“Their roots were sunk deeply into the soil”
The Evolution of the Moroccan Judeo-Muslim Relationship and the Mimouna Festival

by

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Each family celebrates Mimouna in a different manner. It’s like wearing clothes, every person wears their own. But the common thread through all the celebrations is the joy, the happiness, the sharing. And what’s unique during the Mimouna evening, is the Jews in Morocco never close their doors, their doors are open and everyone is welcome.

Joseph Sebag

Ah Lalla Mimouna
Ah mbaraka mes’ouda
O Tarbho o tssa’do
Ah ya oulad lihud
Ah ya oulad Israel

Oh, Lalla Mimouna
The blessed, the happy
Succeed and be happy
Oh, Jews
Oh, Children of Israel
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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Key Terms

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**Part 1**

Introduction

**Chapter 1:** The Pre-colonial Mimouna Festival

Introduction

The Cult of Saints and Saint Veneration

The Judeo-Muslim Relationship Embodied in Mimouna

The Festival

Conclusion

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**Part II**

**Chapter 2:**

French Destabilization of the Judeo-Muslim Relationship

Introduction

Colonial Policy

Episodes of Violence

French Perception of the Judeo-Muslim Relationship

Conclusion

---

**Chapter 3:**

The Turning Point of 1948

Introduction

Setting the Stage for Emigration

The Creation of the State of Israel

Independent Morocco

Conclusion

---

**Part III**

**Chapter 4:**

The Reinterpretation of the Modern Mimouna Festival

An Overview of Modern Mimouna

Mimouna in the Diaspora

Muslim Erasure of the Memory of Mimouna

Memorialization

Epilogue

Bibliography
Key Terms

**Maghreb:** The Maghreb region extends from the Atlas Mountains and coastline of Morocco through Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

**Berbers:** The Berbers are the autochthonous, or indigenous, population of the Maghreb region. They were organized in a series of sovereign tribes that spoke different dialects. The majority of Moroccan Jews are of Berber origin; intermarriage between the Jewish and Berber populations was very common in the pre-colonial era. The word Berber originates from the Latin *barbari*, or barbarian, which has a pejorative connotation. Today these tribes self-identify as *Amazigh*, rather than Berber.

**Arabs:** The Arab people are identified by common genealogical, cultural, or linguistic ties. The Arabs conquered Morocco in the late 7th century and converted the majority of the population to Islam.

**Sephardim:** The Sephardi Jews are descendants of the Jewish community that lived in Iberia before the Spanish Inquisition. They developed distinct Jewish customs and traditions.

**Ashkenazi:** The Ashkenazi Jews are descendants of the Jewish community that lived in Eastern Europe and similarly developed a distinct Jewish culture.

**Toshavim:** The Toshavim Jews are the descendants of the original Jewish population in Morocco. They were the first non-Berber peoples to settle in Morocco. Legends suggest they settled in Morocco as early as 586 BC.

**Megorashim:** The Megorashim, or “the banished,” are the descendants of the Iberian Jews that settled in Morocco after the Spanish Inquisition in 1492. There were profound cultural distinctions between the Toshavim and the Megorashim. They did not identify as a unified socio-religious group until several centuries after the arrival of the Megorashim.

**Mimouna:** Alternate spellings: Mimuna, Maimouna. Mimouna originated as an ancient autochthonous agricultural festival venerating the Judeo-Muslim saint Lalla Mimouna. In ancient times, Jewish and Muslim communities both celebrated the Mimouna festival together. During the pre-colonial era it was reinterpreted as a Jewish celebration on the final night of Passover, still involving Muslim participation. During the twentieth century it was once again reinterpreted and became a Jewish festival with no Muslim participation.

**The Mimouna Paradigm:** The political, economic, and social structure of pre-colonial Morocco that facilitated and required religious coexistence. The paradigm is a pattern of Judeo-Muslim interactions, as embodied by the Mimouna festival, that allowed for 2,000 years of coexistence in Morocco.

**Passover (Pesach):** A canonical Jewish holiday during the month of *Nisan*, or April. Passover is a celebration of the Jewish Exodus from Egypt; god inflicted ten plagues on their Egyptian rulers in order to free the Jews from slavery.
**Hilloula**: Hilloula is an annual Jewish veneration of the life of a saint, typically a Jewish scholar or religious leader. Hilloula exemplifies the role of Berber spirituality in shaping Jewish ritual in Morocco.

**Mellah**: The Mellah is the Jewish living quarter in a Moroccan city. The Mellahs are architecturally distinct zones in each city. Islamic architecture in Morocco typically places a garden or open courtyard in the center of traditional homes or buildings. These traditional raids reflect Muslim notions of female privacy in the home. Conversely, Jewish architecture in Morocco is noted by the use of balconies facing into the street. The Mellah of each city is still identifiable by the presence of balconies and the use of blue paint (blue is the color of Judaism). In modern day Morocco it is clear that a building was once a Jewish home if it possesses a public facing balcony.

![The Mellah of Rabat](image1.png)

**Rabbi**: A Jewish religious leader.

**Talmud**: The Talmud is a fundamental text in Rabbinic Judaism that contains the teachings and opinions of thousands of Rabbis.

**Zionism**: In the early-mid twentieth century, Zionism was an international movement for the establishment of a Jewish state in the land of Israel. Zionist organizations arrived in Morocco as early as 1900.

**Diaspora**: The Jewish Diaspora was the dispersion of the Jewish people from their original homeland in the land of Israel. The modern Diaspora community consists of any Jews living outside of the modern state of Israel.

**Imam**: An Islamic religious leader.

**Ulama**: An educated class of Muslim scholars that arbitrates Islamic law.

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1 Mellah of Rabat, June 2012. Photo by author.
Part 1
Introduction

The Jewish people were like the nomad people of the Sahara, the Tureg. We moved from one place to another. But home is where you feel comfortable. Of course I am aware of being the only Jew left in a Muslim city, I'm not hiding it. I feel like I'm the sole member of a club. I am the community, I am everything. It feels good at times; but at times you feel sad because you saw a world that has collapsed that is no longer around you.¹

-Joseph Sebag

The world around Joseph Sebag, the last Jew living in Essouria, Morocco, has collapsed. The 2,000 years of Jewish and Muslim coexistence in Morocco was erased over the course of 60 years. Over 260,000 Jews left Morocco from 1948 until the present time. Roughly 3,000 Jews remain in Morocco and exist within this paradox: like Joseph, many are optimistic that their community, however small, is still intact. Nonetheless, the rapid departure of approximately 99% of the Moroccan Jews leaves those remaining with a great deal of sadness and nostalgia for what once was.

Most scholarship on Moroccan Jewry dates Jewish arrival in the Maghreb around 70 AD, after the Roman destruction of the second Temple in Jerusalem. However, there is some indication that the Jews may have in fact arrived much earlier; legends date Jewish migration to Morocco before the destruction of the First Temple in Israel in 586 BC. In early writings on the Maghreb, Jews are consistently described as natives rather than a foreign entity.

The early foundation of a Jewish community in Morocco elucidates Joseph’s attachment to Morocco as not only as his home, but also as the home of

an extensive and deeply-rooted Jewish community. Joseph intends to live out his life in Morocco and die the self-proclaimed “Last Jew of Essaouira.” He wears this title with pride; Morocco is and always has been his home, despite a brief stint living in New York. He resists even the idea of moving to Casablanca, where much of his family has settled. “I was born here, as were my parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents. Essaouria has been home to my family for two and a half centuries.”

However, Joseph is an exception; his entire family has left Essaouria, most of them are now settled in France, England, and Israel. The Jews of the twentieth century mass emigration scattered around the globe, primarily to North America, Europe and Israel. This mass exodus resulted in the virtual decimation of Jewish population in Morocco. While there was once a flourishing community—and even periods of time in which the Jewish population outnumbered the Muslims—the modern Jewish community is continuously shrinking.

This thesis proposes an analysis of the gradual deterioration of the relationship between the Jews and Muslims in Morocco. The Judeo-Muslim relationship will be examined through the lens of the Moroccan holiday known as Mimouna, which falls on the last day of the Jewish holiday Pesach. The Mimouna festival is a very peculiar Jewish celebration, as it traditionally required the participation of Muslim neighbors. For that peculiarity, my thesis proposes that the Mimouna festival represents at a microcosmic level the Judeo-Muslim relationship in Morocco at large. The Mimouna holiday embodies the
sociocultural structure that allowed for coexistence, as well as the underlying tensions that counteracted it.

I begin with an examination of the pre-colonial Judeo-Muslim relationship viewed through the lens of the Mimouna festival. For the purposes of this paper, the pre-colonial era begins in the seventeenth century; while the foundation of a coexistent relationship began as early as the arrival of the Jews in the region, the seventeenth century marks the period in which there was both a strong centralized Moroccan government and an influential Jewish population in every major city of Morocco.

Chapter 1 describes what I have labeled the *Mimouna Paradigm*, or a political, economic and social structure that facilitated and required religious tolerance. But this paradigm could only function within the context of pre-colonial Morocco, in which there was minimal influence from external sources. In Chapters 2 and 3, I diverge slightly from the Mimouna festival in order to focus on two key turning points in the Judeo-Muslim relationship during the twentieth century: the emergence of French colonialism and the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. These events instigated significant shifts to the Judeo-Muslim social structure thus rendering the *Mimouna Paradigm* ineffective. The influx of external influence, French colonialism and Zionism, undermined the previously established and delicately balanced Judeo-Muslim relationship.

Chapter 4 returns to the Mimouna festival as a point of comparison. Throughout the twentieth century there was a consistent decline in the practice of Mimouna as a bi-religious festival. Mimouna serves as a pulse of the broader
Judeo-Muslim relationship; as the relationship changed throughout time, so did the way in which Mimouna was understood. During the late twentieth century and the early twenty-first century, two important trends emerged: The first is the appearance and strengthening of the Jewish Morocco identity in the Diaspora, or the Jewish community that immigrated throughout the world. The second is the reinterpretation of Mimouna as an exclusively Jewish holiday within that Diaspora community. Although the composition of the community that celebrates Mimouna has changed, the festival has maintained its use as an annual point of convergence for differing communities. While Mimouna was once a facet of unification for Jews and their Muslim neighbors, in the Diaspora, Mimouna serves to unify Moroccan Jews with their non-Moroccan neighbors.

The modern Mimouna holiday, though it has maintained the same spirit and many of the rituals of the pre-colonial Mimouna, no longer involves Muslim participation. The transformation of the Mimouna festival into an exclusively Jewish holiday has erased an important narrative of coexistence from the collective consciousness of the Moroccan Diaspora Jews.

The thesis was inspired by that erasure. Modern rhetoric about the Mimouna festival ignores the holiday's true origins as a shared Judeo-Muslim celebration. Over the next few decades, as Judaism in Morocco decreases from a fading presence to extinction, Jewish history must be memorialized in the context of this narrative of coexistence.

Jews in Morocco have made no effort to reinstate Muslim participation in the festival. Moreover, Muslims have not attempted to reclaim their former
association with Mimouna. Consequently, the future generations of Moroccan Jews and Muslims, both those remaining in Morocco and those in the Diaspora, have the opportunity to make an important change in this memorialization process. I propose a reassertion of the Judeo-Muslim origins of Mimouna. Should modern Moroccans reclaim the true origin story, these 2,000 years of coexistence, as exemplified by the Mimouna holiday, could serve as a strong counterargument to modern rhetoric about Jews and Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa region in general.

The political tensions between Israel and Palestine led to a re-writing of Judeo-Muslim history in Morocco. Many are quick to buy into this narrative of hostilities, but the Moroccan Judeo-Muslim relationship reveals a long history of coexistence and friendship. This thesis aims to reclaim that history through the Mimouna festival, a celebration of tolerance and renewal.

My path to uncover the true origins of the Mimouna was rather convoluted. Since Mimouna is a relatively obscure celebration, scholarship on the festival is very limited. Within the scholarship, there is a wide-range of hypotheses concerning the origins of the Mimouna festival, many of which are not based in concrete historical evidence. Even while doing field research onsite in Morocco, it was difficult to find source materials on Mimouna specifically.

Without the works of Harvey Goldberg and Claude Arrieu, I would not have been able to so thoroughly understand this fascinating holiday. Goldberg’s *The Mimuna and the Minority Status of the Moroccan Jews* (1978) contributed significantly to my understanding of the role of the Mimouna within the broader
social framework.\(^2\) Goldberg’s article was integral to the formation of my argument about role-reversal rituals in the Mimouna festival. Additionally, Goldberg’s assessment of the many hypotheses concerning the Mimouna’s etymology illuminated the controversy over the origins of the festival.

Claude Arrieu’s book *Mouna, Mimouna, Achoura: Les Fêtes de la Convergence Religieuse en Afrique du Nord Avant 1962*, or, *Mouna, Mimouna, Achoura: Convergent Religious Celebrations in North Africa Before 1962* (2003) examined Mimouna within the context of other North African bi-religious celebrations.\(^3\) His analysis informed my understanding of each individual ritual that composes Mimouna as a whole. The wealth of specific information concerning Mimouna rituals in Arrieu’s book is unparalleled in scholarship written in English or French. Since there are several sources written in Hebrew that I was unable to acquire, I was largely dependent on Arrieu’s descriptions. Moreover, by pairing his analysis of Mimouna with the Mouna and Achoura, two other North African festivals including bi-religious participation, Arrieu illuminated the sociocultural trends that facilitate the sharing of religious celebrations.

Furthermore, my understanding of the role of the Mimouna festival in facilitating coexistence was greatly inspired by David Nirenberg’s argument in *Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages*.\(^4\) Nirenberg

examines the role of violence in enabling coexistence between the Jewish community and the Christian community in medieval Spain. He argues that before the age of the great persecutions (1391-1491), ritual violence and expression of religious tensions guaranteed coexistence because it provided clear and distinct boundaries between social groups. The Mimouna similarly functions as a way to reassert the boundaries between the Jewish and Muslim community, although without the use of violent expressions. By undertaking the one-day ritualized role-reversals associated with Mimouna, the Jewish and Muslim communities reestablished acceptable forms of interaction and simultaneously celebrated the commonalities that allow for coexistence.

While this thesis will rely on previous scholarship such as those mentioned above, there is also a significant original component to my research. Interviews conducted during the 2012-2013 year will factor heavily into my analysis of Mimouna and the Judeo-Muslim relationship in Morocco. Although it can be problematic to use contemporary sources to illuminate the past, I believe these interviews can shed light on Mimouna and the Judeo-Muslim relationship because they reveal which notions have persisted from the past to the present. I was able to gain concrete proof of which Mimouna rituals are still practiced, versus those that have been adapted or abandoned since pre-colonial times. Considering the limited amount of scholarship on this recent period, contemporary interviews were integral to my analysis of the modern Judeo-Muslim relationship in Morocco.
Using these original sources, I will demonstrate that Mimouna can be used as a tool to reclaim the narrative of Judeo-Muslim coexistence in Morocco. The 2,000 years prior to the introduction of disruptive foreign influences—the French and the creation of the state of Israel—should be incorporated into modern rhetoric.
Chapter 1: The Pre-colonial Mimouna Festival: Understanding the Longevity of Judeo-Muslim Coexistence Through the Lens of the Mimouna Festival

The highlight [of Mimouna] is, of course, the evening feast which brings together the whole family. But Mimouna brings people together not just as co-religionists, but also more importantly as close neighbors and friends. It is therefore seen as a moment of community, solidarity and beyond; it is a moment of human brotherhood. (My translation)
-Claude Arrieu

Introduction

I propose that the Mimouna festival can serve as a lens through which to understand the broader Judeo-Muslim social structure in pre-colonial Morocco (17th century-1830). I argue that Mimouna embodies three elements—cultural commonalities, interdependence, and acceptance—that create a paradigm of interaction that enabled coexistence. The delicately balanced Judeo-Muslim relationship is a function of this 

Mimouna Paradigm.

Through analysis of these three structured intergroup relations, my argument will illuminate the social, political, and economic dynamics that facilitated 2,000 years of coexistence.

I begin with a background analysis of the underlying spiritual culture of Morocco, which was dominated by the Cult of Saints. This discussion seeks to emphasize the common spiritual culture of both the Jewish and Muslim communities. Since Mimouna originated as an aspect of saint veneration, it is important to note that the Mimouna festival exists within this ambiguous realm

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of Judeo-Muslim spiritualism. The *Mimouna Paradigm* is unique to Morocco because of this shared spiritual heritage.

The persistence of this underlying spiritual culture into modern times will be examined through the use of contemporary interviews. Modern sources are incorporated throughout this chapter to highlight the extent to which elements of pre-colonial spiritualism remain integral to modern Moroccan culture.

**The Cult of Saints and Saint Veneration**

The autochthonous Berbers and Jews of Morocco practiced a local form of religion known as the Cult of Saints.² Before the arrival of Judaism or Islam in Morocco, 586 BC and 680 AD respectively, the Cult of Saints dominated the local spiritualism.³ The Cult of Saints was centered on the veneration of important individuals, those who were considered to be wise, holy, or in touch with the spiritual elements that controlled day-to-day life.⁴ The usage of the word “cult” in this context denotes a series of collectively practiced rituals.

This popular and decentralized religious structure had several implications for the development of monotheism within pre-colonial Morocco, especially for the Jewish religion. Since the Jewish people settled amongst and intermarried with the Berber peoples, there was a considerable blending of the

Jewish religion with the autochthonous Berber saint veneration. This resulted in the creation of a unique form of Judaism that drew heavily from these local spiritual elements.


The development of this Judeo-Berber religion was in part pragmatism to facilitate conversions.\(^7\) As the Jewish community—and later the Muslim community as well—sought to expand their religious power base, incorporating aspects of the Cult of Saints encouraged Berber adoption of monotheism. For example, as the Cult of Saints became more ingrained in the formal practice of Islam and Judaism in Morocco, important *Imams* (Muslim religious leaders), or *Rabbis*, (Jewish religious leaders) often became the venerated saints.

This osmotic relationship between the Moroccan monotheisms and the Cult of Saints has attracted a considerable amount of scholarship. Historian E’li

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\(^7\) Zafrani, *Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco*, 45.
Azoulay, born in Casablanca in 1947, is one of many scholars fascinated with the topic of Moroccan spiritualism. Azoulay’s research focuses primarily on the Jewish Moroccan saints that bridged that gap between ancient Berber spiritual traditions and Jewish ritual. In *Maroc, Terre des Saints: Histoire et Origine des Saints Juifs du Maroc*, or *Morocco, Land of Saints, History and Origins of the Jewish Saints of Morocco*, Azoulay asserts that there are 656 saints, or places of saint worship, on Moroccan territory. Some of these saints pre-date Judaism, whereas others have arisen in the past few centuries. Of these 656, 45 are Jewish saints venerated by Muslims, 14 are Muslim saints venerated by Jews, and there are an additional 31 saints that are not exclusively attached to either religion. Over 10% of the historically venerated Moroccan saints cross modern religious boundaries. This ambiguous realm of Judeo-Muslim spiritualism has provided the two communities a point of convergence in times of intergroup tension.

