

# Zionism, Colonialism, and Post-colonial Migrations: Moroccan Jews' Memories of Displacement

Contemporary Review  
of the Middle East

6(3-4) 338–351, 2019

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DOI: 10.1177/2347798919872835

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## Abstract

The emigration of Jews from Morocco to Israel, in particular, is the subject of intense debate among historians, signaling the difficulty of telling a unified story of this moment. I want to contribute to this debate by showing that the combining and often opposing forces of Colonialism and Zionism were the main factors that triggered these migrations, in a period of rising Moroccan nationalism. But those forces were also seen as opportunities by some migrants to seize the moment to better their fate and realize their dreams. If we cannot assess every migrant story, I want here to suggest through my family's experience and memory and other collected oral histories, how we could intertwine those memories to a larger narrative to shed more light on this history. The push and pull forces that led to Moroccan Jewry's migrations and post-colonial circulations between the 1940s and 1960s were the result of a reordering of the complex relationships between the different ethnic and religious communities well before the migration took place. The departures of the people interviewed for this study are inscribed in both the collective and family dynamics, but were organized in secret, away from the gaze of the others, particularly that of non-Jewish neighbors. Their belonging to a sector of the colonial world, while still prevalent in their narratives, is blurred by another aspect of post-colonial life in Morocco, that is the cultural/education nexus. Depending on where one has been educated and socialized, the combined effects of Colonialism and Zionism strongly impacted the time of their departures and the places they went to.

## Keywords

Migration, Jews, Morocco, Zionism, Colonialism, memory

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## Introduction

The conditions that led a million Jews to leave their Muslim lands to construct new lives elsewhere, mainly in Israel, raise many questions regarding their migrations. For the several hundred thousands who left the colonial and national spaces of North Africa for Israel, for cities in metropolitan France, and somewhat later for Canada, especially Montreal, Quebec, the question of their mass migration in a relatively short period of time gives rise to divergent interpretations. The emigration of Jews from Morocco to Israel, in particular, is the subject of intense debate among historians. For some, it signals a real displacement of populations achieved by Israeli Zionist organizations in need of a labor force to populate the new State (Chétrit, 2004). For others, it is an exodus, encouraged by the international Zionist organizations, which was rooted in the desire of these Jews to escape the humiliations and abuses committed against them in the name of the Dhimma (Bin-Nun, 2004).<sup>1</sup> And for the few hundred Jews still living in Morocco, it is an ongoing history of displacement that leaves them with a heritage to preserve for the Jewish diaspora. Such diverging views of those events signal the difficulty of telling a unified story of this moment. I want to contribute to this debate by showing that the combining and often opposing forces of Colonialism and Zionism were the main factors that triggered these migrations, in a period of rising Moroccan Nationalism. But those forces were also seen as opportunities by some migrants to seize the moment to better their fate and realize their dreams. If we cannot assess every migrant story, I want here to suggest, through my family's experience and memory and other collected oral histories, how we could intertwine those memories to a larger narrative to shed more light on this history.<sup>2</sup> I want also to illustrate how the push and pull forces that led to Moroccan Jewry's migrations between the 1940s and 1960s were the result of a reordering of the complex relationships between the different ethnic and religious communities well before the migration took place.

## Colonialism and Zionism: A Brief Overview

Since its installation in Morocco in 1863, the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* grew rapidly all over the country, as an extension of French Colonialism, which targeted Jewish communities in the Mediterranean to teach those French and Western cultures. As an able agent of the colonial power, but also as a way to revitalize Jewish diaspora, Alliance aimed at building a network of schools, which would give the colonial administration its workforce, both for its administrative and military needs. Its main purpose was to keep Jews in Morocco as emissaries or middlemen between the French colonial power and the Moroccan "Maghzen" or government. Neither the Alliance nor the French government expected them to become French, a citizenship they granted only to Algerian Jews with the famous Crémieux Decree of 1870, therefore discouraging their migration to France. The many thousands of Jews who sent their children to Alliance Schools to learn French soon discovered

that they were in a dire situation, uprooted from their traditions and languages, but not fully accepted as part of the French community. Westernized, they nevertheless kept their traditions and most of their community organizations and rituals.

