

Personal Experience (Hi)Stories from Moroccan Mixed Ethno-Religious Communities

THESIS

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the  
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

Cory Thomas Driver

Graduate Program in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

The Ohio State University

2011

Master's Examination Committee:

Professor Sabra Webber, Advisor

Professor Daniel Frank

Professor Michael Swartz

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the side-by-side relationship of Jews and Muslims, especially Imazighen, in the High Atlas region of Morocco. A historical survey of the presence of Jews in North Africa is followed by oral histories seeking to detail life in the second half of the twentieth century. The author finds that while living together, and certainly after living apart, the two religious communities define their past by means of their experiences of the other.

## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family, Sarah, Jake, Jess, Yael, Heather, Steve, Matt, Adi, Ynon, Baba Moha and Hayatino. Lastly, in the words of Shmuel, I would like to give all credit to the Creator.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge the great help of Professor Webber, who worked tirelessly on re-reading this work and providing direction. I could not have done the research in Israel without the Melton Fellowship conferred upon me by the Melton Center for Jewish Studies at Ohio State. Professor Chetrit and Professor Frank were both very helpful in suggesting people with whom I should speak, and my research would be much less interesting without their help.

## Vita

2001.....Crown Point High School  
2005.....B.S. Economics, Management; B.A.  
Political Science, Purdue University  
2007 to 2010 .....Outreach Coordinator, Middle East Studies  
Center, The Ohio State University

## Fields of Study

Major Field: Near Eastern Languages and Literatures

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## Chapter 1: Beginning of Project

*From November 2005 to September 2007 the author lived in Midelt, Khenifra Province, Morocco and collected an oral history of the town. This small town, nestled in the foothills of the High Atlas Mountains, has a particularly vibrant past vis-à-vis Jewish-Muslim relations and interactions. Many areas of North Africa had significant Jewish communities, but the most populous of them were in Morocco.<sup>1</sup> From personal and familial histories of several Muslim interviewees in Morocco and Jewish interviewees in Israel, the author has reconstructed the lives of Jewish families who rose from bare subsistence to prosperity only to enter times of persecution. Their stories span and reflect the massive changes in the first two-thirds of the Twentieth Century.*

I had just celebrated my twenty third birthday the day before I arrived in Midelt. The United States Peace Corps and the Moroccan Ministry of Social Economy, Handicrafts and Tourism agreed that weaving cooperatives were needed in the area to provide more taxes and fees to the local municipality. After a little over two months in training in Moroccan Arabic dialect, and two years of academic training in Modern Standard Arabic, I was sent to a town where many inhabitants did not speak Arabic, and for almost all who did speak it, it was their second language after a Berber dialect of the

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, Bernard, *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 113. Perhaps as many as 265,000 Jews lived in Morocco in 1948. Aveni, Arie L., *The Claim of Dispossession: Jewish Land-Settlement and the Arabs, 1878-1948* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1982) 276.

area; alternatively called Shilha or Tamazight by the people who spoke it, even though many linguists will distinguish between the two. As the bus dropped me off, and I had no idea of where to go or what to do, I saw a man waving from several hundred meters away. I walked toward him and soon found that his name was Moha, and that the Peace Corps had arranged that I should live with him until I was able to find my own place, if I wanted. It was my stay with him that occasioned this research. While I stayed with him, I was baking *matzah* for Passover. When he saw what I was making, he mentioned that he used to know some people who made “the thin bread,” and asked if I wanted to hear some stories about them.

## Chapter 2: Theory

Stories of the past are not told in a vacuum. And what are stories, but rehearsed memories? And when these memories are about absolutely anything outside of the most private of internal experiences, they must somehow reflect the presence of “the other” and of an audience. Jean Luc Nancy, in his seminal work *Being Singular Plural*, points out that, “Existence *is with*: otherwise nothing exists.”<sup>2</sup> It is this existence with, and memories of how things used to exist in this certain area in the mountains of Morocco, that I would like to explore. When two long-separated communities – the Amazigh and the Jewish – reflect back on their shared histories, how does the absence of the other shape the story being told? I will show that even though the events in the memories of my raconteurs do not change, the storytellers themselves speak of their interpretations changing over time. Further, the change over time is shaped by the continued connection, or lack thereof with “the other.” However, this is to be expected, as Nancy points out:

Everything, then, passes *between us*. This “between,” as its name implies, has neither a consistency nor a continuity of its own. It does not lead from one to the other; it constitutes no connective tissue, not cement, no bridge.

Perhaps it is not even fair to speak of a “connection” to its subject; it is

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<sup>2</sup> Nancy, Jean-Luc. *Being Singular Plural*. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. p 4.

neither connected nor unconnected; it falls short of both; even better, it is that which is at the heart of a connection, the *interlacing* [l'entrecroisement] of strands whose [lengths] remain separate even at the very center of the knot.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, everything passes between the subjects of my interviews and their relationships to the community perceived as “the other,” and not just in the stories reported: as the relationships among Jews, Arabs and Imazighen changed over time, so too did the memories of shared histories. Their very thoughts and memories are interlaced with the other, yet even when they are tied tightly into a Gordian knot that defies all attempts to separate them and their histories, the Imazighen and Jews I interviewed still represent different strands which are not to be confused or blended.

In this respect, this project comes very close to the work of Susan Slyomovics and her analysis of the Palestinian community of Ein Houd and the Jewish-Israeli community of Ein Hod and earlier works. She points out that,

Projects commemorating places of memory not only are imaginatively constructed and reconstructed but, according to the French historian Maurice Halbwachs, are also collectively espoused: only communally do we remember. Individual memory, he argues, depends for its articulation on the social group...<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Nancy, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Slyomovics, Susan. *The Object of Memory: Arab and Jew Narrate the Palestinian Village*. Philadelphia: Univ of Pennsylvania Pr, 1998. xi.

My project takes a step back from the works of Slyomovics and Halbwachs, however. Where they are addressing Palestinian memories of a village “covered over” by Jewish memories, and Jewish memories of the Mount of Olives are “superimposed over” by medieval Christian imaginations respectively, I am less concerned with the geographical landscape to be described – though certainly the places remembered constitute a vital part of the narrative – and more interested in the psychic and affective landscape created by memories. And indeed, it would be impossible to overemphasize the importance of exactly that notion: that the landscape and the history described below are of necessity *fashioned* by selective individual and shared communal memory, not merely recounted. One important clue to that end is that most of the tales that my memorists recounted were in the form of narrative by the time they told them to me. The stories had already consciously or unconsciously been shaped to follow a certain pattern of storytelling, and were shaped in order to make them interesting for the listener. Slyomovics writes:

Exploring the connections among orality, memory, and history shows that tales and parts of stories are also manifestations of memory, albeit in narrative form. Does memory have a narrative voice, an authoritative narrator? Do memories, especially repeated memories, tend to narrate themselves? Some narratives of the early years possessed great clarity;

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see also: Halbwachs, Maurice. *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter. New York: Harper and Row. 1990, 44-49.

others were blurred. The same phrases, uttered by opposing groups, offer contradictory montages of events.<sup>5</sup>

Sadly, but interestingly, this was the case for me as well. It seemed to me that the raconteurs consulted for the stories below had, not necessarily different versions of events, but rather differences in the meanings of events, for themselves and for the other. It seemed to me that I stumbled upon two vastly independent streams of interpretation of a shared past.

Still, it is the notion of the other that makes us who we are. Miroslav Volf, though speaking in an interview on religion and violence, nonetheless makes a vital point on how communities shape each other- even in times of what he calls embrace:

Identity in the context of enmity.... What one witnessed in the former Yugoslavia was certain purification of identity. Serbian identity, Croatian identity had to be pure. All extraneous elements had to be pushed out. The soil had to be pure, blood had to be pure, language had to be pure. You can see different groups associated with these phrases. And this “logical” purity, that wants to drive out of *self*-perception of that particular group. And yet it is very clear from the start, and sometimes I am teasing my fellow Croatians and saying, “You can rant about it, and you can be furious about it, but it is a fact that you would not be a Croatian if you did not have Serbian neighbors. It is only that fact that you had Serbian

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<sup>5</sup>

Slyomovics. xvi.

neighbors for I-don't-know-how-many centuries that you can be defined as Croatian. It's who you are." So you can push that out as much as you want. It still remains part and parcel of your identity. And therefore then when you talk about embrace, it really in a sense, is recognition that we have been, from the start, shaped by another, especially a person with whom we are in conflict. And so you have a much more complex identity. Then possibly you may come to the point where you would open yourself for the other and you would say, "Well the fact that the other is part and parcel of who I am: that's good, that's who I am." Right? So I can invite the other to be present while at the same time maintaining the boundary.<sup>6</sup>

This notion that one is shaped by her or his interaction with the other is reinforced by Nancy, who states:

A single being is a contradiction in terms. Such a being, which would be its own foundation, origin and intimacy, would be incapable of *Being*, in every sense that this expression can have here. "Being: is neither a state nor a quality, but rather the action according to which what Kant calls "the [mere] positing of a thing" takes place ("is"). The very simplicity of "position" implies no more, although no less, than its being discrete, in the mathematical sense, or its distinction *from*, in the sense of *with*, other (at

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<sup>6</sup> "Religion and Violence." *Speaking of Faith*. NPR: WBEZ, Chicago, 04 Aug 2005. Radio. 1 Jun 2011. <[http://download.publicradio.org/podcast/speakingoffaith/20050804\\_volf.mp3?\\_kip\\_ipx=55193333-1306938311](http://download.publicradio.org/podcast/speakingoffaith/20050804_volf.mp3?_kip_ipx=55193333-1306938311)>.



least possible) positions. In other words, every position is also a disposition.<sup>7</sup>

Thus every opinion, every understanding is shaped by, with, and over-and-against some other understanding. The interviewees who share their memories below are reacting to another story we just spoke about, or a perceived position of an audience – including me. No raconteur simply tells tales, but rather each raconteur is making a point and has an agenda in telling the tales.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the collected folklore is a powerful tool for taking a position on the communities discussed, and for the authors reflecting on themselves.<sup>9</sup> It is my understanding, though certainly not wishing to speak for the Amazigh raconteurs, that they are using the stories of the Jewish community to recall a time when their society felt more diverse and open. The Israeli raconteurs seem to be doing the opposite, and with their memories, recalling a rift in community relations that was psychologically preparing them for the hostilities they would face when they left Morocco. In either case, memory is a useful device for shaping one's understanding of the present. In the case of some Amazigh memory, it is certainly preferable to the present disharmony:

An inverse relationship exists between the growing interest in retrieving from the usable past the cultural synthesis and harmony between Muslims and Jews and the near-disappearance of Jews in Morocco. The romantic view of Morocco as the true heir to the Andalusian “golden age” of

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<sup>7</sup> Nancy, 12.

<sup>8</sup> Webber, Sabra Jean. *Romancing the Real: Folklore and Ethnographic Representation in North Africa*. Philadelphia: Univ of Pennsylvania Pr, 1991. p 17.

<sup>9</sup> Webber, 16.

Muslim-Jewish harmony also contrasts with the contemporary disharmony and fragmentation caused by the mass emigration of Moroccan Jewry, the result of a complex process of political change in the twentieth century. In Moroccan national discourse, Jews are a vital and integral component of the Moroccan nation, in contrast with their real absence and dwindling presence from the landscape of the country. More than mere window dressing, the fashioning of a Moroccan-style *convivencia* from the myth of a Judeo-Muslim cultural harmony, constituting a civil society of different faiths, is a preferable model to the Islamist current, with its anti-Semitism, that became increasingly dominant in the late twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

While a civil society of different faiths may be a myth in Schroeter's opinion. I bring evidence in this paper that there were times when the relationships worked. While it is true that most of those stories have a tragic ending, their entirety is not tragic, and often points to a sort of mini golden age, at least in the memory of some. This is worth further notice and exploration.

I wish to conclude this introductory section by pointing out once more that by consciously telling me these histories so that I could record them and share them with you who are reading, my raconteurs are taking a stand for their versions of the past, and what they meant to those telling the tales, and what they wanted the stories to mean to me. Indeed, "folklore of any sort... requires skill and effort to compose, learn, remember,

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<sup>10</sup> Schroeter, Daniel, J. "The Shifting Boundaries of Moroccan-Jewish Identities." *Jewish Social Studies, New Series*. 15.1 (2008): 145-64. p 146.

and perform, and... consequently it would make little sense to expend such effort if the product were simply a verbal equivalent of the referent itself.”<sup>11</sup> I am not presenting my ideas of the past, but only my understandings of the raconteurs’ relationships with the past and with “the other” as they change over time. I do so with the full understanding that folklore and folk histories are a collaboration between artist and hearer and as such, my listening, probing and taking notes has indelibly shaped the memories that follow. But, interacting at all, I think, makes being singular-plural not only inevitable, but necessary:

*Being singular plural* means the essence of Being is only as coessence. In turn, coessence, or *being-with* (being-with many), designates the essence of the *co-*, or even more so, the *co-* (the cum) itself in the position or guise of an essence. In fact, coessentiality cannot consist in an assemblage of essences, where the essence of this assemblage as such remains to be determined. In relation to such an assemblage, the assembled essences would become [mere] accidents. Coessentiality signifies the essential sharing of essentiality, sharing in the guise of assembling, as it were. This could also be put in the following way: if Being is being-with, then it is, in its being-with, the “with” that constitutes Being; the with is not simply an addition. ... Therefore, it is not the case

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<sup>11</sup> Renwick, Roger. *English Folk Poetry: Structure and Meaning*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1980. p 13.

that the “with” is an addition to some prior Being; instead, the “with” is at the heart of Being.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Nancy, 19.

