

Muslim-Jewish Interactions in the “Islamic City” and the *Mellah* in Precolonial Morocco

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Abstract: British travel writers and explorers who journeyed to precolonial Morocco deployed in their accounts, records and memoirs, a variety of (mis)representations and rhetorical strategies of Morocco's single largest religious minority, the Jews, as well as the latter's inter-communal encounters with Moroccans in the medina. The *mellah* as a Jewish neighborhood is rendered as a permeable and liminal space. That is, the *mellah* is conceived of as a socially, culturally and religiously dynamic entity, focusing on the minority group's acculturation into the broader parameters of Moroccan Muslim society. In this paper, the focus will be on demystifying and analyzing different discursive forms British observers form about Jews and their quarter in the light of their interactions with Muslims in the “Islamic City.” Interestingly, the paper looks at space not as a bounded site of fixed identities and cultural practices, but rather as “a critical terrain” of encounters and transculturation. The “porousness” of the *mellah* and the “Islamic City” as liminal spaces leads to the production of a transcultural, ambivalent, fluid and protean reality.

Keywords: Muslims, Jews, Space, *Mellah*, “Islamic City,” Liminality, Cross-cultural Interactions, Travel Writing, Representation.

Introduction

Scepticism has become writ large about colonial sources of information regarding Moroccan Jews. Very few researchers on Moroccan Jewish history and culture stopped to consider the feasibility of the travel narratives as a bona fide paradigm on Moroccan Jews and their space. While a number of Moroccan researchers, including Mohammed Kenbib, Aomar Afa, Ahmad Tawfiq, Khalid Ben-Srhir, Aomar Boum, Jamaâ Baïda, *inter alia*, have worked in parallel with American¹ and European scholars – Daniel J. Schroeter, Susan Gilson Miller, Emily Benichou Gottreich, Jessica Marglin, to study the Jewish communities of Morocco, very few studies of the Jewries' space and their cultural encounters with Muslims have been produced to date. On the grounds of a shrift attention given to archival documents on the Jews, their quarter and their encounters with

1. As Moroccan Jewish studies in the US moves into the new millennium, several key trends are apparent. The current generation of practitioners is largely comprised of graduates of Middle Eastern Studies programs, trained in the constituent disciplines (history, anthropology, sociology, political science, etc.) during the heyday of federal funding for area studies in the 1990s and the early 2000s.

Muslims,² the colonial travel narratives on Morocco remain one of the key sources in the production of Jews' history, culture, space and cross-cultural encounters with Moroccans.

Most of British travel writers who journeyed in Morocco in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century have stereotypical and sometimes ambivalent views vis-à-vis the Jews and their space in Morocco, so we should bear in mind the main contextualizing discourses and structures of power that galvanize such writers to form such a constellation of images about this minority and their space. British travel writers journeyed to Morocco and interacted with the natives (the Moors, Berbers and Jews), representing it as a country replete with negative portrayals and vignettes: social crises and insecurities, revolts, brigandism, religious fanaticism, social anarchy, tribal feuds as well as harmful practices of the protégés or the “troublesome children of imperialism,” to use Daniel Rivet’s expression in his “Foreword” to Mohammed Kenbib’s book, *Les Protégés: contribution à l’histoire contemporaine du Maroc*.³

Life in the Jewish quarter, the *mellah*, resulted in a specific Judeo-Moroccan identity, as much as the complex relationship with the Muslim community in the “Islamic City.” Both spaces constitute ambivalent and heterogeneous structures of the intermixing of people and their co-existence on the one hand, and those of instability, subservience, chauvinism and prejudice, on the other. Metaphorically, different Jewish quarters reproduced the dialectic of the situation of the Jews of Morocco: assertive and subservient, obvious yet hidden, autonomous yet dependent. This *mellah* of the imagination was as authoritative as any *mellah* defined by walls and gates, describing in spatial terms the peculiar quality of Muslim-Jewish relations in Morocco. It was a relationship in which Jews were influential, yet mindful of the dangers of flaunting that influence. Muslims in their parts accepted such quarters in the middle of the medina as they tacitly acknowledged the primacy of the Jews regarding commerce and finance.

Scholarly research into the Jewish communities and their interactions with Muslims has been increasing. The value of this paper lies in the fact that it tries to carve out a niche and fill a lacunae in the literature which is very scant with regard to British travel writings. In this paper, the focus will be on answering some of the fundamental inquiries related to the *mellah*'s origins in the light of British travel narratives so as to delve into the circumstances of Jewish life and their encounters with Muslims. In addition, we will explore the creation of

2. In this regard, see Khalid Ben-Srhir, “Al-arshīv al-brīṭānī wakitābat tārīkh yahūd al-Maghrib” *Hespéris-Tamuda* LI (2) (2016): 157-80. The main issues dealt with in the second and third parts of the special issue of *Hespéris-Tamuda* (2016) focus on the Jews of Morocco under the following heading: “Jews of Morocco and the Maghreb: History and Historiography.”

3. Mohamed Kenbib. *Les Protégés. Contribution à l’histoire contemporaine du Maroc* (Rabat: Publ. de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines), 1996.

the *mellah*, asking in particular what factors may have contributed to such an innovation and how it was explained or understood by its protagonists, Jews and Muslims alike, taking British travel writers’ accounts, memoirs and essays as an important departure and as a rich archive to be laid bare. Besides, we will bring into sharper focus the travel writers’ depictions of the *mellah* and the medina or the old “Islamic City” and their relations with each other by asking some questions as follows: What are the main discursive choices and rhetorical forms British travel writers deploy to represent both Muslims and Jews as two entities on the move in precolonial Morocco? How did British travel writers render Muslim and Jewish spaces? What are the main ramifications of Jews’ and Muslims’ conditions? How did Muslims and Jews perceive each other in the light of their mutual and permeable interactions both in the “Islamic City” and in the *mellah*?

The *Mellah* and the “Islamic City”

British travel writers to Morocco devote copious space in their accounts to dealing with the question of the Jews, their neighborhood and their various interactions with Moroccans and the latter’s medina or old Islamic City. Before focusing on the Jews’ space, it is worth having a look at the origins of this minority as a constitutive part of the Moroccan society and of the Judeo-Moroccan identity. The end of the thirteenth century coincided with the wane of the Almohad dynasty and a large number of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula settled in North Africa. The Christians’ re-conquest of European part in the fifteenth century created a clear political division in the Western Mediterranean; the expansion of the Ottoman Empire though through Northern Africa between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries excluded Morocco. All this would impact on the development of their own identities in the so-called Western Barbary, which affect both Muslims and Jews.

In the last decade of the fifteenth century, large numbers of Portuguese and Spanish Jews fled from Catholic kings’ persecution and maltreatment and they settled in major Moroccan cities. These immigrants are known as *megorashim*, a Hebrew term meaning “expellee.” They have been referred to in local and colloquial Arabic as *rumis*, meaning Romans or foreigners. Native Moroccan Jews have been called *toshavim*, meaning “residents” in Hebrew and “*Beldyin*” in Arabic. It is believed that these native Jewish residents were believed to be *berberiscos* (partly assimilated into Amazigh culture) and *forasteros*, “foreigners.”⁴

4. Hsain Ilahiane, “Spanish Balconies in Morocco: A Window on Cultural Influence and Historical Persistence in the Mellah (Jewish) Community,” in *Charting Memory: Recalling Medieval Spain*, (London: Routledge, 1999), 179. See also Mohamed Kenbib “Les Juifs de Tétouan entre la chronique et l’histoire,” *Hespéris-Tamuda* 23 (1985): 275; Shlomo Deshen, *The Mellah Society: Jewish Community Life in Sherifian Morocco* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1989), 8.