The persistence of saint veneration into the pre-colonial period reflects the nature of the conversion processes. The Berber adoption of Judaism in Morocco was both peaceful and gradual. Organic cultural exchange and intermarriage, rather than proselytizing, prompted these conversions. This allowed for extensive integration of the Cult of Saints into the monotheistic religions, which is evidenced by the modern day Jewish celebration of *Hilloula*, one example of Berber spirituality transformed into Jewish ritual. The *Hilioula* is

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10 Zafrani, *Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco*, 245.
an organized celebration that occurs several times a year, typically on the anniversary of the death of one of the many Moroccan saints.

The modern *Hilloula* celebration, though associated with the Jewish branch of the Cult of Saints, includes the veneration of Muslim saints considered holy by the Jewish community. ¹¹ Although *Hilloula* is reflective of the common Judeo-Muslim involvement in the Cult of Saints, it is the Jewish ritualization of that veneration. The word itself, *Hilloula*, is an Aramaic word meaning “wedding” and signifies a wedding, or union, between the saint and the Torah.¹²

Jewish adaptation of the Cult of Saints in the form of *Hilloula* originated with the veneration of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai. Yohai went to Rome in 141-142 to demand that the decree forbidding the study of the Torah be lifted. He was condemned to death in 148. Rabbi Bar Yohai wrote the Zohar, which is the basis of mystical Judaism, known as *kabbalah*. Perhaps it was Rabbi Bar Yohai’s strong connection to non-Talmudic spiritualism that inspired the commemoration of his death to become a tradition in the Cult of Saints.¹³

The modern *Hilloula* celebration has maintained its traditional ritualization. *Hilloula* involves making a pilgrimage to the burial ground of a saint and studying the preachings of that saint, usually a Rabbi. It is believed that if one conducts him or herself correctly and lives according to the Torah, the saints will be willing to intervene on his or her behalf. Although *Hilloula* is primarily a celebration, it is also an opportunity for the pious to visit the graves

¹¹ Interview with Mahmoud: Muslim Cemetery Caretaker in Rabat, July 2012.
¹³ Ibid.
of the saints and ask them to intervene. *Hilloula* often includes a reading of the story of the Jews’ passage after leaving Egypt. Sacrifices are typically made, usually of sheep or cows, and orchestras play throughout the night.

*Azoulay*, author of *Maroc, Terre de Saints*, reflects on his memories of *Hilloula* and visiting saintly grave sights:

The memories of our Jewish community of Morocco, who spent days where various saints are buried, are still present in my memory.... Those making the pilgrimage left their homes in the city and traveled by car or bus, sometimes for hours with the elderly, men, women, children of all ages, and even the sick, to go to an isolated, arid, corner of the country in order to receive (blessings)... I remember these women, cheeks resting on the stone warmed by the flames of several candles, crying and begging for the healing of a loved one or making a wish ... I also remember the handicapped and disabled, these strong men rose from their chairs to get as close as possible to the holy and blessed Rabbi without interruption, from morning to night, drawing their strength from a supernatural force, probably generated by the context and by their own dedication.14 (My translation)

*Azoulay* grew up in the 1950s, during the height of the Jewish emigration out of Morocco. However, even in this time of turmoil, it is clear that *Hilloula* maintained a deep importance to *Azoulay*'s community. His powerful imagery of elderly women crying and begging for the saints to intervene illuminates the deeply-rooted belief in the power of the saints. In Morocco and the Moroccan Jewish Diaspora, it was, and still is, strongly believed that if one is to make the pilgrimage to the burial site of a saint or Rabbi, there are supernatural forces that will intercede on one’s behalf.

I collected contemporary first person accounts throughout 2012-2013 in Morocco, New York, and Israel; these accounts reflect a connection to *Hilloula*

14Ibid., 9.
similar to Azoulay’s account from the 1950s. Despite the scope of the Moroccan Jewish Diaspora, many Jews still make the long journey to Morocco to worship at the burial sites of past saints and Rabbis. I interviewed Myriam Siboni, a Moroccan Jew who immigrated with her family to Israel, then France, and finally settled in the United States.

Myriam spoke to me about her parents’ connection to *Hilloula* and reported that her parents, despite their old age, often return to Morocco to celebrate *Hilloula*. They made the pilgrimage as recently as 10 years ago. I asked Myriam what *Hilloula* meant to her and her parents, she responded:

> You see how different the Sephardic and the Ashkenazi culture are. The Ashkenazi probably think that [Hilloula] is such a strange thing! You make an offering at a venerable Rabbi’s grave, essentially you’re making a pilgrimage to the gravesite. You have a whole party at the gravesite, and prayers are said. You’ll see that sometimes in Israel, too.  

Myriam highlights two important elements of the modern *Hilloula* celebration. First, it is a distinctly Sephardic tradition that has no basis in the Talmudic tradition. This is what prompts her to say that Ashkenazi Jews would find the celebration “strange,” because it is of purely North African and seemingly pagan origins. Second, Myriam mentions that the Moroccan immigrant community in Israel also celebrates *Hilloula*, which exemplifies the connection Jews of the Diaspora maintain with the spiritual, non-Talmudic elements of Moroccan Judaism.

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15 Interview with Myriam Siboni: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Immigrant in New York, October 2012.
In Israel, I interviewed Gai Cohen, 22, born and raised in Haifa. Gai’s mother and father emigrated from Morocco at very young ages, 6 and 10, respectively. Despite never having been to Morocco himself, Gai celebrates *Hilloula* with the Moroccan-Israeli community. He explained:

*Hilloula* is something to do if you want to respect the day a big rabbi passed away. For example a big rabbi in Morocco, Amram ben Diwan, he’s really well known. So the day he passed away, we make a big meal [*sic*], light a candle, and have a feast to remember his name.16

Amram ben Diwan was an eighteenth century Rabbi credited with many healing miracles; typically he is noted for his ability to cure barren women. Muslims also venerate Amram Ben Diwan, but know him by the name Sidi Brahim.17 The fact that several centuries later he is still well known and called upon to heal the sick attests to the strength of the Cult of Saints. Although Gai and his family cannot make the physical pilgrimage to Ouazzane where Rabbi Amram ben Diwan is buried, they honor his memory every year with a feast.

These contemporary interviews reveal the enduring importance of the saint veneration in modern religious practice. The adaptation of indigenous traditions to fit the modern monotheisms has allowed these ancient rituals to endure the test of time. Similar to *Hilloula*, Mimouna has persisted into contemporary times. Mimouna originated as an agricultural celebration, venerating saint Lalla Mimouna, but was incorporated into both Judaism and Islam. Unlike *Hilloula*, pre-colonial Mimouna does not denote an exclusively

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16 Interview with Gai Cohen: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in Israel, January 2013.
Jewish or Muslim festival; it is instead a combined festival requiring the participation of both religious communities. Therefore, the Mimouna festival can reveal the intricacies of the early Judeo-Muslim relationship, since it is a point of both physical and cultural convergence.

**The Judeo-Muslim Relationship Embodied in Mimouna**

The Mimouna festival represents the convergence of several religious elements of Moroccan culture: It is at the junction between archaic spiritualism and monotheism and it is a link between Judeo-Muslim coexistence and tension. Mimouna illustrates both the complex religious and spiritual makeup of Morocco and the overarching social and political structure, or the *Mimouna Paradigm*. As a ritualized diversion from the normal structure, the Mimouna celebration reveals how the Jewish and Muslim communities interact, perceive, and coexist with each other.

I argue that Mimouna encompasses the Judeo-Muslim power dynamics; the festival embodies the three elements—cultural commonalities, interdependence, and acceptance—that I credit with the success and longevity of the pre-colonial Judeo-Muslim relationship in Morocco.

The Mimouna festival attracted my attention primarily because it is in direct opposition modern perceptions of these two religious communities. From a twenty-first century perspective, this festival seems to be in direct opposition to the modern Judeo-Muslim relationship. I was surprised to stumble upon a festival so grounded in coexistence and common Judeo-Muslim heritage when
today, political rhetoric surrounding issues of shared Judeo-Muslim interest is so volatile and pessimistic. There was something in particular about North African and Moroccan culture that allowed the Jews to successfully find a niche that they never truly found in Christian Europe.

Moroccan Society had developed in a way that allowed for the cultural commonalities between Jews and Muslims to supersede their differences. Politically and economically, the Jews and Muslims occupied different niches, making the two communities interdependent. Finally, the long historical tradition of cohabitating in Morocco—Phoenicians living among Romans, Berbers living among Arabs, Jews living among Muslims—created a culture of acceptance.

**Etymology and Origins**

Scholars have struggled with the etymology and origins of the Mimouna festival. Haim Zafrani, an expert on Moroccan Jewish history provides this description of the origins of the Mimoua:

We think that it belongs more to the Maghrebian social-cultural landscape and to the immediate local environment. This is shown by almost all the popular manifestations, rites, practices, and customs which mark its celebration. They seem to derive from ancient autochthonous folklore, that symbiotic area where Jews and Muslims happily meet and where the expression of a common destiny on the land which both have inhabited from time immemorial, and to which they are attached, is confirmed in a certain way and on certain special occasions. The term Mimuna which designates this ceremonial has given birth to diverse, mostly fantastic, etymologies, most frequently adopted in order to provide a basis for attributing an ideological role to this celebration.18

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18 Zafrani, *Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco*, 240-41.
Zafrani highlights several key elements of Mimouna that substantiate my assertion that the festival originated as an agricultural rite associated with the veneration of saint Lalla Mimouna. First, Zafrani highlights the derivation of the rituals from local folklore. Second, he specifies that the festival has its origins in the ambiguous Judeo-Muslim spiritualism, or the Cult of Saints. Third, he connects Mimouna to the land itself and the shared Judeo-Muslim occupation of that land. Finally, he mentions the effort to attach an ideological role to this celebration, which explains the Judaization of Mimouna and its association with Passover.

As Zafrani indicated, many fantastical etymologies and origin stories have emerged in order to connect the holiday with a particular ideology. For example, some scholars attribute the word “Mimouna” to its modern usage in North African Arabic dialect, meaning blessings and good fortune.¹⁹ Others believe the word is a derivative of the Hebrew word, ‘Emounah, meaning belief.²⁰ Those who assert that Mimouna is primarily a Moroccan festival with an Islamic association tend to connect Mimouna with the modern Arabic “Mimouna.” Those who assert that Mimouna is primarily a Jewish festival tend to associate Mimouna with the Hebrew ‘Emounah. Both of these theories lack solid evidence. North African vernacular is constantly in flux—it is a mélange of Berber, French, Arabic, Hebrew, and Spanish—therefore it is just as likely that the modern use of “Mimouna” derives from the festival itself. The connection to the word ‘Emounah

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¹⁹ Albert Suissa, "Ma Mimouna à Moi," Kol Ha’ir, April 12 1996.
²⁰ Interview with Rabbi Jacki Sebag and Family: Conversations from Shabbat Dinner in Casablanca, July 2012.
is similarly unfounded, because the Mimouna festival is more oriented toward non-Talmudic based beliefs, rather than the belief in God.\(^{21}\)

Although some scholars continue to disagree on the etymology of the festival, the most likely explanation connects the festival to the venerated saint, Lalla Mimouna, whose tombstone can be found in Tamgrout.\(^{22}\) While this etymological ambiguity cannot be solved, there are many factors that point to Lalla Mimouna as the namesake for the festival. Each saint is remembered for possessing certain holy qualities, or being able to provide certain blessings. Lalla Mimouna is known to be a saint of good fortune, fertility, and renewal. These themes are all embodied in the rituals of the Mimouna festival.\(^{23}\) Notably, Lalla Mimouna is one of the 31 saints that are venerated by both Jews and Muslims, which explains why the Mimouna rituals traditionally involve participation by both communities.

While the Jewish veneration of a typical saint takes the form of \textit{Hilloula}, Mimouna has evolved into a much more elaborate festival. This is likely because of the collective celebration of the Jewish and Muslim communities. Additionally, Mimouna gained popularity amongst the Jewish community because it falls directly after the Jewish holiday \textit{Pesach}, or Passover. Thus, it doubles as the final celebration for the end of the holy Passover week.\(^{24}\)

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 82.
Even though the pre-colonial Mimouna festival is considered to be the celebration at the end, but not fully part of the Jewish holiday Passover, Muslim participation persisted because of the shared veneration of Lalla Mimouna. According to a Moroccan Jewish immigrant in Israel, Albert Suissa, “Lalla Mimouna ensures a place in our collective consciousness….she moves freely and liberally between the ambiguous definitions of what is Arab and what is Jewish.” Furthermore, out of the 656 Moroccan saints, Lalla Mimouna is one of only 23 female saints, which contributes to the understanding of the inclusivity and broad appeal of this festival.

Jewish Moroccan Scholar Harvey Goldberg describes the Moroccan Jewish community as a “sponge,” which absorbed the local customs and traditions into its own version of Judaism. The Mimouna celebration is a prime example of an autochthonous tradition, which was gradually reinterpreted and transformed by the Jewish community. By the pre-colonial period, it became clear that this festival of saint veneration was firmly attached to the sect of Moroccan Judaism in particular.

The Mimouna festival’s association with Pesach elucidates the strong Jewish connection to Mimouna. Since Lalla Mimouna is associated with the qualities of renewal, fertility, and good fortune at the onset of Spring, Mimouna was easily incorporated into Passover, which celebrates these same qualities:

Without a doubt, in North Africa, and particularly in Morocco, where the prevalence of agricultural rituals is still considerable today, the canonical Passover holiday of seven days is prolonged to an eight

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25 Suissa, "Ma Mimouna à Moi."
day...In all of the Mediterranean basin, the final night of Passover awakens a solemn and colorful character of festivities, thanks to the celebration of Mimouna. 27

The connection between ancient agricultural rituals and the Passover celebration is profound. By elongating the canonical Passover festivities, the Jewish community was able to adapt their local traditions as an extension of Talmudic Judaism. The incorporation of Mimouna as a finale to the Passover celebration made this a sanctioned element of Rabbinically approved Judaism, rather than the remnants of Berber tradition.

Lalla Mimouna’s origin story similarly explains why religious scholars necessitated Mimouna’s adaptation to modern religious values. According to Goldberg, Lalla Mimouna had Eastern African origins and was a negress slave woman who was captured and taken to Morocco. Lalla Mimouna is “understood to be a Negro woman who, being both female and black, represents the piety of the simple and lowly as opposed to the learned and prestigious.” 28

Jewish and Muslim communities of the past few centuries have placed great importance on religious education. Thus, Lalla Mimouna is celebrated for values that are not espoused by the modern Jewish or Muslim communities. Both communities venerate Lalla Mimouna as a champion of piety, regardless of the fact that she is part of neither the Jewish educational Talmudic tradition nor the Muslim educated ulama.

To give a modern example of the connection between uneducated piety and the saint Lalla Mimouna, in Fes, when a Muslim child does not know how to recite his prayers well it is customary to say “let him be—God knows Lalla Mimouna, and Lalla Mimouna knows God.” Meaning, even those who have not studied the Qu’ran well are still considered pious.

The Cult of Saints and the Judeo-Muslim connection to the Mimouna festival have greatly informed my understanding of the broader Judeo-Muslim relationship. Accordingly, I will now delve into the rituals and practices of Mimouna itself in order to draw conclusions about the paradigm of coexistence in pre-colonial Morocco.

**The Festival: Rituals, Practices and What They Reveal About the Judeo-Muslim Relationship**

In the following sections I will describe some of the many rituals associated with Mimouna and how they reflect the overall relationship between the Muslim and Jewish communities. Through this exploration of cultural commonalities, interdependence, and acceptance I will illuminate the underlying social structure, or the *Mimouna Paradigm* that facilitated and encouraged cooperative and peaceful Judeo-Muslim relations.

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29 Ibid.
Cultural Commonalities

I propose that the overwhelming cultural commonalities were key in the development of a society conducive to religious coexistence. Historically, the Moroccan Jews and Muslims had greater cultural similarities than differences. Raphael Patai, a late twentieth century Hungarian-Jewish ethnographer, anthropologist and historian, studied the Jewish communities of the Diaspora and eloquently expresses the deep cultural entanglement of the Muslim and Jewish communities.

Their (the Jew’s) roots were sunk deeply into the soil of the Maghreb. Their language was the local Arabic vernacular (with certain idiomatic differences); their ethos and values were those of the Maghrebi Muslims; their personality traits and other characteristics were largely similar to those of their Muslim neighbors; even the Jewish and Muslim attitudes to the supernatural—with the all-pervading belief in magic, the evil eye, saints, amulets, apotropaic utterances and gestures—were practically identical, as was the personality of the God whom the Muslims called Allah and the Jews by one of his several Hebrew names.30 (Emphasis mine)

Patai points to several key elements of shared Judeo-Muslim cultural. First, he references the common linguistic characteristics of the Jews and Muslims. Second, he speaks of their “ethos and values,” which will be exemplified by the shared ritual meanings of the Mimouna holiday. Third, as Patai specifies, the Muslims were neighbors to the Jews, which will be explained with the ritualized “house hopping” tradition and the common use of the public spaces. Finally, Patai mentions elements of collective spiritualism and supernatural belief, including shared magical sayings and symbols.

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Language

Linguistic commonalities are largely responsible for the cultural osmosis between the Jewish and Muslim communities. As Patai mentions, both communities spoke the local Arabic vernacular, which differs significantly from the more formal and standardized Qur’anic Arabic. The flexibility of the vernacular allowed for the development of a singular common language. This shared medium of communication blurred the distinctions between the Muslim community and the Jewish community. In Chapter 2, we will see the undoing of these linguistic commonalities and how the usage of Hebrew and French became a dividing factor between the communities.

In addition to the local Arabic vernacular, in many areas people spoke what became known as the “Judeo-Arab dialect.” This language, called Marrokai, allowed for the sharing of songs, poetry, and music. It differs from the local Arabic vernacular only in that it draws more heavily from Hebrew, whereas the Arabic vernacular draws equally from Berber languages, Hebrew and Qur’anic Arabic.31

In addition to textual evidence of this common language, modern sources provide evidence of this Judeo-Muslim linguistic overlap. Marrokai and the common Arabic vernacular maintained their role as a medium of cross-cultural communication, despite the considerable influence of the French during the twentieth century.