### Chapter 3: Sources of Ancient Oral History in Morocco

When one considers the interdependence of being, it is important not simply to begin with contemporary events, but rather to understand how the present-day relationships came to be. There is a long oral history of Jews in North Africa, and especially of their relations with Berber and Sub-Saharan Africans in addition to Arabs of North Africa. I intend to review a number of historical accounts, with an especially close eye toward written forms of folklore and legend from outside observers of the Jewish community and Jewish sources of history. These stories of traveling, trading and a Jewish kingdom in the midst of Muslims will be directly reflected in the tales of my interviewees and are therefore important for consideration. The long history of Jews in North Africa which is testified to by recorded oral history will be shown to figure prominently in the folklore of North African societies before the modern period.

#### *Non-Jewish Sources of Jewish Presence*

We know of no Arabic language source discussing the Jewish inhabitants of North Africa before the tenth century, and that absence seems odd in light of the considerable ink spilled over the pre-Islamic Jewish presence in southern and central Arabia as well as the issue of the Khazar kingdom. However, from the eleventh century

on, a profusion of writers weighed in on the issue of Jewish kingdoms in North Africa.<sup>13</sup> Al-Idrisi, who wrote in the twelfth century after the consolidation of the Almoravids, made notes on two Jewish communities which had apparently lived in North Africa for centuries before they were expelled to the regions he writes about them inhabiting. First, Al-Idrisi described the community in a country called Lamlam which was situated presumably around modern Ghana:

South of Barisa is the country of Lamlam; and [the distance] between them is approximately ten days. The people of Barisa, Silla, Takrur and Ghana would raid the country of Lamlam, capture its inhabitants, lead them to their country and sell them to traders who came to them. These traders would take them away to the other regions. In the whole country of Lamlam, there are only two towns; small as villages. The name of one is Mallal, and the name of the other is Daw; [the distance] between these two small towns is four days. Their inhabitants – as the people of that district point out – are Jews, among whom there is much ignorance and unbelief. All the people of the country of Lamlam, when reaching maturity, burn tattoo marks on their faces and temples, and these serve as signs to them. Their country and places of residence are on a wadi which

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<sup>13</sup> Hirshberg, H. Z., *The Problem of Judaized Berbers* “The Journal of African History” Vol 4, No 3 (1963), p 313-14.

extends as far as the Nile. Nothing is known of settlements south of the country of Lamlam.<sup>14</sup>

Al Idrisi also points out that another country in what is now Mauritania was also described in much the same way:

However, as regards the country of Qamnuriya which we have mentioned, there were in it well-known towns and famous cities of negroes. But the Banu Zaghawa and Banu Lamtuna of the desert, who live on both sides of that country made invasions into it, that is to say, into the country of Qamnuriya, until they had destroyed most of its inhabitants, exterminated them and dispersed their ranks throughout the country. As traders report, the people of Qamnuriya allege that they are Jews. Their beliefs are confused; they have no settled, agreed beliefs. They have no king and no kingship over them. They are persecuted by all the communities neighboring upon them and countries adjacent to them. In bygone days, the people of Qamnuriya had two inhabited towns; the name of the one was Qamnuri and the name of the other Nighira. These towns contained tribesmen of the Qamnuriya and many others. They had head men and elders, who directed their affairs and judged them in criminal matters and litigations.

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<sup>14</sup> Dozy, R. and M. J. de Goeje, *Description de l'Afrique et de l'Espagne par Edrisi* Brill. (1866) , p 4 (as quoted in Hirshberg). but see also Ibn Khaldun "Al Muqaddima," *Kitab al'Ibar* (Bulaq 1284) as quoted in Hirshberg, in which he does not name the community as Jewish.

These were in time destroyed, and disputes and raids from all sides increased, until they were subjugated in their country, and fled from it. They sought refuge in the mountains and dispersed in the desert, accepting the patronage of their neighbours – scattered in the desert and near the coast. They subsist on milk and fish and are wretched because of the difficulty of making a living and the distressful conditions. Up till now, they roam those countries with the agreement of their neighbours and spend their days in peace.

Between the country of Qamnuriya, Silla and Takrur there are roads there are roads the marks of which are not known, and the users of the paths are few.<sup>15</sup>

From where do these stories emanate? Al-Bakri, who wrote about the same cities over a century before Idrisi, did not make any note about them having Jewish residents. Ibn Khaldun, writing over two centuries after Idrisi, used Idrisi as a reference, but left out any mention of the Jewish residents.<sup>16</sup> Where, then do the notions of the places described above by Idrisi as having Jewish residents come from? It seems that Idrisi was writing during a period which saw many Jewish merchants moving out of Morocco, especially southern Morocco, and taking their families to live farther south or east among Black Africans who were seen as non-threatening, rather than Berbers or Arabs who were

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<sup>15</sup> Dozy and de Goeje, 29-30.

<sup>16</sup> Hirshberg. 315.



participating in the Almohad and then Almoravid movements.<sup>17</sup> As many Jewish travelers made the trip from southern Morocco, and especially from the Ziz, Dara and Sus valleys in the shadow of the Atlas Mountains, Leo Africanus noted that Jewish travelers were taxed by certain armed encampments on their way to Sudan.<sup>18</sup> Hirshberg hypothesizes that it could be through these Jewish families who escaped persecution in and around Morocco and sought places of refuge in the desert and in mountains that certain customs spread to communities already living in the areas. These communities, possibly known as Lamlam and Qamnuriya would then be persecuted for their lack of adherence to strict Almohad or Almoravid versions of Islam due to their practices of some Jewish rituals.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the notion that Jewish belief and practices or even Judaism itself might be picked up by non-Jewish North Africans finds support in several places. One example is Ibn Khaldun's story of Kahina:

It is also possible that some of these Berbers adhered to the Jewish religion, which they had adopted from the Children of Israel at the time of the expansion of their kingdom to the vicinity of Syria and their rule over it. This may have been the case with the Jarawa, the people of the Aures Mountains, the tribe of the Kahina, who was killed by the Arabs at

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<sup>17</sup> al-Barceloni, Jehuda. *Sepher Ha-Ittim* (Hebrew) (1903), p46, and Barges, J. J. L.. "Memoire sur les relations commerciales de Tlemcen avec le Soudan", *Revue de l'Orient de l'Algerie et des Colonies*, June 1853, pp. 5-7, and Terrasse, Henri. *Histoire du Maroc*, I (Casablanca: Editions Atlantides 1949-1950) 1949, 212ff. Peers, H. "Rélations entre le Tafilalet et le Soudan à travers le Sahara, du XIIe au XIVe siecle", in Gautier, E. F., *Mélange de géographie et d'orientalisme offerts à E.F. Gauthier*. Paris. (1937), 409-15.

<sup>18</sup> Hirshberg, 329.

<sup>19</sup> Hirshberg 321-322.

the beginning of the conquest. This may have also been the case with the Nafusa, of the Berbers of Africa, and with the Fandalawa, the Madyuna, the Bahlula, the Ghayata and the Banu Fazaz, until Idris the Great, who shone in the Maghrib, of the Banu Hasan Ibn Hasan wiped out the remnants of religions and communities that were in his region.<sup>20</sup>

Sometimes known as Dahya or Kahina, the Queen of the Aures Mountains and according to Ibn Khaldun, her Jarawa tribe became a powerful leader in North Africa and was able to repulse the Muslim armies coming across North Africa for a time. Ibn Khaldun further points out that Kahina had two or three natural sons, according to various legends, and she also suckled a prisoner of war to make him another son. Her reign extended from Tripolitania to the Atlantic and was only conquered after 27 years of holding out. Several legends tell of her subjects and even her own natural sons joining the enemy because of how ruthless she was.<sup>21</sup> While there were no mentions in Ibn Khaldun's recount of the story of Kahina about what her observances may have been, whether she attended synagogue, celebrated holidays or kept the Sabbath, that she may have been Jewish is the first thing noted about her, and only afterward is her famous resistance against the Muslim wave rolling across North Africa noted.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibn Khaldun, *Histoire des Berbères et des dynasties musulmanes de l'Afrique septentrionale*, Baron de Shane trans. Algiers. 1852., 208-9. As quoted in Zafarni, Haim *Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco* (Hoboken: Ktav) 2002. (Ibn Khaldun's statement that the Berber kingdom extended to Syria comes from his belief that Berbers are descendants of Canaan (Gen. 9 and 10) cited below.

<sup>21</sup> Or in other versions, Kahina told them to convert to save their lives.

### *Notions of a North African Jewish Kingdom*

What arguably provides the best notion of the perceived or imagined strength of numbers and longevity of the Jewish community in Morocco and North Africa are tales of the fabulously rich, powerful and numerous residents of a Jewish Kingdom just beyond the borders of what was known. During my time collecting folktales of Jews from the Muslim residents of Morocco, they would often mention that long ago there had been a Jewish kingdom not far south of Morocco. Different stories existed to explain why it had not been found. Some said everyone converted to Islam but retained legendary poetic skills citing the residents of Mauritania to the south, who are quite envied for their talent with verse. Others said they sailed back to the Holy Land, or Istanbul. For our purposes, noting that the notion existed and continues to exist that a large Jewish kingdom was located somewhere in North Africa, is enough to warrant exploration of early versions and possible sources of this legend.

One of the most notable of recent historians traveling to Morocco and finding folk tales of a giant Jewish kingdom was a doctor named John Davidson who set out to make geographic notes on the route from Tangier to Timbuctu in the 1830s. Along part of his journey, he met a Rabbi from central Morocco, who told Davidson about the Jews of the region. There were between three and four thousand Jews present in his town, and they were absolutely free. They worked in handicrafts and business and had quarries, mines, orchards and vineyards. Most importantly, the rabbi assured Davidson that the Jews in the area controlled the government of their town and had had their own kingdom since

the time of King Solomon.<sup>22</sup> To substantiate this claim, the rabbi pointed out that his community had the seal of the Biblical figure Joab, who apparently visited the area to collect taxes during the time of Solomon. The rabbi also mentioned two tombstones in Ifrane which pre-date the Common Era and were said to belong to members of the tribe of Ephraim who settled there before the destruction of the *First Temple*!<sup>23</sup> The seriousness with which Davidson took this story can be deduced from his further writings on reaching the High Atlas Mountains. He pointed out that he came to more than a hundred Jewish towns, including Taourit, Ait Attab, Tisgin, Tidilli and Amizmiz - where he found more Jews who lived among Imazighen than in the Arab cities he identified with Morocco.<sup>24</sup> Davidson's claims of an independent Jewish kingdom stretching from the time of the early Israelite monarchy are buttressed by the writings of Moses Edrehi. After he moved to London from Morocco, he wrote of a city named Agadir, which had 12,000 residents in the late eighteenth century, most of them Jews. The Agadir he wrote of was not the one most would be familiar with, on the West coast of Morocco, but one in close proximity to Ifrane, where the ancient tombstones were found.<sup>25</sup>

A festival which I observed being celebrated in Fes shed light on an alternative version of the history of Jewish kingship in Morocco. The festival celebrates the climax of a Moroccan retelling of a popular Arab folktale about a Jewish king who gains control over Muslim subjects and then demands a virgin to be provided to him periodically.

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<sup>22</sup> Davidson, John. *Notes Taken during Travels in Africa* (London: Cox and Sons) 1839. , 192-3.

<sup>23</sup> See also Monteil, Vincent. *Hesperis*, xxxv, 1948., 151-62; and Hirschberg, Haim Zeev *Inside Maghreb: The Jews of North Africa*. (Jerusalem: Youth and Hehaluz Department of the Jewish Agency) 1957. (Hebrew) . p168-70

<sup>24</sup> Hirshberg. *Problem...* 334.

<sup>25</sup> Edrehi, Moses. *An Historical Account of the Ten Tribes* (London, 1836 (2nd ed. Philadelphia 1853), p128-9

According to The Encyclopedia of Islam, the first version of this story had two Arab tribes in the region of Medina subject to a Jewish king who was, in turn a viceroy for the Persians in the early seventh century. This Jewish king was named Fityuan, and demanded the right of *primae noctis* among his Arab subjects. He was overthrown and killed by Malik bin al-Adjlan to save his sister from the rapacious king.<sup>26</sup> In much the same way, the folktale I heard in Fes on *Eid al-Tulab* centered on Ibn Mash'al, who was a rich Jew from Taza. He became king by tricking local Muslim leaders and levied incredibly high taxes as well as many virgins for his harem. He was overthrown and killed by Al-Rashid, who started the Alawite Dynasty in Morocco in 1666 which is still in power today. On the day of the festival which is called *Eid al-Tulab* (the feast of students), children receive pens and paper for the school year so that they can study well in order to not be taken advantage of.

A more positive, and certainly more famous folktale, is that which was sparked by David Reubeni's visit to Europe. Reubeni is sufficiently well known that I will not write much about him other than to say he appeared to the Pope and several monarchs around Europe and promised that with financial support from European Christians, he would bring the armies of his brother Joseph, who was king of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, to bear against Muslim powers which threatened Christian interests.<sup>27</sup> Pope Clement VIII wrote a letter of recommendation for him to several

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<sup>26</sup> Arnold, Sir Thomas et al. *E.J Brill's First Encyclopedia of Islam 1913-1936*, Vol 2. (New York: Brill) 1987 p 84.