The majority of British travel writers practically agree on the premise that there were three separate and distinct classes of Jews in the Maghreb: the Spanish, who are the descendants of the refugees from Spain and settled in the coast towns; the Moorish Jews, who emigrated from Palestine at the commencement of the Christian era and live in the Berber country; and the Atlas Jews or the Jews of the Moroccan hinterlands. The exact period of the Atlas Jews' settlement in Morocco is uncertain. Walter Harris remarks that "the Atlas Jews are physically, if not morally, superior to their brethren who reside among the Moors. They are dispersed over the Atlas ranges, and have all the characteristics of mountaineers."⁵ The Jews of the Moroccan Atlas were involved directly in trade and indirectly in agriculture; there was a long historical coexistence of Berbers and Jews characterized by complexities and paradoxes. The Atlas was historically home to a large Jewish population, whose members travelled from one weekly market to another to conduct trade. It is discernible that in some regions of Morocco, such as the valleys and mountains of the Atlas, the *mellahs* are open and do not constitute self-contained fortified villages, as is the case in other rural regions of Morocco. The Atlas Jews enjoyed, like their neighbours, Berbers, a species of quasi-independence of the Imperial authority. In certain tribal areas, which were led by chieftains, Jews fell under the patronage of these powerful figures in their regions who protected them, and whose standards they followed. In his travel account, *Tafilet, The Times'* correspondent and British travel writer, Walter Harris,⁶ describes one such situation, in the Dades Valley of southeastern Morocco, in 1894, as follows:

"The Jews exist at Dads, as elsewhere among the Berbers, under the system of *debeha*, or sacrifice, so called from the fact that a sheep or an ox is supposed originally to have been offered to the Berbers in order to obtain protection. The families of Jews here too live in a feudal state, each being dependent upon some Shleh family for immunity from ill-treatment and robbery: in return for this they pay a small yearly tribute to their protector."⁷

As the French succeeded in their gradual pacification of the south, completed by 1933, a few Jews applied for French protégé-status for fear of losing local tribal support. The Jewish communities of the *bled* continued to fall under the

5. Walter Burton Harris, *The Land of an African Sultan* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1889), 7.

6. Walter Harris (1866-1933) occupied an influential position through his comments on the country, its people as well as its political order, both as a journalist, a political figure and the author of several books on the country, the most of which are *The Land of an African Sultan* (1889), *Tafilet* (1895), *Morocco that Was* (1921) and *France, Spain and the Rif* (1925). For more information, see John Fisher, "'An eagle whose wings are not always easy to clip': Walter Burton Harris," in *On the Fringes of Diplomacy: Influences on British Foreign Policy, 1800-1945*, John Fisher and Antony Best, eds. (London: Routledge, 2011).

7. Harris, *Tafilet: The Narrative of a Journey of Exploration in the Atlas Mountains and the Oases of the North-West Sahara* (Edinburgh William: Blackwood and Sons, 1895), 173-4.

protection of tribal lords and local individuals.⁸ The French administrators left the political and economic management of the south in the hands of tribal kais or *imgharn*, known as the lords of the Atlas, specifically Abdelmalek M'Tougi, Taieb Goundafi, and Thami Glaoui.⁹ The use of the tribal kais was for the subjugation of the tribal dissidents. Therefore, Marshal Hubert Lyautey, the first resident-General in Morocco (1912-1925), and his followers opted for a policy of indirect rule in the lands under the management of these lords, deferring to local kais on issues relating to local Jews.

Notwithstanding the large number of writings on Morocco give the appearance of a miscellaneous body of work, they are in fact a reworking or direct repetition of earlier descriptions. In this sense, each individual representation functions as a referent for another text. Various writings, by intertextually referring back and forth to one another and by borrowing elements from predecessors, constitute a systematic body of knowledge about Morocco. In this systematic body, the Orient, for Edward Said, is:

“less a place than a *topos*, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone’s work on the Orient, or some bit of previous imagining, or an amalgam of all these. Direct observation or circumstantial description of the Orient are the fictions presented by writing on the Orient, yet invariably *these are totally secondary to systematic tasks of another sort.*”¹⁰

British travel writers include in their texts portrayals of the Jewish *mellah*, aiming both at downplaying Jews’ space as it signifies their personality and at emphasizing the despotism and uncivilization of the Moroccan Makhzan. In the thirteen century, the Moroccan Sultan decided to build some quarters for the Jews to be protected against the violence of the Moors, so they built them their quarters which were called *mellahs*. Walled Jewish quarters first appeared in Morocco’s royal capitals, starting with Fez in 1438, followed by Marrakesh in the mid-sixteenth century, Meknes in the seventeenth, and several smaller towns in the early nineteenth century.¹¹ Lawrence Harris – an artist, doctor, war correspondent, author, lecturer, explorer, advertiser, and a fellow of the Royal Geographic Society – claims that the original appellation of this word is quite

8. Leland Bowie, “An Aspect of Muslim-Jewish Relations in Late Nineteenth-Century Morocco: A European Diplomatic View,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan., 1976): 3-19.

9. Gavin Maxwell, *Lords of the Atlas: The Rise and Fall of the House of Glaoua 1893-1956*, is available in many editions (London: Longmans: 1966; New York: Dutton, 1966; Eland Books, 1970; Lyons Press....).

10. Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Vintage Books, 1978), 177, emphasis added.

11. Emily Gottreich, “Rethinking the ‘Islamic City’ from the Perspective of Jewish Space,” *Jewish Social Studies*, New Series, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Autumn, 2004): 118-46.

blurred. He writes: “[t]he literal meaning of the word is “salt,” and the origin of this strange appellation is difficult to ascertain. The learned Moor says it was so-called by the Moors in derision, because the heads of all rebels were sent to the *mellah* to be salted by the Jewish butchers, preparatory to being hung above the gates of the town.”¹²

Lawrence Harris continues on to postulate that this explanation is closely relevant because “during the late troubles at Marrakesh a quantity of heads were sent to the Mellah, and the Jews were compelled to pickle them in salt.”¹³ Still, these travel writers’ assumption which holds that the *mellah* is a “salted, cursed ground” and that Jews were responsible for “salting the heads of the decapitated rebels” is totally false and stereotypical. The *mellah* has nothing to do with salt or Jews salting the heads of the rebels, rather it was the original name of the territory on which part of Fes al-jadid was established.¹⁴

The most important and well-known *mellahs* are those of Tétouan, Fez, Marrakech, Demnat, Sefrou, Meknes and Mogador. It is necessary to point out that not every town or village has a Jewish quarter, or *mellah*. In this context, Hsain Ilahiane remarks that it is essential to distinguish the urban *mellah* from the rural one. “The urban *Mellah*,” he avers, “constitutes an integral part of the urban fabric of major *Medinas* in several large cities; it is adjacent to the *Medina*, integrated into its urban layout or found on its periphery, yet in some places it is enclosed within a walled and fortified enclave.”¹⁵ He continues on to manifest that unlike the *mellahs* of the major urban centres, “most of the rural *mallahs* do not make up separate enclosed enclaves or *qusur* (sing. *qsr*, “fortified village”) but rather point to a long tradition of co-existence and religious tolerance within the ethnic diversity that permeates the Moroccan society as a whole in pre- and postcolonial times.”¹⁶

Moreover, as an explorer in Africa and anti-slavery campaigner, who worked for the *Malta Times*, James Richardson (1806-1851) set off on a mission in 1843 to Morocco to gather statistics on slavery for the anti-slavery society and to convince the Sultan of Morocco to reject slavery.¹⁷ In his journey to the coastal city of Mogador (present day Essaouira), Richardson witnessed and reported in his *Travels in Morocco* that the city was divided into casbahs and citadels which were the space of the elites, and the other space, the medina, for the masses and *mellah* for the Jews. As far as the latter are concerned, he states that: “The Jews

12. Lawrence Harris, *With Mulai Hafid at Fez* (London: Smith, Elder & CO, 15, Waterloo, 1909), 193.

13. Ibid.

14. Hsain Ilahiane, “Spanish Balconies in Morocco: A Window on Cultural Influence and Historical Persistence in the Mellah (Jewish) Community,” 176-7.

