the University of Mohammed V in Rabat who studied the Jews of southern communities faced the same negative public perception to the extent that throughout the south people recalled him as “Abdellah ‘*udayn*” (Abdellah the Jew, in Berber). The study of Jews living in Muslim societies was believed to be the task of Jewish researchers and Western scholars.

Despite the stigma, I looked at the history of Saharan Jewries by following their trading routes and examining their social and cultural customs.¹⁷ I interviewed many Muslims about their memories of these communities, all of which disintegrated as the Jews left for Israel, starting in 1962. During these interviews, I realized that while international Muslim scholarship was generally silent about the role of Jews in North African history, this was not the case in Morocco itself. Until recently, research by Moroccan Muslims focused on histories of Jewish-Muslim relations before independence.¹⁸ Moroccan scholars, largely historians, have begun to reflect on the history of Jews in Morocco after independence, and archival research remains their primary resource. Ethnographic research on Jewish communities by North African scholars is still rare.

Narratives about the French Protectorate are still ingrained in the southwestern Moroccan imagination.¹⁹ The elders of the farthest Saharan oases remember French agents and their role in maintaining control in the region. Colonial memories are not outside the daily frame of reference of the older generation, and even of certain members of the younger generation. My ethnographic encounter with the people triggered some of those dormant community memories and views of the colonial officers, missionaries, and travelers who once visited the area disguised as Jews or Muslims.²⁰ Since 9/11, my study brought back the memories of foreign spies, lack of trust, and questions surrounding the production of colonial knowledge about the region. For some people, I was part of the Western tradition of knowledge. By comparing my work with those of European travelers such as Charles de Foucauld, I was cast as part of a continuing colonial legacy of knowledge. By studying the Jews of Morocco, I was

thought by many informants to be in the process of writing another colonial ethnography on Moroccan Jewry.²¹

But what kind of “reconnaissance” should scholars of Moroccan Jews produce today? Should it be based on a colonial genealogy of knowledge or other sources of knowledge? Should I reject the claims of colonial narratives in their entirety, as some nationalist historians advocated?²² De Foucauld’s study of Moroccan society in the nineteenth century has as many strengths as it has flaws. My own ethnographic encounter corroborated information reported by de Foucauld more than a century earlier. Nevertheless, other sources could complement de Foucauld’s study: legal manuscripts, personal Muslim narratives, and colonial as well as post-colonial Jewish and Muslim newspapers. In any post-colonial revision and reevaluation of Moroccan historiography, we have to accept that colonial knowledge is an interpretation of local reality. This interpretation, like any other, is open to deconstruction. It should be analyzed, critiqued, and appreciated as a phase of Moroccan history and not rejected because of its link with a colonial power. Following that line of thought, colonial narratives such as de Foucauld’s should be used despite their attitudes toward Jews and Muslims because each narrative is told from the perspective of the moral and intellectual climate of both teller and century. While absolute truth may not be available to humankind, knowledge and deliberate ignorance are incompatible.

In many spontaneous group conversations, Muslims discuss Moroccan Jews today in terms of nostalgic memory,²³ gossip,²⁴ ritual insult,²⁵ and political ridicule.²⁶ While members of the older generation express nostalgic sadness about the absence of Jews from Morocco, younger subjects use humor, jokes, hearsay, and mockery to protest, ostracize, demonize, and resist Israelis and Jews in general, whom they see as their political and social enemies. Laughter and derision²⁷ serve as fuel for the perceptions, especially for those of the generation that have never met a Jew, that Jews are political spies and religious inferiors to Muslims.

Historical and Longitudinal Narratives

The key questions of this book are: Which factor is central in the formation of Muslim memories about absent Jews? Is it the long-circulated narratives of shared experiences between Muslims, like Ali, and Jews? Or do actual current events in

the Middle East—in particular, the Arab-Israeli conflict—have greater weight in forming opinions, attitudes, and ideologies about Jews and their relationship to Muslims? This historical ethnography examines the narratives and memories of four successive Muslim generations about their former Jewish neighbors in marginal communities of the southeastern Moroccan hinterlands. Through a close reading of new sources such as travel narratives, legal manuscripts, newspapers, and interviews, I hope to shed light on the silenced and marginalized histories of these rural Jewish communities and their complex relations with Muslims.²⁸ Each generation in the ethnographic sample was equally divided along ethnic background (Arab and Berber). Although I was not refused access to women as interviewees, given the strong cultural restrictions surrounding male-female encounters, I decided to focus my study in the field only on male respondents. The hovering presence of male relatives during a few interviews with women was behind my decision. I felt these consultants were prevented from talking freely in the presence of their husbands or brothers.