<sup>27</sup> For a much fuller treatment, see: Aescoly, Aaron Zeev. *The Story of David Hareuveni* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1993) [Hebrew]

monarchs.<sup>28</sup> It was during one of his interviews with European monarchs, from whom he hoped to collect gold and weapons, that he received a letter from a king in Morocco. The king pointed out that in his country Jews lived on the great mountain and they were poor, but strong. And some of these Jews were apparently members of a marauding kingdom of considerable might that the king wrote to Reubeni about:

Behold, I have heard of thee that thou hast come to the King of Portugal from the tribes. Hast thou knowledge of the people that have gone out into the desert which is between me and the black ones? For they have taken captive all the Arabs that dwell in the desert, them and their wives and their cattle and their children and everything that is theirs. And not one of them hath returned of those that they took, and we know not whether they have killed them or what they have done to them... And there came before me one of them, a member of the priestly class, whose heart is like a lion's – he is not one of the Jews under the Ismaelite rule... And a fugitive from among them who fled unto me hath told me this. And I sent Jews that they might go and see, and they have not returned. And we are amazed at that people, and I have written to thee all this.<sup>29</sup>

The letter was in essence a plea for Reubeni to intervene with a strong Jewish tribe on behalf of the king, because Reubeni represented several strong Jewish tribes himself.

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<sup>28</sup> Hirshberg. *Problem*.... 330.

<sup>29</sup> Neubauer, Ad. "Diary of David Reubeni" in *Medieval Jewish Chronicles*, Vol 2, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), p133

Reubeni points out that his influence lies in the east, and therefore he had little influence with the king's problem.

The story of several of the lost ten tribes appearing in Israel did not stop with Reubeni, but rather proliferated on account of him. At the time that Reubeni was still looking for economic backing in Portugal, Yahuda ben Zamirro wrote a letter from the Portuguese palace to his mother and brothers in Morocco, saying:

A caravan recently arrived in this town from Skura had transmitted a report from Marrakesh of the arrival there of two horsemen – messengers of Muhammad ben Ahmad, the Sherif's caid in the Saharan region of Ghurara, to the Sherif – who, having lost their way on their journey across the desert, had come upon a large tribe of proud, warlike and fabulously wealthy Jews. These Jews had no contact with the Muslim world. Their sultan, who lived in a silk tent marked with a red flag, was told by the messengers of the downtrodden condition of the Jews in Arab lands, with the tribesmen present bursting into tears at this sad story. The messengers spent the night in the Jewish camp. The next day, their hosts would not let them depart until they had given them an example of their military prowess by encircling and capturing a town. They then dismissed them, providing them with a supply of two loaves of bread, which miraculously proved more than sufficient to sustain them all the way to Marrakesh. They also gave them a message to the Sherif, which the latter concealed

after having it translated from Hebrew into Arabic by Ben-Qabisa, a learned Jew of his city.

The desert Jews told their guests, among other things, that their water supply came from a hundred wells that moved and stopped with them on their wanderings.<sup>30</sup>

Zamirro wrote to his family in Morocco to let them know that messages had come in with, in this case, third-hand stories of a powerful Jewish tribe out in the desert which did not have much contact with the outside world, and were quite sad to hear about the conditions of their coreligionists who were not as militarily successful as them. From there, the legend spread back into North Africa, and from that time until when I was interviewing Moroccans, several people swore earnestly that there is a Jewish kingdom somewhere in the desert.

Whether it be from Muslim sources or Jewish folklore, the presence of Jews in North Africa and Morocco in particular is well-attested in many sources and certainly their relations with their surrounding communities are varied. Jewish participation in trading caravans and the Muslim imaginations of powerful Jewish states will figure prominently in the personal experience narratives of chapters 6 – 11. With this in mind, I will now describe the human sources of the oral histories that I collected with an eye toward understanding how interactions at the personal level still help shape memories decades after the events described occurred.

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<sup>30</sup> Colin, Georges, *Melanges d'etudes luso-marocaines, dedies a la memoire de David Lopes et Pierre de Cenival* (Lisbon) 1945. p 62-6.



## Chapter 4: Interviewees

Moha Bouker<sup>31</sup> was born in 1933. He is the oldest of five sons, only one of whom, besides himself, survives. Born in the village of Tachiouite, (see page 39) he is of the Ait Atta tribe. As the first born son, he stayed at home to help on the family farm until his father died. He then joined the Moroccan army and served for several years in the Sahara, including in the famous Battle of Al-Oued Al-Dhab. After 17 years of active duty, he was transferred back to the Khenifra Province to guard official government buildings and supervise other guards. He retired in 1987 and opened a small dry goods store which he continues to operate to this day.

Moha Bouker is the patriarch of a somewhat non-traditional family by Moroccan standards. He and his wife Yasmina were unable to have children, but one of his brothers had a daughter, Amina, and then gave her to Moha to take care of. Amina was married briefly, had a son, Badr, and then was divorced so she moved back into the home of Moha. The elevated home is literally and financially supported by Moha's first-floor store as well as by a *teleboutique* (privately owned pay-phones and cell phone recharge card venders) which is run jointly by Amina and Yasmina. Badr does not work, though he was

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<sup>31</sup> All names of the principal interviewees and their families have been changed.

18-20 during the time of my stay with the family, a fact that bothered Moha no small amount.

Every morning while I stayed with them, and continuing long after I moved only a block away, I would have breakfast with Moha in his store, which was little bigger than a large closet. For the first few months he talked at, rather than to me, because his blend of Tamazight and Moroccan Arabic was very difficult to understand. Gradually, his stories, which were often repeated, would make sense and I was able to ask that he clarify certain points which were unclear, or perhaps a little unbelievable.

For two to three hours, every day of the week, Moha would sit in his giant wooden chair, which grew smaller and smaller over the years as he whittled at it with his knife, and I would sit on a stack of egg crates which were lashed together to form a surprisingly comfortable ottoman, and he would tell me army stories. We would also have competitions for who could remember the most stories from the Qur'an and/or Bible, and he would tell about who in his family was bothering him the night before. Moha would often ask about what chronological order the prophets in the Qur'an lived in. I would tell him what I remembered of a Biblical ordering. He said that I reminded him of his friend 'Azar. It was during these talks that the subject of the former Jewish residents of Midelt surfaced.

Only after a year of working in and around Midelt did I meet Hayat Ait OuAli. She was the day-to-day manager of the largest carpet shop in Midelt. I had come to think of her as the enemy, who bought carpets at much too low a price from the women I was trying to organize into members of a cooperative. Assessing Hayat as taking advantage of

the women of the region was one of many mistakes I made during my first year. One day as I was walking out to the fields to go to Ait Gharit – a nearby village where several of the women lived and the site of a Jewish Cemetery guarded by Hamou (see page 71) – Hayat appeared in front of me and asked why we did not work together because we were both trying to help the local women. From the next day on, I spent three to five hours daily in Hayat's shop listening to her stories, aspirations for herself and for her family, and tales of her family. She told me most of her father, Moha.

Moha Ait OuAli was born around 1952 but the actual date is uncertain. He was from a large family (his father had 3 wives) and was one of the youngest children. He was born in the village of Ait Ayach and is of the Ait Ayach tribe. He worked with his father at a carpet shop and helped at the apple orchards and farm. As he grew up, and especially after the death of his father, Moha took control of the carpet shop, the orchards and the farm. He now has his children manage the carpet shops while he lives in a small earthen hut on the edge of the apple orchard.

Moha Ait OuAli and I met on several occasions in Hayat's carpet shop, and I went to live with him for a time in his hut in Ait Ayach. He told me stories almost exclusively about his and his father's businesses, and the Jews with whom they worked and shared life. These came from no prompting of mine at all, but were the same stories he told his friends on the occasion that he would sit with them in Hayat's shop.

Both of these men (Moha B and Moha A for simplicity) had their family's history closely intertwined with that of a Jewish family and described that history to me over almost 2 years of interviews and conversations. However, these men only provide half

the story. In order to describe the relationships of Jews with the larger community, I needed to seek out members of the Jewish community I was studying.

When I traveled to Israel in 2010-2011, I was told by several sources that I needed to speak with Rafi El-Baz. He was born in 1929, in Sefrou, which is approximately 100 miles north of Midelt. The city of Sefrou was known for its Jewish community, and was called “little Jerusalem” by many of the residents, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Rafi is the oldest of three brothers, all of whom spent most of their young lives in Morocco and then left for Israel at some point in their teen years. Rafi was the first of his generation to leave for Israel, but he also spent the longest time living in Morocco before he left. He described his life in Morocco before he left and his connections to Midelt over cups of mint tea in his home in Israel.<sup>32</sup> During this time, when we were not looking at pictures of his numerous Rotary talks or visiting the synagogue he built and dedicated to the legacy of his grandfather, he told me about his family’s interactions with Imizighen from Midelt. Rafi has been incredibly kind to me, ending one of our first interviews by giving me an inscribed copy of one of his brother’s collections of Moroccan poetry and an apple, “to make my journey to wherever I was going next easier.”

Rafi suggested that I also speak with his brother and author of the book of poetry, Shmuel El-Baz. Immediately thereafter, I received numerous gifts in the mail from Shmuel, including his collected Kabbalistic works and a copy of his family’s Haggadah. Shmuel has been a dream to interview from our first conversation in which he spoke

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<sup>32</sup> Rafi and all my other Israeli interviewees preferred that I not use their last names or give details about their current homes.

Hebrew to me and I spoke Moroccan Arabic to him because my accent was so bad that he could not understand my Hebrew.

Because so much of these two brothers' lives have been lived outside of Morocco, it was difficult for them to focus on their youth when they lived in the High Atlas region. Many of their stories are precursors to other tales. And other seemingly unrelated stories have in them the repeated aside: "which reminds me of Morocco..." This is obviously a vastly different situation from the Mohas who have lived all their lives in Morocco surrounded by the physical traces of their stories and their lives there. Still, both sets of men had much to say about their relationships with "the other." But before personal histories are recounted, a brief note on oral history is needed and an area history must be discussed.

## Chapter 5: Oral History Overview

The Mohas each participated in several interviews over a period between 2005 and 2008, Moha B completed more than 500 interviews and Moha A completed over 100. All interviews in the Mohas' respective shops were followed by rigorous note taking, and my reconstruction of the conversation. Consequently their tales are presented as more thematic in nature, rather than being based on direct quoting. Rafi and Shmuel were interviewed in 2011, both over the course of several hours, and with much more targeted questions than the interviews with the Mohas who simply spoke about whatever came to their minds. I was able to record their conversations, as well as those of Hamou and Raqiya in the cemetery. The topics of all of the oral performances would vary in each of the interview, so the second step after collecting all the stories reproduced here was to sort the stories thematically, which also put them in a rough timeline, although the bits of oral history in each section are not necessarily a linear progression from the preceding section. Still, these stories represent men trying to reconstruct their pasts, and that of their families in a way that is meaningful to them, and they often used the same general themes that serve as section heads here.

It is important to note the importance, and indeed primacy, of oral history when reconstructing past interpersonal events. Although there are certainly very few sources of

writing on related cooperation in other regions of Morocco, even they take into account oral history, as Guy Beiner points out, "...[O]rality is an intrinsic, though often unacknowledged, feature of most historical sources, which generally describe events in the past that were witnessed, most likely discussed, and only then documented."<sup>33</sup> For this reason, I focus mainly on the interviews themselves, and the Mohas' recollections of events, rather than other studies of the area, though other historical works will by no means be absent.

Strictly speaking, this work is mostly a collection of oral history, as it will only attempt to trace the remembrances of the Mohas of their fathers' and their interaction with the large Jewish communities with whom they came into contact. It must be said though that, for information on how the towns came to be settled, and by whom (see next section) I have relied heavily on the accounts told to me by several local sources, all of which are in agreement as to the details except for whether the Izdeg or Merghad tribe settled the area first.

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<sup>33</sup> Beiner, Guy. (2007). *Remembering the Year of the French*. Univ of Wisconsin Pr. P 17.

## Chapter 6: Midelt-Area Oral Tradition

While the official history of Midelt is still being written, the residents of the city and surrounding villages have a very developed sense of the history of the area. At the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the village known as Midelt did not exist. Instead there were four main villages and several smaller ones surrounding the present-day site (see maps in appendix). To the west about 26 kilometers from modern day Midelt was Ait Ayach, which was a collection of smaller, clan-based *doars* (villages). The composition of the town was almost entirely *Imazighen* (Berbers) of the Ait Ayach tribe, with a few Jewish families. It was the largest of the villages and contained approximately 600 – 800 people. Located in the valley of a river which is a tributary of Oued Moulouya, the land around Ait Ayach was excellent for farming and several apple orchards abounded. This town, and Midelt by extension, is still known throughout Morocco for the apple harvests.

Another village called Tachiouite, was located about 7 kilometers northeast of where Midelt was established. At that time it was one of the “newer” villages in the area because it had been settled recently by a small group of people from the Ait Atta clan who customarily lived farther south on the other side of the High Atlas range. This village was watered by a much smaller offshoot of the same river that fed Ait Ayach.



Because of their relative lack of water, the denizens of Tachiouite chose terrace farming techniques rather than orchards. The composition of this town was also primarily *Imazighen*, but with some Arabs that came up from the Sahara with the Ait Atta tribe. There was also at least one Jewish family living in this village.

Sixteen kilometers due west and at the base of the High Atlas range was a tiny village called Tattiouine. Although it too was on the same river as Ait Ayach, and in fact much closer to the source, the early residents did not practice agriculture per se. They picked wild turnips and onions to provide the majority of their diet. Even today residents of this village are known for their bad breath. The villagers instead raised goats in the mountains and were semi-nomadic for the summer season. There would be times when the village was entirely uninhabited. People in this village do not claim a particular tribe, but say that a long time ago a family set out from Imichil and ended up in Tattiouine. The town is exclusively *Amazigh*.