15. Ibid., 178.

16. Ibid.

17. Khalid Ben-Srhir & Lahoucine Aammari. “James Richardson’s ‘Abolitionist and Civilizing’ Tour in the Sharifian Empire,” *Hespéris-Tamuda* LVI (1), 2021: 327-49.

have a quarter or millah to themselves, which is locked up during the night, the key being kept by the police. Nevertheless several Jews, especially imperial traders [*Tujjār as-Sultān*], are allowed to occupy houses in the Moorish quarter or citadel portion of Mogador with the Christian merchants.”¹⁸ The Europeans who visited the south of Morocco mostly lived in Jewish quarters not because they were suitable for living but because they were more immune from the eventual Moors’ attacks than interior places. Richardson includes the report of a European merchant and official concerning this issue as follows: “Mr. Elton related that, whilst the merchants visited the Emperor in the Southern capital, a watch-maker, a European and a Christian, asked permission of the minister to dwell in the quarters of the Moors, instead of that of the Jews, in which latter the Europeans usually reside. The ministry replied, “You may live there if you like, but you must have ten soldiers to guard you.” Such a reply from the Minister, and whilst the merchants were protected by the presence of the emperor himself, is all conclusive as the insecurity attached to Europeans in the interior towns.”¹⁹

Following the track of Richardson and in the light of the latter’s above-mentioned depiction of the architectural topography of the city of Mogador, the British travel writer, Joseph Thomson, remarks in his travelogue, *Travels in the Atlas and Southern Morocco: A Narrative of Exploration* (1889), that Mogador is not a city worthy of note regardless of its impressive aspects.²⁰ The people require no notice; they are reified and effaced from the author’s observation. There is a kind of ambivalent discourse here as the Moroccan topos, including the Jewish quarter, fluctuates between revulsion and enchantment: “Though the town presents few noteworthy points of interest in respect of its architecture, in other ways, like all Oriental towns, it is replete with little pictures and glimpses of life which cannot fail to delight the traveller.”²¹ In his visit to the city of Mogador, Arthur Leared²² demonstrates in his travel text, *Morocco and the Moors* (1876), that it contains about 15,000 inhabitants, of which number about 6,000 are Jews and 150 Europeans. Like most Moorish cities, it is divided into two parts, the citadel and the outer town. The citadel contains the public buildings and the houses of the foreign merchants. The Jewish quarter is in the outer town. It is

18. Richardson, *Travels in Morocco*. 2 vols. (London: Charles Skeet, 1860), 253-4.

19. Ibid., 140-1.

20. Joseph Thomson (1858-1895) is a Scottish geologist and explorer, who played an active role in the “Scramble for Africa.” On the 17th of March, 1888, Thomson took an expedition to the Atlas Mountains. He took notes on the geography, history, geology, and botany of the Atlas Mountains. Thomson’s “personal narrative of exploration” is a rendition of certain geographical sites and territories through which he and his companion pass: Tangier, Casablanca, Azzmour, Mazagan (El Jadida), Mogador, Marrakech, Sidi Rehal, Demnat, Tasimset and back again to the city of Morocco (Marrakech) and then into the province of the Sus.

21. Thomson, *Travels in the Atlas and Southern Morocco: A Narrative of Exploration* (London: George Philip & Son), 1889, 68.

22. See Lahoucine Aammari, “Rhetorical Strategies of Alterity in Arthur Leared’s *Morocco and the Moors* (1876) and Budgett Meakin’s *Life in Morocco* (1905),” *Prague Journal of English Studies*. Volume 7, No. 1 (2018): 45-64.

isolated and enclosed by walls; but many of the better-class Jews live in the same localities as the foreign merchants.

On the basis of Richardson's, Thomson's and Leared's accounts, we can reconstruct a topography of the morphologies of the Moroccan "Islamic city"²³ which was divided into the casbahs, usually for the elites such as governors and officials, and the medina, for the masses and the *mellah*, for the Jews. Among the central tenets of the "Islamic City" is that Islam, understood as a fundamentally urban religion, gave rise to cities whose morphologies were determined primarily by Muslims' need to fulfill the religious obligations of Islam. In his "L'islamisme et la vie urbaine," William Marçais remarks that a "real" city can be identified by a set of features through the presence of institutions like a congregational Friday mosque (*jamaa*) for conducting prayers, communal baths (*hammām*) for maintaining ritual purity, and a market complex (*souk*) or a chief bazaar nearby in which are located the various "guilds," organized and regulated according to religious strictures.

Besides, Joseph Thomson observes that "a network of walls divides Mogador, as is usual in Moorish towns, into the Kasbah or quarter of the Government officials, the Medinah or Moorish quarter, and the Mellah or Jews' town. In the Kasbah Europeans and European-Jews reside."²⁴ In the light of this quote, we can say that not all Jews lived in the *mellah*; there were Jews who lived in casbahs like Moorish elites.²⁵ These Jews were European ones who got the consular protection or were the Sultan's merchants and mediators as part of "*Tujjar as-sultān*."²⁶ In his talk of the merchants of Essaouira, Daniel Schroeter claims that the Jews constituted a significant majority of the merchants of the Sultan, and they exerted greater influence; these royal merchants, Schroeter claims, "were similar to the 'Court Jews' of central Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In both cases, elite Jews were economic instruments of

23. The topic is again taken up throughout the remainder of the century, most notably in Ira Lapidus, *Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984); and André Raymond, *The Great Arab Cities in the Sixteenth-Eighteenth Centuries: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1984). For an overview of the various academic debates surrounding the topic, see Albert Hourani and S. M. Stern, eds., *The Islamic City* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), which was based on a conference held at Oxford University in 1965; Janet Abu-Lughod, "The Islamic City: Historical Myth, Islamic Essence, and Contemporary Relevance," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 19 (1987): 155-76.

24. Thomson, *Travels in the Atlas and Southern Morocco*, 68.

25. Leared depicts their houses as follows: "The better-class Jewish houses are large and substantial, and built in the Moorish style. They are, generally speaking, comfortably furnished in the European manner, though often with indifferent taste, there being too much glitter and too little regard to proportion and relative effects," (76).

26. While the Moroccan Sultan Abderrahman ben Hicham (1822-1859) tried to win the Jewish traders' support and their skills in this field, European countries resorted to all strategies possible to urge Moroccan wealthy Jewish traders to help these countries in different domains. For more information, see Hafsa El Hayel, "Nukhbāt al-tujār al-yahūd waal-ttaḥaoulāt fi Maghrib māqabla al-himāya," *Hespéris-Tamuda LI* (2) (2016): 399-422.

the rulers. Equipped with foreign languages and international connections, the court Jews were used in diplomatic affairs as well.”²⁷

In the second half of the nineteenth century, western powers became more and more aggressive in their search for economic opportunities and political influence in Morocco – and many merchants and diplomats continued to rely on Jews to act as their intermediaries. Moroccan Jews staffed consulates as interpreters and even became vice-consuls in their own right. Some also formed partnerships with foreign merchants or sent their own representatives to trade in places like Gibraltar, France, Britain, and even the Americas. Many of these Jewish merchants and consular officials acquired foreign nationality or consular protection, which gave them a measure of extraterritorial rights.²⁸

The upper-class Jews in Morocco numbered perhaps one per cent of the Jewish community. They were generally protégés of western powers or foreign naturalized Jews. Needless to say, many of the Muslims greatly resented their special status. The activities of these protégés and the foreign naturalized Jews are closely scrutinized by these travel writers, since the former significantly influenced the evolution of Muslim-Jewish relations in late nineteenth-century Morocco. Small towns and villages like Demnat, Qalaa Mgouna, Intifa, Aghmat, Asni, Zagora, and Tarudant each contained dozens, and in some cases hundreds, of Jewish families. Moroccan cities started to witness radical changes at the end of the nineteenth and the outset of the twentieth century. Almost no area of life was left undisturbed by the profound transformations that took place in Morocco during these decades.

Although Morocco was not formally colonized until 1912, the competition for imperial influence began soon after France’s invasion of Algeria. In addition to imposing free trade treaties, Western states extended consular protection to a growing number of Moroccans (both Jewish and Muslim); these protégés were not only exempt from paying taxes, they were also free from the jurisdiction of the Moroccan government and offered foreign powers multiple opportunities to intervene in Morocco’s internal affairs.

After Mawlay al-Hassan became sultan in 1873, he made every effort to get rid of the “right of protection.” He was supported by his deputy, Mohammed Bargash in Tangier, and by Sir John Drummond Hay, the British representative. Hay stated in 1877 that the abuse of protection was spreading so rapidly that soon all wealthy merchants and farmers would be under foreign protection and refuse to pay taxes. Colonel Philip Durham Trotter’s travelogue, *Our Mission to*

27. Daniel J. Schroeter, *Merchants of Essaouira: Urban Society and Imperialism in Southwestern Morocco, 1844-1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), 21.

28. Daniel J. Schroeter, *The Sultan’s Jew: Morocco and the Sephardi World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002); Jessica Marglin, *Across Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco* (London: Yale University Press, 2016).

the Court of Morocco in 1880, Under Sir John Drummond Hay, K.C.B., Minister Plenipotentiary and Envoy Extraordinary to his Majesty the Sultan, is a detailed account of the mission that was entrusted to Sir John Drummond Hay to Mawlay al-Hassan in Fez. Trotter, who portrayed and recorded everything he saw during the mission's trip in Tangier, Fez, Meknes and other cities, wrote that the Jews in the seaport towns carried their heads high, owing to foreign protection. Trading agents were appointed in the interior, who entered into partnerships with others, whether Jews or Moors. These irregular protégés robbed and plundered in the name and under the protection of the protecting government. About 1,800 wealthy Jews, Trotter estimated, were under foreign protection, while the poor ones, numbering about 200,000, suffered at the hands of the Moors. These conditions he ascribed to the inability of the consuls in the coast towns to control the actions of their agents in the interior.