A competing force, Zionism, was also present in Morocco. Its religious and mystical version, which held a millenarian view of return to Zion, was impregnating the traditional religious population and was found everywhere in some form or other. It was present in some cities, like Meknes: my paternal grandparents were ardent Zionists, although nothing appears in the family history about being convinced by anyone about Zionism or being linked to any Zionist organization. Their belief was that someday they will be able to realize their dream to live in *Eretz* Israë̄l. Itshak tried to move to Palestine when he got married, as witnessed by a letter answering Itshak's quest for immigration papers for the enlarged family dated 1935. Many other orthodox and less orthodox Jews shared the religious ideal of moving to Zion. But it is mostly the contemporary secular and political Zionism that pulled them and organized their migration to Israel after 1948, sometimes systematically emptying whole villages of their Jews, especially in the Atlas Mountains, for instance, but not only there; almost 80 percent of the Jewish population went to Israel with the help of Zionist organizations (Trigano, 2009).

There are many differences between the various waves of Aliya, which led almost 200,000 Jews from Morocco to Israel in less than 10 years following the creation of the State. The extent of this migration in such a short period of time could certainly lead us to consider that Zionism was the Jews' answer to Colonialism; in other words, Zionism won over French Colonialism as a pull factor, if we just consider those numbers and the fact that it happened between 1948 and 1956. It is another question to know whether those people went to Israel voluntarily, or because France failed them, or they had no other choice, etc.

It is admittedly a very difficult question to answer, since no one knows exactly how those decisions are taken and how the policies that were decided for them affected them. One thing that recent studies stress is the fact that even the migrants to Israel did not lack agency. The fractious colonial society offered them many different ways to negotiate their fate and actually gave them some agency in their decision to leave and where. Yaron Tsur (1997, 2001, 2007) showed that depending on their place in the different sectors of the colonial society, one could predict where they migrated. The very few who were integrated into the Western sector, composed of Europeans and colonists, went to France. Those in the Native sector, composed of Jews deeply entrenched in the local Arab and Berber culture (and who spoke mainly Arabic or Judeo-Arabic), were pulled by Zionists or wished to go to Israel and those who adopted only part of the Occidental culture, while retaining a strong attachment to their Jewishness, went either to Europe, to Canada, or to South America, depending of their language, their family, or diasporic network. Of course, such a categorization is broad and one should also include their gender, social class, profession, religious, and generational positions to indicate with

better accuracy where they migrated and when. This information will only give us an approximation of the path of migrations, since once they left their country of origin, they tended to circulate many times between different poles and axes of the diaspora (France, Israel, Canada for the Francophones, Central and Latin America for the Spanish-speaking). My family's migrations are a case in point to illustrate these different patterns.

## **My Family's Migration Patterns**

Raphael Cohen's genealogies had been instrumental in tracing many Moroccan Jewish ancestors back to ancient times, especially for Meknes' well-known families (Georgette and Raphael Cohen Family database). He was very kind to trace my own genealogy, in which we can track my father's parents (Abraham Cohen and Jamila Ohana) and mother's parents (Eliezer Berdugo and Simha Toledano). All four of my grandparents were born in the 1880s and died at a relatively young age, in the 1940s in Meknes (but my maternal grand-mother, Simha Toledano Berdugo, died in 1972, prompting my mother to postpone her own family's departure till 1974). On the Berdugo side of my mother's family, all five of her uncles were born and died in Meknes, but an aunt went to Israel and died there. My grandmother, Simha Toledano, had only two siblings, who were born and died in Meknes. But of my mother's six siblings, all were born in Meknes between 1910 and 1935, none is buried in Meknes: two died in France, three in Montréal, and two are still alive, one in Montréal and one in Paris. Westernized in the Alliance schools, even though the father insisted in living in the old Jewish quarter or Mellah of Meknes until his death, this family is an archetype of migration within the colonial landscape. In one generation, between my grandparents and my parents, everyone moved to a francophone country (France or Québec). Before that move, Raphael Cohen has been able to date back to 11 generations of Berdugos that resided in Meknes.