Lastly, less than a kilometer west of the present day city of Midelt was a qsar called Othman OuMosa.<sup>34</sup> With high packed mud walls it dominated the area. This imposing qsar was situated along the same river discussed above and a channel was dug so that the water would flow into the qsar underground. There were approximately 150 - 200 people living in the qsar at the turn of the century, most of whom were, in fact, Jewish. This selection of a fortress as a village reflects the desires of both the outsiders and Jews themselves to segregate somewhat.<sup>35</sup> This village seems to have raised mostly corn and cereals in the surrounding flat fields. The village had a synagogue built into the

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<sup>34</sup> A Qsar/Aghrem is a fortified village with high mud-brick walls.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 149.

packed earth walls (which has since crumbled) and its own cemetery which remains and bears testament to several apparently wealthy members of the Pinto family living nearby.

These four villages lived in peace, for the most part, until the turn of the century. Depending who recounts the tradition, either the Izdeg tribe or the Merghad tribe came out of the mountains and invaded the area. Tachiouite was attacked first because of its small size and the fact that Tattiouine, which is much closer to the mountains and thus closer to the origins of the attacking tribes, was uninhabited at the time. The invading tribe took possession of Ait Ayach and set up camp outside Othman OuMosa, preferring not to destroy the ksar, but rather to trade and commingle. Things settled down for a while, but the original dwellers of the area were discontent with their new neighbors. Stories deviate as to which tribe attacked first, but either the Izdeg or Merghad tribe, whichever had not previously descended into the river valley arrived out of the mountains. Depending on who is telling the tale, the tribe that did not originally attack was prevailed upon by the locals to come and help the beleaguered villages with a promised reward of land usage. This reward would not have been terribly different from what the invading tribe had already taken. I believe it is for this reason that which tribe invaded first is not overly important in the minds of present day locals, who are primarily Merghadis or Ait Izdeg anyway. The Izdeg and Merghad tribes seem to have gone back and forth about who owned the land and who was invading and who was helping. There was little actual fighting, but much arguing.

At the highpoint of this low-intensity conflict around 1913, the French first came into the area. Europeans had long been involved in Morocco, but had stayed mostly in the

coastal areas. At the time of the establishment of the French Protectorate in the final days of 1912, the hinterland was economically, socially and culturally quite distant from the coastal and urban regions. However, soldiers soon streamed into the interior of the country. The French Protectorate soldiers formed a garrison on a hill in the middle of the four villages and named it Midelt after a local mesa where the area *souq* was held. The invading Europeans at first provided a common enemy and then later a pacifying force and eventually initiated a renewed time of mostly peace among the 4 villages. The French forcibly transferred several Jewish families out of Othman OuMosa and into a newly constructed neighborhood just down the hill from their garrison. These Jews were compelled to serve as clerks and other administrative positions for the garrison. Amazigh villagers moved to Midelt to cater to the needs of a French garrison and started constructing their own houses surrounding the soldiers' and the Jewish neighborhood. A miniature *mellah* was formed as the Jewish neighborhood was encircled.<sup>36</sup> Original residents of the villages and the Izdeg and Merghad tribes mingled and further built up Midelt when vast lead deposits were discovered nearby. In order to provide power for the French lead mining operation, in 1927 the French forces began construction on a hydroelectric dam just south of Tattiouine. The construction temporarily enraged the locals who had no water for their orchards or farms until the water filled the reservoir and was then allowed to return to its regular flow. Midelt was the second electrified city in Morocco after Casablanca. Midelt enjoyed much prosperity until the French left in 1956. Then the majority of the lead mines were closed and the town no longer had a stable

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<sup>36</sup> A *Mellah* is the Jewish quarter in North African cities.

income from the soldiers or from the mines and started to fracture. Most townspeople returned to agriculture, if not their ancestral villages. After 1967, Jews in large numbers started to leave Midelt. They mostly headed to Israel, with not insignificant numbers heading to France with many stopping for as long as a decade in Fes or Meknes.

The city has stayed a center of relative importance in the High Atlas region. According to gossip around town in 2009, plans were underway to give Midelt its own sub-*wilaya*, under Khenifa's supervision. In 2004, the hydroelectric dam burst, sending a massive flood into town and ruining several fields, orchards and homes. All my raconteurs were quick to reassure me that there was no loss of life. Midelt now has around forty thousand inhabitants and is a bustling little city on the road between the larger towns of Fes and Meknes in the north and Errachidia in the south.

Sefrou, the original home of several of the raconteurs, is roughly 100 miles north of Midelt and about 30 miles south of Fes. It is an ancient city which gets its name from Ahl-Sefrou, a tribe of Imazighen which converted to Judaism before the Arab invasion of North Africa.<sup>37</sup> The town, known as “Little Jerusalem” is built around a series of streams and miniature canals, the largest of which is called Oued Yhoodi, or simply the Jewish River. Sefrou was known as a Jewish village and a center for trade as far back as the eleventh century.<sup>38</sup> Sefrou has always been known as a sort of safe haven for Jews fleeing from persecutions in the surrounding areas. Especially when times were difficult in Fes, which hosts arguably the oldest Islamic university and has been known to be a focal point

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<sup>37</sup> Stillman, Norman. "The Sefrou Remnant." *Jewish Social Studies*. 35.3 (1973): 255-63. p 256.

<sup>38</sup> al-Bakri, Abi 'Ubayd, "al-Mughribfi Dhikr Bildd Ifriqiya wa 'l-Maghrib" *Description de l'Afrique Septentrionale*, ed. M. de Slane (Algiers 1857), p 147 – as cited in Stillman 1973, p 256.

for religious tension, nearby Sefrou represented a welcome refuge. Thus the relations between Muslims and Jews were almost always quite good due to the fact that as a somewhat peripheral town, it was not a scholastic or religious center in the Muslim tradition, and since Jews constituted such a large part of the population, the town was mostly quite tolerant.<sup>39</sup>

Most important to note about Sefrou is that it was a center for learning for Jewish scholars in Morocco, particularly Kabbalists. Three particularly wise rabbis, Rabbi ‘Amram Ben Diwan, Rabbi Raphael Moshe El-Baz (for whom one of my raconteurs was named) and Rabbi Moshe Ben El-Hammo are associated with the famous cave in the mountain outside of Sefrou, which is a pilgrimage destination and a very important site for veneration of *Marabouyat* (see page 49). The Jews of the area know the cave simply as al-kaf, dyal al zbil le-kbir<sup>40</sup> [the cave of the big mountain].

The history of Jews in the High Atlas area serves as a microcosm of changing roles in that society; while at the same time presenting some entirely and exclusively Jewish experiences.<sup>41</sup> As will be shown, while for the most part positive, the interactions between Jews and Muslims in Midelt were neither that of a Golden Age of tolerance, nor

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<sup>39</sup> Stillman. 1973. p 257.

<sup>40</sup> Please see “The Move to Trading” below for a note of Judeo-Arabic pronunciation.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Lewis asserts that in Morocco the “...position of Jews was substantially worse than in the Ottoman lands. The Jewish community in Morocco was old, deep-rooted and numerous... but the Jews of Morocco, as compared with their coreligionists under the Ottomans, suffered from two major disadvantages... Almohad persecution... [and] their position as the only religious minority in an otherwise entirely Muslim land.” Lewis, Bernard. *The Jews of Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 148. While I certainly do not wish to contradict Lewis without substantial evidence to support my position, I would submit that there were special circumstances surrounding the Midelt region that served to blunt the disadvantages he addresses. In such a remote location the urban movements of persecution were often only heard about much later and not echoed locally. Additionally, according to the interviewees, Jews were not seen so much as a different religious group at the time (although that perception certainly did exist) but rather they were seen as a different tribe living in a land of many different tribes. That nature of tribal conflict in the area allowed the Jews of Othman OuMosa especially to achieve parity with other area tribes.

that of permanent indemnity.<sup>42</sup> Instead a few Jewish and Muslim men simply found ways to coexist peacefully for a time until larger, destructive, global forces eventually found their ways into the town and the once deeply interconnected lives of the residents of Midelt.

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<sup>42</sup> Mark Cohen, "Islam and the Jews: Myth, Counter-Myth, History," *Jews among Muslims: Communities in the Precolonial Middle East*, ed Shlomo Deshen and Walter P. Zenner (New York: New York University Press, 1996)

## Chapter 7: Twentieth Century Moroccan Context

Although the focus of the work is folk history, the histories and experiences of the raconteurs happened in a specific time and place and it is imperative to consider the relations between the micro and macro histories. Immediately after World War II, the number of Jews in Morocco seems to have increased. A 1943 survey of Jews within French Morocco comes details the presence of only 194,554 people, which is much lower than the post-war number of around 240,000 in 1952.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Midelt saw its Jewish community rise from 832 in 1936 to 1,700 in 1951.<sup>44</sup> Many Jews were leaving at this time to go to Israel, however. A major cause was the massacre in Oujda and Djérada of 7 June, 1948 in which 47 Jews were killed.<sup>45</sup> The violence and fear felt by Moroccan Jews was surely a motivating factor for the huge rise in emigration in 1954-56 as Moroccan independence of France loomed. Official French statistics on the number of Jews leaving Morocco for Israel put the numbers at 9,077 in 1954; 26, 554 in 1955; and 12,880 for the first four month of 1956.<sup>46</sup> In his fascinating work, Aomar Boum points out that at least a few of his Muslim interviewees in the first decade of the twentieth century believed that

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<sup>43</sup> Laskier, Michael. *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria*, (New York: New York University Press, 1994). P 67. And Laskier, Michael, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish communities of Morocco 1862 – 1962*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1983) p. 321.

<sup>44</sup> Laskier, 1994. p 90.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid* 84.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid* 126.

in addition to Zionist prodding and a historical connection to *Eretz Yisrael*, many Jews left because of the failure of the authorities to incorporate them into the nascent state:

Aomar: Why do you think the Jews of Akka left southern Morocco for Israel?

Ibrahim: They left for many reasons, economic, political, personal, and religious. But many left because we failed as nationalists to incorporate them even though we claim the contrary. It is true that struggles over power between the king and other political leaders had probably forced the government to strike a deal which facilitated Moroccan Jewish migration in return for economic and military incentives.

Aomar: So do you blame nationalist forces for this departure?

Ibrahim: No! I do not blame anybody! I just think that we, as a nation, lost a very dynamic social group, which could have contributed to our young nation state.

Aomar: But as a Moroccan, I was definitely accustomed to hearing that Jews left because the opportunity of return has been presented to them.

Ibrahim: That is not always true. I as a soldier in the Southern Army of Liberation worked with many Jews from the south. They never thought about leaving for Israel despite the fact that they viewed the land of Palestine as a sacred place, which they have dreamt of visiting.

Many of them saw Morocco as their country. When we were fighting the French around Akka, they provided their trucks, which they themselves



drove to the battlefield. They made sandals, trousers and even shaved the heads of soldiers! Did we acknowledge that after Independence? No! I had to fight to get them recognised from the Ministry in charge of the affairs of ancient resistance fighters for their contribution. We did a poor job in enlisting them in post-Independence national building. The Zionist succeeded where we failed.<sup>47</sup>

Feelings of unfairness and sympathy by Muslim compatriots notwithstanding, Jews had left Morocco in great numbers. By 1971 there were only 35,000 Jews left in Morocco and the number continues to dwindle.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Boum, Aomar, "From 'Little Jerusalems' to the Promised Land: Zionism, Moroccan Nationalism, and Rural Jewish Emigration," *Journal of North African Studies*, Vol 15, No 1, 2010. p 56-7.

<sup>48</sup> Lakier 1994. p 249.

## Chapter 8: Jews as Farmers in the High Atlas Region

Although not often mentioned, Jews in Morocco have been known to be farmers on either their own land, or working the land of others. Haim Zafrani quotes H. Hirschberg as saying, “the Jews of the Maghreb farm small rural properties by the sweat of their brow... earning their living by working the land and raising cattle... pursuing agricultural occupations...”<sup>49</sup> This was certainly the case for ‘Azar and his wife Yehuda who worked for Moha B’s father, Hamou. ‘Azar lived in Othman OuMosa, but would walk the 7 kilometers daily to work on Hamou’s farm in Tachiouite. Before Hamou had any children, ‘Azar had great responsibility on the farm. In addition to his duties helping plow, sowing seed and harvesting, ‘Azar was in charge of all the livestock, which included several chickens, ducks and two mules. Once Moha and the his brothers became old enough to aid in the farm work, there was continually less and less for ‘Azar to do, but Hamou continued to pay him because ‘Azar was related to a *marabou* (a venerated person who was believed to have superhuman powers and the ability to bless objects and people). Moha B swears to this day that unless ‘Azar held each duck and chicken as it laid eggs, the eggs would be few, small and low in quality. For this service, ‘Azar was paid in flour which he took home to Othman OuMosa to be sold and shared. In

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<sup>49</sup> Haim Zafrani, *Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life in Morocco* (New York: Sephardic House, 2005) 155.

interviews, Moha B would always try to impress this point especially: that ‘Azar shared with everyone in town, quite liberally. However, ‘Azar’s generosity did not prevent him from having grain left over to sell and trade. As will be discussed below, the sale of extra grain, first his own, and then selling the grain of others proved to be both his personal downfall and his family’s path to mild prosperity.

