

**The Jews of the Desert:
Colonialism, Zionism, and the Jews of the Algerian M'zab, 1882-1962**

by

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אני אהבת אותך מכאן עד גרדאייא.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
List of Figures	vii
List of Abbreviations	viii
Abstract	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
The Crémieux Decree: French Nationality Policies in Colonial Context	5
French Annexation in the M'zab and the Jews of Ghardaïa	14
Zionism in Algeria and the M'zab	23
Chapter Overview	32
PART I: 1882-1945	
Chapter 2: The Limits of Emancipation and <i>Les Puritains du Désert</i> : The M'zab in French Algeria, 1882-1930	35
The M'zab and its Inhabitants	40
"The Jews of the Desert"	47
<i>Dhimmitude</i> to the Jewish personal status	54
Colonization and Reform in the M'zab	60
Conclusion	65
Chapter 3: The Long Arm of Vichy: French Antisemitism in the M'zab, 1930-1946	69
Antisemitism, Old and New	75
The changing status quo and the long arm of Vichy	81
Liberation and the non-emancipation of the M'zabi Jews	93
Conclusion	97
PART II: 1946-1962	
Chapter 4: Zionism in the Sahara, 1943-1954	101
Surveillance in the south: Contrary French policies and Jewish frustration	105
The "Question Palestinienne" and Muslim-Jewish relations in the M'zab	111
Migration: an international effort	116
A shift in French policy?	125
Conclusion: <i>aliyah</i> or assimilation	133

Chapter 5: War and Development in the M'zab, 1954-1958	136
The Algerian War and the M'zab: a local and global conflict	141
"The key to the Sahara": the key to France's future	149
Conclusion: Anti-Jewish violence and Jewish emigration	159
Chapter 6: "The Milk of Liberty," or the Land of Milk and Honey: Citizenship, Emigration, and Absorption, 1958-1962	164
M'zabi Jewish citizenship and the international Jewish community	169
Belated equality and emigration	178
Citizens, Refugees: Absorption in France	187
Absorption in Israel	196
Conclusion	202
Chapter 7: Conclusion: The Ambiguity of Empire	205
Bibliography	216

List of figures

1.1 Map showing the location of the Mزاب	17
2.1 “Simplified plan of the city of Ghardaïa”	46
2.2 “Juives de Ghardaïa” c. 1905	51
4.1 “A group of Jewish children... c. 1949”	119
4.2 “A typical Jewish family...c. 1949”	120
4.3 “Young Jewish girl...c. 1949”	120
4.4 “An elderly Jewish woman...c. 1949”	121
4.5 “A Jewish family...c. 1949”	121
4.6 “Working as a watch maker...c. 1949”	122
4.7 “Learning to make mirrors...c. 1949”	122
5.1 The Sebban family in Hassi Messaoud	150
5.2 “View of the Whole”	161
5.3 “View of the Hallway”	162
6.1 “A family heads to the airport, for the departure to <i>Eretz Yisrael</i> ”	184
6.2 Burial of religious scrolls in the cemetery in Ghardaïa	186
6.4 Map of development towns in Israel	200

List of Abbreviations

AJC	American Jewish Committee
AJDC	American Joint Distribution Committee
NY AJDC	Archives of the American Joint Distribution Committee, Inc., NY, NY
ANOM	Archives nationales d'outre mer
AIU	Alliance Israélite Universelle
AAIU	Archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle
CDJC	Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine
CZA	Central Zionist Archives
ISA	Israel State Archives

Abstract

This dissertation studies the Jewish community of the Algerian M'zab during the French colonization of the Sahara from 1882 until 1962. French officials refused to extend the 1870 Crémieux Decree that emancipated Algerian Jews to the M'zab after its 1882 annexation. French administrators saw the M'zabi Jews as insurmountably different and consequently excluded them from emancipation. Despite petitions from the community and French and Algerian Jewish advocacy for extending emancipation to the south, successive French colonial and metropolitan governments declined to extend the Crémieux Decree to the M'zab. French officials justified this decision by invoking the insurmountable difference of M'zabi Jews, who were both too Jewish and too similar to Algerian Muslims to be “regenerated” as French citizens.

Within the colonial legal system, M'zabi Jews were classified as “indigènes,” or natives, alongside Algerian Muslims. M'zabi Jews faced the restrictions that bounded the lives of Muslims in French Algeria and settler antisemitism that culminated in the Vichy abrogation of the Crémieux Decree in 1940. When Free French forces reinstated the Crémieux Decree in 1943, the French again excluded the M'zabi Jews. Following this, a number of individuals and families from the community left Algeria to join the growing Jewish community in British mandatory Palestine.

M'zabi Jews were the only organized Jewish community who left Algeria for Israel. Their history challenges historiography that claims Zionism was unsuccessful in Algeria. M'zabi Jews were not ardent Zionists, but they did take advantage of the opportunities for emigration made possible by international Zionist organizations including the American Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency. In contrast to the larger history of Algerian Jews, the history of the M'zabi Jewish immigration from Algeria to Israel is part of the larger history of Jewish migrations from the Arab world to Israel after 1945. M'zabi Jews won full French citizenship in late 1961, but most still opted to make their way to Israel rather than France.

Chapter 1:

Introduction

This project interrogates why and how the French colonial state determined that the Jews of the Algerian M'zab did not merit French citizenship and the consequences of that action on the Jewish community of Ghardaïa during and immediately after the period of French colonization. These individuals were French subjects without full legal equality until just prior to Algerian independence in late 1961, when the French state replaced their Jewish *personal status* with the French *civil status*. The unique history of French colonization in the M'zab and French relations with the Jewish community of Ghardaïa serves as a useful and heretofore relatively unexplored lens into French discourses about difference and nationality. Debates about French identity, popular antisemitism in Algeria and the metropole, international pressure from Jewish and Zionist organizations, and the lobbying efforts of the M'zabi Jewish community alternately influenced these policies in the M'zab. Colonial writings about M'zabi Jews, M'zabi Jewish interactions with French officials, and the relationship between M'zabi Jews in Algeria and Israel also influenced French policies in Algeria pertaining to Jews and Muslims and debates in Paris about nationality and colonialism.¹

¹ A number of historians of French Empire have examined the dialogue between metropole and colony about nationality and colonial policies. See e.g. Gerard Noiriel, *The French Melting Pot*, trans. Geoffrey de

Historians of French Jewry have long argued that studying the discourses surrounding Jewish emancipation and integration into the French body politic reveal important ideas about difference and nationality in France.² Jews were the minority, the “other” par excellence in France and much of Europe. The “regeneration” of Jews as productive French citizens obsessed generations of French politicians, who sometimes conceived of French identity in opposition to Jewish identity or constructed definitions of citizenship based on their interpretation of the requirements necessary to solve the problem of Jewish difference. Once France colonized Algeria, these policies and debates extended to the sizeable Jewish community there. Algeria was the birthplace of many policies regarding Jews, as well as political antisemitism in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Just as colonial histories can inform our comprehension of the metropole, so studying the history of Jews in Algeria is vital to understanding the history of French Jewry, as the two were deeply intertwined after 1830. Though there were significant Jewish communities in Tunisia and Morocco, only Algeria was officially

Laforcade (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Patrick Weil, *How to be French: Nationality in the making since 1789* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008); Neil MacMaster, *Colonial Migrants and Racism in France, 1900-1962* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Herrick Chapman and Laura Frader, eds, *Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004); Tyler Stovall and Sue Peabody, eds., *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Cliff Rosenberg, *Policing Paris: the Origins of Modern Immigration Control between the Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006); Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: the Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa* (Stanford University Press, 1997); Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *The Boundaries of the Republic: Migrant Rights and the Limits of Universalism in France, 1918-1940* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007).

² For examinations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when these debates were at their height in the public sphere, by Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews: The Origins of Modern Anti-Semitism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), Ronald Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews: Representations of Jews in France, 1715-1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), and Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews, and the Sanhedrin* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979). For the twentieth century, see Paula Hyman, *From Dreyfus to Vichy: The Remaking of French Jewry, 1906-1939* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), as well as Pierre Birnbaum, *Jewish Destinies: Citizenship, State, and Community in Modern France*, trans. Arthur Goldhamer (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000).

annexed by France and consequently a place where French citizenship could be fully extended to local Jews.³

Histories of Jews in French Algeria have also been valuable for the ways that they complicate our understanding of Jewish identity, community, and culture in modern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East.⁴ Algerian Jews were the first non-European Jewish community (though many in the Jewish community had deep ties to Europe) to be emancipated. The 1870 Crémieux Decree extended French citizenship to Jewish individuals of the Algerian *départements* for a variety of reasons: to cultivate them as allies in French colonization, to appease the demands for this emancipation from French Jews, and to demonstrate the expansiveness of French universalism. The Crémieux Decree was an exceptional piece of legislation that radically reoriented the identity of Algerian Jewry, creating a kind of third space for them in the colonial binary, between “colonizer” and “colonized.”⁵

After the Crémieux Decree, Muslims were largely seen and legally categorized at the lowest rung of the native populations in Algeria. However, French authorities also

³ Joshua Schreier argues convincingly that Algerian Jews shaped French policies and colonial ideologies well before the Crémieux Decree emancipated them in *Arabs of the Jewish Faith: The Civilizing Mission in Colonial Algeria* (Rutgers University Press, 2010).

⁴ The two classic comprehensive accounts of Algerian Jewish history are: André Chouraqui, *Between East and West: A History of the Jews of North Africa* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1968), and H.Z. Hirschberg, *A History of the Jews In North Africa* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974). The narrative of emancipation, gallicization, and eventual immigration to France is elaborated in many histories of Algerian Jewry, including Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (JPS, 1991); Simon Schwarzfuchs, *Les Juifs d'Algérie et la France, 1830-1855* (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1981); Reeva S. Simon, Michael M. Laskier and Sara Reguer, eds., *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Michael Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Sarah Taïeb-Carlen, *Les Juifs D'Afrique du Nord: De Didon à De Gaulle* (Saint-Maur: Sépia, 2000). Both Joshua Schreier, in *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*, and Todd Shepard in *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), critically examine this narrative and question its veracity. Shepard discusses the exceptional treatment of Jews in the M'zab, but focuses his study on the larger Algerian Jewish population in Chapter 6, “Repatriation Rather Than Aliyah: The Jews of France and the End of French Algeria,” 169-182.

⁵ Albert Memmi, a Tunisian Jew, coined this phrase when discussing his childhood in North Africa in his classic *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (New York: Orion Press, 1965).

placed M'zabi Jewish legal status, uniquely of all Jewish communities in Algeria, on par with Muslim Algerians. The Jews of Ghardaïa were never emancipated after the 1882 annexation of the valley. French officials determined that while most Algerian Jews could become French and were capable of "regeneration," M'zabi Jewish difference was insurmountable. The history of the Jewish community of the M'zab thus offers a radically different vision of the Jewish experience in French Algeria and suggests a new complexity in the relationship between the French nation and Jewish communities in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Including the M'zabi Jewish historical experience in the historiography of Algerian and French Jewry expands our understanding of how the French state dealt with difference, the persistent stigmatization of Jewish practices, and the complex roles Zionism played in the lives of Jews in French Algeria.

That Zionism played a critical role in the M'zab is indicative of a major difference between M'zabi Jewish history and Algerian Jewish history. In contrast to the overwhelming decision on the part of most Algerian Jews to migrate from Algeria to France in 1962, the majority of Jews from the M'zab chose to immigrate to Israel and began doing so decades earlier. The M'zabi Jewish migration to Israel places the history of this community within the larger history of Jewish migration from the Arab world to Israel after 1945. M'zabi Jews made *aliyah* to Israel for a variety of reasons. Just as Jews from Iraq, Morocco, or Libya fled violence or instability, so too many in the M'zabi community chose to leave Algeria when confronted with the violence of the Algerian War. Others sought to escape recurrent French antisemitism, while many simply believed they could win greater prosperity and full legal equality in Israel and not in

Algeria or France. That so many in the community sought to immigrate to Israel instead of France even after the community finally won legal equality in late 1961 suggests a level of distrust M'zabi Jews may have felt towards the French state by that point.

The divergences between the history of M'zabi Jews and Algerian Jewry reflect both the short-term changes that colonialism and Zionists brought to Jewish communities in Algeria as well as the long-standing differences between a Jew from Ghardaïa and one from Algiers or Constantine. The unique experiences of this small community are both the product of French policies and the very real differences—cultural, historical, social, even genetic—between this isolated community and the Jews of the Maghreb generally. Thus, including this Jewish history in the canon of Algerian Jewish historiography is a necessary addition if we are to fully comprehend the diversity of Jewish identity and experience in North Africa in the modern era.

The Crémieux Decree: French Nationality Policy in Colonial Context

“Since the Revolution, France has changed its laws more often and more significantly than any other democratic nation has, and policies governing French nationality have been the object of continual political and legal confrontations”⁶

The emancipation of Algerian Jewry in 1870 is an important moment in both modern Jewish and modern European history. This legislation and the earlier emancipation of French Jews occurred at exceptional moments in French history and are useful for historians to examine French nationality policies and their evolution. Even at the moment of their inception, these emancipatory policies evidenced prevalent discourses and ideas about otherness and Jewishness at that particular moment in Europe and in France. Jews were often used as symbols of the pre-modern period and its woes

⁶ Weil, *How to be French*, 3.

and philosophers and historians argued that their practices and beliefs had to be changed or eradicated in order to achieve full, productive citizenship. Voltaire argued that “regenerating” the Jews could demonstrate the transition from “primitive” to “civilized” society, from archaic religion to modern reason. In the *philosophe* imagination, Jews could stand in for any challenge to the progress of the Enlightenment.⁷ Consequently, their “regeneration” as “proper” French citizens often signified the success of the Revolutionary project after the emancipation of every individual French Jew in 1790 and 1791.⁸

Widespread antisemitism and official criticism followed the emancipatory moment. French Jews were condemned for their lack of acculturation, particularly those in eastern France. While the cosmopolitan *Sephardim*⁹ of southwest France and Paris moved increasingly into French social, economic, and political circles, the *Ashkenazim*¹⁰ living in Alsace and Lorraine remained poor and isolated, much as they had before emancipation. After seizing power in 1805, Napoleon was particularly vested in integrating French Jews, a symbolic task that would prove his power. He hoped to delegitimize what he saw as a separate Jewish “nation” and bring Jewish individuals into

⁷ Ronald Schechter interrogates Voltaire’s obsession with the Jews in *Obstinate Hebrews* (2003).

⁸ The Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre famously addressed the National Assembly on the subject of the emancipation of the Jews in 1789, asserting “We must refuse everything to the Jews as a nation and accord everything to Jews as individuals.” For Tonnerre and his peers, Jewish loyalty to rabbinical authority posed a threat to the Republic and the solution was to emancipate Jews and incorporate them into the nation as individuals. This is one of the fundamental inconsistencies in the French universalist project. Napoleon also argued that French Jews constituted a “nation within a nation” and convened an assembly of Jewish notables, a Grand Sanhedrin, to address how Jewish law might be brought into harmony with the *Code civil*. For additional readings on the emancipation of French and Algerian Jews, see Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews: the origins of modern anti-Semitism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 360-380, and Joshua Schreier, “Napoleon’s Long Shadow: Morality, Civilization, and Jews in France and Algeria, 1808-1870,” *French Historical Studies* 30, no.1 (Winter 2007): 78-81.

⁹ From the Hebrew *Sefarad* for the Iberian Peninsula, generally denotes Jews who fled late fifteenth century persecution to Western Europe, North Africa, the Levant, and the Balkans. Adj. *Sephardi*.

¹⁰ Jews of European descent. Adj. *Ashkenazi*.

French society. Towards this end he convened an Assembly of Jewish Notables in 1806 to specifically address the problem of Jewish moneylending in the northeast, with the goal of “recalling their brethren to the exercise of useful arts and professions in order to replace, through honest industry, the shameful practices to which many of them have resorted from father to son over many centuries.” This commission was also generally tasked with solving the issue of Jewish separateness. Napoleon focused a great deal of energy on the “Jewish Question” at least in part because he believed that by facilitating the “regeneration” of a population widely seen as static he would appear yet more powerful to the French populace.¹¹

Part of these efforts was identifying and eliminating “objectionable” practices in Jewish family life, bringing Jewish private lives into line with the recently promulgated Napoleonic *Code civil*. Emancipation thus blurred the lines between the public and private spaces of Jewish lives, extending state control into their homes and families. The Assembly reassured Napoleon that Jews no longer practiced bigamy or child-marriage and were committed to being good French citizens. Dissatisfied with their findings, Napoleon ordered a second, more imposing body to convene, a Grand Sanhedrin of Jewish religious and lay leaders to create a centralized system of Jewish consistories that would enforce civil law amongst the Jewish population.