Jews were unanimously against the proposed abolition of the protégé system. They recognized the many iniquities which have grown up under it, but at the same time they claimed it to be a necessary safeguard against the barbarity and fanaticism of the Moors, and the only arrangement by which the lives and the homes, and the property of civilized people residing in Morocco could be secured. They were working unremittingly against its abolition, and "will continue so to do until a perfectly satisfactory substitute has been hit upon."²⁹

In the very late nineteenth century, most of the Jews became protégés as they benefited from consular protection. The latter evolved from the extension of extraterritorial rights by Morocco to western legations resident in Tangier. Extraterritoriality included the authority to designate Moroccans either as officials in the legations and consulates or as employees of foreign businessmen. These Moroccan protégés received a number of much coveted privileges: exemption from Moroccan taxation, conscription and juridical control. In other words, the protégés exercised the rights of an alien without, strictly speaking, possessing foreign citizenship. The foreign naturalized Jews, on the other hand, were native-born Moroccans who had travelled abroad, usually for the sole purpose of obtaining another nationality. They would subsequently return to Morocco, where they enjoyed all the prerogatives of foreigners.

Thus, in viewing Muslim-Jewish relations from the perspective of the British archives, one is struck by this genuine paradox: a small privileged minority enjoyed relative comfort as protégés or naturalized citizens, exercising great economic influence over the lives of many Muslims, whereas the vast majority of the Jews lived in subservience to and on the sufferance of the Muslims. And the abuses which the Jewish elite propagated did not bide well for the less-privileged Jews, who bore the brunt of the growing bitterness and frustration evinced by

29. Lawrence Harris, *With Mulai Hafid at Fez*, 325-6.

the Muslims at the close of the nineteenth century. Thomson exemplifies that the Moroccan Jews eke out a miserable existence:

“We understood that they were in a position of semi-serfdom, compelled to huddle together in filthy stys, known as Mellahs, subjected to the most degrading restrictions, liable to be murdered and tortured with impunity, their wives and daughters the legitimate prey of the lustful passions of their oppressors – that theirs, in short, was the life of the pariah dog, glad to escape with no worse than curses, kicks, and blows, and thankful if allowed unmolested to pick up such scraps and offal as might be gleaned from the garbage of the Moorish dunghills.”³⁰

The purpose of bringing the living conditions of the Jews to the fore is that Thomson, among others, aims at showing the European civilizing message and philanthropists’ mission in Morocco and at confirming that these Europeans have a tendency to proffer humanitarian aids to minorities such as Jews. Besides, the traveller wants to stress the fact that the British are characterized by their equality and their belief in tolerance and religious freedom in contrast to Moroccans whose faith is shorn of these features.

Calls for the Makhzan to change its treatment of Jews formed part of a larger pattern in which foreign diplomats, scholars and journalists depicted Morocco as backward, particularly when it came to the question of religious tolerance. Needless to say, neither Morocco nor the Middle East were unique in being accused of injustice; Westerners depicted a number of non-Western states as inherently unjust. Indeed, as Saba Mahmood has argued, a discourse of religious equality was central to Western portrayals of non-Western states as undeserving of sovereignty: religious liberty played – and continues to play – a “role in the maintenance of a geopolitical and international legal order in which Western and non-Western sovereignties are unequally weighted.”³¹ Nor was this sort of criticism merely academic or rhetorical; accusations of intolerance and abuse played a role in justifications for colonialism. Foreign intervention was especially effective when the victims were protégés or nationals of a foreign power;³² in this manner, Joseph Thomson claims that “[w]e ourselves, fresh out from home, and burning with ideas about equality of race and religion, full likewise of sympathy with the downtrodden and the oppressed, were anxious to prove our sentiments in action, to hold out to the victim of tyranny the right hand of fellowship, and do what in us lay to help him.”³³

30. Thomson, *Travels in the Atlas and Southern Morocco*, 414.

31. Saba Mahmood, “Religious Freedom, the Minority Question, and Geopolitics in the Middle East,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54 (2) (2012): 418–46.

32. See Jessica Marglin, “A New Language of Equality: Jews and the State in Nineteenth-Century Morocco,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 43, 2 (2016): 9.

33. Thomson, *Travels in the Atlas and Southern Morocco*, 415.

Thomson draws a comparison between European Jews and Barbary Jews: “For where the Jews are, there also are filth, vermin, and disease. In this respect there is no race on earth so absolutely repulsive as the Barbary Jew. *He hugs his dirt as he hugs his gold.*”³⁴ Yet, their conditions, the author argues, are better than the Moors’. During the last decade of the nineteenth century, thanks chiefly to the vigilance of several European ministers in Tangier and the agents of the Anglo-Jewish Association throughout the Empire, the number of outrages to which the Jews in Morocco was subjected greatly diminished. The majority of these British travel writers relate that the cultural gap between Jews and Muslims was further widened by the “civilizing” efforts of European Jewish organizations, through whose efforts Jews became the first recipients of Western-style educations in pre-Protectorate Morocco, which included the French language and training in “modern” disciplines and vocations.

The organization that had by far the greatest influence on Moroccan Jews was the Alliance Israélite Universelle (A.I.U.).³⁵ The latter had as its mission nothing less than the intellectual, religious, and social regeneration of Jews in non-Westernized countries. Implicit in its policy lay the largely unstated goal of facilitating these Jews’ own assimilation into European society by erasing any signs of “backwardness” among the “primitive” Jews living in parts of the world with which the colonial powers were increasingly coming into contact, lest any association be made between the two groups of Jews. In other words, the A.I.U., in Gottreich words, “sought to de-Orientalize these communities, and by so doing de-Orientalize themselves as well.”³⁶ To these ends Israélite Universelle, it opened modern schools throughout the Middle East, North Africa, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe. The A.I.U. “opened its first school in Tetuan in 1862 and maintained a keen interest in Morocco throughout its history, eventually operating a total of eighty-three schools there, more than in all other countries combined.”³⁷ The aspirations of the A.I.U. extended well beyond the school setting, however, with its teachers and directors constantly striving to inculcate Moroccan Jewish families with contemporary European ideas about hygiene, dress, and the practice of religion.³⁸

34. Ibid., 416, emphasis added.

35. Alliance Israélite Universelle was founded in Paris in 1860 with the intent of improving the status of Jews around the world. Beginning with the founding of a school for boys in Tangier in 1862 it began to invest in improving the condition of Jews in Morocco. Schools were established in the main port cities that gave instruction in French and Hebrew for a range of traditional and modern subjects. The AIU began to have influence in Moroccan Jewish communities by 1880 as these communities adopted the more liberal agenda pushed by the AIU. See also Michael Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862-1962* (Albany: State University of New York Press), 1983, 80-96.

36. Emily Benichou Gottreich, *The Mellah of Marrakesh: Jewish and Muslim Space in Morocco’s Red City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 9.

37. Ibid.

38. Yolande Cohen and Nicolas Jodoin. “Entre l’ancien *mellah* et le nouveau *mellah* de Meknés: Mobilités urbaines et modernité durant l’entre-deux-guerres,” in *Histoire Contemporaine du Maroc: Passé et Temps Présent, Festschrift pour Mohamed Kenbib*, Vol. 1, Khalid Ben-Srhir, ed (Rabat: Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 2021), 181-206.

Most historians depict A.I.U. graduates as avid supporters of French imperialism, especially in contrast to their Moroccan Muslim neighbors. Scholars tend to portray the A.I.U. as facilitating France’s colonization of Morocco by turning Moroccan Jews into French loyalists.³⁹ After France established its protectorate in 1912, the A.I.U. asked the authorities to grant French citizenship to all Moroccan Jews, just as they had granted Algerian Jews citizenship in 1870. Historians read this as the logical outcome of the organization’s procolonial stance. Many similarly claim that AIU-educated and Westernized Jewish elites in Morocco looked to France as a savior who would liberate Jews from the oppressive yoke of Muslim rule.