Myriam explains that the Jewish community used Arabic even in

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moments of extreme religious importance. She proudly reported that her father, born in the early 1900s, is “still able to sing the entire Haggadah in Arabic.” The Haggadah is the text read at the beginning of Passover that tells the story of the Jewish Exodus from Egypt. It explains the Exodus as it is told in the Book of Exodus in the Torah, which was written in Hebrew. Expressions of canonical Judaism were not restricted to the Hebrew language.

In pre-colonial Morocco, Hebrew was merely the language of the educated or the highly religious. Myriam also spoke of her grandmother, who was part of the majority of the Jewish population with little or no knowledge of Hebrew. Myriam’s grandmother emigrated to Israel in the 1950s, but never learned Hebrew, even while in Israel. Instead, she spoke only Arabic with her friends and family.

“Ethos and Values”

At its core, Mimouna is a celebration, although different families or regions may have slight variations in practice and meaning. Every theme espoused by Mimouna falls into the category of common “ethos and values” shared by both Muslim and Jewish communities.

First, the holiday corresponds with the beginning of Spring and the agricultural season. This theme is ritualized during the Mimouna celebration with the use of the color green and symbols of agricultural renewal that adorn

32 Interview with Myriam Siboni: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Immigrant in New York.
33 Brunot and Malka, Textes Judéo-Arabes de Fés, Preface.
34 Interview with Myriam Siboni: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Immigrant in New York.
the Jewish homes throughout the Mellah.\textsuperscript{35} Spring and agricultural celebrations exist as common cultural practices and do not belong exclusively to either religious group.

Second, Mimouna is a celebration of fertility, good fortune and well being. These are three of the qualities that characterize the saint Lalla Mimouna. As previously discussed, the dually venerated saint crosses the boundaries between the Jewish and Muslim communities. Thus, the celebration of Lalla Mimouna calls for her to intercede on behalf of the festival’s participants, both Jewish and Muslim, and reward them with a year of fertility and well being.

Finally, the Mimouna festival celebrates the connection between human existence and the spiritual world. This common connection to local spiritualism exemplifies what Patai refers to as the shared “attitudes to the supernatural.” He even goes as far as to say their common spiritual beliefs “were practically identical.”\textsuperscript{36}

Although the many themes of Mimouna each symbolize a shared value, the most principal overarching theme of the festival is joy. From its origins to modern day, the one constant element of the Mimouna festival is the joyous atmosphere. Joseph, the self-proclaimed “Last Jew of Essaouira,” is one of the few remaining Jewish inhabitants of the town Essaouira, which was founded by a

\textsuperscript{35} Zafrani, \textit{Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco}, 242.
\textsuperscript{36} Patai, \textit{Tents of Jacob; The Diaspora, Yesterday and Today}: 206-07.
Jewish trading community in the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{37} Joseph explained in an interview in July, 2012:

Each family celebrates Mimouna in a different manner. It’s like wearing clothes, every person wears their own. But the common thread through all the celebrations is the joy, the happiness, the sharing. And what’s unique during the Mimouna evening, is the Jews in Morocco never close their doors, their doors are open and everyone is welcome. This is what’s unique about Mimouna.\textsuperscript{38}

As Joseph emphasizes, Mimouna is a shared experience. This is best symbolized by one of the most illuminating Mimouna rituals, which requires that all doors must be left open.\textsuperscript{39} This “open door policy” is meant to be both metaphorical and practical, as it enables the Mimouna ritual “house hopping.”

\textit{The Neighborly Relationship and House Hopping}

“House hopping” is a Mimouna evening activity in which all friends and neighbors are welcomed into one another’s homes. This is facilitated by the “open door policy,” in which each family is able to express their hospitality and their desire to share with their neighbors and community.\textsuperscript{40} “House hopping” was particularly popular in the Mellah, the Jewish living quarter, because the community lived in a consolidated area of the city. In the process of “house hopping,” the festival often carries out into the streets and is not restricted to the houses themselves. The emphasis on sharing with neighbors and the outside community exemplifies the common social sphere in which Muslims and Jews coexisted.

\textsuperscript{37} Joseph Sebag is the last Moroccan Jew to live year-round in Essaouira, however, there is a considerable Jewish population that maintains second homes in Essaouira.
\textsuperscript{38} Interview with Joseph Sebag: "The Last Jew of Essaouira."
\textsuperscript{39} Zafrani, \textit{Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco}, 243.
\textsuperscript{40} Suissa, "Ma Mimouna à Moi."
Patai refers to the Jews’ “Muslim neighbors.” Many of these cultural commonalities were enabled and encouraged by this neighborly relationship. Before the proliferation of *Mellahs* in each major city, the Jews and Muslims cohabitated indiscriminately. While the first *Mella* was introduced in Fes in 1438, the process of establishing a *Mella* in each major city was not completed until 1792, under Sultan Moulay Soulayman (reigned 1792-1822).41

Even after the establishment of these segregated living quarters in the larger cities, many Jewish and Muslims communities continued to cohabitate in the mountainous regions or in smaller villages. Much of the cultural overlap between the two communities was merely a function of their day-to-day interactions and their common living space.

**“Attitudes to the Supernatural”**

The magical elements that Patia refers to, such as the evil eye, amulets, and “apotropaic utterances and gestures,” exist alongside the Cult of Saints in the spiritual traditions of Morocco. These spiritually charged symbols also include the hamsa hand, and the fibula.

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The Hamsa hand exists in both Islamic and Jewish traditions. It is recognized by both religious communities as a protective sign, able to ward off the evil eye or other negative forces.\(^{43}\)

The Fibula is Berber jewelry usually worn on a woman’s dress or in her hair. Both Jewish and Muslim Berbers acknowledge the use of this symbol. It can signify different things to different Berber communities. For example, in some Southern Berber communities, the Fibula is used as a signifier of marital status. A woman would wear one fibula on her chest if she were available for marriage, or two if she was not.\(^{45}\)

\(^{42}\) Hamsa hands in the Jewish Museum of Casablanca, July 2012. Photo by author.
\(^{43}\) Interview with Zakaria: The Modern Muslim Perspective on Moroccan Judaism, June 2012.
\(^{44}\) Fibulas at the Jewish Museum of Casablanca, July 2012. Photo by author.
\(^{45}\) Interview with Mohammad: Muslim Jewelry Salesman in Essaouira, June 2012.
Perhaps the most pertinent cultural commonality evident in Mimouna is the shared saint veneration, which was discussed at length in the above sections. This common spiritualism and shared belief in magical symbols pervaded the Moroccan adaptation of Islam and Judaism.

**Interdependence**

Coexistence was facilitated by the overarching social structure, which established interdependence between the Muslim and Jewish communities. Jewish social inferiority was balanced by their economic superiority. Muslim political dominance was balanced by their dependence on multi-lingual Jewish individuals in foreign affairs. This social, political and economic equilibrium was fundamental in ensuring the continued cohabitation of these two communities. The interdependent Judeo-Muslim relationship is represented in several of the Mimouna rituals.

**Exchange of Food**

The Jewish and Muslim communities’ interdependence is paralleled during the Mimouna festival with a ritual food exchange. It is traditionally the role of the Muslim guests to break the Jewish fast from *hametz*, the flour that is forbidden into Jewish homes during Passover.\(^{46}\) The preparations for the Mimouna feast cannot begin until after sunset on the final day of Passover. Since the Jews rid the house of *hametz* and all the stores have closed for the night, the

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Jews are dependent on the Muslims to provide the flour so that they can begin
the cooking preparations for the following day. 47

The Muslim guests bring a tray with flour, yeast, and prepared products
such as breads and donuts, which is their contribution to filling the Mimouna
feast table. 48 The Muslims, in turn, depend on their Jewish hosts to return the
tray to them filled with prepared goods, often the matzah, mufletta, and
marzipan. Joseph explained this “give and take” relationship:

They (the Muslims) bring flour, butter, they bring honey, they bring it
in a big tray. They don’t walk out with an empty tray. On the other
hand, the Jewish neighbor puts the pastry, the matzos on the tray. So
there is a way to get close to your neighbor. 49

Joseph points to the Jewish reliance on their Muslim neighbors to break the fast
from hametz. He also highlights the Muslim expectation that the tray will be
replenished with food that their neighbors have prepared.

David Teva, Rabbi at Wesleyan University, was surprised to learn about
this element of the festival. In an interview with Rabbi Teva, he discussed the
deep trust that allowed for such a food exchange. Some would consider the
Jewish consumption of food prepared by Muslims to be non-kosher, meaning
that this food exchange broke Talmudic dietary restrictions. Similarly, some
would not consider the Muslim consumption of food prepared by Jews to be
halal, meaning the food exchange would have similarly broken Muslim dietary

47 Rachel Braun, "Home: A Fictional Account of One Jewish Moroccan Woman's Struggle with
48 Suissa, "Ma Mimouna à Moi."
49 Interview with Joseph Sebag: "The Last Jew of Essaouira."
restrictions. This exemplifies how tradition and culture were prioritized above the specificity of scripture.

**Jewish Use of Muslim Lands**

Good fortune, one of the main themes of the Mimouna festival, is exhibited by expressing closeness with the soil. The Jewish community ritualizes this closeness with nature by picnicking and participating in daytime activities outside of the *Mellah* walls, amongst trees and gardens. It is tradition that the Mimouna day be spent outside of the city, in order to experience the spring renewal firsthand. Families usually picnic in a wood or garden, preferably near a body of water.

Muslim families often owned this land, since it was outside of the *Mellah*. According to a scholar of Moroccan Judaism, Issachar Ben-Ami, (as referenced by Goldberg), Muslims welcomed Jewish entrance into their gardens or woods on the Mimouna day, as a sign of a year of rain. Goldberg asserts that Muslims encouraged the Jews to spend the Mimouna day on their property.

The Jews depended on the Muslims to grant them entrance to their private property to complete their ritual return to nature. The Muslims, in turn, felt that they received special blessings for allowing the spiritually charged participants onto their property. This “give and take” between the two communities expresses the atmosphere of coexistence and mutual accommodation.

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50 Interview with David Teva: Rabbi of Wesleyan University, December 2012.
51 Zafrani, *Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco*, 240.
**Political and Economic Interdependence**

Although these microcosmic instances of interdependence contributed to the balancing of the Judeo-Muslim relationship, the overarching economic and political structure was fundamental in establishing that relationship. The two communities were able to reduce cross-group competition and tensions by occupying different societal niches.

Economically, the Jews and Muslims typically occupied different sectors. The Jews controlled most of the trade, whereas Muslims controlled much of the agriculture. In a documentary aired on 2M, the national Moroccan news channel, *Tinghir Jerusalem: Les Echos du Mellah, Des Histoires et Des Hommes*, or *Tinghir Jerusalem: The Echoes of the Mellah, Stories and People*, an interviewee in the Atlas Mountains said "every shop in this town belonged to the Jews, all except three." This illustrates the extent to which the Jews dominated the trading sector. There were, at times, clashes between the two groups, often because of the Jews' more successful economic status.

However, the Muslim community's collection of the *dhimmi* tax balanced these tensions. Under Islamic law, the *jizya* is a per-capita tax levied on non-Muslims living within a Muslim state. This tax was collected irregularly and at the discretion of local officials. The local government structure was dependent

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on the dhimmi tax collected from the Jews both for income and to reestablish intergroup balance if the Jewish community became too successful.

Flemish scholar Nicholas Clenardus (as quoted by historian Norman Stillman) observed this interdependence in Fes during a 15th century visit to Morocco:

The more the sultan needs money, the more they have to pay. It is for this reason that they—broken by adversity—have become ingenious at providing the money due to the sultan. Thus, neither Christian nor Moor can do anything against Jewish intrigues.57

Clendardus illuminates this dichotomy between social inferiority—the Jews were “broken by adversity”—and their economic superiority, which granted them safety and protection from Christians (referring to Europeans) and the Moors (referring to the local Muslim population).

The Jews held the lowest social status in society; they are sometimes referred to as asfal al-safilin, the lowest of the low.58 However, the dhimmi status specified that the Jews were not only protected, but also that they were sanctioned and tolerated members of society:

Most of the Moroccan stereotypes of Jews may be negative, but they are also peripheral. They are perceived primarily as dhimmis, humbled, but protected subjects. As long as the Jew conforms to this role, he arouses little interest.59

The Muslims were dependent on this dhimmi tax income to fund local projects, though corrupt rulers often took advantage of this tradition for personal gain. In return for the Jews’ generous and reliable economic contributions they were

59 Ibid., 80.
guaranteed physical safety.\textsuperscript{60} Therefore, the \textit{dhimmi} social status and associated tax was fundamental to balancing the power dynamics between the Jewish and Muslim communities.

In addition to this institutionalized form of interdependence, Judeo-Muslim patron-client relationships formed on a local level. Patron-client relationships were personal business relationships that developed between individuals, or individual families. These relationships were solidified through generations of partnerships and were frequently formalized with an ‘\textit{ar}, an oath and animal sacrifice.\textsuperscript{61}

For example, a Jewish trading family could make an arrangement with an agricultural Muslim family: The Jewish “client” family provided the Muslim “patron” with the finest goods and the best trading rates and, in return, the Muslim family provided the Jewish caravan with protection along the trading route. Any caravan, Jewish or Muslim, was at risk of being attacked on the road, and the Jews relied on Muslims for the manpower to protect their goods.

Politically, Muslims were dependent on Jews to play the intermediary role between Arabs or Berbers and Europeans. The Europeans related easily to the \textit{megorashim}, those who had been expelled from Spain, because of their linguistic and cultural similarities to the Europeans. The Jewish community gained a reputation for political prowess, particularly in foreign affairs and in negotiating treaties and agreements.

\textsuperscript{60} Hunwick, \textit{Jews of a Saharan Oasis: Elimination of the Tamantit community}, 5-6.
\textsuperscript{61} Deshen, \textit{The Mellah Society: Jewish community Life in Sherifian Morocco}, 27.
One such Moroccan Jew with a reputation for his political maneuvering was Samuel Pallache, who lived in early 17th century Fes. His political career is chronicled in Mercedes García-Arenal and Gerald Wirgers book *A Man of Three Worlds: Samuel Pallache, a Moroccan Jew in Catholic and Protestant Europe*. At various points in his life Pallache served Spain, The United Kingdom, France, the Muslim Ottoman Empire, and the Netherlands. He had a knack for interpreting the socio-religious atmosphere of the time and identified himself as either a Jew or a Christian, depending on his employer and the political role. Although his loyalties were clearly shifting in these many political positions, it is understood that throughout his career Pallache regularly played a double game on behalf of the Moroccan government.62

Pallache and many like him were able to play integral political roles primarily because of their multilingualism and their ability to relate to both cultural worlds. Furthermore, they had a great deal of political agency because of Christian and Muslim perceptions of Jews. “As Christians and Muslims saw it, the Jew was unique in that his services were governed entirely by a market logic of self-interest. That is what made him so useful.”63 Although this stereotype was negative in nature, it allowed the Jews to maneuver themselves into positions of power despite their low social standing.

The extended network of displaced Jews throughout Europe and the United States provided a community of diplomatically and economically trusted

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63 Ibid., IX.
negotiators who spoke a common language. For example, Isaac Cardoso, a Jewish Moroccan living in New York and his family in Morocco acted as intermediaries between the United States and Morocco. Due to their political maneuvering, in 1777 Morocco became the first country to officially recognize the sovereignty of the United States of America.\textsuperscript{64} Another influential Jewish individual was Isaac Pinto, a Moroccan Jew from Tangiers, who facilitated the 1789 Friendship Treaty between George Washington and the Moroccan Sultanate.\textsuperscript{65} Jews occupied a variety of official government positions, for example, Meir Cohan Ben Maqnin, was appointed ambassador to Great Britain in 1826.\textsuperscript{66} The legacy of Jewish political prowess is evident in contemporary Morocco; André Azoulay, a Jew from Essaouira is a senior advisor to King Mohammad VI.

A visiting Spaniard (as quoted by historian Sarah Taieb-Carlen), aptly described the political life of Moroccan Jews in the 17\textsuperscript{th} century. “The Jews were so well educated and intelligent that the King and the aristocracy entrusted them with the management of their affairs. They operated the mint, and many of them were goldsmiths.”\textsuperscript{67} The Moroccan government relied heavily on the Jewish population because of their reputation as a highly educated social group. They were given significant responsibilities in both the government administration and in the economic sphere’s management of money and the mints.

In addition to their economic and political expertise, Jewish craftsmanship was highly regarded and Jewish gunsmiths were the official

\textsuperscript{64} Hull, Jews and Judaism in African History, 215.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Taieb-Carlen, The Jews of North Africa: From Dido to de Gaulle, 38.
suppliers of the Moroccan Royal Army.\textsuperscript{68} Moreover, the Jewish community was entrusted with the royal stockpiles of the expensive commodity salt. Sultan Moulay Ismail (reigned 1672-1727) delegated the Jewish community to manage and sell Morocco’s salt; henceforth the Jewish quarters in each city were named \textit{Mellahs}, from the Moroccan Arabic \textit{Milha}, or salt.\textsuperscript{69}

\textbf{Acceptance}

The Mimouna festival embodies the mutual \textit{acceptance} that enabled the long term Judeo-Muslim relationship in Morocco. I use the word acceptance rather than tolerance to describe the Judeo-Muslim relationship; tolerance implies a more passive willingness to coexistence, whereas acceptance implies an effortful inclusion into society. Moreover, the word acceptance in this case is meant to evoke the dual nature of the Judeo-Muslim relationship; while it was primarily a peaceful relationship, there were considerable tensions and periods of intermittent violence.

Within this singular holiday exist two narratives: the story of Jewish and Muslim coexistence and, alternatively, the basic distinction between minority and majority, inferior and superior, “us” and “them.” Mimouna challenges these distinctions, but does so only on one day of the year and in one particular context. Even though it is tempting to look at the Mimouna celebration as a glowing example of coexistence between the Moroccan Jewish and Muslim

\textsuperscript{68} Hull, \textit{Jews and Judaism in African History}, 213.
\textsuperscript{69} Elmaleh and Rickettes, \textit{Jews Under Moroccan Skies: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life}, 16.
communities, there are fundamental underlying tensions between the two communities that are equally evident in the Mimouna festival.

Sporadic bouts of tensions sometimes erupted into violence. However, when looking at the broad historical trajectory of Moroccan history, the relationship between the two communities was primarily peaceful. I consider the overall success of this long lasting peaceful relationship to be proof of the communities’ mutual acceptance of the other’s presence and influence.