The study included men from four generations (great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, and young adults), who were selected by a stratified,²⁹ purposive³⁰ sampling method according to the political period during which they came of age. The first category's great-grandparents came of age during the Moroccan Protectorate (1912–1956). The second category includes grandparents who witnessed the outcomes of the Vichy era (1940–1943) and the establishment of Israel (1948). The third group includes parents who experienced Moroccan independence (1956), the wars between Israel and the Arab countries (1967, 1973), and the increasing migration of Jews to Israel (1960). The fourth category's younger people may never have met Jews, but they have experienced them through the media, the Intifada (1987), the Oslo Agreement and its aftermath (1993), the al-Aqsa uprising (2000), and ongoing Middle Eastern events.

My main sample included eighty respondents, twenty from each age group; they ranged from their early twenties to late nineties. The respondents—from both Arab and Berber lineages—are also equally divided into two groups: *haratine* and *shurfa*. The Haratine are usually black descendants of either slaves brought from sub-Saharan Africa or the indigenous black population. They form the majority of the population of many villages in southeastern Morocco and practice farming, and they have generally been regarded as belonging to an inferior social stratum. The lighter-skinned *shurfa* are a mixture of Berbers from

clans, such as ayt-Mribat, ayt-Sh'ayb, ayt-Rasmuk, and ayt-Habul, and migrant Bedouins, such as the Oulad Jallal clan. The ayt-Mribat, ayt-Sh'ayb, ayt-Rasmuk, and ayt-Habul historically controlled the political decisions of the region and spread their control over the villages in Akka.³¹

My data collection relied largely on open-ended questions, which led to long stories about interviewees' relations with Jews, their educational background, their dreams, and their aspirations for their children.³² I spent hours with villagers at their farms and houses, streets and cafés, inside tents and under palm trees, around a cup of tea or sharing a spicy *tajine*, a southern dish made with vegetables, camel, or beef. These meetings sometimes grew into spontaneous focus groups in which members of three or four generations shared and debated their views on similar topics. To highlight these perspectives, I have reproduced portions of the narratives in this book because their words inform our understanding of the intrinsic connections and ruptures between various accounts.

To understand how Jews are perceived, I looked at both personal and collective memory across different generations in the contexts of colonial and post-colonial Moroccan politics.³³ Individuals, Tina Campt notes, "remember as members of groups—that is, through common points of reference, contexts, and associations. Memory is about individuals making the past meaningful, not so much for what it was but for how it is of use to us today."³⁴ In this case, memory is not solely about Muslims' stored beliefs about Jews; it also represents the continuous historical process of Jewish representation in Moroccan society, which changes across time and space.

There are methodological reasons why focusing on this remote Muslim community will allow us to gain a greater understanding of Saharan Jews (and those in Akka in particular). My focus on memory and change in attitudes requires an environment where different generations of subjects are not uniformly exposed to similar media likely to reinforce analogous views. The geographic remoteness of Akka and other Saharan communities limited the exposure of many of my interviewees, especially members of the older generations, to mainstream political, educational, and media influences. The fact that a few members of the older generation left the region for urban areas and that many of them were illiterate compared to their children and grandchildren provided variability in the sample. Finally, the long historical presence of Jews in different hamlets throughout southeastern Morocco and the visibility of this

historical memory in this regional landscape make the process of remembering possible.

There are large variations among the different categories of respondents with regard to educational achievements. They vary not only in terms of the age groups of those interviewed but also in terms of their ethnic and language backgrounds. Recall that in each of the four cohorts there are twenty respondents, half Haratine and half *shurfa*. The great-grandparents showed very limited access to education. However, 15 percent of the respondents attended Qur'anic school. (All of those educated were *shurfa*.) All of the Haratine expressed their inability to get an education because they were forced to toil on the agricultural lands.

The grandparents' group not only showed an improvement in schooling but also reflected the beginning of the Haratine's access to education (30 percent of ten Haratine respondents attended Qur'anic school and 10 percent attended only primary school). The post-colonial government encouraged more people to enroll in schools and provided an avenue for the Haratine to break away from the social hierarchies imposed on them over the years. Although only 40 percent of the grandparents' group remained uneducated compared to 85 percent in the great-grandparents' category, the respondents agreed that had it not been for the lack of good infrastructure, more people might have attended school. Not all villagers in these remote areas were able to get to far-away schools, nor did they have the financial means to further their schooling.