Regardless of all the efforts of the Alliance Israélite Universelle to better the Jews’ situations and their space, these British travel writers picture them from a condescending standpoint. Thomson, for instance, draws a comparison in which he makes juxtaposition between the medina and the *mellah*. The former is associated with perfume, order and activity; it is an oriental space replete with the exotic, the arcane and the mysterious, whereas the *mellah* is associated with filth and decay. The travel writer and his companion pass through the medina and they have certain impressions about this space. There is the deployment of a constellation of images related to whiteness to symbolize the Moors’ social and cultural identity. These Moors do not care much about collecting money in the vein the Jews do: “We shall not, however, waste time over the scenes which meet us *en route*, beyond remarking, for the purposes of comparison, the *snowwhite* dresses and *well-washed* persons of the Moors, and the *calm dignified grace* with which they move along, as of men to whom the affairs of this life are but matters of trivial import, and to be attended to at any time.”⁴⁰ Besides, their streets are very clean. The medina is reflective of an Oriental city from which a thoroughly Eastern odour of perfumes and spices permeates the air. Yet, regardless of these aspects of mystery and exoticism, the Moors are a people who rarely believes in hard work; in contrast to the hurly-burly of the Jewish quarter, the medina is the place where Moroccans regard “the affairs of this life [as] but matters of trivial import.”⁴¹

Besim Selim Hakim, and in the reading of these virtually positive images British travel writers form about the Islamic city, argues that this kind of order and neatness of the “Islamic City” can be attributed to a rigid Islamic Law. The latter stressed the principle of maintaining the private life of Muslims. This manifested in the closed-in, urban architectural fabric of the “Islamic City” as distinct from its adjacent Jewish quarter; we can list these principles as follows: (a) avoid harm to others and oneself; (b) accept the concept of interdependence;

39. See, for example, Mohammed Kenbib, *Juifs et musulmans au Maroc, 1859-1948* (Rabat, Morocco: Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1994), 193-97, 212-15, 347, 423.

40. Thomson, *Travels in the Atlas and Southern Morocco*, 421, italics added.

41. Ibid., 421.

(c) respect the privacy of others, specifically avoiding the creation of direct visual corridors; (d) respect the original or prior usage; (e) respect the right of building higher within one's air space; (f) respect property of others; (g) respect the rights of redemption by adjacent neighbours; (h) maintain seven cubits as the minimum width of public through-streets; and (i) avoid locating the sources of unpleasant smells and noisy activities adjacent to or near mosques.⁴²

In contrast to the neatness of the “Islamic City,” Joseph Thomson pictures the Jewish quarter negatively. He writes: “There is more animation quicker movement, more earnest work, and but little evidence of drifting easily through life, trusting implicitly in what Allah will send. An eager purpose shines in each man’s eye – a purpose which absorbs his whole soul, and keeps him restlessly, intensely on the alert.”⁴³ Nothing of interest attracts the attention of Thomson; everything in the *mellah* is the opposite of the medina: “as we pass along, the street begins to narrow and the shops to become fewer. The air, which so far has smelt of the odorous ingredients of Jewish shops, now becomes more and more redolent of the effluvia of Jewish sewage, of which the sole channels, the sole resting-places, are the streets, no matter what its nature.”⁴⁴ Thomson concludes by stating ironically that this description of Jews’ space is meagre; only the pen of Emile Zola can do that!

Moroccan-Jewish In-Between and Liminal Interactions Revisited

The Jewish quarter fulfilled a necessary function in a large number of Moroccans’ daily lives as a liminal space where illicit and unpleasant activities could be pursued far from the vigilant eyes of local governors and officials such as *moqaddems* and *kaids*. For Jews and Muslims alike, the *mellah* concept was a potent and necessary one, allowing each group to strengthen its identity through concomitantly excluding or accepting the other depending on different circumstances. The Jewish quarter represented a compromise between isolation and integration: for Muslims, the *mellah* was closed enough to assure that Jewish worship was removed from sight, while for Jews, it was permeable and porous enough to ward off a fear of intrusion. So, the quarter was a site of contestation, engagement, negotiation, hybridization, and appropriation. To borrow Mary Louise Pratt’s words, we can argue that this encounter between Muslims and Jews should be seen through the framework of the concept of the “contact zone.” The “contact” perspective, Pratt argues, “emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other.”⁴⁵ This perspective can treat the relations among Moroccans and Jews not in terms of separateness or exclusion, but in

42. Besim Selim Hakim, *Arabic-Islamic Cities: Building and Planning Principles* (London: Routledge, 1989), 90.

43. Thomson, *Travels in the Atlas and Southern Morocco*, 422.

44. Ibid., 423.

45. Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 22.

terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically “asymmetrical” relations of power.

The permeability of the *mellah* worked in the other direction as these Jews sought certain commercial transactions in the medina as part of the “Islamic city” and they had encounters with Muslims and their space. Jews had their own sacred space. Meanwhile, Muslims created their own district of sacred space, alongside and surrounding the Jewish zone. Tangier’s Jews in particular did not want to live in a *mellah*, for in that society, at that time and place, it was a mark of dishonour. Yet the desire to mark out a separate space was tied in a deep and compelling way to the question of self-identity, so that even when not coerced to do so, Jews created a *mellah* of their own. For Muslims too, the concept of the *mellah* was a potent one, clarifying and underlining their own sense of identity.

Having many and various encounters both in the medina and the *mellah*, both Jews and Muslims can be seen as inhabiting the liminal. As a term that has been derived from the disciplines of psychology and anthropology, “liminality indicates spaces and conditions of transition, in-between spaces where identities are not fully formed.”⁴⁶ The term derived from the Latin “*limen*,” which means “threshold” and thus carries within it the connotations of “borders.” This threshold is “between sensate and the subliminal, the limit below which a certain sensation ceases to be perceptible. The sense of the liminal as an interstitial or in-between space, a threshold area, distinguishes the term from the more definite word ‘limit’ to which it is related.”⁴⁷ The term is often used in conjunction with other terms, such as “interstitial” and “in-between,” all suggesting zones of transition and unstable identities. Liminal people are those who (re)cross borders, whose location is not in this or that space, but in the zones and passages of transition between such spaces.

As it was originally defined by the anthropologist Victor Turner to explain ephemeral, transitory passages between social roles, the trope of liminality can be usefully adapted here to space, specifically the space of the Jewish *mellah*. Putting aside the unlikely prospect of conversion en masse by Moroccan Jews the liminality of the Moroccan *mellah* is altogether more fixed in both time and place. Nonetheless, Jewish space and Muslim one still appear “betwixt and between,” both from a Jewish and Muslim perspectives respectively. This quality derives not only from the collective experience of being *Maghrebi* but not Muslim, but also, and more to the point here, from the ways in which this particular type of difference became inscribed in the space of the Mellah itself. We will attempt to come to grips, hence, with the role of Jewish quarter within Moroccan society,

46. Pramod K. Nayar, *The Postcolonial Studies Dictionary* (Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), 98-99.

47. Ashcroft Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Postcolonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 2001), 117.

and the role of Muslim space within the lives and imaginations of Jews in the light of British travel writers' accounts under consideration.

As previously noted, British travel writers depict Jews' quarter from different perspectives, mostly in a patronizingly negative manner, as a minority that felt most at home in their *mellah*, where, even if they did not always enjoy the total autonomy sometimes suggested, they nonetheless owned property, practiced their religion with minimal interference, maintained their own institutions, worked, and raised their families. During the day, for instance, the Jew maintained his shops or conducted his business in the *souks* of the medina. After nightfall, the Jew found security among his coreligionists behind the guarded gates of the *mellah*. In a sense, he was moving from the profane to the sacred, from the margin to the centre, from the mundane activities of the market to the exclusively Jewish world of the *mellah*.

Once they are outside the *mellah*, Jews as non-Muslims should clad in peculiar clothes that must differentiate them from Muslims. Historically, the “Pact of Aomar” or Aomar’s regulations (*Shurūt Aomar*) is thought to have been modelled on a capitulation treaty between the Second Caliph Aomar ben Al-khattab (r. 634-644) and the patriarch of Jerusalem. Its terms were eventually extended to other conquered non-Muslim minorities (including Jews), so long as the belief systems to which they subscribed were monotheistic and scripturally based, and pre-dated Islam. The *ahl al-dhimma* (those granted the status of *dhimma*) were accorded the state’s protection, which guaranteed them the right to life, property, and the practice of their religion.⁴⁸ *Dhimmis* were also subject to a series of disabilities intended to underscore their humility, including sumptuary laws, building codes, and bans on public displays of religion. The application of these regulations varied considerably in practice, as did the fulfilment of the guarantee of protection.⁴⁹

Clothes here play a very important role as they are the signifier of otherness, and clothes epitomize identity. The British travel writers under consideration observe that the Jews dress in specific clothes which distinguish them from their religious counterparts. In areas which were regarded beyond the control and vigilance of the Moroccan government, the Jews fell under the patronage of powerful figures in their regions. They were compelled, quite frequently, to wear

48. Farid Bouchiba. “Les ‘dimmī-s’ en Occident musulman au Moyen Âge: bilan bibliographique, fin XIXe-début XXIe siècle,” *Hespéris-Tamuda*, LIV (3) (2019): 315-48.