**Partial Partners**

While Mimouna is primarily a Jewish holiday, Muslims play a role as *partial partners* in the celebration. Partial participation includes sharing the feast, participating in the food swap and partaking in the “house hopping” tradition. This partial participation exemplifies that despite Judaization of the festival, Jews accepted the Muslim connection to Mimouna. Moroccan Jewish emigrant Albert Suissa wrote a retrospective essay, “Ma Mimouna a Moi,” or “Mimouna According to Me,” that reflects a clear acknowledgment of the Muslim connection to Lalla Mimouna and the Mimouna rituals:

> The Mimouna night our Arab neighbors arrive; they know our rites are their rites for all of eternity...You will be happy and joyful we tell them. Lalla Mimouna, the Muslim saint, she will watch over us all.”

(Emphasis mine; my translation)

In turn, Muslim participants accept their role as partial participants as guests in the Jewish homes; they never host the festival themselves.

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70 Suissa, "Ma Mimouna à Moi."
71 Zafrani, *Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco*, 243.
In an interview with Casablanca Rabbi Jacki Sebag (brother of Joseph, mentioned earlier), Rabbi Jacki bluntly explained Muslim partial participation: “they celebrate with us, we don’t celebrate with them.”

Although this quote is from a modern source—and thus it is referencing the tenser modern day Judeo-Muslim relationship—Rabbi Jacki makes an important distinction. Had the Jews not reinterpreted Mimouna as a part of the Passover holiday, there is no indication that the Muslims would have maintained this celebration at all, or at least not in this particular form. Although Rabbi Jacki’s words are rather harsh and shed a more negative light on the Judeo-Muslim relationship, he does accurately explain that the Mimouna festival was reinterpreted as part of Passover; accordingly, it is a predominantly Jewish holiday. Nevertheless, the Muslim participation, however partial, evokes their mutual acceptance.

Mimouna exemplifies this complex relationship through ritualized role-reversals. The Mimouna celebration incorporates several layers of role-reversals; some reversals are gendered, some are generational, but the most important are the role-reversals between the Jewish and Muslim communities.

**Role-Reversals**

Ritualized role-reversals reveal the Judeo-Muslim status quo because a ceremonial challenge to day-to-day life indicates that in all other contexts, the status quo is accepted. Essentially, if the social structure is only being

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72 Interview with Rabbi Jacki Sebag and Family: Conversations from Shabbat Dinner in Casablanca.
challenged in a ritualized annual celebration, this suggests that on all other days of the year the social structure is generally accepted.73

Many cultures celebrate times in the year where the reversal of the status quo is embraced, known as role-reversal practices. This includes festivals such as Halloween, in which children are allowed to challenge the authority of adult members of society for one night only. Another example is Carnival, the rambunctious celebration before the beginning of Lent, which is in direct opposition to the values espoused by Lent’s pious and solemn forty days. The structure of these societies allows for a deviation from normal behavior codes within a fixed context, but it is accepted by all participants that this role-reversal is only temporary. The success of role-reversal rituals depends on the society’s ability to return to the standard accepted relationship outside of this context.74

Mimouna incorporates gender, generations, and economic role-reversals. Although the gender and generational role-reversals are less relevant to the Judeo-Muslim relationship, they serve as important examples of how Mimouna functioned as a day to challenge social norms. Goldberg describes a gendered role-reversing Mimouna ritual in Tunisia in which the men dress as women on the last day of Passover and go “house hopping” asking for sweets.75 Goldberg also cites the generational role-reversal between the youth and the elderly in

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74 Ibid.
75 Mimouna is typically considered a Moroccan holiday, but variations on this holiday are found elsewhere in the Maghreb. Before colonial powers established fixed national boundaries, there was a great deal of cultural exchange between the Berber tribes of North Africa. Mimouna wasn’t historically bound to the modern national borders of Morocco.
“the practice whereby members of a family strike one another with greenery, including children striking their parents.”

In a personal reflection on past Mimouna celebrations from the late twentieth century, quoted by Goldberg, Louis Brunot remarked:

On the last day of the holiday, in the afternoon, we go to purchase stalks of green barley from the Moslems, which we wrap around the lamps, mirrors and clocks in the room. We also buy roses and orange blossoms to adorn the table. That night is the night of the mimuna. The little girls and lasses dress in an ‘ajama (a feminine garb resembling the Moslem caftan), and go about promenading in the Mellah. The young men wear Moslem clothing and tour about the streets with mandolins. The main street is completely filled with people—‘Cast a needle and it will fall on a human head!’

Brunot references two of the important religious role-reversals that occur during the Mimoua. Firstly, he mentions that the Muslims sell stalks of green barley to the Jews, which is an economic role-reversal. Secondly, he mentions the Jewish use of Muslim clothing in the festivity.

During the Mimouna festival, Muslims sell or give stalks of green barley and celery to the Jewish families. This is an economic role-reversal because Jews typically occupied the trading and selling niche; peddlers traveling throughout the Mellah streets would ordinarily be Jewish. However, for the purposes of this holiday, it is the Muslims who take on this role of distributing and selling the barley and celery stalks, which are fundamental house decoration for the celebration.

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77 Ibid., 76.
With these decorations, Jewish homes are transformed into a physical manifestation of the theme of spring renewal. The house and serving table are covered with images of greenery and signs of good fortune and wealth. As Brunot attests, green barley and celery stalks were “wrap[ped] around the lamps, mirrors and clocks in the room.” He also mentions that he table was covered with orange and rose blossoms which add to the bountiful spring-like presentation.

Mimouna costumes are the second point of role-reversal that Brunot mentions. Girls and women dress in ‘ajama, or kaftan, typically Muslim garb. The boys and men similarly wear typical Muslim dress, the djellabah. The implication of this Muslim “imitation” during a Jewish holiday exemplifies the complexity of the relationship between the two groups. Contemporary sources indicate that this clothing choice is still an integral part of the celebration. Israeli-Moroccan Gai Cohen reported that he wears a kaftan every year for his Mimouna celebrations in Israel.79 Dalia Azran, New York-born Moroccan, similarly wears the traditional kaftan during the Mimouna festival.80

**Sultan el Tolba**

One revelatory example of how acceptance functioned as a means to preserve the Judeo-Muslim relationship was the creation of the Muslim festival, Sultan el Tolba. Sultan el Tolba, or the Sultan’s Students, served as the Muslim counterpart to Mimouna, indicating that there was some resistance to the

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79 Interview with Gai Cohen: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in Israel.
80 Interview with Dalia Azran: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in New York, September 2012.
Judaization of Mimouna. Sultan el Tolba offers insight into the Judeo-Muslim relationship because, like the Mimouna festival, it can be viewed as a microcosm for the overarching social structure. However, while Mimouna incorporates the shared culture of the Jews and Muslims, the Sultan el Tolba focuses instead on the political and economic relationship between the Jews and Muslims.

The peculiar Sultan el Tolba festival was only celebrated in Fes in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Fes University students played “mock Sultan” and the neighboring Jewish community sent a “mock gift.” This was meant to replicate the social structure in which Jews acknowledged the supremacy of their Islamic Sultan and were responsible for providing a gift, like the dhimmi tax, in order to secure their safety and acceptance. Zafrani argues that this festival celebrates the victory of the Muslim Alawite dynasty over Ibn Mash’al, leader of the Jewish tribes.81

Scholars, such as Goldberg and Zafrani, often draw connections between Mimouna and Sultan el Tolba. The existence of these two festivals, which occur roughly at the same time of year, suggest that the narrative of coexistence embodied in the Mimouna festival sparked discontent or rejection from one part of the Muslim community, the Fessi students of Islam. However, rather than directly fight against the existence of Mimouna, the Muslim community merely provided an alternate celebration, which counters the role-reversal of Mimouna and reasserts the status quo.

81 Zafrani, Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco, 243.
Sultan el Tolba was in many ways a parallel festival to Mimouna: It required Jewish partial participation, but was considered a predominantly Muslim celebration. Sultan el Tolba also reasserted that the governing forces would remain Islamic, regardless of the strong connection the Jewish community had with the government as the primary intermediaries between Europe and Morocco and as providers of the dhimmi income. Goldberg explains:

In one festival (Mimouna) ...(the Jews) are implicitly acknowledged as having a special link to the land and its powers. In the other (Sultan el Tolba), the wielders of power (the Muslims) celebrate their conquest of these spiritual and temporal autochthones, with the aid of the tolba (students)--those who seek book learning.82

Sultan el Tolba Festival is reasserting the Muslim superiority in response to Mimouna, which asserts the power of Jewish spirituality and the Jewish connection to the land. The development and existence of this Muslim counterpart to Mimouna demonstrates that these communities consciously accepted the others’ right to exist within the Moroccan social structure.

Conclusion

In the pre-colonial era, the Judeo-Muslim relationship was primarily a function of internal Moroccan power dynamics. The Mimouna Paradigm denotes a less entangled relationship, before the direct interference of colonial forces. The structure of this pre-colonial relationship was maintained throughout periods of violence and peace because the Mimouna Paradigm was conducive to long-term coexistence. Any internal event, however disruptive, could be dealt

with in the context of the pre-determined relationship. It was only when third party elements, such as French colonialism and Zionism entered the framework, that this original relationship, which was based on cultural commonalities, interdependence and acceptance, could no longer function.

The following chapters will stray slightly from the Mimouna celebration itself but will retain the elements embodied in Mimouna as a lens for analysis. As the Judeo-Muslim relationship slowly deteriorated—due to French alteration of cultural commonalities, interdependence, and acceptance—Mimouna reflected increased Judeo-Muslim tensions. Muslim participation in the Mimouna holiday gradually declined during the French colonial period (1830-1956) because of the progressive undermining of the *Mimouna Paradigm.*
Part II
Chapter 2: French Destabilization of the Judeo-Muslim Relationship

Dressed as Europeans today; yesterday still in black djellaba, black calotte, babouches, the conquest began from below. The Jew now lives in another body wearing this European clothing.1 (My translation)
-Edmond Amram El Maleh

Introduction

French colonialism considerably undermined the Judeo-Muslim social structure established during the pre-colonial era. The Mimouna paradigm could only function as a force for coexistence during the pre-colonial period, when the social balancing act involved only the Muslim and Jewish communities. The new social framework introduced the self-interest of the French colonialists and consequently, the former social structure was overturned. This chapter will explore the colonial period in which the Mimouna paradigm was gradually disabled.

An account of open hostilities against a Jewish Mellah during Passover in 1912, the year that the French established a Protectorate in Morocco, exemplifies the deterioration of the Judeo-Muslim relationship. A women living in the Mellah at the time of the attack recorded this disturbing account:

The looting occurred immediately after Passover...panic erupted in the Mellah. People, terrified, ran one after the other, because Muslims were stealing from the shops...we (women), we closed the doors to our homes, hearts beating with fear. At that time, traders went to implore Jewish notables of the city and they, in turn, begged the

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(Moroccan) authorities to come to our aid. The entire Passover feast\(^2\) passed in anguish, and god knows how much fear reigned in the Jewish quarter. Three days passed with the Muslims remaining in the Mellah looting houses and setting fires. We hid in the cemetery amongst the graves, imploring the saints for protection. The pillagers followed us into the cemetery and began to destroy the tombs...some of us took refuge in the Sultan's menagerie.\(^3\) (My translation)

As demonstrated in Chapter 1, Mimouna was a unique celebration of religious convergence. Now, at the turn of the twentieth century, what was formerly a festival of joy and renewal became a time of chaos and terror. What accounts for this drastic change in the Judeo-Muslim relationship?

In answering this question, it is important to keep in mind that Brunot, who translated this text in his compilation of Marrokai documents, suspects that the woman who recounted this pillaging may have exaggerated the severity of the attack. Pillages such as this one were frequent during the Protectorate (1912-1956) and occurred throughout the cities, not just in the Mellah. The Mellahs were regularly targeted partly because many wealthy families lived inside the walled-in quarters.

Historians Elmaleh and Ricketts, in their description of the same attack, assert that the Muslims targeted the Mellah because they were unable to attack the well-defended and protected French living quarter. This resulted in the French counterattack, similarly targeting the Mellah where the Muslims loyalist troops were in hiding. Three days of fighting resulted in the death and wounding

\(^2\) The feast she is referring to is Mimouna, since the pillaging occurred immediately following the Passover week.

\(^3\) Brunto and Malka, *Textes Judéo-Arabes de Fès*, Preface.
of 125 Jews and 900 Muslims, a third of the Mellah destroyed, and 12,000 Jews left homeless.\(^4\)

However exaggerated this account may be, it indicates a drastic change in the Judeo-Muslim relationship. As the woman describes, the Muslims descended upon the Mellah during the Passover celebration and wreaked havoc even into the Mimouna festival. This chapter seeks to explain how French colonialism undermined that *Mimouna Paradigm*.

**The Arrival of the French**

The French Protectorate of Morocco was declared in 1912. However, French colonial presence in Morocco began in 1830, when the French conquered Algeria. The lack of clear national boundaries between Algeria and Morocco allowed the French to annex bordering tribes’ territory well before the 1912 Protectorate.\(^5\) Morocco continuously lost territory throughout the early twentieth century to both France and Spain. These dual occupations exacerbated the effects of colonialism because they epitomized two threats to independence, two forces changing the Moroccan way of life, and two powers with a mission to Westernize and civilize the country. Though both the French and the Spanish were actively involved in colonizing Morocco, the subsequent section will focus on French colonialism with little regard for Spanish policy. This omission is due to the concentration of most Jewish communities and key cities in areas of French rule as well as the vastly greater degree of influence that the French played in the country’s development as a whole.

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In addition to European threats to political stability in the twentieth century, the Moroccans faced considerable internal threats to the balance of power under the Sharifian sultans. The formerly self-reliant Berber tribes were only loosely under the control of the Sharifian Dynasty (1664-modern day). These Berber tribes, in which much of the rural Jewish populations lived, pledged tribal allegiance, rather than national political allegiance.

It took the French several decades to fully pacify these tribal regions, which allowed the Judeo-Muslim relationship in these areas to remain relatively intact well into the French Protectorate period. Scholar David Woolman analyzes the Berber rebellions against colonization in his work *Rebels in the Rif* and characterizes these tribal regions as “rarely unified or pacified, chronically misruled, inhabited by a fanatically xenophobic population...a challenge to the colonizer.”⁶ French colonial policy was not as effectively implemented amongst these independent tribes. Therefore, in some regions, the Judeo-Muslim relationship maintained its pre-colonial status.

After 27 years of French conquest, the 1912 Treaty of Fes made Morocco an official French Protectorate. Subsequent diplomacy between France and Spain established the northern third of the country as a Spanish protectorate. Legally, this protectorate status did not displace Moroccan sovereignty. The Sharifian Sultan reigned as a figurehead while the French resident generals

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made virtually all decisions, thus allowing a complete French overhaul of the Moroccan social structure.⁷

Colonial Policy: Implications of French Preferential Treatment and Jewish Opportunism on the Political, Economic and Cultural Structure of Morocco

In the following sections I will illustrate that both French preferential treatment of Jews and Jewish opportunism were dual forces in reshaping the Jewish role in the society. These two forces concurrently undermined the factors that historically allowed for coexistence: cultural commonalities, interdependence, and acceptance.

First, I examine the extensive and profound cultural changes that resulted from French education and language policy. Second, I demonstrate that French political and economic policy disabled the Judeo-Muslim interdependent relationship. Finally, I illustrate that French notions of superiority put considerable strain on Judeo-Muslim mutual acceptance.

Cultural Commonalities

Cultural Changes Prompted by the French Presence and Policy

The presence of a highly influential Westernizing community was integral in reshaping the Moroccan cultural environment. The French consistently demonstrated that they preferred to interact with the Jewish community because of their perception of the Arab and Berber communities as uncivilized

and barbaric. The Jews, in turn, recognized that this French perception was an excellent political and socioeconomic opportunity.

The preferential treatment of Jews was both a function of the French ideological mindset and an administrative practicality. Jews began to quickly adapt to European standards—learning French, changing their clothing to appear European and attending French schools. The Jewish community forged strong cultural ties with the French, which in many ways required the abandonment of certain Judeo-Muslim commonalities.

**The Linguistic Schism**

The linguistic and educational evolution of the Jewish community before and during the period of the French Protectorate facilitated and encouraged the Franco-Judaic relationship. Recall from Chapter 1 that linguistic commonalities were highly influential in developing and maintaining the Judeo-Muslim relationship. French colonial policy and the sociocultural environment during the Protectorate led to the significant decline in use of the Judeo-Arab dialect, *Marrokai*, as well as a linguistic shift in the Jewish vernacular from Arabic and Berber towards French and Hebrew.

Throughout the course of the French Protectorate, French became the language of civilization and education. Even to this day, French is associated with business, formal higher education, and higher social classes. Three linguistic trends were happening concurrently: the increased use of French in personal and professional settings; the continued Arabization of the Berber tribes and the

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resulting decreased use of Berber dialects;\textsuperscript{10} and the Jewish community’s use of Hebrew and French, rather than \textit{Marrokai} in day-to-day life. While these three trends are generalizing a rather complex sociolinguistic shift, they point to the underlying tensions of culture and identity that the Moroccan population faced during the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{11}

By 1939, less than a century after the beginnings of French colonialism, Brunot felt the need to make a historical record of the Judeo-Arabic dialect:

> The Judeo-Arabic dialect of Morocco, like all those of North Africa, are rapidly in decline. There is an urgent need to note it and collect it before the majority of Israeli-Moroccans lose this language completely. Even within the language we can see the clear marks of the colonizers: Hebrew, from which much vocabulary comes, contributed many terms for explaining religious life and social organization. Spanish contributed words of urbanization, and French, today, gives a substantial amount of vocabulary for that which is ‘new.’\textsuperscript{12}

Brunot explains that as Moroccan culture adapted to its various internal and external influences, the vernacular language evolved in response to those cultural and social changes. As Brunot illustrates, each language attributed vocabulary to the vernacular based on its cultural and social contributions. Since the Moroccan dialects were constantly in flux and Hebrew began to eclipse Judeo-Arabic as the language of the Jewish community, in 1939 Brunot deemed it necessary to record the \textit{Marrokai} language. It is also interesting to note Brunot’s word choice—he calls the Jewish Moroccans “Israeli-Moroccans,” which

\textsuperscript{10} Arabization refers to the cultural influence of the Arabs on the non-Arab population. In this case it refers to the cultural influence of Arabs on the Moroccan Berbers. The Berbers increasingly associated with Arab culture, identity and language since their arrival in the region in the 7th century.


\textsuperscript{12} Brunot and Malka, \textit{Textes Judéo-Arabes de Fés}: Preface.
points to the emergence of a strong pan-national Jewish identity tied to the state of Israel, which will be discussed in Chapter 3.