The 1808 decrees that established the consistory system codified a mechanism by which the state could intervene in the daily lives of French Jews, creating for the first time a centralized hierarchy of Jewish religious authorities from both the Sephardic and Ashkenazi communities. Consistories throughout France would monitor Jewish religious activities and ensure that Jews followed French law before Jewish *halakhah* (religious

¹¹ Schechter, *Obstinate Hebrews*, 195.

law), reporting back to the Central Consistory in Paris. Simon Schwarzfuchs described the creation of the consistory system as “a turning-point in the long history of Judaism,” an unprecedented integration of Jewish authorities into the national government that marked a new interventionist attitude towards Judaism in the West.¹² Napoleon III expanded the consistory system to Algeria in 1848 after declaring the areas surrounding Oran, Algiers, and Constantine *départements* of France, legal extensions of the metropole.

Though the consistory system imposed a unified system of government on the Algerian Jewish population, the historically diverse Algerian Jewish community was deeply divided by class, location, and origin. Cosmopolitan *Sephardi* and Livornese merchants and shopkeepers lived in the cities of the Mediterranean coast while poorer Jewish communities dating back centuries in North Africa populated the smaller cities and interior.¹³ The Jews of the M’zab were distinct from all these groups. They lived in close proximity with their Muslim neighbors in the remote city of Ghardaïa, on the northern edges of the Sahara. Early histories of Algerian Jewry focused almost exclusively on the *Sephardi* communities of the coast, who had little to do with Algerian Muslims and had close commercial and familial bonds with Europe. These European connections proved vital to France when, in 1830, Jewish merchants from the Livornese community in Algiers aided the French conquest of Algiers. French officers relied on Jewish information and financial support in the first decades of their arrival in Algeria.

¹² Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews, and the Sanhedrin*, 179.

¹³ Benjamin Stora, *Les trois exils Juifs d’Algérie* (Editions Stock, 2006), 30.

Jewish merchants in Algiers in turn benefitted from the closer trade relations with Europe that French colonization facilitated.¹⁴

Many of the same *Sephardim* who benefited from colonization also lobbied for their emancipation after the 1848 decree that made Algeria's territories French *départements*. In doing so, these Algerian Jews adopted much of the rhetoric about Jewish "regeneration" from early French Republican debates about the emancipation of French Jews in 1791. The same expectations of French Jews only a few decades earlier now resurfaced in the assertion that citizenship would facilitate the "regeneration" of Algerian Jews. A 1836 letter from the Jewish leaders of the Central Consistory in Paris to the Minister of Justice and Religious Affairs advocated Jewish emancipation as a mechanism to further French and Jewish interests in Algeria:

Some advantage to the Government could result from the establishment of a Jewish Consistory in Algeria...It appears to us that this would attach to France an important part of the African population and accelerate the moral regeneration of these new fellow citizens.¹⁵

This was a new iteration of the French civilizing mission from a French Jews who feared the non-European orientation of many Algerian Jews might reflect badly on Jews as a whole and on French Jews in particular. In their efforts to convince the French of their case for Algerian Jews, many contrasted the potential for the regeneration of Algerian Jews with the backwardness and insularity of Algerian Muslims. The 1842 Altaras-Cohen report, written by Isaac Altaras and Joseph Cohen, emissaries of the Central Consistory, asserted that while Algerian Jews held the potential for regeneration, Algerian Muslims were resistant to French influence.

¹⁴ Genevieve Dermenjian and Benjamin Stora, "Les juifs d'Algérie dans le regard des officiers français de la conquête, 1830-1855," in *La Revue historique* (September 1991): 333-339.

¹⁵ Zosa Szajkowski, "Socialists and Radicals in the Development of Antisemitism in Algeria," *Jewish Social Studies* 10 (1948): 258.

Within the hierarchy of race and religion in Algeria, the French deemed fellow Europeans and Jews as the most easily assimilable, followed by Berbers and finally Arab Muslims.¹⁶ Many French colonial officers viewed the Berbers, and in particular the Kabyles, as superior to the Arabs, a trope termed the “Kabyle Myth.” Though no legislation was every passed to codify this hierarchy, it influenced generations of French colonial officials, journalists, and historians. Central to the valuation of Berbers above Arabs was a deep distrust of Islam, which was almost exclusively tied to Arabs, though many Berbers were themselves Muslims. Many in the colonial administration saw Arab and Muslim society as intrinsically opposed to modernity, based often on superficial assumptions about Muslim culture and often on the treatment and appearance of veiled Muslim women. In this context of French secular, enlightened civilization versus Islam, it was the duty of the French, their civilizing mission, to uplift the peoples of Algeria and bring them into the French orbit.¹⁷

Although French anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and government officials wrote lengthy treatises and memoranda about the difficulties of colonizing the Berber and Arab peoples of Algeria, it was the Jews who were first used to represent the regenerative possibilities of the civilizing mission. After 1840, the “regeneration” of Algerian Jews also became an important indicator of the extent to which French Jews had fulfilled the promise of their own emancipation. French Jews lobbied heavily for

¹⁶ This was an oversimplification of the diverse populations in the area that came to be known as Algeria at the time of French conquest, which included Turks, Sub-Saharan Africans, Jews, and others. Benjamin Brower, *A Desert Named Peace: The Violence of France's Empire in the Algerian Sahara, 1844-1902* (New York: Columbia University Press), 20-21. Assumptions about Muslim inassimilability persist to the present-day in France, as evidenced by the debates surrounding the headscarf.

¹⁷ Patricia Lorcin traces the development and repercussions of the “Kabyle Myth” in *Imperial Identities: Stereotyping, prejudice and race in colonial Algeria* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 1995), and Paul Silverstein examines its later consequences for Algerian migrants in the metropole in *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

citizenship to be extended to the Algerian Jews. After 1860, the *Alliance Israelite Universelle* assisted these efforts to “uplift” the Jews of Algeria.¹⁸ The first international Jewish organization, the AIU aimed to “regenerate” the Jews of the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans in the image of the enlightened and emancipated Jews of France, primarily through a widespread network of schools that supplied valuable educational and social resources.¹⁹ Certainly, teachers of the AIU worked altruistically throughout the Jewish world, but this altruism was predicated on a valuation of French Jewish practices and behaviors above those of the Maghreb and elsewhere.

At the time that the Third Republic succeeded the Second Empire in 1870, a new formula for categorizing colonized populations emerged, that of the non-citizen French “subject.” This was the status applied to the Jews of Ghardaïa in 1882 and all Algerian Muslims. This category opened up a vague space between citizenship and nationality and created a new hierarchy of Frenchness in Algeria, from subjects to French citizens. The M’zabi Jews occupied the former, least enfranchised, category despite their Jewishness and legal arguments supporting their claim to the Crémieux Decree. The progression from “subject” to “citizen,” from personal status to civil status, was often predicated on an abandonment of religious and cultural mores that the French authorities deemed incompatible with full political rights. The category of “subject” was closely related to that of *indigène*, or “native,” and each was bounded restrictively by the *Code de l’indigénat* in 1881, just prior to the annexation of the M’zab. This collection of

¹⁸ Schreier, “Napoleon’s Long Shadow,” 103.

¹⁹ For an early history of its founding and an examination of the AIU’s activities in Turkey, see Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); for an analysis of AIU activities in North Africa, see Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco 1862-1962* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

restrictive laws punished “natives” in the colonies for crimes as vague as showing “disrespect to the administration and its civil servants.”²⁰ Gregory Mann describes the *indigènat* in French West Africa as “both a set of sanctions and a colonial state of being.”²¹ It defined what it meant to be “native” in the French empire at different moments of colonization and extended French control in the Empire into the most mundane and private lives of colonized populations. At the historical moment of its implementation in 1881, when M’zabi Jews fell under French sovereignty, the *indigènat* constricted the spaces in French society open to colonial “subjects,” delineating clear boundaries between French and non-French.

Despite the *indigènat* and its restrictions, many Jews in Ghardaïa remained optimistic about their future under French rule. There had been several legislative efforts offering new possibilities for citizenship. The 1865 *senatus-consulte* decreed that Muslims and Jews of Algeria could become French citizens if they surrendered their personal status, meaning that they would agree to have personal law matters arbitrated not in local courts under local Muslim or Jewish law, but in French civil courts.²² This decree of July 14, 1865, confirmed that all Algerians possessed French nationality and “Algerian” signified all individuals living in the conquered area of “Algeria,” not a particular racial, ethnic, or religious group. However, few Algerian Jews or Muslims

²⁰ Emmanuelle Saada traces the evolution of this category from Revolutionary and Napoleonic discourses about race, slavery, and colonization, in “The Republic and the *Indigènes*” trans. Renée Champion and Edward Berenson, in *The French Republic: History, Values, Debates*, ed. Edward Berenson, Vincent Duclert, and Christophe Prochasson (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 229.

²¹ Gregory Mann, “What was the *indigènat*? *The ‘Empire of Law’ in French West Africa*” *Journal of African History* 50, no. 3 (November 2009): 336.

²² For more on the *senatus consulte* of 1865, see Florence Renucci, “Le statut personnel des indigènes: comparaison entre les politiques juridiques française et italienne en Algérie et en Libye (1919-1943),” (diss., Aix-en-Provence Law School, 2005), and also “Le débat sur le statut politique des israélites en Algérie et ses acteurs (1870-1943)” *Les administrations coloniales: contributions aux séminaires de l’IHTP* (2009-2010): 31-49.

took advantage of this decree, particularly after the Crémieux Decree invalidated it five years later. Yet, though largely ineffective, this decree evidenced a certain assimilatory possibility, however limited, for Muslim and Jewish male elites in French Algeria.

The Crémieux decree was the result of decades of lobbying by French Jews, a small number of wealthy Algerian Jews, and liberal French officials. Minister of the Interior Adolphe Crémieux (who was himself Jewish) was particularly active in the effort to naturalize Algerian Jews. The decree stated:

The native Israelites of the Algerian departments are declared French citizens; consequently, their real status and their personal status will be, as of the promulgation of this decree, regulated by French law.²³

The wording of the decree limited it to those Jews and their descendants living in the *départements* of Oran, Algiers, and Constantine, excluding the as-yet unconquered south as well as Jews from other areas of the Maghreb.²⁴ What came to be termed the “regularization” of Jewish personal status simply meant that the previous control given to local courts in personal matters of birth, marriage, divorce, inheritance, and so on, would thereafter be recorded and adjudicated by French civil authorities and French courts, as criminal matters had been for decades under French colonial rule.

A decade later when the M’zab came under French military control, those Jews living in Southern Algeria, almost exclusively in the M’zab, entered into the Jewish personal status. The “regularization” of the Jewish personal status that the Crémieux Decree initiated did not apply to these Jews located geographically outside the bounds of the Algerian *départements* in the militarily administered *Territoires du Sud*. French officials couched their reasoning for excluding the Jews of Ghardaïa within jurisdictional

²³ Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 28.

²⁴ Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*, 103.

debates. However, underlying assumptions about general Jewish inferiority and M'zabi Jewish inferiority in particular informed the decision by successive French officials not to emancipate these Jews. Additionally, widespread settler condemnation of the Crémieux Decree, a resurgence of political antisemitism, and assertions that Jewish emancipation was to blame for Muslim revolts (in particular, the 1871 Mokhrani Rebellion) further hindered efforts to win M'zabi emancipation after 1882.²⁵

French Annexation in the M'zab and the Jews of Ghardaïa

The M'zab was a unique socio-cultural space in modern (and pre-modern) Algeria. While Sunni Islam dominated the religious landscape in most of Algeria, Ibadi Islam was the dominant religion in Ghardaïa and the reason for the M'zabi settlement of the valley. Ibadi Muslims fleeing persecution from the Sunni Caliphate established the towns of the M'zab in the eleventh century. Geographically and symbolically, Ghardaïa and its environs demarcated the border between the Berber lands of Saharan Algeria and the Arab-dominated cities of the Mediterranean coast. In this distinctive space, Ibadi and Sunni Muslims shared power with each other and the local Jewish community, which numbered around ten percent of the population in the twentieth century.²⁶ In this tripartite configuration each community held a level of autonomy in their religious affairs and self-governance, with Jewish personal matters arbitrated by Jewish religious authorities much as they would later be in French Algeria.²⁷

²⁵ Charles Ageron persuasively denied these claims about Jewish enfranchisement inciting Muslim rebellions in his thesis, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France: 1871-1919* (Paris: Presses Univ. de France, 1968).

²⁶ Lloyd Cabot-Briggs and Norina Lami Guède, *No More For Ever: A Saharan Jewish Town* (Cambridge, MA: The Peabody Museum, 1964).

²⁷ Amos Gitai, "Communities in Transition: Five urban Jewish communities and their architecture," (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1986).

Surrounded by the desert, Ghardaïa was also a unique historical space because of the severe environmental conditions that determined the rhythms of life for its diverse inhabitants. The *Oued M'Zab* is one of the most arid climates in the Sahara, with an average of ten days of rain per year. In spite of these extreme conditions, because of its location at the center of north-south and east-west trade routes, Ghardaïa was long a center of trans-Saharan trade.²⁸ Its strategic commercial position brought the first Jewish inhabitants to the M'zab, probably sometime in the fifteenth century, from the vibrant Jewish community at Djerba, in present-day Tunisia. According to Ibadi lore, in the late fourteenth century a delegation of Mozabite authorities went to Djerba to convince a venerated sheikh to return with them to Ghardaïa. This sheikh brought with him Jewish tailors, carpenters, and metal smiths who found the M'zab attractive for its proximity to major trans-Saharan trade routes.²⁹ Despite social and legal restrictions that limited their movement and interactions with non-Jews, Ghardaïa's Jews remained active in metalworking and carpentry well into the twentieth century and were reknowned

²⁸ Ibid., 126.

²⁹ Versions of this Jewish migration to the M'zab are included in a number of travel accounts, dissertations, anthropological studies, histories, and memoirs, including Cabot-Briggs and Guède ; André Chevrillon, *Les Puritains du désert* (Paris : Librairie Plon, 1927); A. Coyne, *Le Mzab* (Alger : Adolphe Journal, 1879) ; Eugène Fromentin, *Un été dans le Sahara* (Paris : Michel Lévy Frères, 1857) ; Gitai, "Communities in Transition; A.-M. Goichon, *La Vie Féminine au Mzab: étude de sociologie musulmane* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927); Régine Goutalier, "La 'nation juive' de Ghardaïa," in *Communautés juives des marges sahariennes du Maghreb*, ed. Michel Abitbol (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1982); Holsinger, Donald Charles, "Migration, Commerce and Community: The Mizabis in Nineteenth-Century Algeria," (PhD diss., North Western University, 1979); J. Huguet, "Les Juifs du Mzab," *Bulletins de la Société d'Anthropologie de Paris* 5, no.3 (1902): 559-573; Charles Kleinknecht, *Les juifs du M'zab : contribution à l'étude d'une communauté saharienne dispersée par le vent de l'Histoire en juin 1962*. (Barr : Kleinknecht C., 1990) ; Marcel Mercier, *La civilisation urbaine au Mzab* (Algiers : Emile Pfister, 1922) ; Jean Moriaz, "La vie économique au Mzab," *Bulletin de liaison saharienne* 11, no.39 (September 1960): 119-140; Pessah Shinar, "Réflexions sur la symbiose Judéo-Ibadite en Afrique du nord," in *Communautés Juives des marges sahariennes du Maghreb*, ed. Michel Abitbol (Jerusalem: Ben Zvi Institute, 1982), 81-114. This is also the history of the Jewish arrival in Ghardaïa recounted by members of the community, as in Eliahou Sebban, *Vayikah Amram: Traditions des Israelites du Mzab* (Israel: 5762). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

throughout North Africa for their skill.³⁰ Official French census records estimate the Jewish population in the M'zab at 738 Jewish individuals in 1882, 1,400 in 1921 and 1,300 in 1931.³¹ The rapid growth of the Jewish population in the early period of French colonization suggests that French annexation and the extension of French resources improved the general quality of life for Jews in the M'zab.

From their arrival in the valley, Ghardaia's Jews had a single modest synagogue. A trained rabbi arrived in the community only in 1870, assuming the duties previously undertaken by a rotating authority from one of the family patriarchs. Soon after, a local Jewish merchant began building a new, more elaborate synagogue in 1872. However, according to French accounts, a mob of local Muslims destroyed this synagogue and stole its funds from the safe box. The likelihood of such an outpouring of violence is somewhat suspect, as there are no records of earlier attacks on the Jewish community. Following this episode of violence, the local French military authorities headquartered in Laghouat noted that the Jews of Ghardaïa appealed to them for help. French Commander Colonel Margueritte ordered the Muslim community to make pecuniary compensation to the Jews. Using these funds, a new synagogue was finally completed in 1887, five years after the official French annexation of the M'zab.³²

³⁰ Gitai, "Communities in Transition," 128. A number of reporters from *The New York Times* remarked on the Jewish metalworkers of Ghardaia in their coverage of the Algerian War in the Sahara in the early 1960s.

³¹ Mercier, *La civilization urbaine au Mzab*, 122; Cabot Briggs and Guede, *No More For Ever*, 9.

³² Marcel Mercier, "Les Juifs du Mzab et Israël," *Travaux de l'insitut de recherches sahariennes* XIX (1960): 136.