49. See Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 2003); Emily Benichou Gottreich, *The Mellah of Marrakesh: Jewish and Muslim Space in Morocco's Red City* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007); Susan Gilson Miller et al. “Apportioning Sacred Space in a Moroccan City: The Case of Tangier, 1860-1912.” *City & Society* 2001. XIII (1): 57-83; Milka Levy-Rubin, *Non-Muslims in the Early Islamic Empire: From Surrender to Co-existence* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011); Aomar Boum, *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

special clothing and to remove their shoes whenever they passed by a mosque. They were not often allowed to ride horses. In his travelogue, *Morocco as it is* (1894), Stephen Bonsal remarks that “in the interior the prescribed custom of the Jews is a black or dark-blue caftan, belted at the waist, a black skull-cap, and black shoes and slippers. They must be all in black, as this is a colour despised by the Moors.”⁵⁰

During the late nineteenth century, the Christian missionary writings reached their peak about Morocco, the most common of whom within this category is Robert Kerr. Dr Kerr (?-1918) was a Scottish physician, missionary, judge, and author. Sent to Morocco by the Jewish Committee of the English Presbyterian Church to work as both a medical and religious missionary, he provided various types of medical care to both Jews and Muslims. Dr Kerr served in Morocco for 30 years and provided aid to a diverse group of patients. In his travelogue, *Pioneering in Morocco* (1894), Kerr describes in details all the harrowing strictures wreaked upon the Jews by Muslims while they were in the medina; writers such as this one observed that the dominant religion, Islam, was the more obvious choice for Jews abandoning Judaism. So those British writers who engaged in missionary activities always had the fear of the Jews’ apostasy to Islam as these travel writers thought it was incumbent on them to civilize this marginalized minority and convert them to Christianity as Islam was a religion which was predicated on tyranny and subservience. The British writers have this biased opinion as they think that it is their burden to do the job and to intervene on the spot. This threat for conversion was not rampant, but it was just an ideological subterfuge, among others, that European imperialists deployed to dominate Morocco, especially once the A.I.U. was on hand to intervene. Variations in the application of *dhimma* strictures and flexibility in the area of conversion helped mitigate Jews’ anxiety about Muslim space.

As European powers tightened their hold over Morocco’s domestic and foreign trade in the latter half of the nineteenth century, especially with the signing of the Anglo-Moroccan Convention under the aegis of John Drummond Hay in 1856,⁵¹ many of the country’s traditional economic centres began a precipitous decline to commercial penetration and capitalist system. Once-thriving cities like Essaouira and Mazagan (the present day El Jadida) were increasingly bypassed in

50. Bonsal, *Morocco As It is*, 316. See also Allan R. Meyers “Patronage and Protection: The Status of Jews in Precolonial Morocco,” in *Jews Among Muslims: Communities in the Precolonial Middle East*, Shlomo Deshen and Walter P. Zenner, eds. (New York: NUP, 1996), 87-88.

51. The Anglo-Moroccan Commercial Treaty (December 9th, 1856) became the model for subsequent bilateral treaties reached by other countries, mainly France and Spain. The treaty was comprised of thirty-eight articles, the commonest features of which are commercially-oriented. It was signed by J.D. Hay and aimed at supporting British trade and protect subjects in Morocco. The treaty abolished monopolies controlled by the Sultan and his merchants (*Tujjār as-Sultān*) on imports save tobacco, opium, firearm and other special items. Also, all additional taxes such as gate or market taxes, were to be waived for British merchants.

favour of port cities, such as Casablanca and Safi, which were more accessible to Europeans. Given the prominence of Jews in the Moroccan economy, discussions of the penetration of European capitalism into pre-colonial Morocco often single out the role played by the country's Jews in this process.⁵² Put otherwise, the Jews were the indispensable agents of modernity and Europeanization; the Jews' job was to substantiate Western-style capitalism in Morocco.

Regardless of the fact that the Jews have their own quarters which distinguish them from Muslims, they engage usually in transactions, and they encounter with Muslims neighbours in the medina. Several thoughts emerge from a survey of the encounter between a privileged Jewish elite and Moroccan Muslims at large. It is obvious, for example, that the eminence of naturalized Jews and protégés in financial circles tended to destabilize any slim hope of friendly relations between most Muslims and Jews. Economic trends in nineteenth-century Morocco only intensified the suspicions which historically the two religious communities nursed toward each other. More specifically, the famines in the 1870s and 1880s compelled many Muslim villagers and farmers to contract extensive loans, the interest for which often verged on the outrageous. Since Jewish moneylenders provided the financing, the traditional resentment between moneylender and debtor was heightened.⁵³

Depending on the contention and testimony of the British historian and journalist, Goldwin Smith, which was quoted in the Nineteenth Century (November 1892 issue), Stutfield demonstrates that it is not fanaticism that prompts outrage and hatred, but "economic and social" reasons: "the unhappy relation of a wandering and parasitic race, retaining its tribal exclusiveness, to the races among whom it sojourns, and on the produce of whose labour it feeds."⁵⁴ Due to their cunning and swindle, Stutfield avers, the Jews practice all aspects of usury possible on the poor Moroccans: "The tyranny of the Jews in this country is exercised in many ways, by the small loans at usurious rates of interest, with which every country is familiar, and other methods which have become inseparably connected with the word 'Jew'."⁵⁵ What is more, Stutfield

52. See for example Abdellah Laroui, *Les origines sociales et culturelles du nationalisme marocain, 1830-1912* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1977), 210-11; and Mohammed Kenbib, "Changing Aspects of State and Society in Nineteenth-Century Morocco," in *The Moroccan State in Historical Perspective, 1850-1985*, ed. Abdelali Doumou, trans. Ayi Kwei Armah (Dakar: Codesria, 1990), 11-27, in which the damaging effects of the protégé system on Moroccan independence are discussed at length. Moroccan Jews are more explicitly linked to the loss of Moroccan independence in Kenbib's longer study, *Juifs et musulmans au Maroc, 1859-1948* (Rabat: Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1994).

53. Leland Bowie, "An Aspect of Muslim-Jewish Relations in Late Nineteenth-Century Morocco: A European Diplomatic View," 18.

54. Hugh E. M. Stutfield, *El Maghreb: 1200 Miles' Ride through Morocco* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1886), 138.

55. Stutfield, *El Maghreb*, 139. In this vein, see Jessica M. Marglin, "Jews, Money Lending, and Usury in 19th-Century Morocco: Between Shari'a and Custom," in *Histoire Contemporaine du Maroc: Passé et Temps Présent, Festschrift pour Mohamed Kenbib*, Vol. 1, Khalid Ben-Srhir, ed (Rabat:

continues depicting the Jews thus: “The superior brain of the Jew gives him unlimited opportunities of swindling the Moorish peasant, whom we observed to be the most gullible creature imaginable, and this results in terrible oppression. A thousand dirty tricks, most of them connected with the coinage, which would seem [...] capable of deceiving a child, are practiced with complete success on the unfortunate people.”⁵⁶

The Jews are not only useful for Moroccans, Stutfield posits, but also for foreigners as well. They play a very important role as agents and intermediaries. What assures their positions more among Moroccans is the consular protection they get. Most of the protected Jews settle in coastal towns where they can have more interactions with Europeans. Stutfield contends that the Jews of Morocco are better than the Moors because of their capitalist instincts to amass as much wealth as possible by all means possible. This Jew “confident in his own inviolability, he raises his head, puts out his stomach, and walk around with a sort of “touch me if you dare” look, inexpressibly exasperating.”⁵⁷

After dwelling upon the Jews and the Muslim space and after deducing that the medina is porous, we turn to Muslims’ roles and activities in the Jewish quarter and to what extent did the latter influence Muslims. The consular protection the Jews got and many encounters they had with Muslims in the medina – because as previously noted the Jews are the motor of Moroccan economy at the time – contributed one way or another to the general transformation the Moroccan society started to witness in the late nineteenth century. Indeed, there was the emergence of some practices such as peculation, extortion, fraudulent claims and usury. Moroccans were no longer introverted and isolated from the outside world, but their cultural, social and economic interactions made them discard some of their values, and they negotiated their identity within a world that was difficult to grasp. This protégé system helps us understand the mentalities of the Moroccan society during a specific period of time: the end of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century.