**European Style of Dress**

French colonialism introduced European culture not only in language and education, but in many other spheres as well. In Edmond Amram El Maleh’s memoir *Parcours Immobile*, El Maleh discusses the stark change in the Jewish community during the French Protectorate:

Dressed as Europeans today; yesterday still in black djellaba, black calotte, babouches, the conquest began from below. The Jew now lives in another body wearing this European clothing. (My translation)

El Maleh’s nostalgic recollections of pre-colonial dress exemplify the profound European affect on the Judeo-Moroccan identity. The djellaba, calotte, and babouches, are shared Judeo-Muslim Moroccan garments, but the Jewish community was quick to abandon these traditional clothes for the European style of dress. El Maleh highlights European dress as a physical manifestation of the French Westernizing influence within the Jewish community.

**The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Institutionalization of French Preferential Treatment**

The first Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) in Morocco was founded in 1862 in Tetouan, a Northern port town. AIU was a French Jewish organization dedicated to improving the lives of Jews through education. The schools aimed to civilize Moroccan Judaism, “which, from the AIU’s and French government’s

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13 Traditional Moroccan dress robe
14 Traditional Moroccan hat
15 Traditional Moroccan shoes
point of view, was steeped in superstition.”17 Furthermore, foreign Jewish communities and Europeans attempted to elevate the Moroccan Jewish social position through the AIU. According to historian Sarah Taieb-Cohen, “during the nineteenth century, the Anglo-Jewish Association, along with French authorities tried to intervene on behalf of the Jews through the AIU,”18 thus the AIU became a symbol of European aid to the Jewish community.

This Western education system was crucial to the development of a French-speaking Jewish commercial class. When the European business firms began to penetrate the Moroccan economy in the early 1900s, the Jews were ready to be employed as local representatives. The Jews had a 40-year leg-up on French linguistic training and Western education therefore, a significant schism began to form between the Jewish and Muslim populations. According to historian Edmond Burke III, only the Jewish population had access to Western education, whereas the Muslims had to rely on the traditional Muslim education system based on rote learning of the sacred texts.19 This traditional Islamic education left them at a substantial disadvantage in securing French employment in business or in the colonial administration.

Although the AIU was primarily an educational institution, it effected drastic cultural changes. Claude Arrieu quotes Juan Bautisa Vilar, a Spaniard in Morocco who studied the Jewish community in Tetouan in the early twentieth century:

Instances of the phenomenon of transculturation debuted in 1862, when the Alliance Israélite Universelle opened its first school in Tetouan. The emergence of teaching standards, the Europeanization of the Tetouanaise youth, and the inevitable conflict between modernity and tradition, prompted irreversible changes in Tetouan and in other Jewish communities of Morocco.\(^{20}\) (My translation)

In this context, Vilar’s use of the word “transculturation” implies the importation and implementation of French culture within the Moroccan setting. As Vilar mentions, this cultural transport, facilitated by the AIU institutions, was transformative for Jewish Moroccan youth who were indoctrinated from a very young age with French culture.

Alfred Goldenberg wrote a memoir about his tenure teaching at the AIU in Marrakesh in 1927. Goldenberg describes the institute's goals as the “fervent defense of Jewish populations and the diffusion and spread of universal culture through communication in French, the European language.”\(^{21}\) Goldenberg and other French-born instructors at AIU institutions were put in charge of indoctrinating these Moroccan youth into European culture.

Although the AIU emerged early on the Moroccan stage in 1862, Goldenberg reflects that there was considerable resistance to this new form of education. Some Jewish parents opposed French education for their children because they feared that European culture would eclipse their Hebrew and Jewish culture. One parent asked Goldenberg:


Our sons are taught in Hebrew schools by Rabbis, why would we put them in a school where they are taught in a language that is foreign to them? There they will lose their connection to Hebrew culture. (My translation)

Many were hesitant to put their children in this secular school system and preferred instead traditional schooling, which was a more localized and religiously infused curriculum.

Despite the strong French commitment to Europeanizing the community, there are many indications that the Jews resisted these assimilation efforts. Goldenberg reflects that outside of the classroom, the children quickly abandoned the French language. He explains, “during recess, I had difficultly monitoring the students because they returned to speaking their maternal language, Judeo-Arabic.” This indicates that while French policy was instrumental in reshaping Jewish Moroccan culture, many Moroccan Jews, even young children, resisted Westernization.

There was also a gendered aspect to parental resistance. For the girls in the Jewish community, it was not a question of where to send them to school, but whether or not to send them at all. Furthermore, much of the Jewish community was suspicious of French intentions, and rumors spread that once the children were enrolled in AIU, they would be sent to France to fight in the French military.

Despite these various hesitations and concerns, especially among the religious orthodox Jews, much of the Jewish community took advantage of the

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22 Ibid., 48.
23 Ibid., 45.
24 Ibid., 47.
AIU’s services because “the state lacked an educational, welfare, or legal system of its own.”\textsuperscript{25} Deficiencies of the Moroccan government were often dealt with through the colonial institutions, such as AIU. As such, AIU gained more support over time, and in 1924, the organization signed an agreement with the French that required all Jewish children, male and female, to attend AIU. This formalized the educational rift between the Jewish and Muslim communities.\textsuperscript{26}

**Interdependence: French Economic and Political Policy and the Deterioration of the Interdependent Relationship**

The French colonial system in Morocco undermined the interdependence that facilitated coexistence in the pre-colonial Judeo-Muslim relationship. As demonstrated in Chapter 1, the two communities created a balanced economic and political relationship by both filling different economic niches and by trading Jewish payments of the *dhimmi* tax in return for political protection. The French Protectorate destabilized these balancing roles. First, I discuss the role of the French as intermediaries in providing political protection to the Jews. Second, I demonstrate how the development of a new commercial Jewish class that, which dealt exclusively with the Europeans, elevated the Jewish economic and social status. Finally I examine the Jewish monopoly in foreign affairs issues and the Jewish incorporation into the French colonial administration.

\textsuperscript{25} Deshen, *The Mellah Society: Jewish community Life in Sherifian Morocco*, 16.

\textsuperscript{26} Goldenberg, *Souvenirs d’Alliance : Itinéraire d’un Instituteur de l’Alliance Israélite Universelle au Maroc*, 50.
French as Intermediaries Providing Political Protection

Beginning in the late nineteenth century, as European influence in Morocco steadily increased, Jews received more formalized legal protections. In the pre-colonial system and according to Islamic law, Jews had lesser legal rights than Muslims. Europeans, including the French, British, Spanish, insisted on a reform of the legal system. According to historians El Maleh and Ricketts:

European consulates urged the king to protect Jews, and some intervened by issuing foreign passports to Jews they considered to be important to their policies. The French had a clear understanding of the important role the Jews could play in their goal of establishing economic and political influence in Morocco.

The French sought to improve Jewish social standing out of self-interest; it was clear that the Jewish population could play an integral role in the colonial establishment. After this formalization of Jewish legal protection, the community no longer relied on the dhimmi status and tax to ensure their protection.

As the Franco-Jewish relationship continued to develop, the French pressured the Moroccan sultanate to make internal changes to the Moroccan system. An 1864 Dahir, or royal decree, criminalized the mistreatment of Jews and gave them equal rights and protection under the law. Moreover, French rule granted the Jewish community a great degree of independence. While the Jews were still technically under the authority of the Sultan and the colonists, in a 1918 Dahir the French authorized Jewish self-governance through traditional

27 John O. Hunwick, Jews of a Saharan Oasis: Elimination of the Tamantit community, 5.
28 Elmaleh and Ricketts, Jews Under Moroccan Skies: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life, 23.
councils of elected notables. For many members of the Jewish community, this freedom cast the French as liberators rather than colonial oppressors.

In addition to the Europeans arguably bribing the Jewish community’s approval with political gifts of passports, Moroccan Jews also leveraged the French presence in order to secure protection and for personal advancement. For example, in the mid nineteenth century, the French were extending French Naturalization (political protection and preferential treatment) to some Algerian colonial subjects. Many Jews falsified documents claiming Algerian nationality in order to obtain French Naturalizations as Jewish Algerian refugees within Morocco. This exemplifies the role of Moroccan Jewish opportunism in reshaping the social structure.

In this new colonial arrangement, the Jews did not depend on the Muslims for political protection; in addition to their own political maneuvering, European advocates sought to officially and legally improve Jewish social standing.

_The Development of a Commercial Jewish Class_

The establishment of AIU had both cultural and economic implications. The AIU fostered the development of “a wealthy Jewish bourgeoisie with strong ties to France....as in the Middle East, where minorities also served as middlemen, this group began to excite the jealousy and suspicions of the local Muslim population.” This wealthy Jewish bourgeoisie developed because the

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commercial Jewish community spoke French and had an historical connection to the Europeans through trade. The financial benefits of this Franco-Jewish relationship initiated a refocusing of the Jewish economic role as intermediaries and middlemen to the French colonialists. The Jews understood the political and economic benefit of associating with the French rather than the Muslims. Consequently, some Muslims began to both question Jewish loyalty and associate them with the flood of cheap European goods into the Moroccan economy.\footnote{Interview with Mehdi: Muslim Guide for Jewish Heritage Tours in Fes, July 2012.}

**Acceptance**

Judeo-Muslim cultural commonalities and interdependence facilitated acceptance of the pre-colonial status quo. French undermining of these first two factors significantly hindered Judeo-Muslim acceptance. Both communities were discontent—the Muslims more so than the Jews—with the French transformation of the social structure. The Muslim community resented the elevation of the Jewish social status and the Jews were increasingly intolerant of their status as lesser individuals in the eyes of their Muslim neighbors. These frustrations ultimately undermined the acceptance that marked the pre-colonial *Mimouna Paradigm*.

**Jewish Role in Foreign Affairs and Colonial Administration**

Jewish employment in colonial institutions exemplified French preferential treatment of the Jewish community. The French colonial
administration promoted Jews to high-ranking positions in the military, whereas Muslims were less likely to attain these positions.\textsuperscript{34} Privileged Jewish treatment, in combination with the social elevation of the Jews, created a society not conducive to Judeo-Muslim mutual acceptance. The association between Jews and the colonial structure was one major point of contention.

Budgett Meakin, a French traveler to Morocco and a journalist, provides an example of European dependence on Jewish assistance, especially in matters of foreign affairs. Here he cites one Jew’s role as the interpreter between Greek and Moroccan dignitaries, “Kyrios Mavrogordato’s stock of polite workable Arabic had been exhausted at the public function, and for business matters he had to rely implicitly on the services of his handy Jew.”\textsuperscript{35} It was not only the French who utilized the Jewish community; foreigners in Morocco also relied heavily on their local Jewish aides. As Meakin suggests, Moroccan Jews had a reputation of being “handy” and reliable intermediaries. Historically, the Jews had filled important government roles as ambassadors and negotiators with the Europeans; accordingly, the colonists identified the Jews as political allies.

Both the incorporation of many Jews into the colonial administration system and the European reliance on Jewish savvy in foreign affairs diminished Judeo-Muslim acceptance. Muslims perceived this Franco-Jewish relationship as an alliance between a faction of the Moroccan population and a foreign colonial power. The link between the Jews and the colonial administration implied a

Jewish approval of and contentment with colonial occupation, which was often not the case.

**The Internalization of the French Mindset**

The Jewish community’s internalization of the French mindset was one of the most profound affects of colonialism and established a significant schism in the Judeo-Muslim relationship. This internalization refers to the Jewish community’s sudden incorporation of Western values and acceptance of French inspired cultural change linguistically, educationally and in regards to the ideals of civilization.

The French regularly cited their *mission civilisatrice* as the justification for colonization. This secular “civilizing mission” assumed that the superiority of French culture could, and should, be imposed on the more “primitive” African cultures. The French perception of Moroccan “barbarism” was exacerbated by both the often incorrect image of Morocco presented by French scholars as well as a lack of knowledge about the Berber peoples, who constituted at least half of the Moroccan population and much of the Moroccan Jewish community.

French visitors to Morocco often reinforced misconceptions about Morocco among the French public. For example, Meakin portrayed the Moroccans as a very backwards community. In 1905 he wrote:

> Even here the foreign influence is purely superficial, failing to affect the lives of the people...few facts are more striking in the study of Morocco than the absolute stagnation of its people, expect in so far as

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37 Interview with Mehdi: Muslim Guide for Jewish Heritage Tours in Fes.
they have been to a very limited extent affected by outside influences.\(^{38}\)

French observer Meakin clearly perceives Morocco as a “stagnant” land and suggests that Moroccan interactions with foreigners have not led to the development of a modernized country.

The French civilizing mission was effective in that the new commitment to civilize, and by extension, Westernize, made tangible schisms within the Moroccan population at several levels. Not only did a social distinction form between the more civilized Jewish community and the “backwards” Muslims, but also between the autochthonous Jewish population and the descendants of the expelled European Jewish community.

The French preferential treatment targeted the *megorshim* rather than the *tosahvim*, the autochthonous Jewish community. French perceived the *megorashim*, the descendants of the expelled Iberian Jews, as more “civilized” than their Moroccan Jewish counterparts. According to the historian Shlomo Deshen, author of *The Mellah Society: Jewish Community Life in Sherifian Morocco*, a book focusing on the day-to-day life of the communities living within the *Mellah*, the French exacerbated the already clear distinctions between *megorashim* and *tosahvim* and thereby created an elite group of Europeanized Jews.

The rise of the *megorshim* families and individuals to political and religious power, compared to the very limited number of powerful *tosahvim* Jews, exemplifies the social distinctions between these two groups. According to

Deshen, “descendants of the *toshavim* barely figure among the rabbinical families. Of the major rabbinical families, only the Ibn-Danan family of Fes is of *toshavim* origin.” The success of the *megorashim* families could be a function of geographical location, because many of the autochthonous *toshavim* Jews remained with their fellow Berbers in the mountainous regions, whereas the Iberian Jews tended to settle in larger cities and thus had greater opportunities for political and religious success.

Meakin argues that both *megorashim* and *toshavim* benefited from French presence. Meakin explains:

> The happy influence of more enlightened European Jews is, however, making itself felt in the chief towns, through excellent schools supported from London and Paris, which are turning out a class of highly respectable citizens...there can be little doubt that, by the end of the 30 years grace, they will have practically absorbed it all.⁴⁰

Through the European school systems, Meakin suggests that within 30 years the Jewish community will have “absorbed” European culture almost completely. The internalization of European ideals is inherently in opposition to many of the elements of pre-colonial Moroccan society that facilitated Judeo-Muslim coexistence.

> The shifting social roles and the imposition of the French ideological mindset had psychological implications on the Judeo-Muslim relationship. Attachment to ideas of “civilization,” modernity, and Jewish superiority marked a clear distinction between Jewish communities and their Muslim neighbors.

Although surrounding Muslim communities were also drawn to notions of

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civilization and progression, they were exposed to these ideals in the context of their own deficiencies. Conversely, Jews were taught these ideals in the French school system and reaped the rewards of this new mindset.

**Jewish Living Space**

These deep cultural rifts undermined the acceptance that allowed for the success and longevity of the Judeo-Muslim relationship. This relationship was challenged even further when the Jews began to leave the *Mellah*, the physical symbol of Muslim control over the Jewish population. The Jewish community grew wealthy because of their ties to European business and began to relocate to the urbanized French quarters.\(^{41}\) They primarily moved to the newly developed French areas such as the Ville Nouveau of Fes and Marrakesh, which were considered hubs of European civilization. Jewish freedom to move in or out of the *Mellah* as they pleased indicated an end to the historical use of the *Mellah* as a Muslim political tool.

Deshen explains the importance of the *Mellah* to bolster Muslim power over Jews:

Spatial seclusion in the *Mellahs* lacked the predominant discriminatory motives, religious and social in nature, that motivated European rulers in their times to restrict Jews to ghettos. It is characteristic that seclusion in many of the major Moroccan *Mellahs*, such as Marrakesh, Sale, Rabat, Tetouan, and Demnat, were rigorously re-imposed on Jews during the 19th century at a time when sultanic power was beleaguered by the advances of imperialism....During the late 17th century and parts of the 18th century, however, when Sultanic power was at its height, comparatively little is heard of confining Jews within *Mellah* walls.\(^ {42}\)

\(^{41}\) C. R. Pennell *Morocco From Empire to Independence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 119-120.

The Jewish community was often secluded to the Mellah merely because of a weak Sultan's power play. Sultans reasserted their centralized power and religious authority by scapegoating and segregating the Jewish community.

The French eliminated an important political balancing act in the Judeo-Muslim relationship by changing the geography of Jewish living space. Furthermore, the French undermined the Judeo-Muslim relationship because the pre-colonial Mimouna Paradigm necessitated the illusion of Muslim control over the Jewish population.

**Episodes of Violence:** the Deterioration of the Judeo-Muslim Relationship

The elimination of the Mellah as a Muslim political tool exemplified the demise of the pre-colonial relationship. Episodes of violence, such as the example of the Mimouna festival discussed at the beginning of this chapter, were all too common under the French Protectorate. There were a series of attacks on the Mellahs of major cities in the 1930s. Due to the development and strengthening of the Franco-Jewish relationship, Jews were easy targets for Muslim resistance to French occupation.43

These episodes of violence began in 1844, the year that the Moroccan government officially acknowledged the French presence in neighboring Algeria. France attacked Mogador (modern Essaouira) and Tangiers during this time, which inspired several Muslim-led pogroms. These attacks resulted in the

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migrations of some of Jewish community from those towns. As many Jews began to leave Morocco, even in this pre-Protectorate period, the sultan imposed an expensive “exit tax” to prevent mass departures. The Moroccan sultanate was well aware of the importance of keeping the Jewish community in Morocco; therefore his motives for imposing this “exit tax” appear genuine rather than malicious.

However, it is important to reiterate that these episodes of violence did not exclusively target the Jewish community. Many factions of the population rose up anarchically during the French Protectorate in opposition to European presence, especially during moments of Berber tribal rebellion. These episodes of violence occurred in Muslim city centers as well and were primarily functions of colonial opposition rather than anti-Semitism.