We cannot trace with such certainty my Cohen family ancestry. But for my father's family, whose belief in religious Zionism was absolute, the only place to go was Israel. Very early on, my grandfather Abraham Cohen was eager to get British or French protection and passport (letter dated 30 December 1918 from the French resident Lyautey to Abraham Cohen). He wrote letters to almost every official that could grant him and his family a passage to Israel, then Palestine, under the British mandate. Unfortunately, he did not succeed, as he and his wife died before they could see the creation of the State of Israel. Their dream would be realized by their children, who took their remains from their graves in Meknes to Jerusalem, where they are now buried. But of their 10 children, born in Meknes between 1910 and 1930, all men except one went to Israel. My aunts and uncles quickly settled in with their large families and became Israeli citizens. This was not the case for Abraham's two younger brothers, my uncles, who decided to leave Israel in 1955 and came back to Casablanca, Morocco, where they became successful businessmen, only to move again to France in the 1970s.

## Leaving for Israel: Zionism and Fragmented Memory

When and how did my family members feel that they were no longer at home in their own country? This perception happened for most of them long before their actual departure. We were able to interview three members of the Cohen family, Aaron and his two youngest sisters Anna and Marguerite, who confirmed that the family atmosphere was already filled with the Zionist ideal of going to *Eretz* Israel. Since the 1920s, their father, Abraham Cohen, a very religious and observant Jew, had been trying to convince the British Consulate to give his large family a visa to enter Palestine. They have not only the memory of those discussions, but David Cohen in his book has shown a copy of the letter that he wrote in 1923 to the British Consulate to that effect. When their father died, his dream became the family's dream. As we saw, it was Itshak, his eldest son's fate to carry it on, as he managed to depart with his own family of seven, all of his brother's families, and his two younger sisters in 1948. My father, Aaron, the youngest of the boys, who had just married my mother in 1948, left Meknes also to join them in Israel, but stayed longer in a refugee/transit camp near Marseille. It is unclear why he did not make the move to join all his brothers and sisters who were waiting for him in Israel. He told us that he received news that the situation was not that great for his siblings, who lost all their fortunes and hopes during the 1948 War/War of Independence and that he should postpone his departure. He stayed longer as an instructor or Shaliach in the transit camp run by the Jewish Agency and HIAS in Aubagne and then had to leave the camp, since he was not departing. He finally went back to Meknes a few years later, settled there with his wife's family, and departed for Montréal later, in 1974, where his wife's sister's family had settled in the late 1960s. While he remained in Morocco, it meant that he could not see his own brothers and sisters in Israel for almost 30 years.

The actualization of the family's Zionist ideal justified the breaking up with their own siblings, family and their own land. In this context, the rupture with their immediate environment was brutal: everyone in the family had to keep the secret of a clandestine departure. This particular event became a secret, which would haunt them later. For my father's two younger sisters, Anna and Marguerite, who were brought to Israel like "a package in their brother's luggage," by flight to Marseille and by ship to Haifa where they settled while only 13 and 15 years old, this story is anything but a nice memory! They still resent their sudden departure from their home, leaving their bicycles on the street, with little or nothing at all, and their harsh transplantation in a country totally unknown to them. Their memory of Morocco is, therefore, totally enshrined in a veil of fear, the only thing now that could have justified their sudden exile.

Zionism was the main motivation for their departure to Israel. The Zionist ideal of their parents was of a religious type: for them, it was the return to Zion. Whereas for their children, especially their two older boys, it was both the religious aspect and the ideal to build their own country that prompted them to leave as soon as the State of Israel was created. They were proud to say that no one helped them to migrate, that it was their money and desire that brought them to *Eretz* Israel, not so for the tens of thousands of people who left during the three major waves of

Aliya between 1948 and 1956. The clandestine work of the Zionist organizations was not acknowledged openly, but the rumors of the help they provided to people who wanted to leave was known. In villages in the south and in the Atlas Mountains, where those communities have been living for many generations, the Zionist organizations were instrumental in organizing their collective departure to Israel, in buses and boats. Whole villages fled, leaving empty their homes, schools, places of worship, cemeteries, and a vibrant Jewish life. But there was no coming back for most of them, only a story that has yet to be told.