Moroccan Jew’ subsistence and economic activities varied according to the ecologic zones in which they lived. For much of modern Moroccan history, Jews have controlled much of Morocco’s international trade, especially with England, the Low Countries, and France. They have also participated extensively in related fields of government service, as customs agents, interpreters, and European consuls to the sultans’ courts. The Jews in the medina played the role of go-betweens and they adopted many occupations; they were concentrated in

Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 2021), 207-26; see also Omar Lamghibchi, “Les Juifs du Maroc et les Finances (XVIIIe-XIXe siècles): De la gestion traditionnelle à la création de banques,” in *Histoire Contemporaine du Maroc: Passé et Temps Présent, Festschrift pour Mohamed Kenbib*, Vol. 1, Khalid Ben-Srhir, ed (Rabat: Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 2021), 227-54.

56. Stutfield, *El Maghreb*, 139.

57. Ibid., 141.

lesser forms of commerce, including trading, peddling, money-changing and money-lending, and a certain proportion served their own communities as rabbis, teachers, and scribes. Throughout Morocco, Jews were artisans and craftsmen; they sold and worked precious metals, they were tinkers, embroiderers, shoemakers, and tinsmiths, and in certain parts of the mountains and desert, they were expert gunsmiths, making weapons for both imperial soldiers and dissident tribes. In rural areas, Jews were sometimes farmers and shepherds, and finally, in urban areas, there was a large underclass of carters, day-labourers, bath keepers, butchers and prostitutes, who lived marginal existences, always on the verge of destitution, vulnerable to any sudden economic change.⁵⁸

The binary polarities of the medina and the *mellah* bring into conspicuous focus a state of liminality for both the inhabitants of these starkly different spaces. The Muslim presence in the *mellah* was hugely significant not only because of the number of individuals involved, but also because of what their presence meant. Like the Jewish presence in Muslim space, it was primarily motivated by economic concerns. Most of Jews were itinerant traders (*Attāra*).⁵⁹ Jewish merchants and peddlers dealt mainly in oil, sulfur, almonds, apricot kernels, cotton, barley and wax. Hence such products were often made available for purchase in the Jewish quarter first, after which they were resold in other parts of the city. Muslim shoppers were naturally attracted to these goods, and hence were especially visible in the *mellah* on Friday mornings when the main *mellah souk* was particularly well-stocked for the coming Jewish Sabbath. What's more, Muslims came to the quarter not only to buy the above-mentioned products, but to sell their own wares and services as well. For example, Muslim porters and water-carriers or sellers loitered in the *mellah* and they were very common among the Jews.

In his book, *Merchants of Essaouira*, Daniel J. Schroeter asserts that while the religious lives of Jews and Muslims remained strictly separate, the commercial life of each was influenced by the other's recurrent schedule of religious practices.⁶⁰ Two main religious events should be mentioned here: the Jewish sabbath (*Shabbat*) and Muslim Friday (*jum'a*). The Jewish sabbath also affected the ebb and flow of trade at the market-place during other days of the week. The Jewish Sabbath in fact begins at sundown on Fridays. On Friday mornings, Jewish beggars were likely to receive donations from their wealthier coreligionists, and at the same time, wealthy Jews contributed to Muslim beggars.

58. Allan R. Meyers, "Patronage and Protection: The Status of Jews in Precolonial Morocco," 86.

59. Aomar Boum, *Memories of Absence: How Muslims Remember Jews in Morocco* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013); "Southern Moroccan Jewry between the Colonial Manufacture of Knowledge and the Postcolonial Historiographical Silence," in *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*. Emily Benichou Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter, eds. (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011), 73-92.

60. Schroeter, *Merchants of Essaouira*, 79.

That sites of Jewish-Muslim commercial and cultural exchange existed both inside and outside the *mellah* does not in itself contradict the idea that the larger framework for social relations in Morocco was determined by Islam as a religion, even when these exchanges took place in a quarter that was the exclusive residence of Jews. What did pose a real challenge to attempts to order the cityscape along confessional lines, however, was that Muslims also came to the *mellah* to pursue illicit activities and immoral vices, such as drinking alcohol, gambling, smoking, mingling with Europeans, and gaining both visual and sexual access to women’s bodies. Jewish women wore clothing and ornaments that revealed their beauty to its best advantage to locals and foreigners alike. Thomas Hodgkin, Moses Montefiore’s travel companion, was duly impressed by the “well-dressed ladies” gazing down on him from the upper floors of the Corcos home.⁶¹ Besides, the London *Times* correspondent Walter Harris noted simply, “[t]he Jewesses are sometimes pretty, and always vain.”⁶²

The relatively high visibility of Jewish women contributed to the *mellah’s* reputation for sexual vices, especially prostitution and adultery. Jewish women, unlike their Muslim counterparts, “posed for European painters and photographers, and were also counted among the country’s most famous dancers and singers, a profession closely associated with prostitution in the Arab world.”⁶³ Such linkages were made altogether more explicit by British travel writers who reported seeing Jewish prostitutes in nearly every part of the country, from Tangier in the north to the tiny town of Demnat in the Atlas, where at one point four Jewish prostitutes lived “perpetually on the verge of expulsion.”

A Muslim crossed ethno-religious boundaries into Jewish space; the Muslim/the self, therefore, loses its fixed boundaries. The boundaries of identity and difference are continually (re)positioned in relation to varying roles. The meanings of here and there, margin and center keep on being sharply sharply displaced according to how one positions oneself. The *mellah*, in short, was where a Muslim was free to act in ways that would risk the severe immorality of the Muslim community if they were indulged in outside the Jewish quarter. Such behaviour by Muslims in Jewish space further disproves the *mellah’s* isolation from the rest of the city. At the same time, the special nature of these interactions unmoors the linkage between Islam as a religion and the disposition of space more generally, leaving room for a more nuanced understanding of the role of Jewish quarters in Moroccan urban history.

The most powerful of all the *mellah’s* insalubrious attractions was *mahya*: the strong brandy-like concoction made of figs, dates, grapes, barley, or a

61. Thomas Hodgkin, *Narrative of a Journey to Morocco, in 1863 and 1864, with Geological Annotations*, (London: Newby, 1866), 86-87.

62. Harris, *The Land of an African Sultan*, 219.

63. Gottreich, *The Mellah of Marrakesh*, 81.

mixture of them.⁶⁴ Indeed, in each Jewish quarter there was a distillery of *mahya*, the ubiquitous *eau de vie* once produced by Jews throughout Morocco. In the Mellah there was a frequently long queue of Muslims who awaited their turn for the procurement of a supply. Jews had long provided Muslims with forbidden alcoholic beverages, and it was one of the reasons for Muslims to venture into Jewish space.

Much of this leverage was consumed, causing quarrels, conflicts and family squabbles in the *mellah*. The director of the Alliance School in Marrakesh, for example, hired a special Muslim Saturday guard to protect the building against such a multitude of disturbances. The main missions of this Muslim guard at the *mellah*'s principal gate were to control alcohol consumption; he prevented *mahya* from being brought out of the *mellah* into the medina. The consumption of alcohol in the *mellah* was associated with other vices, most notably smoking. The sale of tobacco and related items was in fact restricted to the *mellah* by the Makhzan during certain periods, and the government's regulation of supply led to a flourishing black market involving both Jews and Muslims, again centered in the *mellah*. Finally, gambling and card playing were other illicit activities that tended to go hand in hand with drinking and smoking in the *mellah*.

Unpleasant activities ran rife, threatening the Moroccan identity as the Muslim community did denounce such vices. In his journey to the city of Mogador, James Richardson observed that there were interactions between Christians and Jews as far as some feasts are concerned. The Christians visited Jewish families during the Passover and Tabernacles as two main Jews' feasts. Richardson states that Jews did drink an excessive quantity of wine.⁶⁵ In the light of such rampant and illicit activities practised in the Mellah, Muslims were worried about their reverberations among Muslim community. Those Moroccans who frequently visited the Jewish space to pursue such immoral activities started to affect others in the medina and they became the main traders of tobacco, *mahya* and other things in the black markets. Moroccans felt that a number of ethical and cultural values that were deeply rooted in the society were on the wane. According to the local historian As-Siddiqi, the kaid of Essaouira, Mohammed Brisha, ordered the closure of the town's cafés in the 1850s, because alcoholic beverages were consumed there. The kaid at this time decreed that those caught consuming alcohol would receive 100 lashings. It is clear that Brisha's measures were not applied after his administration ended in 1857. In 1867 further orders were issued by the Sultan to close the cafés in the coastal towns.⁶⁶

64. Arthur Leared, *Marocco and the Moors: Being an Account of Travels, with a General Description of the Country and its People* (London: Sampson Low, 1876), 241.