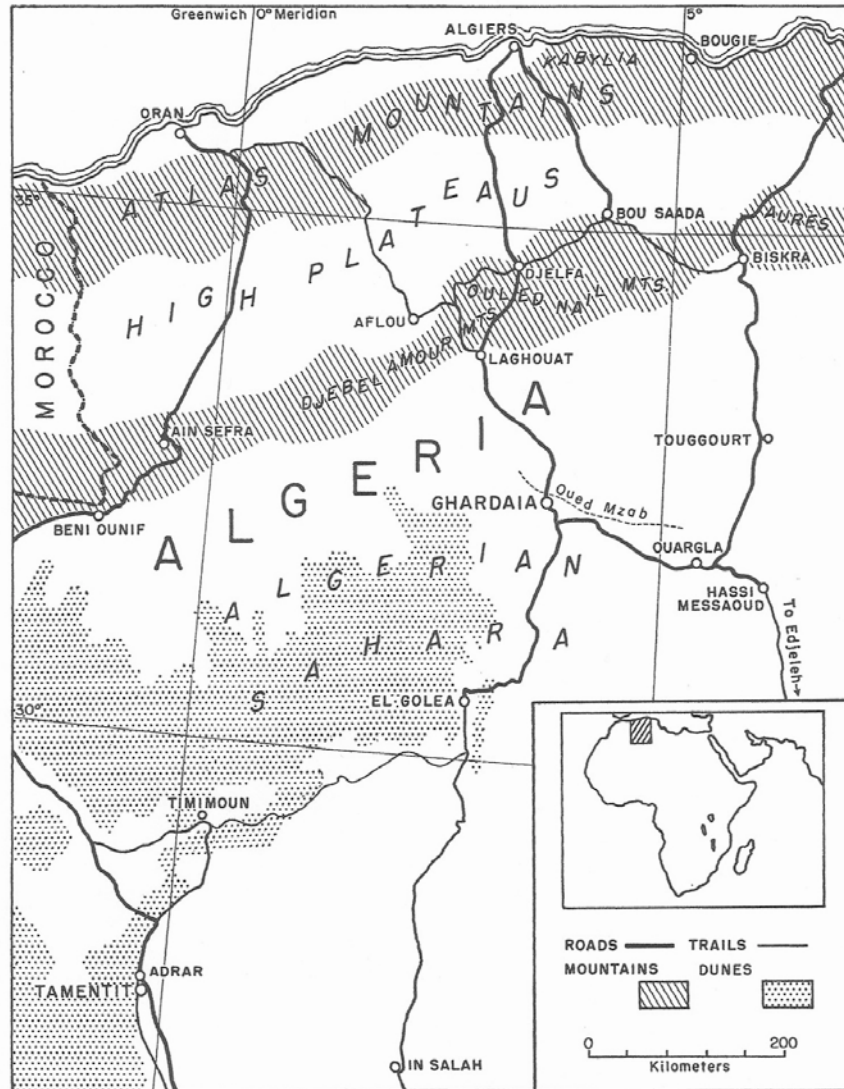


Figure 1.1 "Map showing the location of the Mzab," Briggs and Guède, *No More For Ever*.

Several French travelers to the region in the late nineteenth century cited French support for the construction of a new synagogue as proof of the positive effects of French colonization. In Ghardaïa and elsewhere in Algeria, North Africa and the Middle East, historians, state and military officials have sometimes emphasized moments such as this, constructing a picture of Jewish oppression under centuries of Muslim rule.³³ Mark

³³ Salo Baron first conceptualized "lachrymose" Jewish historiography in "Ghetto and Emancipation," *Menorah Journal* 14 (June 1928): 515–26. His *A Social and Religious History of the Jews* (1937) deconstructed the prevailing characterization of Jewish history as one of constant oppression and powerlessness.

Cohen has dubbed this a “neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history,” borrowing the earlier term coined by Salo Baron to criticize the historiography of European Jewry that emphasized Jewish oppression and persecution.³⁴ It is true that Ibadi strictures heavily circumscribed Jewish life in the Mzab, with Jews confined to the *mellah* and subject to a number of economic restrictions.³⁵ Yet there existed a certain level of cultural interpenetration and cooperation, bred of necessity and longstanding cohabitation. Far removed from the administrative centers of the Mediterranean coast, a unique social, economic, and political organization took place in Ghardaïa. Additionally, in the Ottoman Empire, when Jews in North Africa were *dhimmi*, a tolerated minority, there had been few outbreaks of Muslim-Jewish violence because the same structures that had bound Jews and Muslims remained undisturbed.

All this is not to dismiss the real improvement in Jewish status in the M’zab that accompanied French annexation. Another trend in recent historiography has been to adopt a near total reversal of Cohen’s “neo-lachrymose conception of Jewish-Arab history,” which asserts that relations between Jews and Muslims in North Africa and the Middle East were almost idyllic in a “Golden Age” before the arrival of European colonizers and Zionists. Much of this historiography, by individuals descended from Jewish families displaced in the twentieth century, evidences the great pain that colonialism and the migrations and political eruptions of the postwar era had on the

³⁴ Mark R. Cohen coined this phrase in “The Neo-Lachrymose Conception of Jewish-Arab History,” *Tikkun* (May-June 1991): 55-60. For its application in North Africa, see Susan Slymovics and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, “Jews and French colonialism in Algeria: an introduction,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 17, no. 5 (December 2012): 749-755.

³⁵ Certain Jewish merchants from Ghardaïa were nevertheless able to build profitable trade businesses, particularly in the trade of gold, henna, eggs, and ostrich plumes by the eighteenth century. As recounted by Charles Kleinknecht, the last French official to leave Ghardaïa, in his memoirs, *Les Juifs du Mzab*.

Jewish communities of North Africa.³⁶ However, this narrative can misrepresent the complexity of these Jewish individuals and communities just as their characterization by others as “miserable wretches” reduces their history to one of violence and oppression.³⁷ The historical experience of the M’zabi Jewish community, and Jews throughout the Muslim world, was far less linear than either of these two schools of thought would argue.

Apart from offering a new challenge to both the neo-lachrymose and the “Golden Age” schools of North African Jewish historiography, M’zabi Jewish history differs significantly from the larger history of Algerian Jewry and can offer an alternate history of Jews in the French Empire. These critical differences have not as yet been fully treated by historians, or have more recently been dismissed as simply French constructs. Sarah Abrevaya Stein argues that colonial law and military policy “hardened, if not altogether invented” the differences between Jews in the Algerian south and north.³⁸ The French law system in Algeria certainly did create artificial categories that divided populations and communities, imposing new hierarchies of citizen and subject predicated on racial, religious, or ethnic lines (as seen by the French). However, a cursory reading of the field of Algerian Jewish history reveals a great diversity within the Algerian Jewish communities of the north and between the north and south that pre-dated French colonization and contradicts the argument that Algerian Jews were part of a unified community or felt themselves to be so before the French conquest.

³⁶ See, e.g., Gideon N. Giladi, in *Discord in Zion: conflict between Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews in Israel* (London: Scorpion Publishing, 1990), as well as Ella Shohat in “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of its Jewish victims,” *Social Text* 19/20 (August 1988): 1-35..

³⁷ As in Norman Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991).

³⁸ Sarah Abrevaya Stein, “Dividing south from north: French colonialism, Jews, and the Algerian Sahara,” *the Journal of North African Studies* 17, no. 5 (December 2012): 784.

Although many descriptions of M'zabi Jewish difference reveal more about the prejudices of their French authors than about the community per se, there *were* significant differences in the religious practice, social customs, and economic practices of M'zabi Jews when compared with other Jews in Algeria. The isolated and inwardly focused communities of the south were in many ways more similar to their Muslim neighbors than, say, a Livornese Jewish family in Algiers or a Jewish rabbi in Tlemcen. The Jews in Ghardaïa practiced a number of rituals heavily influenced by their close association with the local Ibadi community and unique in all of the Maghreb and many daily behaviors and customs that would look quite foreign to a French or Algerian Jew.

M'zabi Jewish difference was partly a product of the remoteness of the M'zab and the insularity of its populations. Most Jews in the M'zab married almost exclusively within the few families who initially settled there in the medieval period and had one of the highest rates of endogamous marriage in the world, the consequences of which have been the subject of several studies. In particular, M'zabi Jews and their descendants living today in France and Israel have had one of the highest rates of hereditary deafness in the world, approaching 2.5% of the population. Members of the community created their own sign language, which Israeli researchers dubbed “Algerian Jewish Sign Language,” or AJSL, in the 1960s.³⁹ To brush aside the difference of this community is to reduce the whole of the Algerian Jewish community to a simplistic argument about the effects of colonialism and colonization on Jews anywhere in the Middle East and North

³⁹ Cabot Briggs and Guede; Ronald L. Nagel, “Jews of the Sahara,” *Einstein Journal of Biological Medicine* 21 (2004): 25-32; and especially, Irit Meir, Wendy Sandler, Carol Padden, and Mark Aronoff, “Emerging Sign Languages,” in *Oxford Handbook of Deaf Studies, Language, and Education*, M. Marschark & P. E. Spencer, eds. 2 (2010): 267-280. The persistence of this rate of deafness outside the M'zab supports the hypothesis of congenital hearing loss rather than the influence of local environmental factors.

Africa while ignoring the specificity of the M'zabi Jewish experience. French law and military policies certainly hardened the divisions between the emancipated Jews of the north and the Jewish subjects in the south. Yet, the cultural, social, and yes, biological, dissimilarities between this and other Jewish communities of the Maghreb cannot be reduced to a simple consequence of colonial intervention.

The Crémieux Decree did impose a kind of unity on Algerian Jewry by legally separating them from Jews elsewhere in the Maghreb, seeking through emancipation to “regenerate” Algerian Jews and centralize Jewish practice in French Algeria. However, by the same measure that the Crémieux Decree legally bound all Jews living in the Algerian *départements* by the same legal frameworks, it also drew a clear line of separation between those emancipated Jews in the north and M'zabi Jews. Consequently, Jews living north of the M'zab could be characterized as being the more atypical community when contrasted with Jews living throughout the Muslim world. In this larger context, the historical experience of M'zabi Jews who maintained a greater level of communal autonomy under loose French control more closely resembled other Jewish communities across this region than the exceptional treatment of Algerian Jews who acquired French citizenship. Much as it had in France, emancipation in Algeria imposed a new French identity onto Jews and inserted the state into daily Jewish life and ritual. As the French state had forced Jews in Alsace to submit to the authority of the Republic and the consistory, so too did emancipation in Algeria supplant the pre-existing structures of Jewish life, further empower the consistory system, and flatten the differences between the affected Jewish communities.

The history of M'zabi Jews can act as a kind of foil to that of Algerian Jews, offering a glimpse at what French policies and attitudes towards Algerian Jews might have been without the Crémieux Decree. Examining the French treatment of M'zabi Jews and the gradual enfranchisement of the community until their final acquisition of full legal rights in 1961 can tell us much about the experience of those Algerian Jews who were emancipated. French officials who were opposed to the Crémieux Decree but unable to appeal or reverse it sometimes focused their efforts on preventing any further Jewish emancipation, which is to say, on stymying appeals and petitions for M'zabi Jewish citizenship. In communiqués and memoranda about the M'zab and its Jewish residents, French military and civil officials revealed their biases against Jewish Algerians, even after the extreme antisemitism of the Vichy periods.

These discussions and arguments sometimes condemned M'zabi Jews and their aspirations for citizenship not because of their Jewishness, but instead because of their similarities—both perceived and actual—to Algerian Muslims. The exclusion of M'zabi Jews and the persistent resistance to their emancipation yields further evidence of French prejudice towards Algerian Muslims and is part of the larger history of Muslim exclusion in French Algeria. French officials and military officers saw little distinction between different individuals and communities grouped under the category of “indigènes,” “natives” of Algeria. As such, M'zabi Jews and Algerian Muslims belonged to an inferior legal and social stratum of colonial society. French documents pertaining to the issue of M'zabi Jewish emancipation expand historical knowledge of what it meant to be an “indigène” in Algeria, from an unusual Jewish perspective.

Antisemitism and Zionism in Algeria and the M'zab

When the Vichy government abrogated the Crémieux Decree on October 7, 1940, the M'zabi Jewish population found themselves for the first time on the same legal footing as the formerly emancipated Jews of the northern *départements*.⁴⁰ The treatment of Jews in northern Algeria, however, was markedly worse than that of Jews in Ghardaïa. While all Jews were subject to the *numerus clausus* and heightened state surveillance, no M'zabi Jews were ever imprisoned in the labor camps of the desert or accused of espionage, a regular fate for many Jews from the coast, some of who passed through Ghardaïa en route to their internment.⁴¹ However, despite the treatment of Jews in Vichy-era Algeria and the prolonged debates about reinstating the Crémieux Decree after the Liberation in 1943, the vast majority of Algerian and French Jews characterized the Vichy period as an aberrant episode of antisemitism, reaffirming the power of assimilation and their French identities in its wake.⁴²

Most historians interpret the eventual immigration of over 130,000 Algerian Jews (of a population numbering approximately 140,000) to France in 1962 as evidence of Algerian Jewish assimilation and support for France and, by some, as evidence of the success of French Universalism. It is intriguing then, that Algerian Jews, who experienced worse antisemitism in this period than M'zabi Jews, chose migration to

⁴⁰ Comprehensive accounts of Vichy policies affecting Jews in Algeria include Michel Abitbol, *The Jews of North Africa During the Second World War* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989); Michel Ansky, *Les Juifs d'Algérie: du décret Crémieux à la Libération* (Paris: 1950); Michael M. Laskier, "Between Vichy Antisemitism and German Harassment: The Jews of North Africa during the early 1940s," *Modern Judaism* 11, no. 3 (October 1991): 343-470; and Weil, *How to be French*. Hannah Arendt famously interrogated the logic behind the abrogation of the Crémieux Decree in "Why the Crémieux Decree was abrogated," *Contemporary Jewish Record* 6 (1943): 115-123.

⁴¹ For a study of Algerian Jewish incarceration in Vichy labor camps see Norbert Bel Ange, *Quand Vichy internait ses soldats juifs d'Algérie: Bedeau, sud oranais, 1941-1943* (Paris: Harmattan, 2006).

⁴² Shepard, 170-171. Shepard points out that this attitude was further reinforced by the events of the Algerian War and used to reinforce the boundary between assimilable Jews and non-assimilable Muslims.

France while Jews from Ghardaïa by and large chose to immigrate to Mandatory Palestine and Israel. A great number of historians have explored why and how Algerian Jews came to see their only viable option at the end of the Algerian War to be migration to the metropole.⁴³ Relatively few, however, have examined the choice that most M'zabi Jews made to migrate to Israel instead.⁴⁴ This ignores a fascinating body of archival evidence that includes many notes and reports from French officials who expressed deep surprise when Jewish individuals and families from the M'zab began leaving Algeria for Palestine in 1943. In the larger context of Jewish migrations from North Africa and the Middle East, this is an unusually early date for immigration to begin and indicates instability in Jewish life in Algeria despite the reassurances of the post-Vichy government.

There is likely some correlation between the mercurial French abrogation and then reinstatement of the Crémieux Decree and M'zabi decisions to emigrate. Many Algerian Muslims interpreted Vichy-era antisemitism and anti-Jewish policies as evidence that assimilation was ultimately impossible in the face of French racism and we

⁴³ See, e.g., Abitbol, "The Integration of North African Jews in France," *Yale French Studies* 85 (1994): 248-261; Ayoun and Cohen, *Les Juifs d'Algérie*, Pierre Birnbaum with Jean-Jacques Deldyck, *Le processus d'acculturation des Juifs d'Algérie* (Paris: Harmattan, 2000); Elizabeth Friedman, *Colonialism & After: an Algerian Jewish Community* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, 1988); Nathan Charles Godley, "Almost-finished Frenchmen: the Jews of Algeria and the question of French national identity, 1830-1962." (PhD diss., The University of Iowa, 2006); Michael Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Michael Robert Shurkin, "Decolonization and the Renewal of French Judaism: Reflections on the Contemporary French Jewish Scene," *Jewish Social Studies* 6, no.2 (Winter 2000): 156-176; Benjamin Stora, *Les trois exils Juifs d'Algérie* (Paris: Editions Stock, 2006); Sara Beth Sussman, "Changing lands, changing identities: The Migration of Algerian Jewry to France, 1954-1967," (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 2002); Weil, *How to be French*; Nancy Wood, "Remembering the Jews of Algeria," *Parallax* 4, no.2 (1998): 169-183. Ethan Katz, in "Between emancipation and persecution: Algerian Jewish memory in the *longue durée* (1930-1970)," *The Journal of North African Studies* 17, no. 5 (December 2012): 793-820, demonstrates how Algerian Jews themselves elaborated a vision of their history that emphasized the possibilities of emancipation and the benevolence of French colonialism towards the Jews, largely ignoring or dismissing the Vichy period.

⁴⁴ One of the very few historical works that examines the M'zabi *aliyah* is Michael M. Laskier's *Israel and the Maghreb: Statehood to Oslo* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004), Chapter 6. However, Laskier looks only at the very end of this period, at the penultimate emigration in 1962.

might infer that M'zabi Jews reacted similarly. However, this is not to imply direct causality between antisemitism in Algeria and the Jewish emigration from the M'zab. Many factors influenced the decision to leave Ghardaïa, and the “push” of antisemitism and poverty was sometimes weaker than the “pull” of Israel.