Moha A’s story is a bit different. His father, Mubarak, instead of employing a Jewish man was employed by a Jewish man. Shlomo was a comparatively wealthy land owner who employed at least 4 men in the village of Ait Ayach to work on his orchard and farm. Mubarak was the foreman of sorts and was favored above the other farm hands because of his honesty. Moha A tells the story that the river flooded just as potatoes were being harvested. Shlomo’s land was divided into six parcels, one each for his three other hired hands, one for Mubarak and two for Shlomo to tend. The river flooded all six parcels while Shlomo was away at Beni Oaraïn (see page 56). After the flood receded the three men and Mubarak headed for Shlomo’s field to see if there were any potatoes to be salvaged. After digging up all the potatoes, the three other men took the few unspoiled potatoes to their houses and left the spoiled tubers in the field while Mubarak brought the good potatoes to Shlomo’s house and left the bad potatoes in the field. Upon his return, Shlomo was told of the flood and that he had lost his entire potato crop. When he got to his home, he saw the potatoes Mubarak had brought him from his plot and Shlomo’s. Instead of castigating the other workers for their theft (which was truly small potatoes), Shlomo instead told Mubarak to take the vegetables he had brought him to his own

family. That one incident ingratiated Mubarak to Shlomo and led to further contact between the pair's families.

During my first interview with him in his house in Israel, when I first asked Rafi what he knew about Midelt, he instantly exclaimed, "Hee bled zwin, Hee bled tfah, nahon?" (It's pretty land, land of the apple, right?) in what I quickly understood to be his own particular brand of Judeo-Arabic with the occasional modern Hebrew word appearing. Rafi said that he remembered his grandfather, Moshe, traveling to Midelt in order to buy the apples for which that area was famous. Also, Moshe would visit his "cousin" – though Rafi could not tell me how they were actually related – Haim Pinto, who was a powerful Rabbi in the area and who would be sought after to pray for fields of both Jews and Muslims. Haim Pinto's grave is still a site of pilgrimage, and one of my more interesting interviews took place there (see page 71).

### *Shared Religious Services*

During the course of the two years I spent conducting the interviews in Midelt with the two Mohas, I had the opportunity to observe several holidays with them. When I told the two men I was going to observe Passover and described it to them, they immediately recognized it as "*Eid Djaj oo Khobz Rqiq*" (the Festival of Chicken and Thin Bread). Mubarak, and then later Moha A, had been invited to Shlomo's house every year for a Passover Seder. Moha B had even received matzah from 'Azar's wife, Yehuda a number of times. 'Azar always brought it over late at night and told him to eat it before the morning. Both Mohas recalled that a chicken would be slaughtered by most Jewish

families they knew, and only the richest households (which did not include ‘Azar’s or Shlomo’s) would use a ram or sheep. As a child Moha A participated in the Seder many times. He recalled as a child eating *marror* (bitter herbs) and also marveling at the, “thin bread with the holes in it.” Once, he was even selected to ask why this night was different from all the others. Being selected to play the role of one of the Jewish children had a lasting impression on Moha because of the degree of inclusion he felt. The degree of interpenetration of families was truly incredible but not unusual.<sup>50</sup>

One cannot talk about the history of Jewish and Muslim cross-pollination in Morocco without touching on the affinity of those living in the High Atlas Mountains for *mehya*, an incredibly strong alcoholic beverage made from figs. Any Muslims who I encountered drinking it would be very quick to tell me that they had seen the Jews do it for years in their prayers, and it always went well with them. Indeed, Stillman notes that on Fridays and Saturdays, the *Kiddush* is often said over *mehya* rather than wine, in accordance with the *Shulhan ‘Arukh*’s allowance of drinks other than wine.<sup>51</sup> Thus, the Muslims who violated their own religious prohibition of alcohol practiced their being singular plural with their former Jewish neighbors, who were not only allowed to drink, but considered it to be part of a holy ritual. Obviously several of the Imazighen whom I met with an affinity for *mehya* simply enjoyed drinking. But there were a few who insisted that they were participating in some sort of Jewish spiritual experience that lived in their memories, even though it is very difficult to imagine the implications and official

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<sup>50</sup> Shokeid, Moshe. “Jewish Existence in a Berber Environment,” *Jews among Muslims: Communities in the Precolonial Middle East*, ed Shlomo Deshen and Walter P. Zenner (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 113.

<sup>51</sup> Stillman. 1973. 260.

consequences if someone decided to raise a protest over Jews giving alcohol to Muslims. Happily, no one I spoke to remembered any incidents, but several had memories of nights spent drinking the potent fig spirit together with members of “the other.” In order to defend their character, I must add that neither Moha ever told me a story about them personally drinking mehya, and that those stories came from other sources in and around Midelt.

In Israel, Rafi took me to the synagogue that he had sponsored construction of in memory of his grandparents, and especially his maternal grandfather, Abba ElBaz, the Chief Rabbi of Sefrou. His first action upon entering was to show me pictures of young Muslim and Christian children in the synagogue that we were standing in. He then told me that his grandfather had taught all the children – not just the Jewish children – from the villages surrounding who came to ask him how to pray. While he personally could not remember being at a Seder meal in Morocco at which Muslims sat, he was so impressed by the stories regarding his grandfather’s invitation to Imazighen to participate in Passover, that Rafi made it a point to invite children of other faiths into his newly built synagogue to not only teach them Hebrew, and but even prayers if they were interested. In this way, the local Jewish, Amazigh and Arab families became closely intertwined. Due to the reordering of their society, the recent arrival of the French and the building up of Midelt in addition to the already large cities of Sefrou and Fes, the families would become even more intertwined.

## Chapter 9: The Move to Trading

Due to the burgeoning size of the city of Midelt thanks to the French military presence, many of the locals; Jewish, Arab and Amazigh alike, left their farms and moved into trading or retail. ‘Azar and Shlomo would soon join the high proportion of Jews around the world engaged in trade and craft work.<sup>52</sup> Both of the Mohas’ fathers initially stayed out on their farms, but they did not lose touch with their Jewish friends. Rather they strengthened their economic ties. This was a common phenomenon. Schroeter points out that, “It was the marketplace above all where Jews and Muslims interacted.”<sup>53</sup> There is no shortage of tales of distrust, dishonesty and discord, but as Moshe Shokeid recalls from interviews with Atlas Mountain Jews, “Others are tales of mutual dependence, based on genuine mutual respect, which stress fair play and personal friendship between the Jewish trader or craftsman and his Muslim client, partner or patron.”<sup>54</sup> This is certainly the case with ‘Azar and Shlomo.

As mentioned above, ‘Azar would sometimes sell the extra wheat he received from Hamou as payment for his services on the farm. ‘Azar, like many others, was conforming to an emerging cultural pattern in North Africa and Middle East where,

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<sup>52</sup> Lewis. 28.

<sup>53</sup> Schroeter, Daniel . “Trade as a Mediator in Muslim-Jewish Relations: Southwestern Morocco in the Nineteenth Century,” *Jews Among Arabs: Contacts and Boundaries*, ed Mark R. Cohen and Abraham L. Udovitch (Princeton: Darwin Press, 1989) 113.

<sup>54</sup> Shokeid. 112.

“[Foreigners’, in large inland cities,] access to the farmers was through small merchants and moneylenders recruited chiefly from minority groups... who advanced money, bought crops for resale... and marketed goods consumed in the countryside.”<sup>55</sup> ‘Azar was not filling all of those roles yet, but he would soon start. With the move of so many people into Midelt, several plots of land needed to be managed by absent landlords. Hamou, like others, stayed out in the village and worked land in addition to his own in return for a share of the harvest. Hamou did not have the connections or the time to sell the grain, but with the increasing size of Hamou’s family/workforce, ‘Azar increasingly spent more time trading and less time farming. So a partnership was formed wherein Hamou and his sons would work land of absent landlords, and ‘Azar would use his connections in town to sell and trade the grain. Moha B went with ‘Azar on several occasions into the newly created city of Midelt to help sell the grain. He recalled several details that made ‘Azar different from the Arab and Amazigh traders he had seen at the souq. ‘Azar went around calling, “*Ounik Allah*,” inverting the standard Amazigh greeting: “*Lah Oun*,” which in either case means, “God help you.” Also curious to Moha B was that ‘Azar gave candy to children and always spoke with them. Moha was accustomed to sellers at the souq being wary of children, who would often steal whatever was for sale and dash off into the crowd before the victim could respond. ‘Azar told Moha it was less expensive to give the children candy than for them to steal a sack of grain when he was not looking. Moha was so impressed with this practice that even today in his dry goods store he gives children candy to prevent them from stealing from him.

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<sup>55</sup> Issawi, Charles. *An Economic History of the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 6.



Several bits of wisdom were being accumulated by Midelt's residents, as 'Azar was not the only one to learn how to survive in the city.

Shlomo took a decidedly different route, but like 'Azar, ended up in the city. Noticing that several French officers and miners had a taste for local crafts when furnishing their homes, Shlomo opened a carpet store in the newly constructed (and permanent) date souq. He bought products made by local Amazigh women in their homes and resold them to the French and Moroccan Arabs, who were brought by the French from Casablanca, Fes and Meknes to act as interpreters and guides. Knowing, however, that wool in the area was poor quality and fearing to leave his store unattended for long periods of time, Shlomo realized he needed a partner to purchase wool from a better source. Because Mubarak had acted honorably in the potato incident and because Mubarak had family near the town of Beni Oaraïn, Shlomo selected him and a Jewish man named 'Illo to work with him. 'Illo, who would be Shlomo's partner, was originally from the large Jewish community in Beni Oaraïn, but had moved South to Midelt to participate in the mining boom. However, he disliked the conditions in the mine, and so joined Shlomo in the carpet business. He wrote letters to his contacts in Beni Oaraïn who herded sheep with much higher quality wool than the local variety. Three times each spring, Mubarak would then take the letters north to Beni Oaraïn and come back weeks later with wagons full of wool which he had purchased from 'Illo's presumably Jewish friends. Mubarak would then be paid a fee and return to working Shlomo's lands in Ait Ayach. The local women proceeded to make carpets, pillows and blankets which were noticeably higher in quality than the other woolen items being produced in the area. Soon

Shlomo, ‘Illo and Mubarak, as well as Hamou and ‘Azar, were doing quite well.<sup>56</sup> It goes without saying, then that the relationships between all the men described above become those of being singular plural. When Moha B, in particular, spoke of Hamou’s early life, he could not tell a story which did not include some mention of ‘Azar. for Moha B, quite simply, there is no memory of his father without ‘Azar. True to Nancy’s claim, there is no “being” for Hamou in Moha’s memory apart from Hamou “being-with” ‘Azar.

Rafi and Shmuel’s family was doing quite well also. Though they lived in in Sefrou, they too had economic interactions with Imazighen from Midelt. Their father, Eliyahu, in addition to being a noted plumber to whom all denizens of Sefrou came to have their various problems fixed, had a number of small factories outside of the walls of Fes. These factories employed both Jewish and Muslim women in making soap and preparing sheep skins. Eliyahu, along with Mubarak, knew that wool from around the Midelt area was low in quality when carded and spun for weaving. When not sheared, the sheepskin rugs are very warm and an important part of keeping ones’ feet warm when interior floors are made of tile, concrete, stone or even earth. Thus, Eliyahu coupled his business of making soap with cleaning sheep skins and often used the *sabon bildi* which was made from the byproduct of olive presses to clean the skins. He then sold the sheep skins throughout Fes to in order to keep chairs and floors warm. While all the olive

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<sup>56</sup> It should be noted that even as some Jews prospered beyond their Muslim counterparts, the social ties remained very much intact. Even economic class differences did not isolate persons that religious and ethnic differences had failed to separate. Shlomo Dshen, paraphrasing Lawrence Rosen, observes, “...[R]elations between individuals in traditional Morocco were governed to a considerable degree by the particular person-to-person ties, and to a lesser degree by abstract social categories in which a person fitted.”

Dshen, Shlomo. *The Mellah Society Jewish Community Life in Sherifian Morocco* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 123.

Rosen, Lawrence. “Muslim-Jewish Relations in a Moroccan City,” *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 4 (1972) 435 - 449

pressings his factories required could be easily acquired from the immediate vicinity around Fes and Sefrou, the sheepskins were much harder to come by because the local sheep were prized for their very high quality wool in addition to their meat. Essentially enacting the opposite of 'Illo's route, Eliyahu had his employees go to Midelt and buy from the shepherds there as many large sheepskins as they could, which they were able to do at great discount because the shepherds and weavers around Midelt were not at all interested in the skin or wool of the sheep.

During this discussion of the sheep trading economy with Rafi, several interesting pronunciation differences between normative Moroccan Arabic and Judeo-Arabic of the region appeared. First, two main sound transformations asserted themselves over and over. The (ش / *sh*) turned into a (س / *s*) and the (ج / *j*) was pronounced as (ز / *z*). Thus the sentence: "He left Sefrou and bought the skins from Midelt" which in normative Moroccan Arabic would sound like, "Hoo khroj min Sefrou oo *shra* al-jlood min Midelt," was pronounced as "Hoo khroz min Sefrou oo *sra* al-zlood min Midelt." This difference reflects a particularly Sefriwi pronunciation. The speech patterns reflect a conservation of a very ancient urban Arabic which was spoken prior the invasion of the Banu Hilal around the end of the twelfth century.<sup>57</sup> Even of Muslims from this area today it is said, "klam dyal nes min Sefrou, klam Yahoodi" [The words of people of Sefrou are Jewish words]. Linguistically speaking, though the Jewish community of Sefrou today is a handful of families, the very speech of the Imazighen and Arabs in the area *is* Jewish speech.

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<sup>57</sup> Stillman 1973. 256. Stillman references: Colin, G.S., "Les Parlers: l'arabe," *Intuition au Maroc*, Institut des Hautes Etudes Marocaines, 3rd edition (Paris 1945) p 219-44.