A case in point is the unknown story of my uncle, Itshak Cohen, who created an immigrant association in 1949 to defend and represent North African Jews, Irgoun Ole-Zfon Africa, whom he considered discriminated against by the Israeli establishment. The clash between his Zionist ideal and the reality he discovered there could not have been more acute. Well before the Black Panthers movement fought for them, denouncing their plight as Black Jews or Arab Jews, he demanded respect for his group of migrants, who left everything they had to join in the creation of a Jewish State. His was a strong ideal, inherited from his parents as a religious call, but also as a means to build a country of their own. Contrary to European Zionism, with its millenarian accents, his was a strong belief in one people, one state. So, his disappointment was complete and long-lasting, when he saw that no one cared about those migrants in Israel. One of several letters that he wrote to different Israeli institutions to warn them about the harm that North African Jews were enduring, outlined some of his grievances (letters in Hebrew from Itshak Cohen, Comité de la Communauté Israélite d'Afrique du Nord, 24 July 1949, and in French, to Mr Chetrit, Israel Police minister, 7 December 1949), to no avail. He lost his fortune and ended up very bitter, impacting his entire family of nine children, dispersed all over the world, while Moshe tells us his story with a maze in his voice.<sup>3</sup>

My family's migration patterns were determined both by the big events of a period marked by the Shoah, the end of World War II and the decolonization process, of which Zionism and Colonialism were by-products, as well as the personal agency of their members. The period of 1940s was the decisive moment in which their fate was sealed: whether they went to France or Israel, in the first wave or second or third of migrations, they knew that they could not stay in Morocco any longer as a vibrant Jewish community. In this story, there is no one thing that emerges as a cause of departure, but a web of small events, unrelated to each other, which stem from the memories of people who we have interviewed.

### *Fractured Memories of Departures*

Individual trajectories only illustrate some trends, but in the absence of a unified story, I used oral history interviews to document Moroccan Jews' memory of their departures (Cohen & Messika, 2012; Cohen-Fournier & Messika, 2015). This study draws on interviews collected in Montreal and in Paris, with 64 individuals who are native of Morocco. In the sample collected in France, there were natives of Morocco and of Tunisia. In this respect, the first wave of migration, mostly to

Israel in 1948, is different from those that took place at the end of the 1950s, after the independence of Morocco.

As we will see, the meta-narrative outlined earlier frames some of the memories transmitted to us by our interviewees and became elements in a larger strategy to present their migration as a simple way to better their lives. How are the competing forces of Colonialism and Zionism playing in their decisions to migrate? The more neutral term of migration will be used to characterize their departure from Morocco, as we let them explain how they saw it, then and now. Far from offering a unified story, the memories collected here show a tapestry of mixed feelings of decisions taken in haste and a lack of clear perspective by a group of people who were taken up in the maelstrom of big events and who tried to make the best of them. For the older generation of interviewees, the interviews were conducted at two different moments in time. The first ones were done with older migrants that arrived in Montreal in the 1970s and collected in the 1980s. The second group had been recently interviewed within the Montreal Life Story Project.

## **Defining the Collectivity**

How did the interviewees define the group to which they belong? We find a complex geography of relations between the different groups within colonial society that are altered by independence. The relationships between the French, the Arabs, and the Jews during the colonization of Morocco left lasting traces in their memories. First, conviviality, friendship between Jews and Arabs is mentioned, in particular, within work relations for men. Women often kept away from too much public exposure in mixed settings, fearing that their daughters would get forced to marry to Muslims (marriages with Catholics being more tolerated). The protection of Jews by the king of Morocco under the Vichy regime is a trope that served to explain their gratitude toward Morocco and to the King. Little is said about their situation as Jews in Morocco or about anti-Semitism. By contrast, the anti-Semitism of the French is often emphasized not only in Morocco, but also in France (Abitbol, 2010).

Class also played a role in their relations not only with the other groups (French and Arab), but also within the Jewish community. Léon (born in 1942 in Casablanca) evokes the bad memories that his father kept of Morocco, notably of being relegated, because of his poverty, to the back of the synagogue by the wealthier Jews. His father also had, according to Léon, the memory of having been mistreated by the Arabs and was rather happy because of the French presence. A comparison is also often made with the other Jews of Europe during World War II, leading the interviewees to minimize what happened to them as benign events, like stones being thrown and raids in the Mellah. Admittedly, the memory of the abuses suffered, whether small daily humiliations, or some major public events, are relegated to a hazy memory, but are evoked spontaneously by the interviewees (Elbaz, 2001; Gottreich & Schroeter, 2011; Trigano, 2009).