The M'zabi immigration to Israel demarcates a second historical moment in which the history of the Jews of Ghardaïa diverged from that of the Jews in Algeria's urban north. After 1882, when Jews in the Sahara were not emancipated, their experience of French colonial rule began to differ dramatically from the emancipated Jews of Algeria's north. While citizenship afforded Jews from Oran, Constantine, Batna, Tlemcen, or Djelfa the opportunity to attend French schools, universities, and join the French military to fight in World War I, the Jews of Ghardaïa remained relatively isolated inland, though many attended local French schools. Thus, we might argue that it is unsurprising that the M'zabi Jews left Algeria not for the French metropole as the rest of the Algerian Jewish community did, but for Israel. Yet, the simple argument that a lack of familiarity with French cultural, economic, and social networks discouraged their immigration to France paints a far too simplistic picture.

French officials first remarked on the number and frequency of Jewish emigration from the M'zab shortly after the first organized *aliyah* in 1943. However, rather than enact policies to encourage Jews to remain in Ghardaïa, French policies in the M'zab in the Fourth Republic restricted Jewish economic practices and specifically targeted Jewish-dominated areas of trade. The postwar period also saw the entry of international Jewish relief agencies into the lobbying effort aimed at the French government to extend Jewish emancipation to the M'zab. In addition to the AIU, the American Joint

Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency were actively involved in monitoring the situation of Jews in Ghardaïa and assisting the Jewish emigration from Algeria to mandatory Palestine and Israel. The M'zab is one of the few places in Algeria where French colonialism and Zionism confronted each other, in the differing visions that French officials and Zionist emissaries had for the future of North African Jews.

The presence of Zionist organizations or representatives in the M'zab and even the involvement of a small number of M'zabi men in Zionist leadership positions does not mean that the majority of the M'zabi Jewish community was actively supportive of Zionism. Though certainly aware of political Zionism as a movement, the attraction to Israel was for most predicated on a deeply religious interest in returning to Zion, fulfilling the biblical injunction for Jews to go back to the land of their forefathers, and not an engagement with the largely secular political ideology of Zionism. This religio-historical attachment to Zion had long figured in Jewish life in the M'zab; what changed after 1943 was the presence in Algeria of a successful and well-funded international Jewish relief network that facilitated their migration. French authorities often assumed that the relationships between M'zabi Jews and Zionists from the United States, Europe, or Israel indicated M'zabi affiliation with Zionism, which led to a number of confrontations between colonial authorities and Zionists.

These confrontations between France and Zionist organizations came at the same moment that the French and Israeli militaries became increasingly close allies. At times, Israeli strategic objectives appeared contradictory in the M'zab, with the imperative to bring Jews to Israel clashing with the Israeli need to support the French in order to win French military supplies, notably French fighter jets. For the most part, though, Israeli

and French diplomatic objectives intersected, as they did in the unsuccessful Suez Crisis in 1956. One unfortunate consequence of this collusion between French and Israeli military forces to seize the Suez canal was widespread attacks on Jewish communities across North Africa, who were often mistakenly believed to support Israeli actions against Egypt.

Muslim-Jewish relations in Algeria and the M'zab deteriorated in the 1950s as a result of the mounting tension between Israel and neighboring Arab states. M'zabi Jews wrote to French officials and international Jewish relief organizations of their fear about Muslim violence, fears that intensified after the commencement of the Algerian War in November 1954. To a certain extent these fears were the product of propaganda from the Jewish communities of the Algerian north and the French themselves, who encouraged the new vision of vulnerable Jews at the mercy of Muslim violence.⁴⁵ Ibadi Muslims in Ghardaïa were directly involved in trying to assuage Jewish fears, but there were a number of Algerian nationalist organizations and individuals associated with the FLN who later launched attacks on local Jews or encouraged economic sanctions. The violence that characterized the conflict between French colonial and Algerian nationalist forces in Algeria only encouraged Jewish emigration from the M'zab.

However, the rate of emigration actually *decreased* soon after the Algerian War began as a result of French investment in the Sahara, where many in the government believed lay the future economic success of France. In 1956, French engineers began developing oilfields in Hassi Messaoud, seventy kilometers northwest of Ghardaïa, which brought renewed French interest and investment to the area. M'zabi Jews profited from

⁴⁵ Ethan Katz discusses this trope as a product of the 1934 riots in Constantine in "Between emancipation and persecution," 802-807.

the development in the Sahara, expanding their businesses to serve the increased demand for transportation services and general trade. Despite the economic growth of this period and assurances delivered by the French president and members of the AIU, Jewish emigration from Ghardaïa again picked up after 1958, when the violence of the Algerian War arrived on the doorsteps of the M'zabi Jewish community, in several small bombings and targeted stabbings of Jews in the south. Sometimes working with, sometimes against, the French, the Jewish Agency and the American Joint Distribution Committee worked steadily to assist M'zabi Jews in their emigration.⁴⁶

In the final years of the Algerian War, French officials elaborated the hierarchy of colonial citizenship, sometimes in negotiations with Algerian nationalists. The boundaries between those classified as “Muslim” Algerians and “Europeans” had to be reiterated and redefined as the French and the FLN determined who would be part of a future independent Algeria and who would be repatriated to France. In this climate, French Jews, led by the AIU, advanced the call to emancipate the M'zabi Jews. The ambiguity of Jewish “indigènes” had to be resolved, and in 1961 and 1962 French authorities were insistent on elaborating new ideologies and policies that rigidly included Jews while excluding (most) Muslims. Jewish leaders in Ghardaïa also petitioned the government for full citizenship and the replacement of their personal status with civil status, articulating their own demands and willingness to undergo what they termed “Frenchification.” They were successful and a bill regularizing the civil status of the M'zabi Jews passed the French National Assembly and Senate on June 28, 1961.

By the time of their full emancipation, over half the community had already emigrated from Ghardaïa to Israel. After an independent Algeria was declared in March

⁴⁶ Kleinknecht, *Juifs du M'zab* (1963).

1962, the Jewish Agency worked with the French to mobilize an airlift of the remaining Jews from the M'zab. On June 1, 1962, there were nine hundred Jews left in Ghardaïa. By August 1 of that year, there were none remaining.⁴⁷ The final emigration was dramatic in its rapidity and totality. Most of these individuals left Algeria for Israel, but a small group of M'zabi Jews, between fifty and one hundred and fifty individuals, chose to immigrate to France in 1962.⁴⁸

French Jewish lay and clerical leaders observed that the absorption of Jews from the Algerian south was more difficult than that of other Algerian Jews, that these Jews were more traditional and less familiar with French culture and society. M'zabi Jews in Strasbourg and elsewhere in France found adjustment very difficult and quite a few ultimately made *aliyah*, leaving France for Israel. This experience of adversity contrasts with the absorption of Algerian Jews more broadly in France, which was met at the time with great expectations and has been characterized since as largely successful, both by Algerian Jews themselves and by the French Jewish community and French government. The more difficult history of M'zabi Jews in France after 1962 has been largely disregarded by Algerian Jewish historians and underrepresented because there have been no Jewish historians *from* the M'zab, while there have been many Algerian Jewish historians from northern Algeria. Without such “memory carriers,” as Algerian Jewish historian Benjamin Stora calls himself and his peers, to transmit this history, it has fallen under the historiographical radar.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Thomas F. Brady, “Half of Jews in Algeria Reported to have Fled,” *The New York Times* (June 25, 1962).

⁴⁸ Kleinknecht, *Juifs du M'zab*.

⁴⁹ Benjamin Stora, *Les trois exils juifs d'Algerie* (Paris : Stock, 2006).

The absorption of M'zabi Jews in Israel has gained greater attention insofar as it falls under the rubric of the historiography of Jewish *aliyah* from the Middle East and North Africa. In Israel, unlike France, M'zabi Jews were one of a tremendous number of Jewish communities who arrived in Israel from Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia. After their arrival in Israel, the particular provenance of these communities was subsumed to the larger category of *mizrahim*, “Oriental” or “Eastern” Jews. Thus, while it is possible to trace their travel from Algeria to Israel and initial resettlement, archival evidence documenting specific communities after their arrival in Israel is scarce.

This project is bounded by the limited sources available on the history of the M'zab and the Jewish community in Ghardaïa. By far, the most sources are located within the French national archives, especially at the *Archives Nationales d'Outre Mer* in Aix-en-Provence. However, French archival documents only very rarely include items written by Jewish authors from the M'zab. For the most part, materials from French archives represent the attitudes and opinions of French authorities, which are valuable for an analysis of the multiple logics underlying French policies towards the Jews of Ghardaïa. Reading these documents “against the grain” does enable us to see the actual subjects of French correspondence, their aspirations, daily lives, and conflicts with each other and the French state.⁵⁰ Similar interactions with foreign European observers include the private journals, memoirs, and academic reports of various French and European travelers to the M'zab, from the late nineteenth century through the period of the Algerian War.

⁵⁰ As Alice Conklin demonstrates in *A Mission to Civilize: the Republican Idea of empire in France and West Africa* (Stanford University Press, 1997).

In addition to French and European archives, the archives of Jewish communal and international organizations are critical to this study. The Jewish community of Ghardaïa was bound within international networks of Jewish travelers and organizations that communicated with the leaders of the community and also wrote extensively about assisting the Jews of the M'zab. The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU), the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), the World Zionist Organization (WZO), and the Jewish Agency all worked individually and collectively to address the needs of the Jews in the Algerian south. Representatives of these individual agencies sent detailed reports back to their headquarters about the social, economic, and political lives of the Jews in Ghardaïa, accounts that constitute an important source of non-governmental analysis and anecdote. These organizations also demonstrate the great diversity in ideology and objectives within the international Jewish community, from the assimilationist AIU to the Zionist Jewish Agency, and correspondence between them and the M'zabi Jewish leadership reveals the complex and sometimes contradictory positions held by different M'zabi Jews in the twentieth century.

Finally, the writings and recollections of Jewish individual and families from the M'zab, including memoirs of both their lives in Algeria and after emigration, were invaluable to this dissertation project. In particular, conversations with Marc Balouka, the self-designated historian for the community and the documents he has compiled over a number of years, as well as the published memoirs of Eliahou Sebban, were valuable sources for reconstructing the rich tapestry of Jewish life in the Algerian Sahara.

Chapter Overview

Chapter two maps out the long history of Jewish existence in Ghardaïa and the unique environment, physical and cultural, of the M'zab. Comparing the family structures and religious practices of the M'zabi Jewish community with those of Jewish communities in North Africa and Europe highlights the unique and traditional practice of Judaism in the M'zab, as well as its linkages with Ibadi Islam. The M'zab and the larger Sahara fascinated French travelers and colonial officials of the nineteenth century who romanticized and exoticized its inhabitants. Labeled alternatively as more “open” than Muslims and less civilized than their northern coreligionists, the French portrayed the Jews of the M'zab as non-assimilable French subjects after annexation in 1882. French prejudices and imagined constructs about the Jews and Muslims of the M'zab persisted well into the twentieth century and informed the French decision not to transform the status quo in the south.

The third chapter explores increased French involvement in and surveillance of the M'zab in the 1930s and early 1940s. The 1930 centennial of French rule in Algeria heralded a number of French attempts at reforming the colonial system under a range of governments, culminating in the failed efforts of Léon Blum's Popular Front government. These gestures at change reflected the increasing organization and effectiveness of Algerian nationalists, who established various Algerian nationalist organizations in Algiers and Paris in the 1930s. Ibadi M'zabis also initiated their own reform movement, while M'zabi Jews petitioned for emancipation in 1919 and 1932. In response, French colonial administrators examined the status of M'zabi Jews and admitted that their “indigène” status presented difficulties and highlighted the disharmony of colonial

policies. However, bureaucratic inertia and a recurrence of the perennial antisemitism of Algeria's *pied-noirs* meant no change to M'zabi Jewish status resulted.

This antisemitism culminated in widespread support for the 1940 abrogation of the Crémieux Decree. During the Vichy period and after the Allied landing in North Africa, M'zabis came increasingly into contact with the outside world. After liberation, Jewish M'zabis were in regular contact with international Jewish relief organizations during the campaign to have the Crémieux Decree restored. However, when reinstated in 1943 the Crémieux Decree still did not encompass the Jews of the south. Beginning in that year, largely as a consequence of growing disillusionment with their prospects in a French colony and the economic disruptions of the war years, a number of young men left the M'zab for the first time, seeking economic opportunity instead of spiritual succor in Palestine. This marked the beginning of emigration from Algeria to Israel.

The "Question Palestinienne" obsessed French officials in the M'zab in the years between the fall of the Vichy regime and the beginning of the Algerian War. Chapter four examines the contradictory policies of French colonial authorities that specifically targeted and restricted Jewish-dominated trades. These economic restrictions, along with growing antagonism between Jews and Muslims in Algeria, encouraged increased numbers of Jews to make *aliyah* during this period. The deterioration of Muslim-Jewish relations reflected larger trends across North Africa resulting from the mounting hostilities between Israel and neighboring Arab states. During this period international Jewish organizations increased their activities in Algeria and the M'zab and enlisted the assistance of government officials in the United States and elsewhere, expanding the issue of M'zabi Jewish legal inequality to a diplomatic level.

While this chapter introduces an international diplomatic dimension to this historical narrative, chapter five introduces the question of economic and resource development in the Sahara. The development of the desert preoccupied a new generation of French officials after the discovery of vast reserves of oil, coal, and natural gas there in the late 1940s. Spurred by hope for an economic regeneration in the desert, Fourth Republic officials turned their eye ever southward and the residents of the M'zab became increasingly critical allies in the development of the Sahara. At the same time, in the early 1950s, the increasingly intense forces of Algerian nationalism, led by the FLN, challenged French hegemony and forced the French towards greater compromise with potential allies. French officials argued they could not emancipate the Jews in Ghardaïa, as this would anger the still disenfranchised Muslims of the south.

Only in 1961 did the French finally emancipate the Jews of the M'zab, and chapter six delves into the morass of diverse actors and interests that mobilized to convince the French government of the utility of Jewish emancipation. In this final period, through economic, political, and social interactions, the Jews of Ghardaïa developed friendly relationships with local French officials. The under-prefect of Ghardaïa and the Commissioner expressed a certain fondness for the Jewish community and its leaders in their later memoires and writings. These friendships assisted the Jewish community in lobbying for their full integration into the French body politic, with the physical process of emigration from the M'zab, and with their absorption in France. A final comparison of absorption processes and experiences in France and Israel demonstrates the difficulties of migration and the contrast between the experiences and choices of Jews from Ghardaïa and Jews from elsewhere in Algeria.

PART I: 1882-1945

Chapter 2:

The Limits of Emancipation and *Les Puritains du Désert*: The M'zab in French Algeria, 1882-1930

For the residents of the M'zab, French annexation violated the centuries-old autonomy of the valley and marked a profound shift in the relationship between the Algerian Sahara and the Mediterranean coast, binding what had been an independent confederation of city-states to the northern administrative urban centers of Laghouat, Algiers, and distant Paris. The M'zabis were now officially categorized as French nationals—but not citizens—according to the *senatus-consulte* decree of 1865.⁵¹ As non-citizens, M'zabis had access to most French civic rights, but were excluded from voting or serving in the French military. Algerian nationals classified as “Algerian Muslims” or “native Israelites” could become citizens only if they renounced their personal status.⁵² The 1865 *senatus-consulte* had been very unpopular. Of the estimated Algerian Jewish population of thirty-five thousand, only two hundred and eighty-eight applied for citizenship between 1865 and 1870.⁵³ Most Algerians, Muslim, Jewish, or otherwise, did

⁵¹ Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization*, 26-27.

⁵² Paul Silverstein, *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 43. In addition to this being the actual terminology of French documents, the category “Algerian Muslim” often lumped together individuals and communities who were not Muslim, as was sometimes the case with the M'zabi Jewish population after 1882.

⁵³ Richard Ayoun, “Le décret Crémieux et l'insurrection de 1871 en Algérie,” *Revue d'histoire modern et*

not chose to abandon their local laws. They instead continued to live their lives according to their customs and have disputes relating to personal status arbitrated by their own religious leaders.

After annexation in 1882, M'zabis followed the "Mozabite customary law," and M'zabi Jews the "Mosaic personal status," according to *halakhah*, Jewish law derived from the Torah, tradition, oral law, teachings from rabbis and scribes, and custom (*minhag*). *Halakhah* was (and is) in constant evolution, responding to local needs and respecting the local custom, law, and authorities. For centuries, *halakhah* guided "personal, financial and social relationships amongst Jews and between Jews and Gentiles, as well as all other practices and observances of Judaism."⁵⁴ Jews enjoyed much judicial autonomy in the Muslim world. In the M'zab and in Ottoman Algeria Jews had been able to regulate their communities and adjudicate conflict according to *halakhah* and in their own court system, the *beit din*. French colonization and the emancipation of Algerian Jews put an end to this system, bringing Algerian Jews into the French legal system and delegitimizing *halakhah* in favor of French courts. For the Jews of the M'zab, exclusion from citizenship meant they were able to retain both *halakhah* as a valid legal system for themselves and a certain measure of autonomy in their personal affairs. However, this autonomy was often compromised by French interventions into the private lives of colonial subjects. For example, a law of March 23, 1882, obligated

contemporaine 35 (Jan-March 1988): 61, cited by Nancy Wood in "Remembering the Jews of Algeria," *Parallax* 4, no. 2 (1998): 169-183.