## Chapter 10: A Time of Prosperity

Moha B grew up, and after several years of serving in the army fighting against Polisairo in the Sahara, Moha B returned to the area in and around the Khenifra province. He started work as a guard in another former French garrison town, Tounfite. The French had withdrawn out of the region due to the Second World War, and staged a brief re-militarizing only to pull out again by the mid-1950s to concentrate forces elsewhere. Quite by chance, Moha B met ‘Azar’s son Ezra. When Moha asked about ‘Azar he was told by Ezra that ‘Azar had been killed and only a few sacks of his grain stolen while he was riding to Midelt from Tachiouite. Obviously the crime was more murder than robbery. Undaunted, Ezra was involved in the distribution of subsidized grain to villages, though Moha was vague as to what Ezra’s actual capacity might have been. Besides his actual duties, he would “intercept” governmental grain shipments before they got to the local Moroccan municipal workers and then sell them at lower prices than the amount of money necessary for bribes for government workers to “lose” some sacks of grain to those not receiving subsidized grain. By undercutting the prices of bribes, and by giving away a higher number of sacks than his position demanded, Ezra remained popular enough to avoid being turned in to the authorities. Moha in the meantime was assigned to guard the grain stockpiles after they arrived. Mirroring his travels with ‘Azar between

Tachiouite and Midelt earlier in his life, on occasion Moha was assigned to guard Ezra while he traveled between Midelt and Tounfite. He did his job of guarding the grain rigorously, which cut down on competition with Ezra from dishonest government employees who would try to steal grain and then resell it. Ezra always insisted that there was extra grain and that he was not hurting anyone. Ezra told Moha, however, that if there ever was not enough grain to go around to the poor families who received subsidized grain that Ezra would be happy to provide for them from his own pocket. Fortunately for everyone involved, that was never the case. There were no incidents of grain being successfully stolen from the supplies Moha guarded, and Ezra was able to make a comfortable living “helping” in the grain distribution process.

Shlomo was also able to make a comfortable living by way of his carpet store. After Moroccan independence in 1956, ‘Illo left for France leaving Shlomo without a full partner. Shlomo asked Mubarak to become a partner instead of merely making the trip to Beni Oaraïn (which he continued to do even after being made a partner). Even after the exit of his French customers, Shlomo did such brisk business with locals that he was able to buy 3 other stalls at the date souq which were abandoned by people due to very real concern, albeit premature, about Midelt’s post-protectorate decline. Because Shlomo had no children he put Mubarak, Moha A and Hussein, Moha A’s younger brother in charge of the other 3 stores. They each were allowed to keep all of what they sold, but had to pay Shlomo rent for the stores. Shlomo was old enough and prosperous enough that he was no longer interested in making a large profit, which Moha’s family sometimes earned. He

simply wanted a stable income that the rent on the stores provided him. The Ait OuAli family thus prospered with, and because of, Shlomo.

Selling carpets and renting stores were not the only businesses in which Shlomo prospered. He also set up his own bank of sorts. He would take and hold money for the semi-nomadic people of Tattiouine so that they did not have to worry about having their wealth with them in the mountains as they moved from site to site. When they came into town - which for them was the only place money was useful - Shlomo would be ready to give them what they had deposited. For this service he charged no fee, and did not collector pay any interest, but he did accept “gifts” of produce after his depositors returned from souq and trusted their money to him again. Moha thus treated his Muslim depositors as he would fellow Jews, and as his depositors would expect to be treated by fellow Muslims, by not participating in interest banking, but rather by accepting payments for his services. While it was certainly in his power to collect a fee based on the amount deposited, Shlomo saw his depositors not as an economic “other,” but rather as people who, although they were not Jews, were “singular-plural” enough that the Biblical prohibition against charging interest to “your brother” meant that Shlomo would not charge it to his Muslim, Amazigh customers. When Moha A was very young, he remembered seeing Shlomo take the logs and ashes out of his fireplace, open a trap door and take a small bag from a chest hidden in the floor because a man had stopped by and was asking for his money. While the man waited in the entry room, Moha was trusted to come inside to see where the money was deposited. Thus in carpet retail and banking, Shlomo was doing quite well, but the prosperity would not last long.

Rafi and Shmuel's family also prospered greatly. Eliyahu, their father, was called from his plumbing shop into many of the houses around the area, although not as far as he traveled for the wool. Shmuel recalled several trips to Fes and Meknes with his father during which he would hold hands with his father while walking through the medina before entering the home of a rich Arab or Frenchman. To see silver or even golden piping for faucets encrusted with glass handles was not uncommon and it can be fairly said that Eliyahu at this time was fairly well-to-do himself. Shmuel told me of the first time he accompanied his father on such a trip to the home of a wealthy Arab in Fes. He had been brought up in a very religious family, he re-emphasized, and so had his parents. Consequently, he said, he and his father and grandfather spoke very little, because they had been told that the Holy One only gave them so many words that had to last the span of their lifetimes, and that when their words ran out, so too would their lives. It was because I told Shmuel that my grandfather used to say the same thing to me about the words of our lives being limited that he remembered what his father said, or rather had not said to him on his first trip into Fes.

As stated before, Shmuel used to accompany his father on some of the trips into the larger cities to see the inside of the houses of the rich. Rafi was gone already to Casablanca to learn Hebrew at "the university" – though which university in Casablanca would have been teaching Hebrew in the 1930s, I never learned – so Shmuel was the youngest of the children and went along with his father. On one trip, they went to the home of a Muslim Arab to fix the piping because Eliyahu was well-known for his good character and his good work. While they were there, the home owner offered Shmuel and

Eliyahu kefta, which Shmuel called when telling me this story, “all the beautiful things that I liked.” Shmuel, having a taste for kefta, looked to his father and asked with his eyes but without a word if it was permissible to take the proffered treats. With his eyes and without a word, his father let him know that it was certainly not permissible, because while they might work in the home of a Muslim, they would not eat meat not ritually slaughtered by Jews. Shmuel was disappointed, but did not say a word.

When the job was done, Eliyahu took Shmuel through the market area in Fes’ medina on the way to the synagogue that Eliyahu would visit when he came to Fes. Shmuel remembered all the senses this trip excited; all the smells of smoke and the perfumes for sale, the din of the merchants and the tinkle of the bells of the rosewater sellers. Shmuel recalled that the streets were exceedingly tight, not like those of Sefrou. And finally he remembered seeing a stall cooking and selling the beautiful things that he liked: kefta! The Muslim merchant apparently also saw Shmuel’s delight at his wares and walked over to where Eliyahu and Shmuel stood. Without a word he gave a little bow to Eliyahu and then after a few moments, Eliyahu gave a little bow back to the kefta seller. The man immediately went back over to his stand and then made a little kefta sandwich and brought it over to Shmuel who took it eagerly. But still unsure of what was happening, he wordlessly looked to his father and asked permission with his eyes. Surprisingly Eliyahu’s eyes granted permission even though he had denied permission earlier.

Wondering at this, but saying nothing, Shmuel accompanied his father to synagogue and after prayers Eliyahu was invited into a meeting with some of the older



men. The topic of discussion was what to do with the descendants of Jews who had been forcibly converted in one of the outbreaks of violence. The descendants were practicing Muslims, but were also children of Jewish parents. After some time, Eliyahu spoke up and said that the child of a Jew was a Jew, even if their parents had been forcibly converted even before the exile from Spain. He then turned and looked Shumel directly in the eye and said to all those gathered around that he would go so far as to let his child eat meat slaughtered by the “coerced ones.” It was then that Shmuel knew that his father, who practiced some degree of ritual separation from his Muslim and Christian clients, nonetheless maintained relationships with, and he later found out, financially supported Muslims whose ancestors were at one time Jewish. Even though they were practicing Muslims, Eliyahu identified them as Jewish enough to carry out kosher slaughtering and thus as part of his community.

## Chapter 11: An Increase in Persecution

After successive wars fought between Israel and Muslim neighbors, the position of Jews in Morocco grew more tenuous. According to Stillman, “Street youths frequently harass Jewish children, so that now [1973] young children only leave the house in the company of an adult or an older brother or sister. Garbage is sometimes thrown into the doorways of Jewish homes, and now and then a slogan is chalked on the door.”<sup>58</sup> I personally was on the receiving end of these kinds of harassments. The raconteurs observed these persecutions and others.

By 1967 Moha B had been transferred to Meknes to guard the *Wali*. He lived just outside of the mellah and would often frequent the cafés in the mellah, “because they had better pastries.” On one of his evenings off in the middle of June (he could not remember the exact date) he was at a café in the first floor of a hotel with some soldier friends. Suddenly a Jewish couple started celebrating and dancing because of Israel’s progress in the Six Day War which had just been announced on the radio. This went on for most of the night and the other patrons were becoming rather annoyed. Finally the Jewish couple got tired and started to climb the stairs to go to their room in the hotel. A Moroccan man in a red shirt stepped forward and shot the Jewish man in the side of the head. Moha B

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<sup>58</sup>

Stillman 1973. p 257.

indicated that he was too far away to grab the man, but close enough to the victim to see the bullet entering his temple and killing him instantly. The victim's partner screamed and fainted as the culprit ran out of the café and into the streets. Moha and his soldier friends ran after him. According to Moha, there was a desperate search to find the shooter that went on all night through the mellah in Meknes. All that was recovered of him was his red shirt. It is not surprising to learn that as the Arab world was shown to be weakened by the state of Israel, that relations which up until recently had been cordial between Jews and Muslims in several areas of Morocco, if not necessarily warm, quickly deteriorated.<sup>59</sup> Still, violence directed at Moroccan individuals for the actions of states was if not unheard of, certainly quite rare.

Closer to home for Ezra and Shlomo, there were increasing acts of violence against traveling Jewish merchants around Midelt and around the country.<sup>60</sup> Even after fully integrating financially, their lives were becoming increasingly imperiled.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, as Morocco became more ordered and more easily traversed, the tolerance for Jewish traveling merchants decreased.<sup>62</sup> On one evening, Mubarak overheard some men plotting to attack Shlomo as he traveled between Ait Ayach and Othman OuMosa the next day. They would steal his money and kidnap him to be held for ransom. One of the other men reasoned that since Shlomo did not have any family (his wife had died years earlier) they could not expect any ransom. Therefore it would be better to simply kill him. Mubarak, fulfilling the role of a Rosen-esque Dyadic partner, told Shlomo of the

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<sup>59</sup> Lewis. 32.

<sup>60</sup> Deshen. 40.

<sup>61</sup> Cohen. 55.

<sup>62</sup> Lewis. 57 - 58.

plot, but Shlomo insisted on going anyway. Mubarak went with him and brought his rifle and his two teenage sons.<sup>63</sup> The next day as they were traveling, the plotters ran up and yelled for Mubarak and his sons to leave, but he would not and instead spoke of what a great shame it was to mistreat *dhimmis*. The men finally relented and went away, but from that day on, recalls Moha, Shlomo was a broken man. He apparently had never believed that he would be attacked or threatened because he was Jewish. Shlomo came of age in a wild area where the rich were often targets of brigandage. On that day Mubarak was also a rich man, but the plotters were not interested in stealing from him, only Shlomo.

Pushed by these incidents and others, and pulled to Israel, France, Canada or America, Shlomo, Ezra and most of the remaining Jewish community soon left Midelt and its environs forever. On his way out, Shlomo deeded all his property to Mubarak and insisted that he never sell the carpet stores or the land but keep them in his family forever.

Rafi and Shmuel had heard rumors of persecutions of Jews all over Morocco after the creation of the State of Israel and were thinking about leaving. As mentioned above, Rafi chose, as the oldest, to attend a university which taught Hebrew in Casablanca, and from there made his way to France as a Hebrew teacher, and then finally on to Israel. Shmuel took a difference tactic. At age fourteen, Shmuel told me that he did not know anything about Jewish and Muslim relations in the wider world. But what he did know was that his parents and grandparents said that the situation was worse now than it had

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<sup>63</sup> "In times of danger... each Jewish family had a Muslim guarantor to whom it would turn; this person was supposed to protect them from injury and to avenge them if they were harmed."

Meyers, Allan R. "Patronage and Protection: The Status of Jews in Precolonial Morocco," *Jews among Muslims: Communities in the Precolonial Middle East*, ed Shlomo Deshen and Walter P. Zenner (New York: New York University Press, 1996) 84.

been before. He said that he had not heard of any violence, and that his childhood was quite unique in that he was one of the only children in Sefrou, and maybe most of Morocco who studied in Hebrew school all day. This assumption was born out when he arrived to Israel, and was one of the very few Moroccan Jews who could speak fluent Hebrew. At any rate, he made ready to leave and left one morning, very early, without telling anyone. His parents, when they came to wake him for morning prayers, found that he was not in his bed. His mother, sensing what he had in mind to do and wanting to prevent him from leaving the country, rode to Fes and took him from the bus station back to their house in Sefrou. Clearly she thought that the journey to Israel at this point was much more perilous than remaining in Sefrou. Shmuel, however, was very upset and told his mother that, “[a]fter 2000 years of exile, it was time to go home.” His mother did not reply.

Later that same week, Shmuel decided he would try again and was more careful. He waited until the family had gone to synagogue in the morning, and then slipped away. He ran outside of the walls of Sefrou and was waiting for a bus, terrified that his family would find him. Eventually the bus to Fes pulled up and he got on board. The bus was just about to pull away when Shmuel looked out the window and saw his grandfather standing there, staring at him. A moment passed and then his grandfather came over and handed him a small package. Shmuel asked what it was, and his grandfather told him it was money for him to give away to a poor person in Jerusalem. Without another word, the bus rolled away, and that was the last time Shmuel saw Sefrou.