**French Perception of the Judeo-Muslim Relationship**

French perceptions of the Judeo-Muslim relationship reveal the French motivation to consciously or not, shift the social structure in favor of the Jews. The following excerpt is one of Meakin’s observations of the Jewish community in the early twentieth century. While he provides a few accurate observations, he also projects some of his European attitudes and biases towards Jews onto the Moroccan Jewish community:

The third section of the people of Morocco—by no means the least important—these are the ubiquitous, persecuted and persecuting Jews. Everywhere that money changed hands and there is business

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44 Ibid.
to be done they are to be found...With the exception of a few ports wherein European rule in past centuries has destroyed the boundaries...Always clad in black or dark-colored cloaks, with hideous black skull-caps or white spotted blue kerchiefs on their heads, they are conspicuous everywhere. They address the Moors with a villainous cringing look which makes the sons of Ishmael savage, for they know it is only feigned. In return they are treated like dogs, and cordial hatred exists on both sides. So they live, together yet divided; the Jew despised but indispensable, bullied but thriving. He only wins at law when richer than his opponent; against a Muslim he can bear no testimony; there is scant pretense at justice...but he find revenge in sucking his life's blood by usury. Receiving no mercy, he shows none...46

Meakin refers to the Jews as “persecuted and persecuting,” which demonstrates French understanding of the give and take that existed between the Jews and Muslims. He speaks of the Jewish economic control, but does so with language reminiscent of European stereotypes about Jews and money. He comments on the discrimination against Jews, their seclusion to the Mellah and their legal disadvantages, but does so with minimal acknowledgment of the balance that these two communities forged in the previous centuries. Meakin's description of the Moroccan Jewish attire—he refers to their skull-caps (presumably yarmulkes) as "hideous"—exemplifies some of his European bias against Jews.

Meakin’s uses rather inflammatory language to describe the Judeo-Muslim relationship, which does not accurately reflect the neighborly and brotherly relationship that existed underneath the social and religious tensions. However, Meakin refers to the Jews as “despised but indispensable, bullied but thriving,” thus capturing the delicate balance of these communities.

46 Meakin, Life in Morocco and Glimpses Beyond. 214.
Conclusion

French colonialism in Morocco was responsible for the deterioration of the Judeo-Muslim relationship. Colonial policy made irreversible changes to the social structure, rendering the delicately balanced *Mimouna Paradigm* ineffective. Consequently, society was no longer conducive to peaceful coexistence. French colonialism set the stage for mass Jewish emigration from Morocco in the mid-twentieth century. While in many rural regions of Morocco the Judeo-Muslim relationship remained strong, the tensions created by the French were exacerbated in 1948 by the creation of the state of Israel. Additionally, emerging identity trends deepened the schisms created by the French, further hindering peaceful Judeo-Muslim relations in Morocco.
Chapter 3: The Turning Point of 1948: The Creation of the State of Israel and the Mass Exodus of Moroccan Jews

_They celebrate with us, we don’t celebrate with them._

-Rabbi Jacki Sebag

Introduction

An elderly Jewish immigrant in Israel was interviewed in _Tinghir_ Jerusalem: Les Echos Du Mellah, a 2M documentary (2012) and remarked:

> Of course I had Muslim friends. We were neighbors. We used to talk terrace to terrace. After 1948 the relationship between Muslims and Jews changed, because they wouldn’t recognize Israel as a state. They didn’t say hello like before. Before, we would say hello, stop to talk, laugh, but after 1948, that was over. ([My translation](#))

Why was 1948 such a turning point in the relationship? Why does this woman who once enjoyed such a close relationship with her Muslim neighbors, all of a sudden feel that this relationship was “over?”

In this chapter I will demonstrate how the events of the 1940s leading up to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 marked a new era in the Judeo-Muslim relationship in Morocco. While the French created significant schisms in the Judeo-Muslim relationship, Zionist influences and the official establishment of Israel exacerbated these tensions. The combined effects of the emergence of Zionism, the Holocaust, and Vichy government policies in the 1940s provided the impetus for the Jewish population’s mass emigrations out of Morocco.

The escalating Judeo-Muslim tension culminated in the rapid emigration

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1 Interview with Rabbi Jacki Sebag and Family: Conversations from Shabbat Dinner in Casablanca.
of virtually the entire Jewish population. Almost all Jews left between the years of 1948 and 1956 and most of the remaining community emigrated after the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.\textsuperscript{3} Before 1948, it is estimated that 265,000 Jews lived in Morocco. By the early 1970s, 90\% of Jews left Morocco. Today, in 2013, roughly 3,000 Jews remain, a small minority compared to the 33 million Moroccan Muslims.\textsuperscript{4}

Moroccan Jews immigrated not only to the state of Israel but also to Europe, Canada, the United States and elsewhere. Mass emigration to locations other than Israel indicates that the Moroccan Jewish Diaspora of the mid-twentieth century was created by both the desire to relocate to the Jewish state of Israel and the desire to leave Morocco. A novel by Edmond Amran El Maleh reflects on his experience as a member of the Jewish community that relocated in France. The title of his work alludes to the nature of this emigration, \textit{Mille Ans}, \textit{Un Jour}, or \textit{A Thousand Years, One Day}; the long lasting “thousand year” Jewish community of Morocco disappeared virtually overnight. Centuries of coexistence were undone in less than 60 years.\textsuperscript{5}

This chapter presents a very problematic time period in the Judeo-Muslim relationship. Some Muslims were deeply saddened by the mass emigration, while others encouraged their departure. This ambiguity is also evident in the government’s response to the events of the 1940s. While the


\textsuperscript{4} Interview with Rabbi Jacki Sebag and Family: Conversations from Shabbat Dinner in Casablanca.

\textsuperscript{5} Scharfman, ”The Other's Other: The Moroccan Jewish Trajectory of Edmond Amran El Maleh,” 136.
official rhetoric of the Moroccan King Mohammad V supported the protection of
the Jews and discouraged emigration, he was merely a figurehead ruler and
could not effect change to French Vichy policy. Therefore, the following
discussion aims to present these problematic and sometimes contradicting
moments of Judeo-Muslim interaction.

**Setting the Stage for Emigration**: Zionism, the Holocaust and
the Vichy Government

**Introduction**

It is important to note the chronological overlap between the encroaching
French colonial presence (1830-1912) and the emergence of Zionism in Morocco
(1900-1948). Zionism, the movement for the establishment and development of
a Jewish state in the land of Israel, was an international initiative for creating a
protected state for the historically persecuted Jewish community. The idea of a
Jewish state was introduced to the Moroccan Jewish community long before the
official establishment of Israel in 1948. The first Zionist organizations arrived in
Morocco in 1900 in the southern coastal town of Mogador (modern Essaouira)
and the northern coastal town of Tetouan.⁶ While this chapter will focus on the
events of the 1940s and the changes in the Judeo-Muslim relationship prompted
by the creation of the state of Israel, it is important to keep in mind that all of
these events and societal transformations are happening within the context of
French colonialism.

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In order to understand the implications of the official founding of the state of Israel we must first understand the political climate in Morocco in the 1940s. This political climate was the product of the following events that occurred in the period immediately before the establishment of Israel in 1948: First, I examine the emergence of Zionism in Morocco in the twentieth century. Second, I discuss the Holocaust and its effects on the Moroccan Jewish community. Finally, I assess some of the policy changes that occurred under the French Vichy regime in Morocco.

**Zionism: A Double Colonialism**

Moroccan Jews experienced a “double colonialism,” according to Edmond Amran El Maleh. The first colonists were the French; the second were the “Israeli Ashkenazi Zionists,” or the European Jews with the political motivation to mobilize and relocate mass numbers of Jews worldwide to the land of Israel. While the majority of the Moroccan Jewish community did not consider the Zionists to be colonists per se, El Maleh’s proposition illuminates the propagandizing role of the Zionists in Morocco.

El Maleh considered these lobbying Zionists “colonists” for several reasons. They were primarily Ashkenazi Jews, who often considered themselves ethnically and culturally superior to the North African Sephardic Jews. They were in many ways forcing their culture on the “less civilized” Sephardim. Additionally, like the French, they put their own political and personal goals first.

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7 Interview with Myriam Siboni: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Immigrant in New York.
8 Interview with Gai Cohen: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in Israel.
The Zionists were focused on garnering support for Israel without concerning themselves with the negative implications this emigration had on the remaining Jewish population.

Furthermore, both the Zionists and the French used the tactic of divide and conquer, a colonial approach to attaining power by isolating social groups. The Zionists made efforts to isolate the Jewish community from their Moroccan Muslim neighbors in order to further their political cause. All of these factors led El Maleh to conclude that the Zionists were the colonizers of the vulnerable minds of the Jewish population. El Maleh even goes as far as to draw parallels between Nazi deportations and the Zionist inspired emigration to Israel. While this is a rather controversial comparison, it demonstrates that many Moroccan Jews felt manipulated by the Zionists presence in Morocco.

In light of El Maleh's rather extreme perspective, let us now take a step back to examine the actions of the Zionists that led directly to the emigration of the Moroccan Jewish community. The influence of Zionism is evident in the 2012 documentary film Tinghir Jérusalem: Les Echos Du Mellah, in which director Kamal Hachkar explores the emigration of the Jewish community from the Atlas regions. Hachkar interviews an Israeli immigrant from the High Atlas Mountains about his decision to leave Morocco. He explains, “The Zionists came to our house to see us. They came to register the names of people that wanted to move

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9 Interview with Gai Cohen: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in Israel.
10 Edmond Amran El Maleh, Mille Ans, Un Jour (Grenoble: La Pensée Sauvage, 1986), 40.
11 Scharfman, "The Other’s Other: The Moroccan Jewish Trajectory of Edmond Amran El Maleh," 137.
to Israel, they told us there was work and homes for us in Israel.”

The Zionists often went door-to-door in this manner, encouraging people to leave their homes, facilitating their travel arrangements, and guaranteeing them homes and jobs in Israel. They made these promises even before statehood was established.

This campaign rallied the Jewish community to leave Morocco and provided the logistical aid for them to relocate.

Zionist organizations were not alone in their efforts; Myriam, a Moroccan Jew living in New York, also noted the efforts of the Jewish organization JDC (Jewish Joint Distribution Committee). She explained, “Israel was helping, you know. The Jewish Joint Distribution Committee was helping Jews from Arab countries move to Israel. And it was easier as a Moroccan Jew to move to Israel than some other countries, like Iraq or Yemen at the time.” The Moroccan Jews may have been particularly targeted by Zionist organizations because of their link to the French colonial population and Westernization. Other Sephardic or non-Ashkenazi communities were perceived as less civilized and faced considerable discrimination once in Israel.

Even before Israel’s official inception, Zionism profoundly affected the Judeo-Muslim relationship. The Zionist ideology promulgated a distinct Jewish identity, which undermined the Judeo-Muslim cultural commonalities. Ashkenazi influence on values, culture and ideas of what it meant to be “Jewish” weakened the Sephardic Moroccan identity. The Zionists and other Jewish

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14 Interview with Gai Cohen: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in Israel.
organizations promoted an international Jewish identity, which slowly chipped away at the Moroccan Jewish identity.\textsuperscript{15} 

The efforts of international Jewish organizations were relatively minimal, but consistent in the period leading up to Israel’s official establishment. Emigration before 1948 was comparably marginal to the hasty departure of thousands of Jews after two significant events in the 1940s: the massacre of millions of European Jews in the Holocaust created widespread fear among Jewish minorities worldwide; and the fall of the France to the Germans led to the rule of the Vichy French government in Morocco in 1940.

\textbf{The Holocaust}

The Holocaust prompted Jewish awareness of the community’s physical vulnerability. It was not until the Holocaust that the ideas of Zionism truly resonated with much of the Moroccan Jewish community.\textsuperscript{16} The mass murder of millions of Jews demonstrated the necessity of creating a state solely for Jews and their protection. The Holocaust transformed the dynamics between every minority Jewish community throughout the world and the majority population in which they lived.

While the Holocaust was carried out predominantly in Europe, there is some debate over the degree to which the Holocaust affected the Moroccan Jewish community. At its core, this polarized debate centers around the extent to which the Moroccan government was able to protect its Jewish community versus the extent to which the Nazis effectively implemented discriminatory

\textsuperscript{15} Hachkar, \textit{Tinghir Jérusalem: Les Echos du Mellah, Des Histoires et des Hommes.}
\textsuperscript{16} Interview with Joseph Sebag: "The Last Jew of Essaouira."
policies in Morocco.

A map in Yad Veshem, the official Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem, represents the number of victims of the Holocaust by country. The figure it gives for Moroccan victims of the Jewish genocide is 300,000.\textsuperscript{17} The figure is impossible, first because the estimated population of Morocco was only 265,000, and second because the Moroccan king, Mohammad V, refused to turn over any of the Moroccan Jewish population to the Nazis.\textsuperscript{18} Morocco even opened its doors to foreign Jews in search of asylum throughout the 1930s.\textsuperscript{19}

I asked Joseph Sebag how his parents felt during the Holocaust. He replied:

They felt safe here. Mohammad V, the grandfather of the current king, he was very good to the Jews. He didn’t know the difference between Moroccan Jews and Moroccan Muslims. For him they were all subjects, and they were treated equally and fairly.\textsuperscript{20}

Mohammad V's actions reflected the beliefs of many Moroccan Muslims who genuinely felt that the Jews were equal Moroccan subjects. Mohammad V refused the German demand that Jews wear a yellow star and halted the planned deportation of Moroccan Jews to European camps.\textsuperscript{21} Even after the war, Mohammad V continually made efforts to re-forge the Judeo-Muslim bond; for example, he required all Muslim newspapers to print the Jewish calendar date alongside the Muslim date.\textsuperscript{22} But while this protected many Jews from certain

\begin{itemize}
\item[17] "Holocaust Victims by Country," (Yad Veshem Museum).
\item[18] Robert B. Satloff, Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust’s Long Reach into Arab lands, (PublicAffairs, 2006). 19.
\item[19] Ibid. 20.
\item[20] Interview with Joseph Sebag: "The Last Jew of Essaouira".
\item[21] Elmaleh and Rickettes, Jews Under Moroccan Skies: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life, 33.
\item[22] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
death in Nazi concentration camps, the Jews were not immune to the psychological effects of the Holocaust.

**The Role of Fear**

For the Moroccan Jewish population, the most tangible effect of the Holocaust was fear. The French Vichy government set up several small Jewish labor camps in Morocco, reminiscent of Nazi concentration camps in Europe. However, these camps, located in southern Morocco near the Sahara desert, were not created to draft Moroccan Jews into forced labor. Instead, they housed some of the European Jewish refugees who came to Morocco to seek asylum.²³

Historian Robert Satloff, in his work, *Among the Righteous* presents the “lost story” of Jewish suffering in North Africa. While it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of Moroccan Jews who died in these camps, if any, Satloff estimates that only 1% of all North African Jews died in the Holocaust.²⁴ Satloff encapsulates the profound psychological effects of the Holocaust on all Jewish communities in North African:

> Virtually no Jew in North Africa was left untouched. Thousands suffered in more than 100 forced labor camps set up throughout the region. Many thousands more lost homes, farms, jobs, professions, savings, and years of education. Still more lived in a state of perpetual fear and daily privation...by a stroke of fortune, relatively few perished directly as a result of Fascist rule, with estimates ranging between 4,000 and 5,000 people.²⁵

Although Satloff is speaking about the broader North African region, he captures the effects of the Holocaust on the Moroccan community. While Mohammad V

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²⁴ Satloff, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories from the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands*, 20.
²⁵ Ibid., 19.
and the Moroccan government prevented a large death toll, they were unable to protect the Jews from discriminatory policies or the anti-Semitic actions of individuals. Therefore, the Holocaust considerably disrupted the lives of the Moroccan Jews professionally, economically, and educationally.

In the eyes of the Jewish Diaspora communities, the fear created by the Holocaust strengthened the image of Israel as a safe haven. After the Holocaust, Israel was not only a religious site of importance; it was also portrayed as the only safe home for the Jewish people. Jews living in minority communities around the world could now immigrate to Israel where they were guaranteed freedom from religious persecution.

The Moroccan Jewish community grew increasingly worried about their safety throughout the twentieth century. This anxiety was a result of both Zionist encouragement to emigrate and widespread anti-Semitism of the 1940s. Panic sparked the Thousand Years, One Day effect, in which the Jewish community began abandoning their homes and businesses in haste. The profitless Jewish real estate turnover to Muslims during the mid-twentieth century was proof of this hurried and fearful departure.

Many Jews sold buildings, homes, and businesses for virtually nothing or left their properties vacant; one elderly Muslim man interviewed in Tinghir Jérusalem: Les Echos du Mellah reported, “I bought the synagogue from my neighbor. The synagogue was right next to the mosque in our town, separated by

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26 Interview with Rabbi Jacki Sebag and Family: Conversations from Shabbat Dinner in Casablanca.
no more than 20 meters. I bought it from him for only 200 Dirhams.”

The synagogue, symbolically sitting harmoniously next to the Mosque, was abandoned in such haste that it was sold for the equivalent of $20. Jews similarly deserted property in the Mellah quarter. A Muslim man who grew up in the Rabat Mellah in the 1970s explained, “after the Jews started leaving there were plenty of houses in the Mellah. My family, we were very poor, found an empty house, moved in and that’s where I grew up.”

The desertion of property illustrates that much of the community had no intention of ever returning to Morocco.

Joseph reflected on the role of fear in accelerating the Jewish departure:

The Jews were never forced to leave Morocco. The Jews have always been considered as citizens, the same as Moroccan Muslims. But there was as we say, mseekos, its like fear. When you see your next-door neighbor leaving, when you see the Rabbi was not attending services, and you apply for a passport and you don’t get it on time, this caused mseekos. And the Moroccan people started to build some animosity towards their fellow neighbors. All this combined provoked immigration to Israel, to France, to wherever. The Jews were never forced to leave, not like in Poland or in Germany. But there were tensions.

Joseph emphasizes mseekos, or fear, as a cause for the accelerated Jewish emigration after World War II. Mseekos created an emigration ripple effect. Many Jews left Morocco because the entire community appeared to be relocating and no one wanted to be left behind. As Joseph’s quote reflects, people watched as their neighbors and their Rabbis emigrated and it no longer seemed practical to stay. This ripple effect was the primary impetus for many individuals. A Muslim

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28 Interview with Mahlouf: Growing up in the Muslim Mellah, July 2012.
29 Interview with Joseph Sebag: "The Last Jew of Essaouira".
man interviewed in *Tinghir Jérusalem: Les Echos du Mellah* about the departure of the Jewish community from the Atlas mountain region reported:

> I was here when they left. I watched them leave family by family, it caused a lot of pain for a lot of people, we (Muslims) didn’t want them to leave. I asked a friend why he was leaving and he said he didn’t personally want to go, but all the Jews were leaving. He couldn’t stay behind, alone.\(^{30}\) (My translation)

Much of the community did not have a personal desire to leave Morocco, but this ripple effect strongly encouraged emigration.