However, these uneven relationships changed with the independence of Morocco in 1956: as the French had no more direct authority over inter-community

relations and Moroccan nationalism had won, uncertainty reigns (Rivet, 2002). Rumors replaced news, which reinforced their desire to leave: in 1957, it was said that the Jews would be enrolled in the Moroccan army and Léon did not see himself serving and was scared of being drafted to combat against Israel. The awareness of international tensions stemming from the Arab–Israeli conflict revealed potential conflicts between neighbors. The Middle-Eastern conflict, which spanned several decades, thus played an important part in the shifting of social relations between the Jewish and Arab communities in Morocco. After independence, Léon mentions that the Arabs suspected the Jews of sustaining, even financing Israel, which created certain tensions (surveillance, ransoms) and a “heavy atmosphere.” The clashes between groups in an already segmented society made it difficult to retain their traditional way of life. Everything seemed to be shattered by those big events, while some felt that there is little they could do to change this path. The belief in *Mekhtub*/destiny will take different forms and shapes in their memory of those events.

### *Clandestinity*

For six interviewees, their departure took place clandestinely. Each of them remembers some element of the story. Freha (born in Casablanca in 1940) recalls that her father had sold half of his property before leaving, but that he could not get his money safely out of the country. He asked his friend, a French colonel, to do the transaction on his behalf, with all the risks related to that. Freha herself, when she departed the second time, was hiding her money in her baby’s diapers! Henri (born in Meknès in 1926) remembers his mock departure “we left the house in order, as if we were leaving for the holidays!” Crossing the border into Spain, his car packed with all kinds of things, he feared crossing and being caught at the border. Hiding from their neighbors that they were leaving for good was not easy, as it implied not sharing essential aspects of their lives. In many cases, they went to great lengths in order to hide it carefully.

Who were they hiding from? Were they equally frightened by the local authorities as their Muslim neighbors were? Were they suspicious of their neighbors, who might report them? They obviously were afraid, even in the 1970s when the administration was giving out passports more easily (with some corruption, “bakchich” or intervention from well-placed friends or business relations). None of them talked really about it. There is a sense of urgency in the packing of their things and in their departure. Even if their decision to leave took a long time to mature, as they say that they had been thinking about it for quite a while, the actual departure happened when there was an opportunity or when they thought that the situation was deteriorating.

There is a striking difference between the individuals in the first wave who had to depart precipitously to an imposed destination, mostly in Israel in 1948, and those who participated in the second waves of migrations, which took place in the 1950s. In their discourses, their departure is the result of an individual or family decision. Their memory of their parent’s continuous administrative hassle to seek



the notorious papers (visa, administrative authorization, and sometimes passports) to depart is quite vivid. Jacques (born in Casablanca in 1937) evokes, therefore, his departure for Canada in January 1957, with his father and brother, who obtained their visa from the British Consulate in Casablanca, after a job offer in a newspaper ad. His mother and sisters, who stayed behind to liquidate their assets, joined them later. Leaving the women behind could be interpreted as a way to signal to the others (the administration, the neighbors, the friends) that it was not a definite departure, but only a (temporary) job-motivated migration. For her part, Freha said that she first left Morocco to join her husband, who was studying medicine in Paris in 1961. Her parents, who went also to France with two of her sisters, finally migrated to Montreal in 1964. She came back two years later, as her husband decided to do his internship in a Moroccan hospital in Casablanca, where his parents lived; only to move back again to Paris, at the birth of her first son and then to Canada in the 1970s and then to the USA, in Arizona, where her husband settled with their family of four. Finally, when she divorced from her husband, she left the USA to join the rest of her siblings who were established in Montreal.

### *Multiple Migrations: Post-Colonial Circulations*

It is striking to see the succession of departures and returns, alone, with, or without her family during this period of Post-independence of Morocco. Many other interviewees explain these migrations as family-bound, or simply to study or work, as if it were a natural move; even though we know how challenging such migrations are, involving a massive cost in money, time, relations, networks to seek entry, exit permissions, immigration papers, etc. It seems as if there were no other causes for their departure or at least they were erased from their memory. They also insist that they had the choice of their destination and their going back and forth from Morocco, freely, is a witness of their ability to decide whether or not they will leave. Canada is the foremost choice, for it is far away from colonial France and newly independent Morocco. In the midst of the fierce political battles that were conducted by international Jewish organizations like Jewish Immigrant Alliance Services (JIAS) to “save the Jewish community of Morocco,” our interviewees’ memories have erased such rhetoric and retained only that they themselves could take this opportunity to leave (Messika, 2015). Our interviewees’ itineraries are complex, as they move from one place to another within a diasporic triangle: Israel, France, Canada, and/or when possible USA; they stop for some time in one country and return to Casablanca, and finally leave Morocco completely. Their families are dispersed along the road in different destinations and eventually gathered in one place. Leon’s parents left Morocco for Israel in 1946 (after 6 months spent in a camp in Marseille), came back to France in the 1950s, and left again for Israel in 1965 with their younger children only to come back in the 1960s again to France and then to Montreal in the 1970s. Their migrations resemble a patchwork of the eternal migrant or “wandering Jew.” Once they left their country of origin, they did not find a place to stay long enough to call it their home!