The ride from Fes to Taza was uneventful, but for the journey from Taza to Oujda, Shmuel was terrified. He had heard that Jewish children were “disappeared” from buses by Arab gendarmes. He told me many times that he had heard rumors to such effect. He said that Jews were forbidden from going from city-to-city, especially near port towns. It was at this point that I began to wonder at the veracity of the details of the story. I have heard about violent incidents happening while Jews were traveling by themselves out in rural areas. But I wonder if the later contacts with Arabs while fighting in the Israeli army colored his vision of the past. I refer here to Nancy’s notion that being is “made with,” and that perhaps his later memories of habitual conflict were superimposing themselves on earlier memories. I asked him about this, and he said quite simply that I was not there, and that I could not understand what was in his head. He was correct on both of these points. I sought to clarify, however, what his main reason for leaving and for being frightened of the journey. He said that two thousand years was long enough, and that as a young man, he did not have his own identification papers yet, so that if anything happened to him, he would just cease to exist, and no one would know about it. And because he was traveling without an identification card, if he were stopped or questioned at a check point or by any police, he would have been in trouble.

Nevertheless, he chose to make the journey. Shmuel did not know how to smuggle himself, or about anything, really, except what he had learned in his very religious upbringing, before he got on the bus for Oujda. He went to the market and bought some dark sunglasses, and hat and an Arabic newspaper in order to make himself look like a “chic Arab.” When he got on the bus he saw that it was divided into two

sections. The front was first class, and the back was cheaper tickets. As he passed by the elderly people in front, he passed by several that he thought might be Jewish because of the way they held their hands. At this point in the interview, I must have sounded incredulous, because when I asked how he would have known they were Jewish by how they held their hands, Shmuel told me that he was not stupid, and that he could tell certain things. He said they held their right hand on their faces like they were reciting a prayer. I apologized and we moved on.

Shmuel was very frightened at this point, but when reached his seat at the back of the bus, he began acting up as a display to show how he was not afraid to call attention to himself, thereby hoping to actually divert attention. A few kilometers outside of Oujda the bus stopped at a check point and a gendarme got on. Shmuel was sitting in the back of the bus and holding his paper up to his face, all the while hearing the paper rustle because his hands were shaking. The gendarme called the kid sitting immediately next to Shmuel off the bus and started to question him. Although he was hiding behind his paper and was convinced that he looked like a chic Arab kid, Shmuel was terrified that he would be next. But the bus apparently left at that point, with Shmuel saying that he was so terrified that he never saw if his friend got back on the bus or not.

It was at this point that the elderly people on the front of the bus who Shmuel had taken notice of before started smirking and laughing while looking right at him. He was very confused, and still very frightened, so he just sat there for the time being. However the laughing continued, and eventually it was joined by a hand motion which consisted of an index finger pointed out horizontally being moved in a vertical cycle. Shmuel was

very confused by this until one of the older men finally came back to him and told him that the Arabic newspaper which he had purchased and unfurled in order to help him blend in and escape notice, he had been holding upside-down the entire time.

When he got off the bus in Oujda, he scratched his right temple, which was the agreed upon signal that he learned in Fes. Someone met him and led him to a synagogue. There were hundreds of people there waiting for the night when well after midnight each night, small groups of eight to nine people would be taken to the border with Algeria and would sneak slowly across the border, at times running flat out and at times stopping and lying in the sand while the searchlights went by. Shmuel slept that first night on the floor of the synagogue right in front of the ark. But the next evening, he got his chance to sneak across the border. Shmuel told me it was like rush hour in New York City: stop and go for what seemed like forever. Finally they crossed the border and hopped on a train to Algiers. Shmuel reminded me many times throughout this section of his story that he had no identification card, and if something happened to him, no one would ever know. Also, if anyone would ask to see his papers, he was now an illegal alien and would be in quite a bit of trouble.

Happily, he made it to Algiers, where the first of two magical events happened to him. When he went to the safe house near Bab al-Wad area of Algiers, he found an incredibly big building with people sleeping on the stairs. There he received a temporary fake ID and also the first real meal of his journey since he left Sefrou. What struck him most was that as he was going up and down the stairs, there were elderly and sick people sleeping on stairs. He mentioned that several times while talking about the safe house,



asking if I had ever seen people of any age sleeping on stairs. When I said no, he was glad and said that it was a very pitiful sight.

Being a young man, and already coming so very far from the only home he had ever known, soon Shmuel tired of waiting around the safe house to have his name called for his spot on the daily boat to Marseilles. He decided one night, after listening to the names called and not hearing his among them, that he would go explore the casbah of Algiers. He told himself he was going out to find a synagogue, but really he just wanted to explore. However it soon became late, and since this was his first time exploring Algiers on his own, he quickly got lost. He was wandering alone when he noticed that three boys were following him. He started to pick up his pace, but then the boys started to run after him. Soon he was running for his life in a city that he did not know. Upon rounding a corner, he saw a large Arab man in a cape, holding it open and looking at him. Not knowing what else to do, Shmuel ran to the man who closed his cape around the boy while the three pursuers ran past him. Shmuel was shaking from fear as the man led him back to the safe house without a word being exchanged between them. When they finally came to the entrance to the safe house, the man said, "*Yella, Dkhol!*" [Hurry, go in!]. Shmuel started toward the door, but when he turned to thank the man, he was gone. Shmuel told me that he has never told that story to anyone except for his grandfather after he came to live with Shmuel and Rafi in Israel. He made me promise that I would write that he gives all credit to the Creator for his miraculous rescue.

At this point, I should say that Shmuel, when relating these stories has clear ambivalence about his Muslim neighbors in North Africa and in Israel. While he had

great respect for the “holy men” as he called them who would come out of their mosques to greet his grandfather as he passed, and he was certainly grateful to the Arab man who saved him in the story above, he decried Palestinian refugees wanting to move back to Israel because he certainly could not move back to Morocco. He talked about how difficult it is [not *was*] for Jewish children in Morocco to go to school without being harassed. The picture of Morocco for him is far from rosy, but he still waxed poetic when he spoke about the land of his birth. His story did not stop here through.

The night his name was called, Shmuel left the safe house and went to the dock. He saw that the ship he would be on was an Italian vessel called Modika. He immediately took this as a bad omen because it was so close to the French word “*maudit*” [cursed]. He knew that he was the cursed one. But still he was very excited to go because he had never seen a boat before. He said that he thought it would be like a house on the water or like Noah’s Ark. Instead it was a smooth ship which was soon slicing through the water. The next story was the last of his journey to Israel that I heard and one he assured me that he had never told anyone except his grandfather. Shmuel said that if he would ever be a filmmaker, he would love to direct this scene. He would open the scene with him on the deck of the ship holding his little book of piyyutim and psalms, which was his only earthly possession. He watched one of the most amazing sunsets he ever saw and recited Psalm 104. Just as he was reciting “There is the sea, vast and spacious, teeming with creatures beyond number — living things both large and small. There the ships go to and fro, and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there,” a storm started to blow up. He thought it was just normal, not having ever been on the sea, but all the sailors ushered

everyone below decks and went down themselves because it was turning into a very bad storm. They told people to hold on and watch out because the boat might capsize. Shmuel instantly thought himself a kind of Jonah and knew what he had to do. He said to the ocean that all he had left was his small book of piyyutim and that it should take the book and be done storming. With that, he threw the last thing he owned over the rail and into the sea. And suddenly, the storm stopped.

All I could say was, “wow.” However, in an interviewing moment I will never forget, Shmuel simply said “Go camera three!” After I stopped laughing, he said that as he turned around on the deck, he saw that he was no longer alone, but that there were three men dressed in djellabas standing there, smiling at him. When he got off the boat the next day at Marsielle, he did not see the men get off the ship, and indeed, he never saw them again. He said he never knew who the men were until he told the story to his grandfather years later. His grandfather said, “You lived all those years in Sefrou, by the cave, and you don’t know who the men were who watched over you?” They were the same three rabbis he had been hearing about his entire life who watched as he threw his last material connection to Morocco into the sea in a gesture as pregnant with meaning for Shmuel that day as it was when he told me the story.

### *Motifs*

Shmuel’s stories, more than those of the other raconteurs, contained several motifs that are familiar from Thompson’s folklore index. Whether his stories were more stylized, or had more classically folkloric elements because of his repetition of them, I

cannot say. Several of the tales he told me, however, he assured me that I was the first one to hear them. In any case, throwing his book of piyyutim into the Mediterranean is a perfect exemplar of Sacrifice to the Sea [V11.2].<sup>64</sup> Similarly, the vanishing of his savior in Algiers and the older folks realizing he was not Arab because he was holding the paper upside-down conform very neatly to Magical Disappearance at Night [D2087.4] and [method of ] Reading Identifies Transformed Person [H62.1.2], respectively.<sup>65</sup> Irrespective of his consciousness of using these motifs in his performances of his memories, they show up again and again and reinforce the folkloric nature of his memories.

*Partnership in the Face of Persecution (Interview Transcript)*

Even among times of turmoil, there were still other stories of partnership and sacrifice. On the western hill of Ait Gharit's hill, is a small Jewish cemetery, hosting several unmarked stones, as well as those of the famous Pinto and Macnin families.<sup>66</sup> The cemetery served as a final resting place of Jews from all around the area, but most especially Othman OuMusa. In order to gain access to the enclosed cemetery, one must go through the house of the Amazigh family who are charged with guarding the cemetery. A woman named Raqiya and her father, Hamou live there to protect the cemetery from, "crazy kids" who would vandalize. I asked if I could walk around and

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<sup>64</sup> Thompson, Stith. *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature; A Classification of Narrative Elements in Folktales, Ballads, Myths, Fables, Mediaeval Romances, Exempla, Fabliaux, Jest-Books, and Local Legends*, Vol 6 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966). 677.

<sup>65</sup> Thompson, 211, 631.

<sup>66</sup> See Schroeter, Daniel. *The Sultan's Jew: Morocco and the Sephardi World*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

take some pictures. Raqiya asked to see my passport, and then asked about my family background. When she was satisfied that I bore the deceased no ill will, she let me walk around, but kept a watchful eye on me.

After walking around for twenty minutes, I went back to her house to ask Raqiya a few questions, and we talked for more than four hours. What follows is part of the transliterated transcript of our conversation.

A few notes on the transliteration are pertinent at this point. I take a very simple tack in the transliteration because Moroccan Arabic is exceedingly rarely written. The vowels I use are all the short forms (a as in ball, e is in bed, i as in bill, and o as in sod and u as in tub) unless they are doubled (oo as in yahoodi) or if there is a final i, in which case it makes the long e as in tree.

Cory: *Elash katskuni hena? Kayfish Jiti?*

Why do you live here? How did you come here?

Raqiya: *Ba dyali khadem ma yehoodim fi Fes. Milli bzaf minhom jao hena, jaboo-ho mahom.*

My father worked for the Jews in Fes. When several of them moved here, they brought him with them.

C: *Ash kaydir Ba dyalik?*

What does your father do?

R: *Ba dyali kunt qsha o wire. Al Rab atta-hoo floos bash ou-wen-hoo. Wa illa shi-wahed dar shi-haja hiiba ala shi yehoodi li kayn fi moosooliya dyal ba, Ba drub-oo.*

My father was very strong, and crafty. The Rabbi hired him to help him, and if anyone would do something bad to a Jew that the rabbi was responsible for, my father would rough him up.

C: *Keefesh ba dyalk shid had amal?*

How did your father get the job?

R: *Gelt-lik. Hoowa qsha bzaf o wire.*

I told you, he was very strong and crafty.

C: *Wesh ymkn tgooli kter ala ba dyalk ola azdikah yehoodi dyaloo?*

Can you tell me more about your father, or his Jewish friends?

R: *Sooloo*

Ask him (her father appeared)

Hamou was wearing a blue, very dirty djellaba. His eyes were opaque white, and he was obviously blind. He sat down slowly on a sheep skin rug on the floor. He started talking to his daughter right away.

Hamou: (to Raqiya) *Schoon hoowa? Ash kay-dir hena?*

Who is this? What is he doing here?

R: *Ja bash ysool-na ala tareeka dyal yehoodim min hena. Hoowa min Amrika.*

He came to ask us about the history of the Jews around here. He's from America.

H: *Wesh kayhadr Fransiwi?*

Does he speak French?

R: *Oohoo, Tarabt.* (spoken in Tamazight)

No, Arabic.

H: *Waha.*

Okay.

C: *Shookran ala halitini nglis hena wa-nsoolik sooalt.*

Thank you for letting me sit here and ask you questions

H: *Makaine mooshkil*

No problem

C: *Keefesh kunti azdikah ma al Rabbi min Fes, o kayfesh jiti hena?*

How did it happen that you were friends with the Rabbi from Fes, and how did you come here?

H: *Milli kunt saghir, Aysht qerib bzaf ma yehoodim. Kol jrran-na kunt yehoodim. Kabar-na ma-hom. Ma-andi-sh mooshkil ma-hom. Milli ana kunt rajal saghir, kunt qsha bzaf o wire. Al yehoodim fi Fes, homa khaifin. Shi-wahed qutl wahed mi-hom, shi-wahed drub wahed min-hom, shi-wahed shafar min-hom o mashi meziene. Al Rabbi sool-ni ila ymkn ou-wen-hom. Galt Iyeah. Ila shi-wahed shafar min-hom, drubt-hoo. Ila shi-wahed drub-hom, drubt-hoo. Ila shi-wahed qutl whaed min-hom, drubt-hoo o dat-hoo al bolees. Ana kunt bhal saba! Nas gal-ni: al saba dyal yehoodim.*

When I was little, I lived very close to Jews. All our neighbors were Jews. We grew up together. I have no problem with them. When I was a young man, I was very strong and crafty. The Jews in Fes, they were frightened. Someone would kill one, someone would beat up one, someone would rob one; it was not good. The Rabbi asked me if I could help them. I said yes. If someone stole from them, I beat him up. If someone

beat them up, I beat them up. If someone killed one of them, I beat them up, and then took him to the police. I was like a lion. People called me the Lion of the Jews.