**French Vichy Policy**

After the French were defeated by the German powers in 1940, the French Vichy government implemented many of its anti-Semitic policies in Morocco. Some Muslims supported these policies, primarily because they shifted political and economic power out of Jewish hands.\(^{31}\) For example, a 1940 *dahir*, or royal decree, limited Jewish employment opportunities and excluded them completely from certain positions.\(^{32}\) Some Muslims supported this *dahir* because they could then fill these vacant positions. In 1941, another Vichy French *dahir* re-secluded the Jews to the *Mellah*, even though much of the community had recently moved out of the *Mellah* and into the French Ville Nouvelles.\(^{33}\)

In addition to economic motivations for supporting these discriminatory *dahirs*—increased employment opportunities and the worsening of the Franco-Judeo relationship— the pervasive ideology of anti-Semitism during World War

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\(^{33}\) Ibid.
II also profoundly affected Muslim community. While Muslim and Jewish conflicts in pre-colonial times were caused by political or socioeconomic tensions, World War II heralded in a new age of anti-Semitism and conflict rooted purely in religious persecution. Just as the Jewish community internalized French ideas about civilization—which gave them the political upper hand over Muslims, some Muslims internalized the Vichy ideas about Jewish inferiority. However, it is important to note that the Muslim community held a wide variety of opinions about Jewish emigrations; some were deeply saddened, some were indifferent, and some merely saw an opportunity for Muslim political and economic advancement.

The anti-Semitic dahir put in place under the Vichy regime institutionalized discrimination against the Jews in the economic sphere. Even though the dahir were formally revoked after the German defeat, the Jewish community had already felt the effects. Many lost their jobs and Muslims had filled their empty positions. As illustrated in previous chapters, the Judeo-Muslim relationship was able to maintain its balance for an extended period of time because Jewish social inferiority equalized their economic superiority. In the mid-twentieth century, there was no longer such clear Jewish superiority; instead, Jewish economic survival was at stake.

Poverty struck the Jewish community of Morocco following the 1940s discriminatory dahir. In addition to the above mentioned dahir, several forces hindered Jewish employment. First, as the French colonial population increased, French colonists began to push Jews out of their economic positions and take on
those roles for themselves. Second, as the Judeo-Muslim relationship continued to deteriorate, it became more difficult for Jews to trade and do business with Muslim clientele. Third, rural Jewish populations began to crowd the city *Mellahs* in search of work, exacerbating the unemployment problem. Finally, some Muslims illegally seized Jewish businesses for themselves. These factors problematized the success of the Jewish community.

I interviewed an American-born Moroccan Jew, Dahlia, about the economic factors that persuaded her grandfather to immigrate to Israel. Dahlia reflected that her family went from being wealthy and prosperous to very poor after the Muslims appropriated the family’s stores:

> My grandfather had a high up position when he was in Morocco. He owned stores but then he lost most of it during the war. They were taken from him. And then afterwards they were very poor in Morocco and it was hard to be living there.\(^{35}\)

Many Jews struggled with this frustrating transition from prosperity to poverty, especially since their properties and livelihoods were taken illegally and maliciously. Once Jewish families lost their businesses, the move to Israel was a logical next step, especially after this Muslim betrayal of the former neighborly relationship.

These economic hardships drastically lowered the standard of living for many Jews in Morocco. As the economic situation worsened, many relied on foreign aid from organizations such as the JDC to feed their families.\(^{36}\)

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\(^{34}\) Interview with Mehdi: Muslim Guide for Jewish Heritage Tours in Fes, July 2012.  
\(^{35}\) Interview with Dalia Azran: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in New York.  
of rural Jews exacerbated this sudden poverty and unemployment.

Overcrowding in the *Mellahs* led to several disease outbreaks. The Jewish cemetery in Fes has an entire section dedicated to unmarked graves of young children who died during a typhus outbreak in the 1960s.\(^{37}\)

![Unmarked children's graves from the typhus outbreak of the 1960s](image)

In addition to these grim living conditions, many Jews were re-secluded to the *Mellah* as per the Vichy *dahir*. These middle and upper class Jews were forcibly moved from their newly constructed modern homes in the French Ville Nouvelle into the overcrowded and deteriorating *Mellah* quarter. Much of the wealthier Jewish population resented their segregation with the lower Jewish class.\(^{39}\)

Policies of the French Vichy government disabled the former economic balance between Jews and Muslims. Interdependence had been a key force in

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\(^{37}\) Interview with Mehdi: Muslim Guide for Jewish Heritage Tours in Fes.

\(^{38}\) Jewish Cemetery in Fes, July 2012. Photo by author.

\(^{39}\) Interview with Myriam Siboni: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Immigrant in New York.
preserving a positive and peaceful Judeo-Muslim relationship. However, the combination of the French Protectorate policies in the early twentieth century and the Vichy discrimination of the 1940s disabled this relationship. Muslim and Jewish communities dually undermined Judeo-Muslim acceptance; Muslim internalization of the anti-Semitic Vichy ideology made them less accepting of the Jewish minority living amongst them. Furthermore, re-seclusion to the Mellahs created a worsened socioeconomic environment; the Jews did not accept this new position of total inferiority.

As illustrated, the deterioration of the Judeo-Muslim relationship was a multifaceted process spanning the early to mid twentieth century. Many Moroccans cite the year 1948 as the moment when the Judeo-Muslim relationship went sour. With the preceding events of the 1940s in mind, we now turn to the climax of Judeo-Muslim tensions and the acceleration of the mass exodus, the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.

**The Creation of the State of Israel:** The Crystallization of an International Jewish Identity and the First Wave of Emigration

Moments of important political transition are often marked with violence. Just as there was an outbreak of violence against Jews in 1912, the year Morocco became a French Protectorate, the creation of the state of Israel in 1948 also sparked a violent reaction. Three months after the establishment of the state of Israel there were two pogroms in the towns of Oujda and Djerrada. The attacks
wounded 500 Jews, killed 8 Jews, and destroyed 900 Jewish homes.\textsuperscript{40} We have seen the mounting tensions between the two communities for several decades, so why were these attacks indicative of a turning point?

These attacks were different in nature than the violent outbreaks in the early 1900s, which were in response to the development of the Franco-Jewish relationship. The 1948 pogroms took on an entirely different character; these were anti-Jewish attacks with the intention to accelerate Jewish emigration to Israel.\textsuperscript{41} A faction developed within the Muslim community that asserted a national identity based in Islam, exclusively to the Jewish population. Among those who held this view, the attacks in 1948 intended to, and succeeded in, encouraging the Jews to move to their newly designated homeland, Israel.\textsuperscript{42}

The pogroms exemplified that at least part of the Muslim population did not accept Jewish presence in Morocco after 1948. While the Jews previously relied on the French and Moroccan government for protection, no one came to aid the Jews in 1948. This demonstrated to the Jewish community that the French were not truly invested in their protection and the King, despite his pro-Jewish rhetoric, did not have the power to truly protect them.

The demise of the Judeo-Muslim relationship is most evident in this open discrimination and persecution against Jews after the creation of the state of Israel. The official founding of the state of Israel resulted in significant Jewish-Arab tensions worldwide. The year 1948 crystallized the emergence of two

\textsuperscript{40} Elmaleh and Rickettes, \textit{Jews Under Moroccan Skies: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life}, 36.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
international and opposing identity groups; the Jewish and Muslim communities of Morocco now belonged to these polarized factions.

The Moroccan Jews connected Israel's cause. Although Diaspora Jews had different nationalities, languages, cultures, and versions of Judaism, most Jews united against the constant attacks on Israeli sovereignty. The creation of an international Jewish identity had profound implications on the Judeo-Muslim relationship in Morocco. As Jews began to relate more and more to this international identity, many of them began to deemphasize their Moroccan national identities. For example, in an interview with Joseph, I asked him how he self-identifies. He responded: “I am a Jew first, I am a Moroccan second.” This subtle distinction undermined perhaps the strongest cultural commonality holding the Judeo-Muslim relationship in balance: their common identity as Moroccans.

The allegiance of Moroccan Muslims to the Arab identity, however, was much more complex. Although half of Morocco's population identified as Arab (the other half as ethnically Berber) Morocco's Muslims connected with the Arab cause against the establishment of Israel. This was in part due to their common language, Arabic being the language of Islam. Such cultural commonalities epitomized the emerging Pan-Arabism movement, that which celebrated Arab cultural nationalism.

These newly forming identity movements reflect a critical alteration of the Judeo-Muslim relationship in Morocco. Beginning in the late nineteenth

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43 Interview with Joseph Sebag: "The Last Jew of Essaouira".
century, external forces became highly influential in the Judeo-Muslim relationship. These third parties, the French, as demonstrated in Chapter 2 and Zionism and Pan-Arabism, as illustrated in this chapter, had their own political motives in shifting the delicate balance between Moroccan Jews and Moroccan Muslims.

The creation of the state of Israel crystallized the identity groups; the Moroccan Jews who supported the state of Israel and the Muslim Jews who connected to the Palestinian and Arab cause. The Judeo-Muslim relationship remained consistently tense during this period leading up to Moroccan independence in 1956. After the end of French colonialism, Morocco was left to its own devices and Mohammad V quickly took a stance on Jewish emigration.

**Independent Morocco:** The Effort to Stop Mass Emigration and the Islamizing of the Moroccan Identity

As previously mentioned, Mohammad V was a friend to the Jewish community. However, his effort to end the mass emigration backfired. Upon Moroccan independence in 1956, many Jews’ fear was realized when Mohammad V outlawed emigration. While his intentions were to keep the Jewish Moroccan community in Morocco until tensions died down, these travel restrictions created significant panic within the Jewish community. Many Jews felt that the travel restrictions were indicative of worsening discrimination and left the country illegally during this time.44

Boats carried thousands of Jews illegally from Morocco to Israel and

44 Ibid., 37.
Europe after 1956. This emigration restriction was not lifted until 1961, following the death of Mohammad V. His son, Hassan II came to power and reinstated Jewish emigration rights in return for Jewish political support. Hassan II did not have the popular support of the people and enlisted Jewish help in revealing plots against the throne. This Jewish leveraging of power further hindered the Judeo-Muslim relationship as many Muslims resented the allegiance between the Jews and the tyrannical Hassan II. Although Hassan II was an oppressive authoritarian, he established an important precedent for the emigrating Jewish community that remains true to this day: any emigrated Moroccan Jew is welcome to reclaim their Moroccan citizenship at any time.\(^{45}\)

Despite the efforts of Mohammad V and Hassan II to encourage Jews to remain in or return to Morocco, the damage had already been done. Mohammad V’s emigration restriction served as proof for many that they could no longer be guaranteed safety and complete freedom in Morocco. Moreover, in the years leading up to independence, there was a nationwide movement to reclaim Moroccan identity. The Islamizing of the Moroccan national identity that occurred in the 1950s was not a deliberate effort to exclude the Jews—it was a political tool to unite the Arabs and Berbers against the French with the common goal of Moroccan sovereignty. While this began as an ideological movement in the early 1950s, after independence in 1956, concrete changes reasserted Moroccan identity and culture.

For example, this movement required undoing many of the physical

\(^{45}\) Interview with Mehdi: Muslim Guide for Jewish Heritage Tours in Fes.
changes the French had made to the Moroccan cities. In an interview with
Myriam Siboni, she explained that many of the street and city names were
expunged of their French labels and given back their Arabic names:

> We have a cousin who lives part time in Paris and most of the time
> in Morocco. He lives in what’s called Kinetra. Years ago it was called
> Port L’Aiour, named after a French general. But after Morocco
> became independent, they took back a lot of the older names
> because they wanted to get rid of the French, and made it much
> more Islamic and Muslim. But my parents and all the older people
> still call is Port L’Aiour, not Kinetra.46

This reclaiming of the Moroccan Muslim identity made further schisms in the
Judeo-Muslim relationship. Myriam reports that the movement emphasized
“Islamizing,” not the “Arabizing” of place names. This is because Islam unified
the Berbers and Arabs; Islam is the cultural connection that holds these two
ethnic groups together.

Myriam notes that her parents and the older generation still refer to
Kinetra as Port L’Aiour. This illustrates that the Jews were still tied somewhat to
the French even after Moroccan independence, which would not have gone
unnoticed by their Muslim neighbors. The Jews did not play a role in the
Islamizing of the Moroccan identity because this popular movement required the
removal of Western influence—which the Jews had become profoundly
connected to—and replaced it with Islamic influences instead, which the Jews
could not relate to.

However, it is important to note that many Jews were integral
contributors to the independence movement. El Maleh, for example, was a strong

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46 Interview with Myriam Siboni: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Immigrant in New York.
promoter of Moroccan independence. He was one of many Jews who not only joined the fight for independence, but also helped unite the Moroccan community as one against a common enemy.  

**The Second Wave of Emigration**

After the reinstatement of Jewish emigration rights in 1961, there was another wave of departures after the Six Day War in 1967. The wars against Israel—the independence war in 1948, the Sinai campaign in 1956, the Six Day War in 1967, and the Yom Kippur War of 1973—all affected the Moroccan community. These wars not only rallied the Muslims for the Palestinian cause, but also presented the Jews with an opportunity to contribute directly to the Israeli cause. For example, Myriam’s father joined the Israeli army in 1948 even though he did not relocate to Israel until 1958. He traveled to Israel to fight in the war for independence in 1948 and the Sinai campaign in 1956 against Egypt. After both wars he returned to Morocco, but eventually decided to emigrate in 1958.

At the start of this second wave of emigration there were roughly 35,000 Jews remaining. Emigration continued slowly and steadily until modern day. Contemporary estimates suggest that only 3,000 Jews remain in 2013.

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47 Scharfman, "The Other’s Other: The Moroccan Jewish Trajectory of Edmond Amran El Maleh," 140.
48 Interview with Myriam Siboni: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Immigrant in New York.
Conclusion

The Judeo-Muslim relationship in Morocco in the mid-twentieth century faced considerable obstacles. Despite the many complications and hardships that the Jewish community faced, a Jewish community, albeit a small one, persisted to contemporary times. Although the mass exodus of the twentieth century decreased the Moroccan Jewish population significantly, many resisted the desire to emigrate. The following chapter will return to Mimouna as a means of understanding the Judeo-Muslim relationship as it functions in twenty-first century Morocco.
The community is shrinking. Not because the Jews are leaving but because the community is aging. All the kids who went abroad to study they don’t want to come back to Morocco. They meet their little boyfriend or girlfriend, stay in France or Germany or the States. So we see no marriage. We see no birth.1

-Joseph Sebag

The Mimouna festival served as a tool for the Jewish and Muslim communities of pre-colonial Morocco to unite and acknowledge their common heritage. After the deterioration of the Judeo-Muslim relationship during the nineteenth and twentieth century, Muslim participation in the Mimouna festival gradually diminished. Today, Mimouna has once again been reinterpreted. Now, rather than serving as a bridge between two religious groups, it serves as a link between Jews in the Diaspora and their Moroccan heritage. Moreover, Mimouna is a point of convergence for Moroccan Diaspora Jews and their non-Moroccan neighbors.

Mimouna has transformed into a symbol of Jewish Moroccan Heritage. While the composition of the community that celebrates Mimouna has changed, it’s ability to unify has remained the same. Furthermore, the festival can still be used as a lens through which to explore overarching social relationships. The modern Mimouna festival reflects the relationship between the Diaspora Jewish community and their Moroccan heritage; and it reflects the lack of relationship between the Muslims and the Jews who still remain in Morocco.

1 Interview with Joseph Sebag: “The Last Jew of Essaouira.”
Since this chapter will be dealing with the remaining Jewish community in Morocco and the Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora simultaneously, I will distinguish these two communities by specifying “Diaspora Jews,” or “Moroccan Jews.” The term “Diaspora Jews” specifies any Jew of Moroccan origin or descent living outside of Morocco. Any mention of the “Moroccan Jews” refers to the 3,000 Jews that remain in Morocco today.

Scholarship on the modern Mimouna holiday is limited. Therefore, Chapter 4 will primarily rely on firsthand research gathered from interviews with Moroccan and Diaspora Jews. These modern sources offer unique insight into how Jews perceive Mimouna today.

**An Overview of Modern Mimouna**

Modern Mimouna is celebrated by both the remaining Jewish community in Morocco and by the Diaspora community. The festival retained virtually all of the ritual elements of pre-colonial Mimouna, except for one key aspect: the involvement of Muslims. While most Moroccan Jews recall a day in which Mimouna was a shared Judeo-Muslim celebration, they agree that the current form of Mimouna is a purely Jewish festival. The Diaspora community similarly considers Mimouna an exclusively Jewish festival. However, unlike Moroccan Jews, Diaspora Jews have effectively erased the memory of Muslim involvement.

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2 Interview with Rabbi Jacki Sebag and Family: Conversations from Shabbat Dinner in Casablanca.
3 Interview with Gai Cohen: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in Israel.
Just as the festival transformed during pre-colonial times from an agricultural rite to fit into the emerging monotheisms, it again has been reinterpreted rather than abandoned. It is clear that there is something unique about the Mimouna festival that allows it to adapt to constantly evolving social structures. Mimouna demonstrates a history of flexibility and it maintains its significance to the Jewish community despite being a non-canonical tradition. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the modern Mimouna celebration is the way in which the Moroccan Diaspora community has reinterpreted the Mimouna holiday in their new context.

**Mimouna in the Diaspora:** A Symbol of Common Heritage

Modern Mimouna has retained its function as a point of unification. However, rather than a facet of Jewish and Muslim unity, Mimouna now embodies the cultural commonalities of the Moroccan Diaspora community around the globe. The mass exodus of the twentieth century scattered the Jewish community throughout Europe, the Americas, Israel and elsewhere. While many of these communities have assimilated to their new nationalities, Mimouna remains an annual celebration of Moroccan heritage among Diaspora Jews internationally.4

I interviewed members of the Diaspora community in Israel and New York. Diaspora celebrations of Mimouna clearly reflect the strong relationship between the Moroccan emigrants and their Moroccan heritage and identity.

4 Interview with Dalia Azran: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in New York.
Rather than assimilating entirely into the Diaspora nation, Moroccan Jews maintained this holiday as a celebration of the cultural commonalities within the Moroccan immigrant community.

Israeli-born Gai Cohen, though he has never been to Morocco himself, highly values his Moroccan identity. He describes his yearly celebrations of Mimouna:

On the Mimouna night you open your door to anyone who wants to come in, and you give him food to eat like he’s family even if he’s a total stranger. So on the Mimouna night I start at home, with my mom, eating *mufletta* and drinking tea, and then I’ll go to a friends, my grandma’s, also my aunts, they do Mimouna as well. I go to my Moroccan friends’ moms, there are a lot of places. In the evenings, everyone dresses in *kaftans* and you’ll walk in the streets and you’ll hear music from everywhere, Moroccan music.\(^5\)

From this description it seems that Mimouna has preserved many of its key rituals in Israel. The open-door policy, the house hopping, and wearing traditional Moroccan clothing, the *kaftan*, are unique Mimouna rituals that persisted into modern times. The most interesting aspect of Gai’s reflection is the eagerness to share with strangers and invite all members of the community.