In these interviews, one gets a sense of loss, but it is not explicit. They are in a survival mode, so the relationships with the others are secondary, not important, not worth recalling. They do not even tell us if they discussed the decisions to leave within their own family. The overall impression is one of a quick departure, with no one really in charge of taking care of such details as the destination of the family migration and the explanation of the cause of their departure.

In Henri's family, the oldest son decided to bring with him his two younger sisters to Israel, after their parents died and just when the State of Israel was founded, in the summer of 1948. He even rented a house in Marseilles for all of them to wait for their papers. In Léon's family, as the oldest son of a family of nine, he worried about the education of his younger brothers and helped them emigrate to Canada. Around him, the family will finally reunite in Montreal. His preoccupation is inward, within the family unit, not with the outside world, which is perceived as malevolent, scary, and not to be trusted.

In many interviews, the same feeling of powerlessness pervades their memory of those hard times. Even if they identify a-posteriori one factor that triggered their own departure and their family's, there is also a general atmosphere in the community that played a major role in their decision to leave. One of them told us "everybody was leaving, so we had to leave as well." Their segregation from the rest of the Moroccan people in the Mellah and their subtle exclusion from the Western world, even when some of them moved away to live in the Westernized city ("ville nouvelle"), brought on a strong feeling of alienation. They indeed did some business with the other communities, some even went to the same French schools, but the strict separation between those different sectors was quite efficient to keep them from mingling with each other. They quickly learned to keep their stories to themselves and not to share the more intimate questions about their lives with anyone else. Even within the Jewish community, the sharing of the information was not open and rumors replaced it.

### *Leaving for the Children*

These events are but a back-story behind the factor, often cited as determining their departure, which is to say that the parents saw little future for their children in Morocco. Even if their economic situation is considered flourishing by Henri, the decision to leave "for the children" takes over. Some children, for that matter, left for Paris to study (the older girl in Henri's family, Freha's husband) before their parents' departure. We can also notice that within families, there is a concern for the education of girls who can leave home (and change countries) for this reason. As the issue of the children's education is often cited as one of the reasons justifying the family's departure, focusing on this aspect of student migration allows us to establish the influence of French-Jewish Colonialism.

The narratives highlight the importance of Alliance Israélite Universelle schools. In 1956, the institution enrolled nearly 33,000 students in Morocco and held a major role in the transmission of Jewish and French education, even if some of the children could attend French schools and all these schools were

competing with the religious education offered by Talmud Torah schools (Kaspi, 2010; Laskier, 1994). Even if the Alliance Israélite Universelle was a Jewish institution, it was considered to be a vector of Westernization and there were tensions with traditionalist families who wanted mostly a Jewish education. The distinction between the education received in the French schools and the education received in the schools of the Alliance Israélite Universelle is not as clear-cut. There were several transfers from one school to the other and it was common to receive part of one's education in a school of the Alliance and then in a French lycée. The high quality and the prestige of the French lycées seemed to have drawn the parents to enroll their children.

The way in which these stories play down the existing tension between Jewish and secular education gives an indication of the attractiveness of French culture; it gave them the possibility to navigate within several school systems. The centrality of French culture constitutes a crucial experience in Morocco, where the French presence was the most recent in North Africa and where the colonial society was still organized around established communities. Certain narratives concerning French culture reflect the idea of a possible emancipation and of a possible rupture with the traditional world. This may take a gendered dimension. Indeed, the women emphasize their mother's or grandmother's will for them to pursue their education. It also gives us insights into the family and gender dynamics that were expressed during the confrontation with the French educational institutions. For the men we interviewed, attending school was not accompanied by the same militancy.