⁵⁴ Aryeh Shmuelevitz, *The Jews of the Ottoman Empire in the Late Fifteenth and the Sixteen Centuries: Administrative, Economic, Legal, and Social Relations as Reflected in the Responsa* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1984), 41-42.

Muslim judges to register all Muslim marriages with the colonial office of records within three days of the ceremony. Jewish marriages were similarly recorded.⁵⁵

In light of the 1870 emancipation of Algeria's Jewish population, it is surprising that the French decided only a decade later that M'zabi Jews would be legally "ranked" not as emancipated French Jewish citizens, but as non-citizen subjects alongside "Algerian Muslims." The official explanation for the French exclusion of M'zabi Jews from citizenship was their geographic location approximately two hundred kilometers south of the borders of the *départements* of French Algeria, which were under military, not civilian, administration. However, internal French correspondence indicates a more complex logic behind their exclusion from citizenship. An 1881 telegram from the Ministry of Justice to the Ministry of the Interior summarized the various opinions of high-ranking French officials about the potential emancipation of the Jewish community on the eve of the annexation of the M'zab. Governor General Tirman argued that there were "inconveniences presented by the extension to the M'zab of the provisions of the [Crémieux] decree. Positioned in a markedly inferior situation *vis-à-vis* the locals, the Jews of the M'zab are in no way prepared for naturalization *en bloc*." General Saussier added "giving the status of French citizen to all the *Israélites* of the M'zab and removing them from paying local taxes could compromise the moral success of our endeavors."⁵⁶ These French officials expressed concern either that these particular Jews were too different from other Algerian Jews or that improving the situation of the Jewish

⁵⁵ Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 88.

⁵⁶ Mercier, "Les Juifs du Mzab et Israel," *Travaux de l'Institut de Recherches Sahariennes* XIX (1960): 124; Charles Kleinknecht, *Les juifs du M'zab*, Annexe 8.

community would antagonize the local Muslim community, couching their arguments in a bureaucratic dispute over jurisdictional boundaries.

Since the late nineteenth century, legal scholars have argued that if the wording and intended meaning of the Crémieux Decree were followed exactly, M'zabi Jews would have obtained citizenship when the M'zab was integrated in 1882.⁵⁷ The non-application of the Crémieux Decree to the M'zab in 1882 and afterwards can be interpreted both as evidence of the exceptional emancipatory moment in 1870 when the Crémieux Decree passed the National Assembly and the following decades of opposition to Algerian Jewish emancipation.⁵⁸ The non-application of the Crémieux Decree to the Jews of the M'zab is perhaps more indicative of the backlash against the decree in Algeria and France than reflective of French attitudes towards the M'zabi Jewish community.

French fears that Jewish emancipation in the M'zab would antagonize the local Muslim community revealed a reductionist interpretation of Jewish-Muslim relations to which French officials clung during the period of Algerian colonization. French reluctance to extend citizenship to the M'zabi Jews reflected their belief that Muslim M'zabis would be critical allies in the colonization of southern Algeria. French colonizers depended on the support of local notables to secure their control over the

⁵⁷ These include, but are not limited to, the attorney general of the Supreme Court (*avocat général près de la Cour de cassation*), Louis Sarrut, in *Cour de cassation*, 18-27 April 1896, *Dalloz Périodique* I (1896): 353; E. Audinet, "La nationalité des israélites algériens," *Revue Générale de Droit International Public* No. 1-6 (1897): 488; Henri Pensa, "La nationalité des israélites algériens," *Questions diplomatiques et coloniales* (January-April 1899): 171; Emile Larcher, *Traité élémentaire de législation algérienne* (Paris: Rousseau; Alger: Jourdan, 1911) 2nd edition, and Albert Tissier, "De l'application du décret du 24 octobre 1870 sur les israélites indigènes de l'Algérie" *Revue Algérienne* II (1891): 67; all are cited in Florence Renucci, "Le débat sur le statut politique des israélites en Algérie et ses acteurs (1870-1943)" in *Les administrations coloniales: Contributions aux Séminaires de l'IHTP* (2009-2010): 31-49.

⁵⁸ Renucci argues that successive decisions not to emancipate the M'zabi Jews underline the exceptionalism of the original emancipatory legislation in 1870. *Ibid.*

Sahara and framed the decision not to extend citizenship to M'zabi Jews in terms of economic and political utility. Both in 1882 and in later debates over emancipating the Jews of the M'zab, the French were sensitive to any possibility of alienating the Muslim majority in the M'zab.

Lastly, French hesitation to apply the Crémieux Decree in the Sahara was also the product of French prejudice against the M'zabi Jews, whom they considered culturally backward and unprepared for membership in the French polity. Periodically, French officials, academics, and journalists also repeated the claim that the Jews of the M'zab were themselves uninterested in French citizenship, which would interfere with their traditional way of life. These claims failed to reconcile the petitions to the French military command filed by members of the community asking for mass naturalization in accordance with the Crémieux Decree, in 1892 and 1919.⁵⁹ Regardless of the actual wishes of M'zabi Jews, French officials constructed a wall of insurmountable difference around them. French arguments about the incompatibility of M'zabi Jews with modernity and Republican values bear many similarities to French arguments about the preparedness of French Jews for emancipation in the early years of the French Revolution, demonstrating a continuity in French discourses about Jews from the late eighteenth to early twentieth centuries.

Rhetoric about the “regeneration” of M'zabi Jews and French complaints about their non-European cultural practices persisted into the twentieth century and echoes of this earlier colonial logic can be heard in documents from the 1930s and 1940s, when successive French governments abrogated and then reinstated the Crémieux Decree and debated, for a second time, the possible emancipation of the M'zabi Jews. This chapter

⁵⁹ René Cassin, “Note sur la condition des Israélites du M'zab,” 26 May 1955, 3. ANOM 81F/1212.

introduces the peoples and place of the M'zab and examines the multilayered French logic behind the refusal to extend citizenship to M'zabi Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though French annexation brought dramatic changes to Jewish life in Ghardaïa, following an initial bout of colonial intercessions and interferences, the French stopped short of applying the Crémieux Decree in the south. French assumptions about the particularities of the M'zab and the non-assimilable nature of the M'zab and M'zabi Jews, influenced by popular representations of the area, colored official reports and colonial policy. During this period, Jewish and Muslim M'zabis engaged in various efforts at reform and modernization. This initial period of French colonization in the Sahara coincided with the spread of political antisemitism that would restrain official French attempts to amend the situation of the Jews in Ghardaïa.

The M'zab and its Inhabitants

The first decades of French colonization in the Sahara did not interfere deeply with most of the existing political, social, and cultural frameworks of the M'zab, leaving them intact well into the twentieth century. The Jews of the M'zab and their Muslim neighbors maintained relative autonomy in their internal affairs under the small French command established at Ghardaïa in 1882. Weak French intervention in M'zabi affairs echoed earlier Ottoman approaches towards the region.⁶⁰ Before the French conquest in 1830, interaction between the Ottoman Dey in Algiers and the M'zabis had been largely confined to commercial dealings.⁶¹ Those few M'zabi men, mostly Muslim but also some Jews, who lived for brief periods of time in Algeria's coastal cities did so for trade

⁶⁰ "Note: Le M'Zab" 1956, 1. ANOM FM 81F/52.

⁶¹ Brahim Benyoucef, *Le M'zab: les pratiques de l'espace* (Alger: Entreprise Nationale du Livre, 1986), 10.

purposes and remained an insular community.⁶² The *Beni M'zab* fiercely guarded their isolation and independence, maintaining distance from the Ottoman authorities in Algiers and from the populations of the urban Mediterranean coast. Though the M'zabi economy depended heavily on the trade they conducted abroad, economic advancement was secondary to maintaining the integrity of their community.

This insularity stemmed from the religious ideology of the M'zab: Ibadism, a theological descendant of Khariji (sometimes Khawaridji) Islam.⁶³ Kharijism formed in the tumultuous decades following the death of Mohammed, when disputes over his succession resulted in a series of sectarian rifts in the Islamic community in the seventh century. In this period of the first Caliphate, a small group broke with the dominant Umayyad Islamic ruling power, calling themselves the Kharijis, or “the seceders.”⁶⁴ The Kharijis were notoriously hostile to other Muslims, following their belief in the doctrine of *isti'rad*, the execution of all non-Khariji Muslims.⁶⁵ A number of moderate Kharijis disagreed with the practice of *isti'rad* and at the end of the seventh century a theologian named Abdullah b. Ibad broke with the extremist Kharijis, forming a more moderate sect that came to be known as Ibadism.⁶⁶

More tolerant than Kharijism, Ibadis nevertheless maintained poor relations with other Muslim communities. Their violent relations with non-Ibadi or non-Khariji

⁶² Schreier, *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*, 25-26.

⁶³ Ibādism, or Ibādiyya, is a sect of Islam distinct from both Sunni and Shi'i Islam. Descended from the seventh-century Islamic sect of the Khawarij, Ibadi Muslims established successful political dynasties in Oman, Libya, Djerba, Tunisia, the east coast of Africa, and the M'zab. For further reading, see Adam R. Gaiser, *Muslims, scholars, soldiers: the origin and elaboration of the Ibadi imamate traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁶⁴ *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*. 1st ed. S.V. “Kharijis.”

⁶⁵ Pessah Shinar, “Ibadiyya and Orthodox Reformism in Modern Algeria,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 9 (1961): 97.

⁶⁶ Abdullah b. Ibad was deeply influenced by an earlier imam, Jabir b. Zayd al-Azdi of Oman, who is often cited by contemporary Ibadis as the original spiritual leader of Ibadism. For further reading, see Amr K. Ennami, “Studies in Ibadism (al-Ibadiya)” (Ph.D. diss., University of Libya, 1972), 4-6; Isam Al-Rawas, *Oman in Early Islamic History* (Reading, UK: Ithaca Press, 2000), 75-79.

Muslims led to regular conflicts. Originally centered in Basra, present-day Iraq, Ibadi groups gradually moved further afield in order to create independent Ibadi cities and empires, which they accomplished both in present-day Oman and in the Maghrib. Ibadism spread across North Africa and reached its zenith in the ninth century Rustamid empire founded by ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn Rustam in 776. The Rustamids converted a large number of indigenous tribes across the western Maghrib, swelling their numbers and integrating local language and customs. The success of the Rustamids was short lived. Less than two hundred years after its foundation, the Sunni Fatimid Empire sacked the Rustamid capital, Tahert (present-day Tiaret, Algeria), in 909. Fleeing further persecution, a group of Ibadi notables fled south, first to Ouargla, then west across the dry, hilly *chebka* plateau to a Saharan valley where they constructed five walled cities (*ksours*) along a dry riverbed, the *Oued M’zab*.⁶⁷

Each *kçour* sat on a hill, the city descending down the hillsides from the mosque at its apex. Atop the mosque sat a tall minaret that doubled as a watchtower. The urban landscape of the cities in the M’zab demonstrated the two primary concerns of Ibadi life: religion and defense from outside invasion or interference.⁶⁸ The hostile environment of the M’zab accomplished much of the latter for them. The uninviting climate of the Sahara discouraged settlement. This was the primary reason the Ibadis chose the valley, accessible only across large swathes of hostile desert, for it provided them the isolation from religious persecution that they sought.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Shinar, “Ibadiyya and Orthodox Reformism,” 99.

⁶⁸ Michael Brett, *The Rise of the Fatimids: The World of the Mediterranean and the Middle East in the Fourth Century of the Hijra, Tenth Century CE* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 245.

⁶⁹ Benyoucef, 30.

There was hardly anything else to recommend the M'zab beyond its remote location. The *oued*, a dry riverbed running through the valley, flooded only every three to five years, providing scant water resources for agriculture. Yet, the Ibadis built seven thriving cities in the valley, transforming the few oases along the *oued* into vast gardens dedicated to the cultivation of date palms. By the time French troops arrived in Laghouat in the mid-nineteenth century, the M'zab was well known for its date production, as French painter Eugene Fromentin noted in his 1853 voyage to the area, “the *Beni-Mzab*...who count their palm trees in the hundreds of thousands and bring us their dates, the best in the world.”⁷⁰ Surrounding the date gardens were vast necropolises where the Ibadis buried their dead along the hillsides rising up from the valley floor.⁷¹

Inside its walls the city was divided into four distinct areas: the commercial district surrounding the great *souk*, or market, and three residential areas where Ibadis, Malikis, and Jews lived. The Malikis were non-Ibadi Muslims descended from the Sunni mercenaries the Ibadis had recruited in the early years of settlement in the M'zab. These three groups conducted business with each other in the *souk*, as well as with the many travelers who passed through Ghardaïa, one of the most important trading cities of the northern Sahara. Ghardaïa was a way station along the great trading routes that crossed the Sahara, connecting Sub-Saharan Africa and the Mediterranean. Passing traders and travelers could not rest in the city after dark and were forced to remain outside the city walls in small tent encampments or, after French annexation, one of the few hotels that appeared in the early twentieth century.⁷²

⁷⁰ Eugene Fromentin, *Un été dans le Sahara* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1857), 196.

⁷¹ André Chevrillon, *Les Puritains du désert*, 74.

⁷² Among these foreign ‘travelers’ were several hundred sub-Saharan African slaves who passed through Ghardaïa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. For a detailed analysis of slavery in the M'zab

The three dominant religious groups in the M'zab, Ibadis, Malikis, and Jews, occupied distinct spheres of influence and existence. Prior to the French annexation in 1882, Jews lived alongside the majority Muslim population of the M'zab as *dhimmi*, or “protected people,” a status accorded Jews and Christians throughout the Muslim world.⁷³ As a historian of Moroccan Jewry, Emily Benichou Gottreich, points out, Christian groups disappeared from the Maghrib by the twelfth century, thus “Jews came to constitute the region’s *only* indigenous religious minority; in the Maghrib, a *dhimmi* was, by definition, a Jew.”⁷⁴ Similar to Jewish communities throughout the Maghrib, Jews in the M'zab depended on Muslim protection and patronage for their survival. This support was predicated on their payment of additional taxes and willingness to adhere to the *dhimmi* system. Though discrimination against Jews rarely took the form of physical attacks in the M'zab, it did elsewhere in North Africa, and the economic, political, and social structures of the *dhimmi* system reinforced Jewish difference and inferior status.⁷⁵

Jews lived in a *mellah*, a ghetto separated from the rest of Ghardaïa by high stone walls, accessible only through two gates that were closed at night.⁷⁶ They were

prior to and during French annexation, see Brower, *A Desert Named Peace*, 139-196.

⁷³ The name *Dhimmi* is an abbreviation of *ahl al-dhimma*, or “People of the Pact,” in reference to the seventh century Pact of ‘Umar, a capitulation treaty between the caliph ‘Umar b. al-Khattab and the patriarch of Jerusalem. The terms of this treaty were extended to conquered non-Muslim minorities throughout the Islamic world, so long as they subscribed to other monotheistic faiths that pre-dated Islam. *Dhimmi* were granted protection and freedom of religion, but in return paid special taxes, among them the *jizya* poll tax, and were prohibited from various practices allowed Muslims, probably in order to encourage their conversion to Islam. For a twentieth century interpretation of the Pact of ‘Umar, see Norman A. Stillman, *The Jews of Arab Lands in Modern Times* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 225-226. For an example of the great variety in *dhimmi* treatment in Muslim North Africa, see Emily Gottreich, *The Mellah of Marrakesh: Jewish and Muslim Space in Morocco’s Red City* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2007), 12-13.

⁷⁴ Emily Benichou Gottreich, “Historicizing the Concept of Arab Jews in the Maghrib,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 98:4 (Fall 2008): 443.

⁷⁵ In one of the earliest general histories of the Jews in North Africa, H.Z. Hirschberg details the 1805 riots in Algiers that resulted in at least forty Jewish casualties. See his *A History of the Jews in North Africa*, Volume II (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 35-45.

⁷⁶ Created in the sixteenth century, like its counterpart the European *ghetto*, the *mellah* (sometimes called the *hara* in Tunisia) was a distinct section of North African cities where Jews were required to live and

prohibited from building outside the *mellah*, cultivating date gardens, or wearing the *haik*, a white cloak worn by Ibadi men.⁷⁷ The ruling Ibadis allocated one, insufficient, well in Ghardaïa to the Jewish community. In addition to these limitations on property ownership and residence, a number of additional customs restricted daily contact between Jews and Ibadis.⁷⁸ Similar restrictions existed for each minority group in Ghardaïa and were not exclusive to the Jewish community. Non-Ibadi Maliki Muslims were similarly required to live in a part of the city separate from the Ibadi majority. As a descendant of the community later recalled, “each resident [of Ghardaïa] lived in their particular sector and did not mix with the others, which did not prevent the existence of good neighborly relations between all.”⁷⁹

work. It was often walled off from the Muslim section of the city, with gates that closed at night to keep its inhabitants from fraternizing with non-Jews. This was the case in Ghardaïa. For contrasting interpretations of the North African, specifically Moroccan, *mellah*, see Shlomo Deshen, *The Mellah Society: Jewish community life in Sherifian Morocco* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); and Gottreich, *Mellah of Marrakesh*.