The composition of the Israeli community is religiously homogenous, so Mimouna serves as a way to reach out to non-Moroccan Jewish neighbors.

Moroccan-born New York resident Myriam Siboni touches upon the same key elements of the Mimouna festival in Queens, New York. She reflects:

I grew up in Queens, NY and we would have big Mimounas. We would have bands there, big Moroccan bands, and we would all belly dance. My mother and her friends were in the kitchen. They would make *muffleta*, a lot of tea, the couscous—the sweet kind with cinnamon and sugar...

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\(^5\) Interview with Gai Cohen: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in Israel.
people lived very close together, when you live close together its easy to go from house to house to visit our friends and family.\footnote{Interview with Myriam Siboni: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Immigrant in New York.}

The Diaspora communities of New York and Israel maintained many of the same key rituals. Although Mimouna is an ancient tradition with shifting geographical boundaries, many aspects of the festival have persisted, including house hopping, eating the traditional Moroccan bread \textit{Muffleta}, incorporating Moroccan music into the festivities, and extending invitations to create large communal parties.

The creation of close-knit Moroccan immigrant communities facilitated the perseverance of Mimouna among Diaspora Jews. Within these communities, a collective consciousness of the uniqueness of Moroccan Judaism developed. For example, Myriam settled with her family in Forest Hills, Queens along with several other Moroccan families. They founded a Moroccan Jewish synagogue in which they could practice their unique form of Judaism. Similarly, Gai’s family settled in development projects in Israel in what became a primarily Moroccan neighborhood. All of the families that traveled on the same boat from Morocco with the Cohen’s settled in one area, where they then founded a Moroccan synagogue.\footnote{Interview with Gai Cohen: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in Israel.}

As these immigrant communities continued to grow and assimilate, often intermarrying with Ashkenazi Jews, Mimouna remained as one of the few uniquely Moroccan traditions in the Diaspora. Historian Haïm Zafrani notes, “Mimouna was the only local Jewish celebration that the disrupted Maghrebian
community took with it and transplanted when it settled in new places in France, Canada, and the South American continent." Not only does the Mimouna festival reflect the cultural commonalities of the Diaspora communities, it is the cultural commonality. This holiday of distinctly Moroccan origins has been adapted and maintained within Diaspora communities even as other indicators of Moroccan heritage—such as clothing, music preference, Marrokai etc.—are lost to new national identities.

Linguistically, Marrokai, the Judeo-Arabic dialect, is fading from popular use. While the Moroccan Jewish community and the elderly Diaspora community retain knowledge of Marrokai, they have not taught this language to the generation of Moroccan Jews born in the Diaspora. The Jews of the Diaspora learned to use the language of their new nation, typically Hebrew, French, or English. Moreover, the remaining Moroccan Jews now prefer to use Hebrew; this is partially due to the increasing religiosity of the remaining Moroccan Jewish community.

The near extinction of Marrokai exemplifies the deterioration of the Judeo-Muslim relationship in modern Morocco. Linguistically, Hebrew serves as a strong cultural unifier for Jewish minority groups throughout the world. Therefore, as the Judeo-Muslim linguistic commonality deteriorates, the Moroccan Jewish connection to the international Jewish identity strengthens.

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9 Zafrani, *Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco*, 245.
9 Interview with Gai Cohen: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in Israel.
10 Interview with Dalia Azran: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Descendant in New York.
11 Interview with Rabbi Jacki Sebag and Family: Conversations from Shabbat Dinner in Casablanca.
In addition, the Mimouna celebration serves as an important point of convergence for Jews of various heritages. Although the Moroccan Jews no longer invite their Muslim neighbors for Mimouna, the Jews of the Diaspora invite their Ashkenazi, Yemenis, Iranian, South American, and other Jewish neighbors.

I interviewed an Italian Jew living in Israel, Yael Gazit, who regularly attends the Mimouna holiday at a close friend’s house. She explained, “I enjoy learning about other Jewish cultures that exist within Israel. The Mimouna celebration is one way to learn about my friends’ culture.” Modern Mimouna has retained its traditional role as an annual point of convergence for differing communities.

**Muslim Erasure of the Memory of Mimouna**

While the Mimouna festival maintains its importance among the Diaspora community, it has virtually disappeared from the Moroccan Muslim consciousness, particularly in the younger generation. Mimouna, a shared Judeo-Muslim cultural festival for centuries, is no longer considered “shared.” The modern form of Mimouna is a symbol of the Moroccan sect of Judaism, exclusive of any Muslim connection or Muslim participation.

I interviewed several young Moroccan men, between the ages of 20 to 26, and asked, “What is Mimouna?” None of the seven interviewees in this age bracket could correctly identify the Mimouna festival. One interviewee, Zakaria,

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said, “I’ve heard of it but I don’t know what it is.” Another, Hatim, recognized the etymological connection between Mimouna and the Moroccan Arabic word for good fortune, *Mimouna*, but did not know of the festival. Majid asked if it had any thing to do with Yom Kippur, another Jewish holiday. Majid thus had some intimation that Mimouna involved a Jewish celebration, but knew nothing else of it. Of these seven interviewees, none had any inclination how important the Mimouna festival had been to their ancestors.

The absence of a large Jewish community in Morocco has left a hole in modern Moroccan Muslim memory. While the pre-colonial Mimouna involved and to a certain extent necessitated Muslim involvement, this seems to have eluded the contemporary narrative among Moroccan Muslims. I propose that there are dual forces that led to this erasure of memory: First, as discussed above, the Mimouna festival has become a symbol for the Moroccan Diaspora community and has developed as a unique aspect of the Moroccan sect of Judaism. Therefore, it would be rather difficult for modern Muslims to retain a connection to an exclusively Judaized holiday. Second, this erasure of memory occurred organically as the Moroccan Jewish population decreased in size. The Jews who remained did not make deliberate efforts to re incorporate the Muslim participation in the Mimouna holiday, thus their involvement declined gradually.

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13 Interview with Zakaria: The Modern Muslim Perspective on Moroccan Judaism.
14 Interview with Hatim: The Modern Muslim Perspective on Moroccan Judaism, July 2012.
15 Interview with Majid: The Modern Muslim Perspective on Moroccan Judaism, July 2012.
16 Interview with Rabbi Jacki Sebag and Family: Conversations from Shabbat Dinner in Casablanca.
Memorialization

Since the Jewish population in Morocco is nearing extinction—Joseph anticipates that the community will be completely gone within ten years—the question arises: How will Moroccan Judaism be remembered? The memorialization of Moroccan Judaism is a combined effort of the Jews remaining in Morocco, the Diaspora Jews, and Moroccan Muslims.

Each of these groups are involved in a different aspect of the memorialization process. The remaining Jewish population has played an integral role in establishing the Jewish Museum of Casablanca, the only museum of Jewish history in an Arab country. The Diaspora community established Jewish tourism in Morocco, which encouraged the preservation of sites of Jewish heritage, such as cemeteries and synagogues. Finally, the Muslims are playing perhaps the most important role for future generations. Since there is a limited Jewish population still in Morocco, Muslims are actively involved in the operational aspects of Jewish tourism and the physical preservation of Jewish heritage sites.

Writer Ronnie Scharfman proposed to answer the question, “What remains?” According to Scharfman, all that is left of Moroccan Judaism is “Archaeology and tourism, returning to the sites of memory over and over again, in an effort to read the meaning of the experience.” In the absence of a large

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17 Interview with Mehdi: Muslim Guide for Jewish Heritage Tours in Fes.
18 Ronnie Scharfman, "The Other's Other: The Moroccan Jewish Trajectory of Edmond Amran El Maleh," 144.
Jewish community, the only indication that there was once a thriving Jewish population in Morocco for 2,000 years is archeology—cemeteries, synagogues, *Mellah* walls—and tourism, fueled by the Diaspora community’s efforts to reconnect to their heritage.

Muslims are almost exclusively the caretakers of the remaining archeology and tourism industry. Of all of the Jewish cemeteries in Morocco, (a Jewish cemetery can be found in every city where there was a substantial Jewish population), only one is currently maintained by a Jew. The rest were entrusted to Muslim caretakers, typically members of the Muslim community that had close personal ties to the Jewish community. Similarly, synagogues that are no longer operational have been entrusted to Muslims to maintain.

Part of the recently renovated Synagogue Ibn Danan in Fes, maintained by a Muslim.

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Note the wide variety of styles in Moroccan synagogues. This picture was taken in the non-operational Haïm Pinto Synagogue in Essaouira. A Muslim woman who inherited the job from her father maintains the synagogue; her father was given the position because he was a close personal friend of members of the Jewish community.

This picture was taken in an operational synagogue, Bet El Synagogue in Casablanca. Since the majority of the 3,000 remaining Jews live in Casablanca, there are still several synagogues in use.

These Muslim caretakers of Jewish heritage in Morocco rely on funding from the Moroccan and the Diaspora Jewish community for their personal salaries and the preservation of these sites. Muslims play an equally integral role in crafting and guiding what are known as “Jewish Heritage Tours.”

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20 Haïm Pinto Synagogue in Essaouira, July 2012. Photo by author.
21 Bet El Synagogue in Casablanca, July 2012. Photo by author.
The Diaspora community bears considerable responsibility for the memorialization process through tourism because they are the most numerous participants in “Jewish Heritage Tours.” Additionally, the Diaspora community has helped keep certain traditions alive by celebrating holidays onsite in Morocco. For example, as mentioned in Chapter 1, Myriam’s parents return to Morocco once every few years to celebrate Hilloula. Accordingly, the high season for Jewish tourism falls around important holidays.

The modern Mimouna festival exemplifies the dual responsibility of the Diaspora community and the Muslim community in keeping Moroccan Jewish traditions alive. For example, the Muslim caretaker of the Essouira synagogue hosts a group of Diaspora tourists for Mimouna each year. “Here, (in Essaouira), it is no longer celebrated because there are no Jews left. The tourists come to celebrate it though. I host it at my house on the cemetery property.”

It is fitting that a Muslim annually hosts the modern Mimouna celebration. Since Joseph is the only Jew left living full-time in Essaouria, he goes to Casablanca for the holidays to celebrate with his family. Consequently, the visiting Jews depend on a Muslim woman, entrusted with the preservation of Jewish archaeology in Essaouria, to open her doors on the Mimouna night.

The Jewish tourist industry in Morocco is often used as a means to gather extended families. For example, in the early 2000s, Myriam’s family took an organized heritage tour throughout Morocco. The trip gathered over 40 extended family members from several generations of Siboni’s living throughout

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22 Interview with Fatima: Muslim Cemetery Caretaker in Essaouira, June 2012.
23 Ibid.
the US, Europe, and Israel. Tourism is a way for Diaspora Jews to reconnect with their roots or celebrate the holidays, while simultaneously gathering extended family that the mass-exodus of the twentieth century scattered around the world.

In addition to participating in Jewish tourism in Morocco, the Diaspora Jews are active participants in the memorialization process based on how they reinterpret, reproduce, or abandon Moroccan traditions in the Diaspora world. For example, the Moroccan Israeli community has dictated the way in which the modern Mimouna festival is practiced and understood in Israel.

The Mimouna festival became a national Israeli holiday in 1966, implying that its practice was widespread and significant to the greater national population. The Moroccans are one of the largest ethnic groups in Israel, second only to the Russians. However, as previously mentioned, the Israeli Mimouna does not include the partial participation of Muslims. This modern interpretation of Mimouna reveals a sad truth about the Diaspora communities. While they no longer have Muslim neighbors to share the festivities with, many have forgotten, or deliberately ignored, the holiday's origin as a Jewish and Muslim celebration. This new narrative of Mimouna as a purely Jewish holiday is both inaccurate and counterproductive to the memorialization of the long history of Jewish and Muslim coexistence.

24 Interview with Myriam Siboni: Moroccan Jews of the Diaspora; Moroccan Immigrant in New York.
Scholarship on the Israeli Mimouna Festival is rather limited, but there is a wealth of popular sources, such as newspaper articles, blogs, or websites, that report on the Israeli Mimouna each year. Many of these sources, such as the online newspaper *The Jewish Daily Forward*, attribute the etymology and origins of the Mimouna festival as a celebration of Maimonides, a famed Jewish scholar who lived briefly in Morocco.\(^{27}\)

Israeli Jews have latched onto this alternate narrative because it gives the holiday exclusively Jewish origins; the celebration of Maimonides unites ethnically and nationally diverse Diaspora Jews. Wesleyan University’s Rabbi David Teva explained that this connection with Maimonides helped the festival “fit nicely into a neat Israeli box.”\(^{28}\) If the Moroccan Jewish community in Israel were to assert that the holiday began as a Judeo-Muslim agricultural festival associated with saint veneration, the larger non-Moroccan Israeli community would likely reject it.

Blogs, articles and other sources rarely engage in extensive critical analysis of the festival. Instead, they provide commentary and information on where public celebrations are held, the number of attendees, occasional photos, and a basic explanation of Mimouna’s North African origins. This omission of the true origins of Mimouna in modern rhetoric contributes to the contemporary erasure of narratives of Judeo-Muslim coexistence. Although many modern Muslim countries were once home to thriving Jewish communities, such as

\(^{27}\) Nathan Jeffay “Mimouna Revelries Mark End of Passover,” *The Jewish Daily Forward* April 22\(^{nd}\), 2012.
\(^{28}\) Interview with David Teva: Rabbi of Wesleyan University.
Algeria, Tunisia, and Iran, modern rhetoric about Judeo-Muslim coexistence is often rather pessimistic.

I propose a reclaiming of the true origin story of the Mimouna festival to counter this modern rhetoric; a reassertion of the Mimouna celebration's Judeo-Muslim past would contribute to accurate memorialization of Jewish history in Morocco and perhaps, a more optimistic view of modern Judeo-Muslim relations.
**Epilogue: Reclaiming the True Origin Story**

*One of the most convivial aspects of the Mimouna is its aim to forge connections and ties. We are in the midst of forging the most remarkable bonds in Jewish History, between the Jews and the Palestinians and Arab neighbors in general. The day will come when we will be able to set an international festival of peace between us; why not chose the day of the Mimouna precisely?*

-Albert Suissa

Albert Suissa, a Moroccan emigrant and author reflects eloquently on the potential of the Mimouna to shape the Judeo-Muslim relationship for future generations. It is clear that the Mimouna is unique; it has an indescribable quality that allows it to mold and persevere despite the ever-shifting role and status of the Moroccan Jewish community. In the above quote, Suissa aptly calls for a return to the Mimouna as a symbol of peace between neighbors. However, he extends the Mimouna beyond the boundaries of the Moroccan population and applies it to the Judeo-Muslim relationship in the Middle East as a whole. I, like Suissa, believe the Mimouna could once again be transformed and adapted to a new purpose. The Mimouna could maintain its historical role as a facet of unification and a celebration of commonalities in order to facilitate a peaceful Judeo-Muslim relationship on an international scale.

As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict persists into the twenty-first century, modern rhetoric is often pessimistic about Judeo-Muslim coexistence. History, in this case, supports a more optimistic view. 2,000 years of Judeo-Muslim coexistence in Morocco attests to the possibilities of mutual tolerance. While the longevity of coexistence in Morocco and the complex intricacies of the Israeli-

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1 Suissa, "Ma Mimouna à Moi,"
Palestinian conflict today are not necessarily analogous, we can use the history of the Moroccan Judeo-Muslim relationship to contest the negative modern rhetoric. As Suissa suggests, when peace is finally attained, Mimouna could serve as a symbol of that peace.

Mimouna is a rather obscure holiday, so why does Suissa propose it as an international festival? As demonstrated, the Mimouna embodied the delicate balancing act between Jews and Muslims in pre-colonial Morocco. Furthermore, it continually facilitated interactions between Jews and Muslims by serving as an annual point of convergence for the two communities. The Mimouna could serve a similar purpose within the Israeli-Palestinian context.

Moroccan Jews throughout the world are in a position to make an important contribution to Judeo-Muslim peace and mutual understanding. We must reclaim the true origins of the Mimouna. While the depiction of Mimouna as a purely Jewish holiday played an important role in forging a unified Diaspora community, this omission of Judeo-Muslim coexistence from the Mimouna narrative is both historically inaccurate and politically questionable.

The reinterpretation of Mimouna’s history demonstrates the importance of the memorialization process that will continue over the next few decades. There appears to be a resurgence of a positive narrative about the Judeo-Muslim relationship in Morocco. Elmaleh’s 2012 book, Jews Under Moroccan Skies: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life and Hachkar’s 2012 documentary Tinghir Jérusalem: Les Échos du Mellah both present optimistic accounts that minimize the realistic historical tensions in an effort to present an image of mutual
tolerance. I suspect that further scholarship will be done on the Jews of Morocco that similarly reflects the longevity of Judeo-Muslim coexistence. I am hopeful that in this double process, of academic memorialization and the development of collective memory, we will see the narrative of Judeo-Muslim coexistence further develop and strengthen.

As the Mimouna festival has gained traction with non-Moroccan Jewish communities, I am optimistic that Muslims will once again play a participatory role. Perhaps the Mimouna festival’s unifying and joyful spirit will facilitate a balanced relationship between neighboring countries, Israel and Palestine. However, this grandiose image of peace is thwarted by the profound tensions between Israel, Palestine and the Arab countries.

Nonetheless, I have hope that as the Mimouna festival becomes more popular amongst non-Moroccans, the true origin story will begin to reemerge. Online newspapers reported the most recent Mimouna festival, celebrated April 2nd, 2013. One newspaper, *Haaretz* explored some possible origin stories:

Historian Yigal Bin-Nun, who studies Moroccan Jewry, argues that all these explanations are relatively late attempts to Judaicize what is essentially a pagan festival based on Moroccan folklore about a demon named Sidi Mimoun and his female equivalent, the part-goddess part-demon Lala Mimouna, or Lady Luck...Lala Mimoun and Sidi Mimoun figure prominently in many folkloric tales among Moroccan Muslims, have became part of the Jewish culture in Morocco.2

This reassertion of the folkloric origins of the Mimouna celebration and its connection to the Muslim community is a step in the right direction.

While I disagree with Bin-Nun’s association of Lalla Mimouna with pagan

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demons, I commend his acknowledgment that the Mimouna festival has been Judaized from its Judeo-Muslim origins.

Moreover, it is well within the power of individuals to keep the true spirit of the Mimouna alive. Upon completion of this project I will be hosting a Mimouna celebration at my home. I will extend an invite to both the Jewish and Muslim communities at Wesleyan University. As per custom, my door will remain open throughout the festivities to anyone who wishes to join in a celebration of shared humanity.
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*Name changed

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