## **The Ethnicization of Social Relations**

The majority of the stories collected seem to follow the existing social and community segmentation of the colonial world. In these narratives, the Arab-Muslim world is absent and the interviewees focus on evocations of the family or of French culture. Fear is seldom present in the narratives of the people interviewed, who left their countries when they were younger, in contrast to the interviews conducted with older Moroccan Jews, who had a profession and children. Due to the social stratification and the ethnicization of relations within colonial society, the Arab-Muslim society is a seldom-cited motive in our narratives.

For many, the previous departure of members of their family to Israel, Paris, or Montreal determined their own. It was as if the whole community was taken by this wave of migration. Their profound disengagement from their own life made me think as if their belonging to the Jewish community (which was an extension of their family, their clan, or their sector) represented their connection to the outside world.

They considered migrating as something quite "natural" for the generation that grew into the French colonial system. The younger generation (the baby boomers, who grew up when Morocco succeeded in getting its independence from France) were the principal actors of the decision to migrate. In some cases, they were old

enough to decide for themselves and the family followed suit; for others, their future (jobs, alliances, etc.) was the reason their parents gave for moving their family away.

## Conclusion

The departures of the people interviewed for this study are inscribed both in the collective and family dynamics, but were organized in secret, away from the gaze of the others, particularly that of non-Jewish neighbors. Their belonging to a sector of the colonial world, while still prevalent in their narratives, is blurred by another aspect of post-colonial life in Morocco, that is the cultural/education nexus. Depending on where one has been educated and socialized, the combined effects of Colonialism and Zionism strongly impacted the time of their departures and the places they went to.

The creation of the State of Israel was a strong pull factor for those people who, like my father's family, were eager to go to the land of their forefathers. The pull was rapidly reinforced by a push factor, which was exercised by Zionist organizations among local indigenous populations. Its effect was massive, since most of those people did not have much to say and went along according to plans devised for them.

Soon after the independence of Morocco, the future of those who considered themselves part of the Westernized sector, like my mother's family, appeared suddenly blocked, even though our interviewees present their migration as a means of improving their lot. They decided to depart and they think of their migration as a non-coerced choice.

The destinations differ according to the sectors and to the combined action of Zionism and Colonialism; the non-occidental majority was pulled very early on to migrate to Israel by the strong Zionist organizations, whereas Colonial France accepted very few migrants from Morocco, having at the same time to relocate a million French citizens after the Algerian War. The population of this Westernized sector tried first France and then Canada or Latin America for the Hispanophones. Also noteworthy is the difference in the temporality of these migrations: after the migrations of the mainly French and Christian colonials toward their country of nationality, the Jews migrated in the 1950s through the 1970s and more massively than their Muslim counterparts, who migrated in turn from 1980 to 2000. It is striking to see how the cognitive and memory processes of those migrants have blocked the trauma associated with their migration. The thing that remains vibrant is their feeling of belonging to a lost world. As Moshe recounts the story of his father, which he carefully documents, digging letter after letter in the trove of the Zionist archives, he looks back to this world with amazement, wondering how his family has made it through it all.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Notes

1. “Dhimma” is a set of Islamic laws regulating the relationship of Muslims and non-Muslims in a Muslim state. Enforcing the rules of Dhimma varied over history, and the traditional way of viewing Jews as subordinate to the Muslims, while recognizing and respecting their places of worship and religion, has been a pervading feature of this relationship through the contemporary era.
2. This text presents the results of a larger research project on the Migrations of Moroccan Jews in France and Canada, funded by a Social Sciences Research Council of Canada grant (2014–2019). For the use of oral history narratives in this research, see also Cohen, Messika, and Cohen Fournier, 2015. For the purpose of this article, I had also relied on never published oral interviews and written correspondence with Moshe Cohen, son of Itshak Cohen, during the last year. He sent me the original material he found at the Zionist Archives in Israël on his father as well as some family archives that are displayed in the annexes.
3. “My father is a ‘notable’: he was associated with his father in importing goods from Great-Britain for all of Morocco; they made lots of money ... My father had a large family of 9, who are now all over the world: Marie (NYC), Shmuel (Genève and now in Israel), Daniel (Captain in the Commercial Marine, who died recently), Gabriel (Zurich), Shlomo (Cote d’Ivoire, and Israel), Shochana (in Israel). He was educated with Rav Messas, one of the brightest students in their Yeshiva, speaking and writing French perfectly,” (Interview with Moshe Cohen, August 2018 and May 2019).

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