⁷⁷ Jean Moriaz, “La vie économique du Mzab,” *Bulletin de liaison saharienne* 11, no. 39 (September 1960).

⁷⁸ Kleinknecht, *Les juifs du M'zab*.

⁷⁹ Sebban, *Vayikah Amram*, 17.

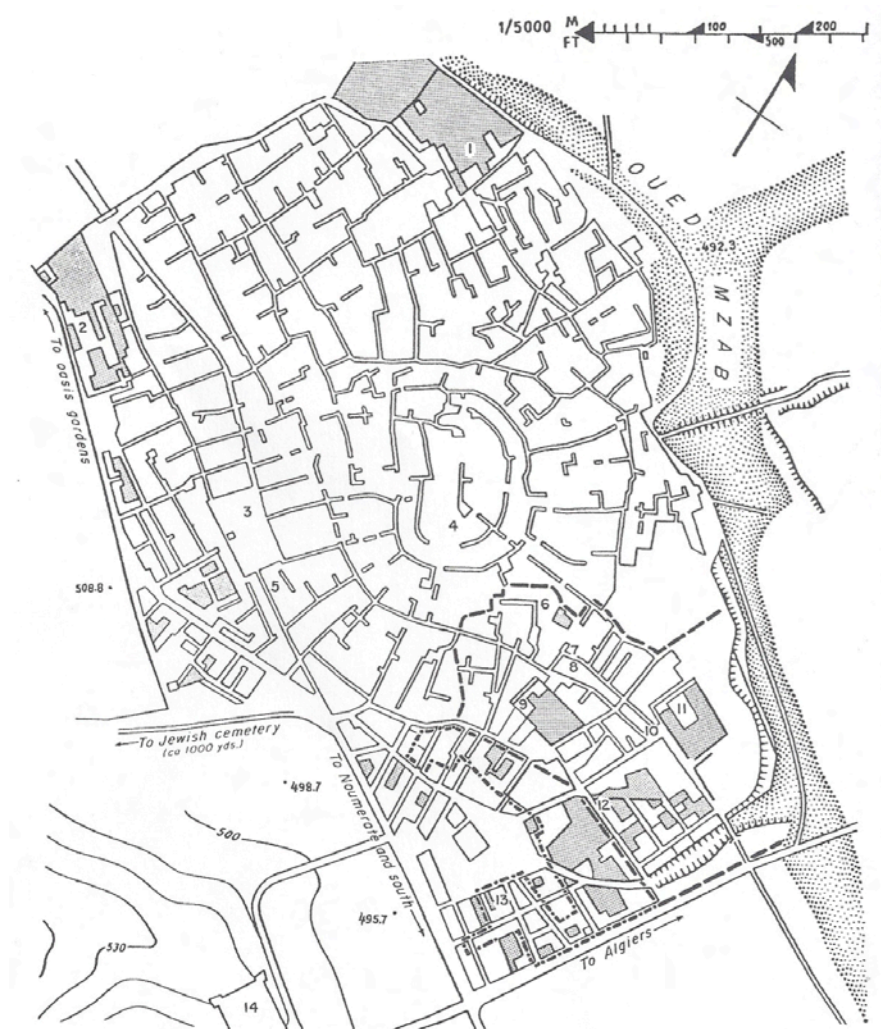


Figure 2.1 "Simplified plan of the city of Ghardaïa," Briggs and Guède, *No More For Ever*, 6. Dotted lines indicate the area of the *mellah*.

The Jewish community in the M'zab numbered almost one thousand by 1896.⁸⁰ The sheer existence of a relatively large community in this isolated place, for centuries after their arrival, attests to the possibility of a vibrant Jewish life amongst the Ibadis. After 1882, French officials emphasized the terrible conditions of Jewish life in the M'zab, both stressing French responsibility for uplifting the Jewish community and simultaneously condemning the Ibadis and the Jews themselves for their poverty and lack

⁸⁰ J. Huguet, "Les Juifs du Mzab," 560.

of education. A critical omission from French reports of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is any mention of Jewish-Muslim cooperation in the M'zab. Non-official French and Jewish accounts of the M'zab do, however, make mention of what Pessah Shinar describes as “a productive symbiosis” in the M'zab for centuries.⁸¹

“The Jews of the Desert”

Ibadi men lived for periods of time outside the M'zab conducting trade vital for the M'zabi economy. While abroad, Ibadi and Jewish M'zabis maintained their distance socially and in business ventures from non-M'zabis. Coupled with their acute business acumen, these behaviors won them little love from their customers and the M'zabis had a reputation, both under the Ottomans and the French, as the greedy “bankers of North Africa.” Throughout the nineteenth century, Sunni Muslims from the Tell attacked Ibadi travelers and settlements. In one such instance, the sack of Medea in 1835, the Maliki leader demanded “all Jews and M'zabis be delivered up to him, in order to put them to the sword.”⁸² In 1914, a Muslim guide described the M'zabis as the “Jew[s] of the Desert.”⁸³ The boundaries between Jewish and Ibadi M'zabis thus faded in the eyes of non-M'zabis who considered them both part of the same problematic minority from the Saharan hinterlands.

Despite this hostility, Jewish and Ibadi M'zabis grew wealthy from trade. In addition to dates, they traded in gold, bronze, and ostrich plumes from Sub-Saharan Africa that arrived in the M'zab via trans-Saharan trade routes, passing through Ghardaïa

⁸¹ Shinar, “Réflexions sur la symbiose Judéo-Ibadite en Afrique du nord,” 81-114.

⁸² Col. P. Azan, *L'Emir Abd el-Kader* (Paris, 1935), 39, cited in Shinar, “Ibadiyya and Orthodox Reformism in Modern Algeria”: 100.

⁸³ Helen C. Gordon, *A Woman in the Sahara* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes, 1914), 49.

en route to the port cities of Algiers and Oran.⁸⁴ Some of the precious metals that passed through the M'zab found their way to the workshops of Jewish jewelers renowned for their metalworking skills.⁸⁵ The first Jewish tinsmiths, goldsmiths, and metalworkers arrived in Ghardaïa sometime in the late fourteenth century, accompanying an Ibadi sheikh from the island of Jerba, present-day Tunisia.⁸⁶ These Jerban Jews augmented the pre-existing Jewish community of Ghardaïa, comprised of Jewish immigrants from the Mediterranean coast who had fled south alongside the Ibadis following the Fatimid conquest in the eleventh century.⁸⁷

By the arrival of the Ottomans in North Africa in the fifteenth century, Jewish M'zabis were important commercial allies of their Ibadi neighbors and, as Julia Clancy-Smith has demonstrated throughout the Sahara, "Jewish traders often enjoyed ties of patronage with Muslim associates and were indispensable for economic and other sorts of exchanges."⁸⁸ Along with their joint commercial trading ventures, Jews and Ibadis interacted in their daily public and, sometimes, private lives. Though rules governing the proper behavior of *dhimmi* limited Jewish exchange with the Ibadis, they sometime worked together and even developed personal relationships across religious and ethnic boundaries.

⁸⁴ Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Plumes: ostrich feathers, Jews, and a lost world of global commerce* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 157.

⁸⁵ Mercier, "Les juifs du Mzab et Israël," 120.

⁸⁶ Adolphe de Calassanti-Motyliniski, *Notes historiques sur le Mzab: Guerara depuis sa fondation* (Alger: A. Jourdan, 1885), 6; Kleinknecht, *Les Juifs du M'Zab*; Briggs and Guede, *No More For Ever*, 9-11; Sebban.

⁸⁷ Huguet, "Les Juifs du Mzab," 560.

⁸⁸ Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 15.

A 1905 European travelogue mentions a marriage between an Ibadi man and Jewish woman in Ghardaïa.⁸⁹ This was unusually rare as Jews in Ghardaïa married almost exclusively within the faith, and usually within the community.⁹⁰ More common were moments of indirect contact or long-standing cultural associations. Isolated as they were from Jewish communities elsewhere in North Africa, M'zabi Jews interacted most frequently with their Ibadi neighbors and adopted many of their cultural practices, including the food they ate and the languages they spoke.

Family structures were much the same in Ibadi and Jewish households in Ghardaïa, partly as a result of the economic system, which required men to travel for extended periods of time, and also due to the strict Ibadi religious doctrines that influenced the Jewish practices of the local community. While M'zabi men traveled extensively, with at least a fourth of all M'zabi men abroad at any one time, M'zabi women were banned from leaving the M'zab, a prohibition that the *djemaa* believed would protect and sustain the integrity of the community.⁹¹ Jewish women, like Ibadi women, were similarly prohibited from leaving the M'zab.⁹²

In the late nineteenth century, most M'zabi men and women married at the age of fourteen or fifteen.⁹³ Both Ibadi and Jewish M'zabis practiced polygamy, which was especially troubling to later French colonial officials and, though diminished, persisted

⁸⁹ Calassanti-Motyliniski, *Notes historiques sur le Mzab*, 30. This account does not elaborate how this marriage took place or if one or other spouse converted to either Judaism or Islam.

⁹⁰ The community had one of the highest rates of endogamous marriage in the world, making it the subject of numerous medical and anthropological studies in the twentieth century.

⁹¹ Huguët, "Les Juifs du Mzab," 560; A.-M. Goichon, *La Vie Féminine au Mzab: étude de sociologie musulmane* (Paris: Librairie Orientaliste Paul Geuthner, 1927), 1-3.

⁹² Huguët, "Les Juifs du Mzab," 561.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 563.

into the twentieth century.⁹⁴ An alternative to taking multiple wives was divorce and elevated rates of divorce in the Jewish community surprised French travelers, who observed its detrimental effects on Jewish women. The anthropologist J. Huguet observed in 1902 that “there are not any men who had not wed two or three wives, or even five or six. As soon as the wife is old enough and used up by repeated pregnancies, the husband looks for a pretext to divorce her. I knew a 35 year old Jewish man who was on his fourth wife.”⁹⁵ However, Jewish women could also divorce their husbands according to Jewish law, which is to say with the acquiescence of their husband to a termination of the marriage contract, and demand child support.⁹⁶ Huguet failed to note this possibility in his survey of the community.

Like their Ibadi counterparts, Jewish women in the M’zab had a heavily circumscribed daily existence. Nevertheless, they did participate in the local economy by weaving intricate fabrics and lace from materials brought to their houses, products that men sold in the *souk*.⁹⁷ As did women in traditional or orthodox Jewish communities around the world, married Jewish women in Ghardaïa covered their hair outside the home. In addition, for much of their history married Jewish women in Ghardaïa publicly covered their faces with a white veil specific to the Maghreb, the *melah’fa*, which covered them from head to toe.⁹⁸ Over time, this conservative dress gave way to more open female clothing and by the early twentieth century, European travelers to the region

⁹⁴ Briggs and Guède, in *No More For Ever*, 46-47, observe that at least three men had more than one wife when he began his anthropological study of the Jewish community in Ghardaïa in 1955.

⁹⁵ Huguet, “Les Juifs du Mzab,” 567.

⁹⁶ Briggs and Guède, *No More For Ever*, 60; Freddy Raphaël, “Les Juifs du Mzab dans l’Est de la France,” *Les relations entre Juifs et Musulmans en Afrique du Nord, XIX-XXe siècles, Actes du colloque international de l’Institut d’histoire des pays d’outre-mer, abbaye de Sénanque, octobre 1978* (Paris, 1980), 208.

⁹⁷ Sebban, *Vayikah Amram*, 12.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

noted that, unlike the Ibadis, Jewish women in the M'zab wore no veils, though they did cover their hair.⁹⁹ European travelers found the Jewish women of Algeria, and Ghardaïa, fascinating and they were the subjects of hundreds of postcards in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The girls from Ghardaïa seen in the image below are both representations of the particular dress worn by Jewish women in the M'zab as well as revealing of the ways that Europeans saw women from the Sahara, exotic images meant to excite or inspire sympathy.



Figure 2.2 “Juives de Ghardaïa,” c. 1905. *Juives d’Afrique du Nord, Cartes Postales (1885-1930)*, ed. Clémence Boulouque and Nicole S. Serfaty (Saint-Pourçain-sur-Sioule, France: Bleu autour, 2005).

Jews in Ghardaïa followed the basic tenets of orthodox Jewish practice as it was performed throughout the Jewish world, but also had several unusual practices that suggest an Islamic influence specific to North Africa. Jews in Ghardaïa maintained their adherence to *kashrut*, with a *shochet*, or ritual slaughterer, appointed by the

⁹⁹ Huguet, “Les Juifs du Mzab.”

community.¹⁰⁰ Uniquely, Jewish men spoke Hebrew with each other as well—a language rarely spoken colloquially in Jewish communities elsewhere—which they studied in a religious school after the age of five. Jewish religious education, limited to male children, culminated in the *bar mitzvah* ceremony at the age of thirteen. Jews in Ghardaïa marked the passage of time with Jewish yearly festivals, including Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Passover. These practices resembled those of orthodox Jewish communities elsewhere. Their religious practice was an integral part of everyday life, public and private, and their customs were certainly influenced by the very austere Islamic practices of the Ibadis, though they also resembled other variants of Judaism elsewhere in North Africa.

Jewish practices particular to the Maghrib included an emphasis on mysticism, pilgrimage, and *Zaddik* (saint) veneration, which were similar to corresponding Islamic practices in the region. Many M’zabi Jewish mystical beliefs resembled those of the community at Jerba, though as Ghardaïa was even more isolated than Jerba, M’zabi Jews developed practices distinct from those of their Tunisian coreligionists.¹⁰¹ Jewish belief in mysticism manifested in daily recitation of prayers to repel evil spirits and the prominent display of various material symbols to repel the evil eye. Writing in 1927, traveler André Chevrillon observed in Ghardaïa that Jewish homes resembled Ibadi homes in that the lintels of both were decorated with “hands of Fatima, crescents, stars, suns, painted or carved into the stone,” indicating both communities believed in the evil eye and used similar symbols to repel it.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Sebban, *Vayikah Amram*, 23-26.

¹⁰¹ Shlomo Deshen, “Southern Tunisian Jewry in the Early Twentieth Century: Elements of French, Arab and Jewish Culture,” *The Journal of North African Studies* 10, no. 2 (June 2005): 183-199.

¹⁰² Chevrillon, *Les Puritains du désert*, 112.

Pilgrimage and *Zaddik* (plural *Zaddikim*) veneration evidenced theological cross-pollination between Muslims and Jews in North Africa. While Jewish pilgrimages to Jerusalem resembled most closely the Muslim *Hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, Jews in North Africa more frequently made pilgrimages to the graves of venerated rabbis in the Maghrib. In Ghardaïa, at least one Jewish man made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem and returned to the community in the 1920s.¹⁰³ More frequent were visits to the graves of local or regional *Zaddikim*, usually former rabbis from the community who were venerated for performing ‘miracles’ during their lifetime. These pilgrimages took place annually in a *hillula*, a gathering of hundreds of Jews to the tomb of a great rabbi, which occurred regularly throughout Algeria and Morocco.¹⁰⁴ Tlemcen in northern Algeria was an important site for pilgrimage, as it was host to a number of Jewish religious schools. More frequently, Jewish men from Ghardaïa made pilgrimage to the nearby gravesites of former rabbis from the community, who appear to have come almost exclusively from one of the two most prominent families in the M’zab, the Partouche or Sebban.¹⁰⁵

Deviating from Jewish practice elsewhere, M’zabi Jews celebrated lifecycle events with unique festivals and traditions, some of which borrowed from the Ibadi custom. These practices were largely confined to celebrations of male lifecycle events and began at birth. While Jewish male infants in the Maghrib and wider Jewish world were circumcised on the eighth day after birth, many M’zabi Jewish boys were circumcised at three years of age.¹⁰⁶ This was perhaps a result of Ibadi influence, as

¹⁰³ Sebban, *Vayikah Amram*, 21.

¹⁰⁴ Isaachar Ben-Ami, “Beliefs and Customs,” in *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times*, ed. Reeva Spector Simon, Michael Menachem Laskier, and Sara Reguer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 201.

¹⁰⁵ For a listing of *zaddikim* from Ghardaïa, see Eliahou Marciano, *Les Sages d’Algérie* (Marseille: Institut Méditerranéen Mémoire et Archives du Judaïsme, 2002).

¹⁰⁶ Huguët, “Les Juifs du Mzab,” 569.