C: *Wesh nta ma-khaf-sh li shi-wahed ghadi drub-k?*

Were you not scared that someone would beat you up?

H: *Oohoo, la, la, la. Ana kunt qsha bzaf o wire.*

No! No, no, no. I was very strong and very crafty.

C: *Ma-Omrik shi-wahed dar shi-haja hiba bisbub aliqat dyalk ma al-yehoodim?*

Never in your life someone did something bad to you because of your relationship with the Jews?

H: *Fil-huqiqah, ana awar deba hit shi wahed drub-ni b-ras.*

Truly, I am blind now because of someone hit me in the head.

C: *Ymkn t-goolni hatha reewaiya?*

Is it possible to tell me that story?

H: *Iyeah, welakin, hssni te ou-wul. Ma-kan-gool-sh hatha reewaiya qadam binti. Kay-hzn-ha.*

Yes, but I need some tea first. (Raqiya went to make tea) I do not tell story around my daughter. It makes her sad.

C: *Fhemt*

I understand.

H: *Al yehoodim bna dar kbir dyal-oo...*

The Jews built their big house...

C: *Al-blasa li y-saliyoo fi-ha?*



The place where they prayed?

H: *Iyeah. Homa bna dar kbir dyaloo fi Othman OuMusa. O kol juma, msheet o helt la-bab fi asheeya o sabrt bera milli saliyoo. O shaft milli kol-hom khrajoo. Dholt fi Dar Kbir o tfit kol al afeeyat o sidt la-bab.*

Yes. They built their big house in Othman OuMusa, and every Friday I would go unlock the door in the afternoon and wait outside while they prayed. I watched while all of them went out. Then I went into the big house and extinguished all the fires and locked the door.

C: *Andk al-saroot dyal al dar kbir?*

You had the key to the big house?

H: *Iyeah, ma-aloom andi la-saroot, kaytyqoo-ni bzaf. Shrbt hleeb teeqa, o homa i-ee-don. Mashi bhal hooma ahoreen. Homa shrboo hleeb hiiba min Eema-hom hiibeen, o milli kabar hom hiibeen.*

Yes, of course, they trust me very much. I drank the milk of trust, and so did they. Not like these others. They drink the bad milk from their bad mothers, and when they grow they are bad.

C: *keefesh kunti awar?*

So how did you become blind?

H: *Yon Wes, sidt la-bab bad kol-wahed khrooj min dar kbir. Shi-wahed drub-ni min lor. Tht, welakin mazel qdrt shoof o fukr hit ana qsha bzaf o wire. Welakin, maqdrsh nshoof shkoon kayn bisbub al-glom. Hoowa ja o drub-ni b-linen. Bad hatha, maqdrsh nshoof.*

One day, I shut the door after everyone left the big house. Someone hit me from behind. I fell down, but I could still see and think, because I was very strong and crafty. But I could not see who was there because it was dark. He came and hit me in my eyes. (Hamou made a thrusting gesture with his thumb several times) After that, I could not see.

C: *Elash daroo dek-shi?*

Why did they do this thing?

H: *Hit ana sahab Yahoodim kbir.*

Because I am a great friend of the Jews.

C: *Shnoo kat-dir?*

So what do you do?

H: *Ma-kan ma-dir. Al yehoodim talla f-rasi. Homa bna had dar li ana aish fi o sif-oo-ni manda min Fes. Mazel sif-oo-ni. Mashi bzaf, welakin ana kbir. O Raqiya andha kol-shi li hss-ha.*

I didn't have anything to do. The Jews took care of my head. They made me this house that I live in, and they sent mandats (Postal Checks) to me from Fes. They still do. It's not very much, but I am old. And Raqiya has everything she needs.

C: *Wow. Shukran alla gal-ni.*

Wow. Thank you for telling me.

H: *Makaine mooshkil*

No problem.

Some of the passages in the text above are especially interesting and deserve special mention. On several occasions, Raqiya and her father, Hamou, use Tamazight words, especially at the beginning of sentences, and then ease back into Moroccan Arabic. Responses to questions come as “*Iyeah*” for the affirmative and “*Oohoo*” for the negative. In one case, Hamou responded first with an *Oohoo*, and then immediately afterward followed with a series of “*la*” which is familiar to speakers of Arabic. Also, Hamou used the phrase *yon wes* for “someday” instead of the more commonly spoken *shi-nhar*, again substituting a Tamazight term for an Arabic term. In my research, even though the community was diglossic, Tamazight speakers tended to use fixed Arabic phrases more often than Arabic speakers tended to use Tamazight phrases. Hamou was an Arabic speaker from Fes, who included Tamazight words in his speech. This is at least noteworthy, if not an anomaly.

Also of interest is the switching definite article. *Al-* is used before *yahoodi* and *dar*. But even after I in my question said “*al-saroot*,” (the key) Hamou in his response, spoke about “*la-saroot*.” I believe that certain objects take a form of French definite article, with “*la*” standing in for *le*, *la* and *les*. The door (*la-bab*) is another term which always in my experience received the *la-* rather than *al-* definite article. The definite article was paired to the object and therefore the speaker could not choose which one to use. Often I was corrected that it was only proper to say *la-bab* instead of *al-bab*. This certainly was a site-specific distinction though, as on my trips to Fes, *al-bab* was the preferred pronunciation for “the door.”

Two notes on phrases need also to be mentioned. There are two common fixed phrases that Hamou uses which are typical in the storytelling of the region. It seemed that every young man in any story was described as “*qsha bzaf o wire*” meaning that they possessed both physical strength and also the ability to out-think and trick opponents by being shrewd and crafty. This combination of attributes was only applied to people in the past. One could be told she or he was *qsha* in the present, or told that he or she were *wire*, but the two together represent an almost mythical combination which is reserved for telling about past ability only.

Lastly, at the time I was observing conversation and recording stories in Midelt, there was much talk about “the milk of trust.” It seems that a distinction was made by those men in the village who spoke for Amazigh autonomy in Morocco between those who had Amazigh mothers and those who had Arab mothers. Those who had Amazigh mothers were said to drink the milk of trust, and thus they could be counted on to behave in an honorable manner, whereas those who had Arab mothers, according to Moha Ait OuAli, drank bad milk and grew up to be bad. Thus, when Hamou told me he drank the milk of trust, he was letting me know that even though he grew up in Fes and was primarily Arabic speaking, he still considered himself Berber, and made a distinction between himself and Arabs. Even more interestingly, he said that his Jewish friends also drank the milk of trust. I did not ask, though I wish I did, if he meant that in purely ethnic terms and he considered the Jews he lived and worked with as Imazighen as well, or if he meant it as purely an indication that they were trustworthy, like himself. It was that

distinction, according to him, that made him a good helper for the Jews he protected in their life and he still guarded after they died.

Hamou certainly defined himself by his relationship with the Jewish community. His memories, though obviously stylized in the retelling, make clear both the hostility Jews and those who were identified with them sometimes faced, and the degree in which people's stories become one with that of a community that is not their own.

## Chapter 12: Contacts and Memories

Even though Mubarak died shortly after Shlomo left, Moha A is still connected to the past. When Shlomo finally got to Israel, he sent, with the help of a woman named Miriam, a letter to Moha A. In the letter was a New Israeli Shekel which Moha still carries in his wallet to this day. Moha keeps in contact with Miriam by writing letters every year or so. After Mubarak died and Shlomo left, the brothers split the carpet shops with Moha taking the original shop and the one Mubarak had run. Hussein acquiring the one Moha had run previously, in addition to his own. Moha also bought a carpet shop from his brother who would later defy Shlomo's wish and sell his only remaining carpet shop to a stranger. Moha eventually gave his three carpet shops to his three children. In Shlomo's old shop is a very small carpet which was woven half by Shlomo's wife and half by an Amazigh woman. Hayat, Moha's daughter, proudly displays it as a metaphor of the interconnectedness of Mubarak's and Shlomo's families. (See Appendix 3). As for Moha Ait OuAli, he now lives in an earthen hut between Shlomo's apple orchard and the potato patch.

Even though it is a long way for a 74 year old man to walk, still Moha B walks from his house in northeastern Midelt to his apple orchard some 7 kilometers away most days in the spring, summer and fall. On his way, he passes by the old Jewish cemetery

where ‘Azar and Yehuda are buried. Sometimes he says a prayer for them, but more often he just thinks about ‘Azar giving candy to children and laughs. The stages that the Mohas watched their Jewish friends and neighbors go through reflected the changes they themselves went through. As they moved from agriculture to city life to prosperity to the eventual capsizing of the Midelt mining boom and the withdrawal of the French, Jewish and Arab residents of their town, they may be using the stories of their Jewish neighbors as a stand-in for their own lives. Their tales of the lives of Shlomo and ‘Azar and their families may be their way of being singular-plural, and remembering their lives as lives together with the Jewish community.

As for Rafi and Shmuel, they define their lives largely against their experiences in Morocco, instead of with them. Both live comfortably now, and both are proudly Moroccan. But Rafi was the only one to visit Morocco again, and even then, he only traveled to Tangier to give a speech for Rotary. He never went to Sefrou or Casablanca. Shmuel, when I asked, said he would never go back to Morocco. He said he should, and it would be a good thing to see Sefrou again, but there is too much of a mixed memory for him, which I think reflects much more of his time fighting in the army against Arabs than it does his actual childhood experiences in Morocco. But this is not unusual:

Both external (the Arab-Israeli conflict) and internal (unemployment, political instability and the transition from a traditional to a modern society) factors have corroded the Jewish-Muslim symbiosis and

weakened the network of personal ties which had long served to maintain viable – and on the all-important individual level – cordial relationships.<sup>67</sup>

Eventually, Rafi and Shmuel's entire family came to live with them in Israel, and thus ended their family's connection with Morocco, at least in a geographic sense. They still remember daily, however, the High Atlas Mountains and their community that was.

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<sup>67</sup>

Stillman 1973. 263.



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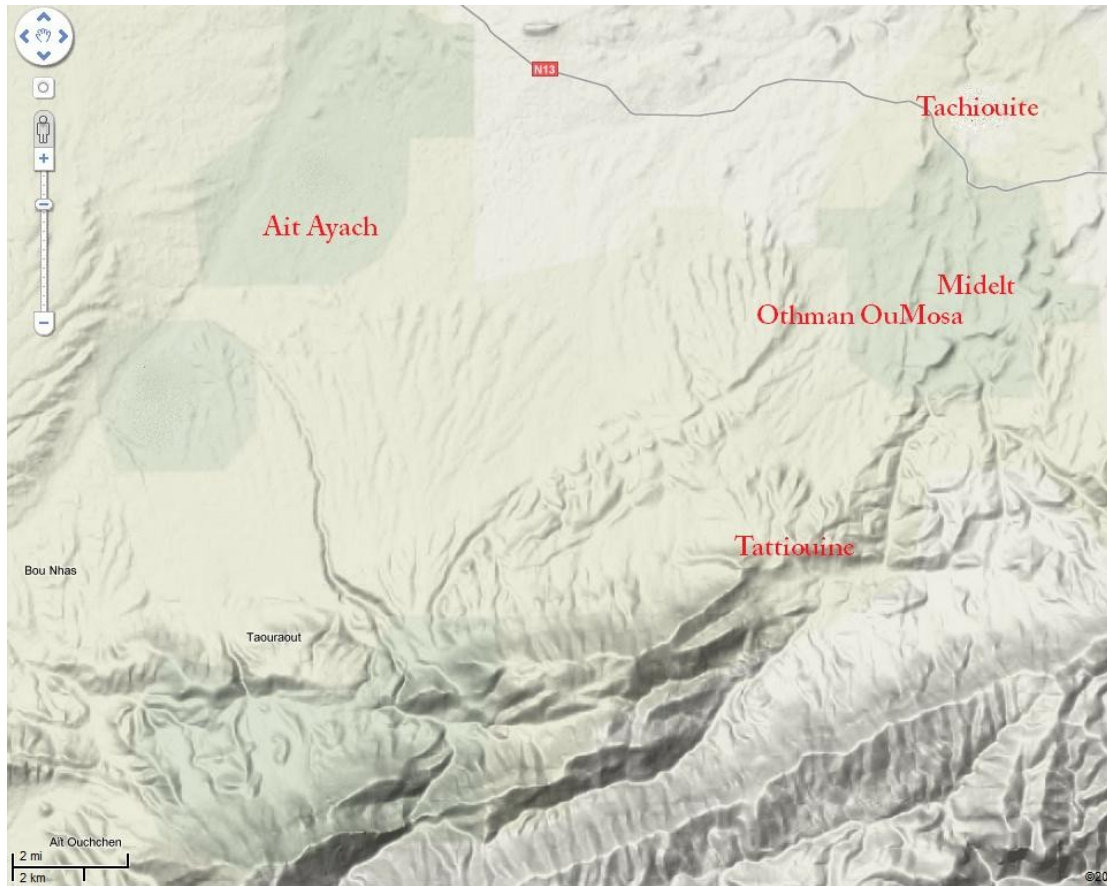
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## Appendix A: Figures



*Figure 1. Google Topographic Map of Midelt Area*

*<http://maps.google.com>*



Figure 2. Country Map

[http://www.rediscover.co.uk/morocco\\_trekking\\_map.htm](http://www.rediscover.co.uk/morocco_trekking_map.htm)





*Figure 3. Hayat's carpet.*

The rug blends traditional Amazigh icons on the left with Stars of David on the right.