The parents interviewed showed the first educational results of the independence era. Only 10 percent of these respondents never attended primary school. This is the first time that at least one respondent attended school all the way from the Qur'anic level to the secular university. Respondents ascribed this rise in school attendance to the accessibility to schooling in their rural districts. They no longer had to travel long distances to attend a primary school and then move to a neighboring city's boarding school to finish their secondary and high school education. Still, schooling expenses continued to be an extra burden on the households. Many parents chose to keep their children in the village instead of spending more money on their education. Many villagers, mostly Haratine, were eventually able to allow their children not only to attend but also to actually finish school because their relatives provided remittances after migrating to France and other European countries. In time the Haratine became some of

the most highly educated people in the villages. In some villages, the first primary school teacher was of Haratine ancestry.

In the young adult category, 60 percent of the respondents had a university degree. Ninety-five percent had concurrently attended the Qur'anic and primary school; 80 percent pursued secondary education. Bureaucratic jobs require diplomas, and despite the high rate of unemployment among university graduates nationwide, the majority of the respondents still believe that education is the best means of social mobility. Forty percent of young adult respondents who had university training are Haratine. This shows that the level of education continues to increase among the minority than the majority after independence. According to Haddou, a Haratine descendant, "We had nothing. No lands. No shops. No business. The only way to improve our situation is to get a university degree and training to take care of our families. The *shurfa* do not want to study because they had land, water shares, and still own the majority of palm trees in the villages."

The educational achievement of the different groups in the current schooling system has also influenced the linguistic profiles of many respondents as well as their occupations. Looking at the correlation between the age groups and the number of languages spoken, we can distinguish between two categories of languages: native and colonial. Schooling, as may be expected, has encouraged the acquisition of foreign languages. Access to languages and the level of proficiency in them turned out to be a significant factor in the young participants' choice of university degree specialization. More than half of those interviewed had majored in geography, Arabic, history, law, and Islamic studies. The majority of them explained this choice by noting their desire to finish their degree in the field of Islamic studies rather than economics and mathematics, which require a fluency in French. Equally important, many students could not afford their college education, so they relied on the Ministry of Education's scholarship (US\$500 a year). If they failed their annual exam, they would lose their financial support. A degree in Islamic studies relies on a prior knowledge of the Qur'an and the Hadith (the collection of the Prophet's sayings and deeds), so these students are generally able to finish their degrees in four years. Finally, access to education improved the respondents' ability to listen to different news channels, participate in the political system by joining a party, and therefore be able to move outside the village. The relationship be-

tween the age cohort and primary place of residence (urban vs. rural) reflected a higher mobility among the youngest cohort. This group and some members of the parents' cohort spent time in certain cities, such as Casablanca, Rabat, Marrakesh, Fez, Tangiers, and Agadir.

Few studies have considered modern Muslim generational attitudes toward Jews of Moroccan descent in Israel, the United States, France, Canada, and other parts of the world.³⁵ Anthropological research has focused largely on the Moroccan Jews themselves, as opposed to what Moroccan Muslims might think of Moroccan Jews. Furthermore, most of the studies that relied on Muslims focused on members of the older generations, who had nurtured personal contacts with their Jewish neighbors, leaving aside the attitudes of other Muslim cohorts. My work takes into account this methodological limitation to answer questions about the perceptions and both negative and positive attitudes of Muslim generations.

As the voices reveal, I suggest that there is a breakup at the level of transmission of knowledge to the extent that the very notion of Jews as indigenous Moroccans is alien to many interviewees. In the minds of many Moroccans, including some of Omar's customers, Ariel Sharon and other leaders have been joined with Moroccan Jews. In fact, in one newspaper article, "Our Jews: Are They Afraid?," Daniel, a Moroccan Jew from Casablanca, betrays his perception of a widespread attitude toward Jews: "I am not a killer of Palestinians, I was born in Morocco, I am a Moroccan and I have the right to live in peace."³⁶ This confusion between Moroccan Jews and Israel and Israeli policies has largely put Moroccan Jews today outside Morocco. The stories that follow describe the historical shifts in Muslim attitudes and perceptions toward Jews in local, national, and global contexts.