Islamic practice dictates a later date of circumcision. The community celebrated the entrance of young boys, usually between four and five years of age, into their religious education with a ceremony called the *kittab*, from the Arabic for “book.”¹⁰⁷

Anthropologist J. Huguet experienced a *kittab* ceremony during his study of the M’zabi Jews in 1896 and noted that the family and friends of the celebrated child spent the day drinking heavily of the date liquor that Jews exclusively produced.¹⁰⁸ In the 1950s, Lloyd Cabot-Briggs found the *kittab* ritual alive and well. Ceremonies lasted for up to thirty days and included twenty days of banquets at family homes, followed by a henna ceremony for the boys, and a final procession through the synagogue.¹⁰⁹ There is little evidence that similar ceremonies occurred elsewhere in the Maghrib, even in Jerba, the community with the closest cultural ties to the M’zabi Jewish community. The M’zabi Jewish community, while part of the larger North African Jewish world, was a distinct community with its own particular traditions. These unique characteristics were largely the product of their long coexistence with the Ibadi community in Ghardaïa.

Dhimmitude to the Jewish personal status

Conflicts between the Jewish and Muslim communities grew in frequency after the arrival of French forces to the south and the crumbling of the *dhimmi* system that had enforced rigid boundaries between the two. One of the first such historical occurrences arose around the issue of building a new synagogue. From their arrival in the M’zab until the late 1880s, the Jews of Ghardaïa had a single modest synagogue, indistinguishable from the surrounding houses. Perhaps emboldened by news of the 1870 Crémieux

¹⁰⁷ Briggs and Guède, *No More For Ever*, 22.

¹⁰⁸ Huguet, “Les Juifs du Mzab,” 563.

¹⁰⁹ Briggs and Guède, *No More For Ever*, 28-31.

Decree, some members of the community tried unsuccessfully to build a second house of prayer a few years before official French annexation of the M'Zab, in 1872. Construction of a second Jewish house of prayer drew criticism from the Ibadi community and the *djemaa*, the local council of laypeople, found the synagogue objectionable. Soon after its completion, a group of around one hundred Ibadi men came to the *mellah* and destroyed the new house of prayer in a single night. Jewish communal leaders appealed to the French commander at Laghouat, who demanded the *djemâa* make restitution for the damages.¹¹⁰ However, with only loose French influence over the independent M'zab, it is unclear how or if this French order for compensation had any effect.

After this traumatic episode, the Jewish community halted their construction plans until French annexation of the M'Zab. In 1882, members of the Jewish community planned for a second time to construct an additional synagogue. Motivated partly by intracommunal friction between the prominent Balouka and Sellam families, patriarch Bers ben Itzhaac Balouka petitioned the French command for permission to construct a new synagogue. In his petition, Balouka complained that the existing synagogue was plagued by people who “arrive drunk and with mischievous intentions.”¹¹¹ The Balouka family may well have been trying to demonstrate their growing wealth to their rivals, but the sharpest rejection of their plans came from the Muslim community. Construction did not begin until 1887, slowed by five years of objections from the Ibadi community.

Again, as in 1872, the Ibadi community responded unfavorably to the idea of a second synaoguge. However, this time they stopped short of taking physical action against the Jews and instead inundated the French Colonel in Ghardaïa with counter-

¹¹⁰ Mercier, *La civilization urbaine au Mzab*, 136.

¹¹¹ Briggs and Guède, *No More For Ever*, 20.

petitions challenging the construction of an additional synagogue. As in the earlier period, the French rejected Ibadi objections to the synagogue and gave permission for the construction of this second synagogue, which was successfully built. In the 1920s, a member of the Balouka family constructed an additional synagogue following a feud within the family. By that time, construction in the *mellah* ceased to cause unrest between the Muslim and Jewish communities, as the Jewish neighborhood had long been open and the *dhimmi* system dismantled.¹¹²

That construction of a synagogue came swiftly on the heels of French annexation suggests that the Jews of Ghardaïa found a new freedom after 1882. This particular episode is instructive for our understanding of how Jews and Ibadi Muslims interacted prior to the arrival of the French. However, taken alone, it suggests a hostile relationship between the Jewish and Muslim communities of the M'zab and diminishes the strong historic ties and collaboration between the communities. Jewish and non-Jewish M'zabis did interact and these relationships complicate assumptions about the inferior position of Jews in the *dhimmi* system. Though episodic, there were instances of alliance and exchange between the Jews and Ibadis of the M'zab before the arrival of the French to the region in the late nineteenth century, particularly in their frequent joint economic activities. Ibadis frequented Jewish businesses, especially some Jewish cafes. However, this is not to say that the status of Jews in Ghardaïa did not benefit in many ways from the French presence in the M'Zab, for French annexation heralded the end of the *dhimmi* system.

In the period immediately following annexation, the French military command ordered that the *mellah* be opened and Jews allowed greater freedom of movement. Jews

¹¹² Briggs and Guède, *No More For Ever*, 20-21.

were now allowed to wear clothing previously forbidden them and photographs from the early twentieth century show Jews in Berber clothing, particularly Jewish men who wore the *haik* or *gandoura*, a white cloak made from a large rectangle of cloth folded in on itself, sometimes covered by a second layer, a *burnous*.¹¹³ Anthropologist J. Hugué noted during his passage through the M'zab in 1902, "The Israelites no longer have walls separating them from the rest of the population, can now dress like the rest of the population, and are allowed to own gardens in the oasis; in 1882, they had already 500 palm trees, one well in the city and 7 in the oasis."¹¹⁴ The structural subjection of Jews characteristic of the *dhimmi* system largely disappeared by the twentieth century, however, the stigma of Jewishness remained, both from the M'zabi Muslim community and from the newly arrived French military command.

When France annexed the M'zab to French Algeria it did so as a militarily administered *territoire*, not as a *département* governed by the civil state. Consequently, the Jewish community became non-citizen French nationals; the status formerly accorded Jews in the now-emancipated Algerian north and all Algerian Muslims. Without citizenship, M'zabi Jews and Muslims could not participate in French elections; instead, the M'zabis retained their preexisting local governmental system, including the *djemaa*, the same group of notables who signed the 1853 treaty with General Randon. The French decision not to emancipate the M'zabi Jewish community ignored the fact that M'zabi Jews very much wanted to become French citizens, as their 1892 petition to have the Crémieux Decree applied to the south attests.

¹¹³ Sebban, *Vayikah Amram*, 178; Lloyd Cabot Briggs, *Tribes of the Sahara* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 207.

¹¹⁴ Hugué, "Les Juifs du Mzab," 7.

Jews in Ghardaïa may have believed French intercession into the M'zab would benefit them. Despite their geographic isolation, some Jews from Ghardaïa witnessed firsthand the benefits of French citizenship after 1870 on their frequent journeys northward. The Crémieux Decree extended as far south as Laghouat, where Jews from the M'zab often went for commercial and personal reasons. A French traveler to the M'zab in the late 1870s noted,

These Israelites of the Mzab [*sic*], temporarily living in Laghouat or elsewhere, come back to the confederations, where they are again subject to the laws specific to the M'zab, after having been treated in Laghouat like French citizens.¹¹⁵

After visiting Jewish citizens in the French *départements*, no doubt many M'zabi Jews felt dissatisfaction with their inferior status upon their return to the M'zab, and were perhaps intrigued by the possible benefits of obtaining French citizenship.

Without eliminating the preexisting *djemaa* and other local governing bodies specific to each religious group, the French created a new municipal commission with representatives from the Ibadi, Maliki, and Jewish communities. To represent the Jewish community at the municipal commission, the Governor of Algeria created the post of *Chef de nation juive*, and named Aaroun ben Khalfalla Partouche the first leader of the “tribe of the Israelites of the city of Ghardaïa” in 1887.¹¹⁶ This created a second authority in the Jewish community in addition to the religious leadership of the rabbi who was loosely under the jurisdiction of the French military command. The appointment of Partouche and creation of the post of *Chef de nation juive* bore similarities to earlier French ways of organizing the Jewish communities of the north after the conquest of

¹¹⁵ A. Coyne, *Le Mzab* (Alger: Adolphe Jourdan, 1879), 39.

¹¹⁶ Kleinknecht, *Juifs du Mzab*, Annexe 13.

Algeria in 1830, which in turn were extensions of the original Republican system of classification created in the early nineteenth century.

The most dramatic change French annexation brought to Jewish life in the M'zab was the initial destruction of the *mellah* and end to the *dhimmi* system. This and the establishment of the *Chef de nation juive*, a largely symbolic role, were accomplished within the first decade of the French arrival. However, when the Jewish community petitioned the French command for the application of the Crémieux decree to the south in 1892, the French took no action. From the quick response in their initial arrival, at the turn of the century the French colonial administrators in the desert maintained the status quo. This meant the continued categorization of Jews in Ghardaïa as French nationals and their legal treatment according to the Jewish “personal status.”

A critical factor in French hesitation to extend the Crémieux Decree to the south was the backlash against Jewish emancipation that swept through Algeria in the following decades. Much antisemitic propaganda in Algeria asserted that Jews voted *en bloc* against the interests of the state.¹¹⁷ A number of riots against Jews in major Algerian cities erupted, in Oran in 1884, and in Algiers in 1897 and 1898. Politicians including Max Régis and Edouard Drumont used the Crémieux Decree to mobilize a new wave of antisemitism that culminated in the Dreyfus Affair.¹¹⁸ The political antisemitism amongst the Algerian settler population persisted into the 1940s and the Vichy regime.

¹¹⁷ David Prochaska, *Making Algeria French: Colonialism in Bône, 1870-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 201-202.

¹¹⁸ Sarah Taïeb-Carlen, *Les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord: De Didon à De Gaulle* (Saint-Maur: Sépia, 2000), 103.

Colonization and Reform in the M'zab

In addition to the continuing opposition to the Crémieux Decree, Jewish emancipation never came to the Sahara in these years because the nature of the French colonial enterprise in the south differed dramatically from the earlier colonization of the Algerian coastal regions after 1830. On his travels through Ghardaia in the 1920s, the writer André Chevrillon observed,

It's forty-five years that France has been in the Mzab. One might think that we just arrived...France has only installed tokens of their capture: a few *écoles indigènes*, a post office, a fort. With two officers, a dozen mokhaznis,¹¹⁹ some indigenous soldiers, this fort, that holds the [M'zab], is all the military.¹²⁰

Chevrillon aptly described the French approach to the M'zab, which contrasted dramatically with the intensively colonized Algerian coast. The different tempo and path of French colonization in the M'zab suggests that the French colonization of the Sahara differed in critical ways from earlier colonial periods. Unlike the settler colonization of the Algerian coast, French annexation of the M'zab did not result in an influx of French or European settlers, as many Europeans believed the Sahara to be increasingly hostile after the 1881 Flatters massacre. The different tack taken by the French in the M'zab also reflected French suppositions about the uniqueness of the M'zab and its residents. With only a small military command center in Ghardaïa, French colonial control did not make significant inroads into the M'zab for decades.

This late nineteenth century approach to colonization differed from earlier, more invested colonial efforts in Algeria. Partly a product of the remoteness of the M'zab, the

¹¹⁹ In French North Africa, *mokhazni* were local policemen endowed with limited power by the French colonial authorities. See Michael Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria* (New York: NYU Press, 1994).

¹²⁰ Chevrillon, *Les Puritains du désert*, 69.

small investment the French made in the northern Sahara also reflected new ideologies about colonization and about colonial subjects. The universalism espoused by the Third Republic did not extend to its new colonial possessions, where a new policy of association replaced the old practice of assimilation. Assimilatory colonial policies assumed that colonial subjects, like French peasants in an earlier era, could be made into French citizens. This schema was based on the belief that all individuals were inherently equal and consequently able to evolve into civilized Frenchmen, an idiosyncratic interpretation of the Republican ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality.

The ideology of association was instead predicated on a belief in universal difference, that colonized subjects were not receptive to the civilizing process. Patricia Lorcin argues that this new policy was deceptive,

...for, rather than impelling a conformity to an alien culture, it held the promise of the tolerance spawned of cultural pluralism. In fact, because its basic premise did not arise out of a notion of equality but, on the contrary, out of one of racial inequality, it marginalized the indigenous population even more than before.¹²¹

The logic underlying this civilizing mission drew on nineteenth century scientific race theory and social Darwinism. The idealistic, patronizing colonial vision of the assimilatory civilizing mission yielded to a more pessimistic colonial logic that assumed French racial superiority. In Algeria, the racial hierarchy placed Europeans at the top, followed by the now-emancipated Algerian Jews, then Berbers, with Arab Muslims at the bottom. The close association of Jews in the M'zab with Muslims and their adoption of various Berber customs influenced the French decision not to emancipate the community after 1882. Reflecting this disdain for the M'zabi Jewish community, the General Commander of the nearby region of Médéa wrote in 1886, "The Israélites of the M'zab

¹²¹ Lorcin, *Imperial Identities*, 171.

are in no way French citizens. They should be considered as foreigners.”¹²² Negative opinions about the M’zabi Jewish community persisted well into the twentieth century. Similar objections to the Ibadi community also informed French actions in the M’zab and the French Colonel in Ghardaïa and his small command center made little investment into the area for many years. For the remainder of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, life in the M’zab continued much as it had in the period prior to annexation, with few French interventions into M’zabi life.

French civilians often did not share the opinions of the French military command, though their exoticized imaginings of the M’zabis were also predicated on the racial and ethnic inferiority of the M’zabis vis-à-vis the French. As it had in the nineteenth century, the Sahara intrigued French writers and travelers, though, frustrated by its inaccessibility, few made the journey to the M’zab until after the arrival of the French railway system in the 1910s.¹²³ Facilitated by the new accessibility of the region, a number of French writers, journalists, and scholars passed through the M’zab after the First World War. This new era of Orientalist fascination with the Sahara yielded academic works including Marcel Mercier’s *La civilisation urbaine au Mzab* (Alger, 1922) and an anthropological study of M’zabi women by A.-M. Goichon, *La vie féminine au Mzab* (1927), as well as popular travelogues including Gouvion’s *Monographie du Mzab* (Casablanca, 1926) and Chevrillon’s *Les Puritains du désert* (1927).

Though these accounts differed in their intended audiences and tone, each critically observed the treatment of women in the Muslim community. This criticism was sometimes posed in opposition to the perceived openness of Jewish women and Jewish

¹²² Kleinknecht, *Les Juifs du M’zab*.

¹²³ Gordon, *A Woman in the Sahara*, 131.

homes. André Chevrillon, a professor of English and member of the *Académie française*, wrote of Ghardaïa, “I feel, in this mellah, that I am back in the middle of Europe. What a contrast with the closed faces of the Muslims, with their refusal to socialize with us!”¹²⁴ French observers and colonial officials had long asserted that the veiling of Muslim women, which frustrated European gazes, was proof of both the exoticness of North African women and the incompatibility of Islam with Western civilization. If they observed an improvement in Muslim women’s social status, it was often credited to European intervention. This was the case with Anne-Marie Goichon’s detailed anthropological study of M’zabi women. Goichon found that the situation of women in the M’zab was improving in the twentieth century and attributed this to “the period of transition opened up by the French occupation, which has imported several character traits that undoubtedly will soon better them.”¹²⁵ Changes in M’zabi women’s lives were thus attributed to outside colonial intervention, not internal efforts at reform.

Though none of these authors discusses it, there were internal reforms taking place in the M’zab during this time. In the Muslim community, M’zabi Ibadi religious leaders in regular contact with other Ibadi communities in Jerba and Oman initiated these movements, and Ibadi scholars elaborated a new theology influenced by the Islamic cultural renaissance of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These Ibadi reformists opposed French occupation and sought to build, in tandem with their peers in Tunisia and Oman, a new pan-Ibadi movement to unite Ibadis across the Middle East and North Africa. New religious schools opened in Ghardaïa, and Arabic was emphasized as the language of daily life instead of the local Berber dialect or French. Pan-Ibadism was

¹²⁴ Chevrillon, *Les Puritains du désert*, 113.

¹²⁵ Goichon, *La vie féminine au Mzab*, 257.

in many ways similar to the larger movements of Pan-Arabism and early Arab nationalism. Ibadis reinterpreted their religious texts to emphasize their commonalities with other Muslims and became invested in the situation of other Muslim communities. Ibadis were, for instance, very interested in the outcome of Ottoman battles in World War I, when only a century earlier they had rarely interacted with the Ottoman Dey in Algiers.¹²⁶

During the same period, M'zabi Jews found themselves in greater contact with Jewish communities outside the Sahara. Whereas earlier rabbis had been chosen exclusively from the community, after 1900 a number of rabbis arrived in Ghardaïa from Morocco, starting with Rabbi Avraham Layani from Figuig who arrived in the late 1890s and was succeeded in the early 1900s by Rabbi Yossef Elbaz, born in Demnat, Morocco. Shortly thereafter, Rabbi Elbaz left Ghardaïa on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, where he remained for the rest of his life; his successor, Rabbi Avraham ben Simon 'Attia, was also born and trained in Morocco.¹²⁷

The early twentieth century also saw the establishment of an *Alliance Israélite Universelle* school in Ghardaïa. Created in 1860, the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* was an association of French Jews dedicated to educating Jews in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Balkans according to European standards. In some ways adopting the French civilizing mission, the *AIU* established schools throughout North Africa where young men, and sometimes young women, took vocational classes, courses in French language, and came in contact with teachers trained in Paris, all aimed at bringing them

¹²⁶ Amal N. Ghazal, *Islamic reform and Arab nationalism: expanding the crescent from the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean (1880s-1930s)* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 37-49.