65. Richardson, *Travels in the Atlas and Southern Morocco*, 330.

66. Schroeter, *Merchants of Essaouira*, 80.

Cross-cultural conspicuous rituals characterized the Moroccan-Jewish interactions as well. These rituals which were purely Jewish spread among Moroccans did not slip under these travel writers’ radar. Ritual and sacral practices such as wearing a *khmesa* to ward off the evil eye and holding a horseshoe on the ceiling to procure goodness were first almost Jewish practices and then by dint of daily interactions they spread among Moroccans.⁶⁷ Besides, the Jewish practice of visiting shrines preceded the colonial period, as did hagiographic discourses in which saints incarnated divine sanctity and claimed to “intercede” with God on behalf of devotees in search of health, wealth, fertility, and good fortune. In her article “Rethinking the ‘Islamic City’,” Emily Gottreich emphasizes the fact that it was not only commerce which attracted a lot of Jews to the “Islamic City” but certain religious and ritual practices as well. The Jews made pilgrimages to some tombs of sacred people for different reasons: sterility, spirit possession, panic attacks and other nervous conditions.⁶⁸

British observers talk about Moroccan and/or Jewish mind as superstitious; the subterfuge behind such representation is to stress the claim that while Moroccan and/or Jewish minds confused and combined superstition and religion, rational British minds did not. While Moroccan religion confused and combined elements of Judaism and Islam, refined British religion did not. In a Morocco that appeared to be rife with boundary transgressions against which the British defined themselves and their colonial project, the idea of Judeo-Muslim pilgrimage served its purpose. The socio-religious hybridity of Judeo-Muslim pilgrimage represented the mental, social, and political chaos that defined Morocco as an object of colonial imagination, control, and rationalization.

Until the first quarter of the twentieth century, travel writings remained what they had always been: eyewitness reports from travel writers who imperfectly struggled to recount their meetings with Moroccan societies for their government. Despite their shortcomings, the reports British travel writers produced played a major role in the colonial enterprise, many of these writers had tried to reach sub-Saharan Africa through the southern Moroccan desert. It was no surprise that the local population of Morocco saw Christian travelers as spies whose intention was to prepare the ground for colonial nations’ imperialist intentions to gain complete control of Western Barbary. Many travel writers were aware of this risk and travelled in Muslim territories in disguise as Jews.

67. As an example of these cross-cultural encounters between Muslims and Jews regarding different rituals and traditions, see Siham Lasri’s study which sheds light on ceremonies of marriage, divorce and birth, “Al-mar’ā al-yahūdiyya fī Maghrib mā qabl al-ḥimāya,” *Hesperis-Tamuda*, LI (3) (2016):195-217.

68. Gottreich, “Rethinking the ‘Islamic City’,” 123.

Conclusions

British travel writers to Morocco include in their texts representations of the Jewish space, the *mellah*, as the latter is the signifier of otherness. In contrast to what some of these writers claim, the *mellah* has never been a ghetto, but a cultural platform of a highly valued ethnic group with special skills. These writers depict the Jews and their space in a condescendingly patronizing manner, describing Jewish neighborhood as the hotbed of filth, dirt as well as swindle. The writers maintain that this set of strong vignettes indicates sneaky and cunning personality of the Jewish character. Such (mis)representations are practically complex as the authors depict the Jews and their space negatively because those British writers who journeyed into late nineteenth-century Morocco found the Jews as the main commercial and political rivals in Barbary as they played very important roles in their relation with the Court as part and parcel of the Royal merchants. Because of their insidious agendas in Morocco, British travel writers, as mouthpieces of the British imperialists, tend to orientalize Moroccan Jews and their space.

By reading and analyzing British observers' accounts, memoirs and essays on precolonial Morocco and by critiquing and reinterpreting their mindsets and (mis)representations vis-à-vis Muslim and Jewish spaces, we almost confirm that the Islamic city and the *mellah* are two spatial entities that were on a constant flux. These travel writers aim at creating a topographical distinction between these two entities and deny the internal dynamics and spatial encounters between Muslims and Jews, accentuating instead the mythical binary polarities. The *mellah* cannot be seen only as a closed space inhabited by a minority with a status as *ahl al-dhimma*, nor can the medina be rendered as a purely Islamic space. These two spaces are characterized by their porousness; Muslims' and Jews' interactions with each other involve a kind of re-sitting of boundaries and a constant negotiation of identities and cultures, which lie at the intersection of dwelling and (re)crossing into/out of the margin of the centre.

We believe that such a study will be a catalyst for other studies that look at the interactions between Muslims and Jews both in the Islamic City and the *mellah* from nuanced insider-perspectives as counter discursive representations to these British observers' stereotypical discourse. This can be achieved by culling, drawing from and unearthing published and archival sources and by carefully and comprehensively using these sources.

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العنوان: تفاعلات المسلمين واليهود في فضاءات "المدينة الإسلامية" والملاح في مغرب ما قبل الاستعمار

ملخص: نشر كتاب الرحالت والمستكشفون البريطانيون من سافروا إلى المغرب قبل الاستعمار في مروياتهم وسجلاتهم، مجموعة متنوعة من التمثيلات (الخطاطة) والاستراتيجيات الخطاطية تناولت بالاهتمام أكبر أقلية دينية في المغرب، وهم اليهود، وكذلك الشأن مع تفاعلاتهم بين بقية أعضاء الطوائف اليهودية، ومع جرائمهم المغاربة المسلمين في المدينة. وتبعداً لهذا، فإن الملاح باعتباره من حيث المبدأ حي يهودي بامتياز، فقد يتم تحويله إلى مساحات نفاذة ومفعمة بالحيوية. أي، أنه قد يُنظر إلى الملاح باعتباره كياناً ديناميكياً اجتماعياً وثقافياً ودينياً، كما يركز على تناقض الأقلية في المعايير الأوسع للمجتمع المغربي المسلم.

وقد انصب التركيز في هذه الورقة، على إزالة الغموض عن الأشكال الاستطرادية المختلفة وتحليلها من قبل الملاحظين البريطانيين بخصوص أحوال اليهود وأحياءهم في ضوء تفاعلهم مع المسلمين في فضاءات "المدينة الإسلامية"، برمتها. ومن المثير للاهتمام أن الورقة لا تنظر إلى الفضاء على أساس اعتباره موقعًا مقيداً بهويات ثابتة ومارسات ثقافية محددة، بل على أساس أنه "فضاء حرج" تكتنفه سلسلة من المواجهات والتفاعلات المنغمسة في مكونات التعديلية الثقافية. وتؤدي "النفاذية" الساربة المفعول بين مجالات الملاح وفضاءات "المدينة الإسلامية" باعتبارها مساحات حدودية إلى إنتاج واقع متعدد الثقافات، متناقض، مرن ومتجدد..

الكلمات المفتاحية: المسلمين، اليهود، الفضاء، الملاح، "مدينة إسلامية"، تقارب، تفاعلات بين الثقافات، كتابات السفر، تمثلات.

Titre: Interactions judéo-musulmanes dans la “cité islamique” et au sein du *mellah* au Maroc précolonial

Résumé: Les écrivains et explorateurs britanniques qui ont voyagé dans le Maroc précolonial ont déployé dans leurs récits, archives et mémoires, une variété de (fausses) représentations et de stratégies rhétoriques de la plus grande minorité religieuse du Maroc, les Juifs, ainsi que les rencontres intercommunautaires de ces derniers avec les musulmans dans la médina. Le *mellah* en tant que quartier juif est rendu comme un espace perméable et liminal. Autrement dit, le *mellah* est conçu comme une entité socialement, culturellement et religieusement dynamique, se concentrant sur l'acculturation du groupe minoritaire dans les paramètres plus larges de la société musulmane marocaine. Dans cet article, l'accent a été mis sur la démystification et l'analyse des différentes formes discursives que les observateurs britanniques forment sur les Juifs et leur quartier à la lumière de leurs interactions avec les musulmans dans la "Cité islamique." Il est intéressant de noter que cet article considère l'espace non pas comme un site délimité d'identités fixes et de pratiques culturelles, mais plutôt comme "un terrain critique" de rencontres et de transculturation. La "porosité" du *mellah* et de la "Cité islamique" comme espaces liminaux conduit à la production d'une réalité transculturelle, ambiguë, fluide et protéiforme.

Mots-clés: Musulmans, Juifs, espace, mellah, "Cité islamique," liminalité, interactions interculturelles, récits de voyage, représentation.