¹²⁷ Marciano, *Les Sages d'Algérie*.

into the European sphere of influence.¹²⁸ In Ghardaïa, the school was small and is rarely mentioned in sources from the M'zabi Jewish community; however, its existence in the early twentieth century indicates a growing level of interaction between M'zabi Jews and Jewish communities elsewhere in North Africa and France.¹²⁹

Conclusion

In his doctoral thesis, Marcel Mercier concluded that Jews from Ghardaïa were uninterested in French citizenship because they held traditional beliefs and did not want to engage in civil marriages or allow women to inherit.¹³⁰ Mercier ignored or failed to properly research his subject; the Jewish community from Ghardaïa had petitioned the Governor General of Algeria for citizenship in 1919.¹³¹ His description of M'zabi Jews echoed eighteenth and nineteenth century conceptualizations of the “eternal Jew,” stubbornly clinging to an archaic set of beliefs and uninterested in modernity or change. Influential members of the M'zabi Jewish community *were* interested in obtaining French citizenship by the turn of the century, in contrast to the assumptions of French writers and academics. The military command ignored or rejected these petitions and no changes in the legal status of M'zabi Jews occurred until the 1930s. Colonial officials' rejection of Jewish petitions for naturalization reflected their prejudices and assumptions that M'zabi Jews were unchanging and resistant to modernity, their fears of antagonizing the local

¹²⁸ For a detailed examination of the AIU and its activities in North Africa, see Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862-1962* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

¹²⁹ Though few records from the school exist, material objects produced by students at the AIU school in Ghardaïa attest to its existence. For images of ritual Jewish artifacts produced at the school, see Chaya Benjamin, *North African Lights, Hanukkah Lamps from the Zeyde Schulman Collection in the Israel Museum* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2003).

¹³⁰ Mercier, *La civilisation urbaine au Mzab*, 124.

¹³¹ René Cassin, “Note sur la condition des Israélites du M'zab,” 26 May 1955, 3. ANOM 81F/1212.

Muslim population, and the general political climate in Algeria opposed to expanding the Crémieux Decree.

Popular representations of M'zabi Jews also influenced the decision not to engage with the problematic situation of Jews in Ghardaïa. Some of these prejudices are reminiscent of earlier critiques of Jews in France, then in recirculation in Algeria. For instance, a doctoral dissertation from the 1930s noted that, "In the Territories of the South, the preponderant usurer is the Israélites."¹³² The author blamed "usury" for weakening the Algerian economy and fomenting local conflicts. The accusation of moneylending echoed the early nineteenth century criticisms of Alsatian Jews. Though Jews in Ghardaïa did indeed act as moneylenders well into the twentieth century, they did so alongside Ibadi moneylenders, who acted as loan agents for travelers along the trans-Saharan trade routes and neighboring tribes.¹³³

Moneylending was, in the M'zabi context, a vital economic activity associated not only with the Jewish minority, but, in contrast to European history, with the Muslim *majority* and yet another link between the Ibadi and Jewish communities in the M'zab. French failure to grasp the particular context for Jewish activities they deemed objectionable colored their refusal to extend to the Jews of Ghardaïa the same rights granted Jews in the Algerian north. French officials had similar misunderstandings of M'zabi Jewish culture in the following decades. Not until the late 1950s did a critical consensus of French officials support full citizenship for the M'zabi Jews, influenced by culturally sensitive colonial officials with experience living in the M'zab.

¹³² A. Maissait, *L'Usure en Algérie* (Alger, 1937), cited in Shinar, "Reflexions sur la symbiose Judéo-Ibadite" 92.

¹³³ Shinar, "Reflexions sur la symbiose Judéo-Ibadite," 91-94.

Members of the M'zabi Jewish community petitioned the French military command at Laghouat for naturalization again in 1932 and, for the first time, won the attention of the Governor General, who initiated an investigation into the civil status of M'zabi Jews. The investigation suggests that the colonial regime recognized that the legal status of the M'zabi Jewish community was problematic, although such acknowledgement did not produce the desired results. In lieu of actual emancipation, the commission made only superficial changes to the administration of the community, including transferring responsibility for recording ceremonies affecting the civil status of M'zabi Jews to the *chef de la fraction israélite de Ghardaïa*, formerly the *Chef de nation juive*.¹³⁴ This individual would then supply this information to the Colonel in Ghardaïa, effectively adding a powerless Jewish middleman to the same process of surveillance.

Significant alterations to the legal status of M'zabi Jews would not arrive until after the Second World War, when the French colonial government reinstated the Crémieux Decree, abrogated from 1940 to 1943 under the Vichy regime. The treatment of Algerian Jews during the Vichy period manifested many of the prejudices and antisemitism that M'zabi Jews had experienced from French officials since the annexation of the M'zab in 1882. The restrictive Vichy policies also, paradoxically, expanded the Jewish world for M'zabi Jews who were put in contact with Jews from northern Algeria, some for the first time. As in this period, later changes to Jewish practice and daily life would arise from a combination of French policy and colonial intervention with internally generated Jewish calls for reform, change, and political enfranchisement. Yet, when Algerian Jews were re-naturalized following the liberation of North Africa, France again excluded the Jews of Ghardaïa based on the logic of their

¹³⁴ René Cassin, "Note sur la condition des Israélites du M'zab," 26 May 1955. ANOM 81F/1211.

cultural difference. Nevertheless, M'zabi Jews would utilize new avenues of soliciting international contact and support, including the attentions of international Zionist organizations.

Chapter 3:
The Long Arm of Vichy:
French Antisemitism in the M'zab, 1930-1946

*Be wary of those in power, for their friendship is often a matter of convenience.
They appear as friends when it suits them, but they will not stand by you in time of need.
--Pirkei Avot II:3*

On December 9, 1943, a bus left Ghardaïa headed north towards Algiers on the long road across the desert carrying sixty Jewish men and women out of the M'zab. For most of the passengers, this was their first trip out of the desert and the beginning of a long journey that would take them by boat from Algiers to Marseilles and then on to Palestine.¹³⁵ This was the first organized group migration to Palestine from the M'zab and the individuals who chose emigration were mostly young couples seeking a better life away from the M'zab. The first of many such migrations from the South of Algeria, this and the following migrations to Israel in the 1940s and 1950s marked a dramatic divergence between their history and that of most other Algerian Jews. Whereas most Algerian Jews argued that the antisemitism of the interwar and Vichy years was an aberration in French policy in Algeria, many of the Jews of the M'zab, like Jews in Morocco and Tunisia, reacted to French and Algerian settler antisemitism by leaving the French sphere of influence for Palestine, and later, Israel.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Sebban, *Vayikah Amram*, 14.

¹³⁶ For the vast majority of Algerian Jews, French citizenship in Algeria availed them of privileges and

Michael Laskier writes “in Algeria, the Jews were more inclined to let bygone be bygones. Their faith in France, particularly Free France, was not shaken as a result of Pétain’s laws or the German threat.”¹³⁷ While true for many, persistent French antisemitism persuaded some M’zabi Jews to seek a new home in mandatory Palestine after 1943. The choice to emigrate in 1943 or 1946 was linked to the M’zabi Jewish experience of greater instability and vulnerability throughout the interwar and Vichy periods. Historian Robert O. Paxton writes of mainland France that the “incipient civil war of the 1930’s” was linked to “the social transformations of the postwar years.”¹³⁸ The same could be argued for Algeria and the M’zab, where the upheavals in the status quo during the 1930s foreshadowed the coming political changes of the 1940s and 1950s.

As in the first encounter with the French in 1882, after the liberation of North Africa from the Vichy regime French officials again refused to extend the Crémieux Decree to the Jews of Ghardaïa, citing both their cultural difference and fears about antagonizing the local Muslim community. While Jews elsewhere in Algeria, given French citizenship in 1870 and then re-emancipated in 1943, could dismiss Vichy as an aberration, for the Jews of the M’zab the Vichy period evidenced how easily the French could turn against the Jewish population. How little their status changed following Vichy’s fall suggested that it was part of a continuum of French imperial antisemitism, not an imposition of foreign ideas but the realization of homegrown colonial policies and attitudes.

rights that made *aliyah* a less appealing prospect than it was for Jews elsewhere in North Africa. Michael Laskier details the different reactions to Zionism this difference in legal status produced in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, in *Israel and the Maghreb: Statehood to Oslo* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2004).

¹³⁷ Michael Laskier, “Between Vichy Antisemitism and German Harassment: The Jews of North Africa during the Early 1940s,” *Modern Judaism* 11, no. 3 (October 1991): 366.

¹³⁸ Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 49.

During the Vichy regime Jews throughout Algeria, citizen or no, were equally repressed by the antisemitism of colonial officials. In October 1940, the French declared the Crémieux Decree null and void, leveling the status of all Algerian Jews to non-citizen French nationals. In this tragically ironic turn, M'zabi Jews thus found themselves on the same legal footing as their coreligionists for the first time in fifty years. Compared with the experiences of most Algerian Jews, the Jews of Ghardaïa were spared the worst persecutions of the rabidly antisemitic Vichy officials in Algeria. No evidence suggests any Jews from Ghardaïa were sent to the wretched labor camps of the Southern Sahara, where Jewish and other political prisoners were forced to excavate stone and sand for Pétain's beloved Trans-Saharan Railroad project.¹³⁹ Spared this, the French nevertheless subjected Jews from the M'zab to the *numerus clausus* and extensive surveillance of their activities and interactions with Jews from other communities.

The defeat of the Vichy regime eventually brought about a return to citizenship for the Jews of Algeria. This historical return to citizenship for most marked the second great divergence in the history of M'zabi Jewry from that of the larger Algerian Jewish community—the first the non-application of the Crémieux Decree to the M'zab in 1882. In a bitter repetition of history, the reinstatement of the Crémieux Decree in 1943 yet again excluded the Jews of Ghardaïa. Additionally, the return to citizenship for the larger Algerian Jewish community was put up to public debate and repeatedly denounced by French officials in the months following the Allied liberation of North Africa. In these debates, Jews throughout Algeria, France, and the rest of the world saw deep-seated antisemitism voiced by officials at the highest ranks of French government. For the Jews

¹³⁹ For a detailed examination of the importance of the Trans-Saharan Railroad to the National Revolution, see Ruth Ginio's work on French West Africa, *French Colonialism Unmasked: The Vichy Years in French West Africa* (Omaha: University of Nebraska Press, 2006).

of the M'zab—and many Algerian Muslims as well—these arguments were further evidence that French antisemitism and racism were alive and well even after the removal of the Vichy government in North Africa.

International and American Jewish organizations attempted to sway French opinion about the reinstatement of the Crémieux Decree in 1943. American Jewish Committee (AJC) president Joseph Proskauer personally wrote to Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles to intervene with French officials on behalf of the Algerian Jewish community.¹⁴⁰ Even while Vichy controlled North Africa and curtailed the rights of the Algerian Jewish population, international and American relief organizations like the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), the Jewish Agency for Palestine (JA), the World Zionist Organization (WZO), and the American Jewish Committee (AJC) turned their efforts to assisting the Jews of North Africa. The AJDC raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to aid Jews affected by Vichy's anti-Jewish policies and established a number of refugee and relief camps in northern Algeria for Algerian, Moroccan, and Tunisian Jews seeking to immigrate to Palestine. After liberation, emissaries from the Jewish Agency arrived in Algeria and elsewhere in North Africa to encourage emigration.

These international Jewish relief organizations were part of a growing cast of characters, ideologies, and political movements with which the Jews of the Sahara had growing contact in the interwar and postwar period. Diverse and numerous, the political movements of the interwar period captured the imaginations of many Algerians and reached far inland to the isolated M'zab. Political ideologies centered on religion gained

¹⁴⁰ Letter, Joseph M. Proskauer to Hon. Sumner Welles, 17 March 1943. American Jewish Committee Archives, doi: http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/CR12.PDF.

popularity amongst the Ibadi Muslim community, particularly the religious political ideology of Sheikh Ahmed Ben Badis. Largely benevolent towards the Jewish population, Ben Badis and his Ibadi followers nevertheless placed Jews at the margins of their visions of empowerment for Algerian Muslims. Yet, political indifference towards the Jewish community in the M'zab did not shift to physical violence from the Muslim majority in this period as it did elsewhere in Algeria after 1930. In Eastern Algeria, worsening relations between Jews and Muslims produced increasingly violent encounters, and after 1929 anti-Jewish riots in British Mandatory Palestine widened the schism in Jewish-Muslim relations throughout North Africa. For the Jews of the M'zab these decades were ones of great change in their interactions with the larger Jewish and Gentile worlds.

During the interwar and Vichy periods, Jewish-Muslim relations shifted in Algeria in new and dramatic ways. The growing war between Zionist and Arab forces in Palestine contributed significantly to the worsening conflicts between Jews and Muslims in Algeria as throughout North Africa. However, local French misreading of the relations between Jews and Muslims as well as isolated incidents of French colonial officials fomenting conflict between the two also incited greater distrust and violence. In 1943, French officials argued that giving citizenship to the M'zabi Jewish community would anger Algerian Muslims who were then beginning to demand their own citizenship. However, in the M'zab and elsewhere, many Algerian Muslim political leaders, in particular Islamist elites, worked actively to maintain positive relations with Jews for much of the interwar period.

Eventually, the declining power of the old Islamic elites in the face of an Algerian political awakening weakened the protective symbiosis of centuries and contributed to an outbreak of conflict between Jewish and Muslim communities in the 1930s and 1940s. Followed swiftly by the official violence of the French colonial Vichy regime, these shifts in public discourse and military action against Jews set the stage for the eventual success of Zionism in the M'zab. Emigration emerged as a viable option to the status quo in the M'zab, presenting the Jews of Ghardaïa an option unused by other Algerian Jews.

In addition, in the aftermath of the *Statut des Juifs* and in the extended debate over the reinstatement of the Crémieux Decree, events brought the Jewish M'zabi community into greater contact with the outside world and, critically, with Jewish communities elsewhere in Algeria and the world. Some M'zabi Jews interacted with Jewish political prisoners from Algiers and other points in northern Algeria, sent by Vichy to the south under house arrest to minimize their efforts to undermine the Pétainist government. Others met Jews from mainland France and Eastern Europe who came south seeking refuge in the Maghreb, but ended up in various labor camps in the Sahara, forced into arduous work in mines, breaking rocks, or building the Trans-Saharan Railway. And after 1942, some Algerian Jews met with representatives of the AJDC and the Jewish Agency who visited the area to evaluate the need for aid. While limited, these encounters between M'zabi Jews and foreign Jewish individuals and organizations brought the community into an unprecedented level of contact with the world and revealed to them new opportunities and possibilities outside of the M'zab and French Algeria.

Antisemitism, Old and New

Anti-Jewish and antisemitic rhetoric were long a feature of Algerian politics. Largely in reaction to the Crémieux Decree, political antisemitism was a constant of Algerian politics, ebbing between elections only to resurface in physical violence or polemical attacks a few years later. Indeed, when the fate of Algerian Jews was first brought to the center of political debate in the 1840s, Marshall Thomas-Robert Bugeaud suggested, “expelling every single Jew from our African possessions.”¹⁴¹ As various pogroms in the following decades, the growth in popularity of antisemitic political figures like Édouard Droumont, and the reticence to emancipate the Jews of the M’zab indicated, the Crémieux Decree was tremendously unpopular with the French and European settler population. A number of political parties arose in Algeria in the 1880s and 1890s around the theme of rescinding the Crémieux Decree and agitating against Algerian Jews.

Assaults on Algerian Jews were particularly widespread at the time of the Dreyfus Affair, more so than in the metropole, during what was termed Algeria’s “Anti-Jewish crisis” of the late nineteenth century. Mayor of Algiers Max Régis famously wrote in an 1898 editorial, “We will water the tree of our liberty with Jewish blood.”¹⁴² Many antisemitic politicians and political ideologies originated in Algeria and made their way back to the metropole and not vice versa, such as the Antisemitic League founded in Algiers in 1899. When, in the 1920s, antisemitism again moved to the center of the political debate in Algeria, many of the politicians and public figures that had been

¹⁴¹ Cited in Pierre Birnbaum, “French Jews and the ‘Regeneration’ of Algerian Jewry,” in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry XIX*, edited by Ezra Mendelsohn (Oxford University Press, 2004), 90.

¹⁴² *Le Réveil algérien* (Oran), 23 February 1898, quoted in Charles-Robert Ageron, *Les Algériens musulmans et la France: 1871-1919* (Paris: Presses universitaires, 1968), 596.

involved in the anti-Jewish crisis of the 1890s again emerged on the national stage. One critical factor distinguishing this second anti-Jewish crisis from earlier periods was the involvement of a number of Algerian Muslims in violence against Algerian Jews.

Colonial politicians manipulated antisemitic sentiment to distract Algerian Muslims from their own oppression and to win the support of the settler population, who feared both Jewish and Muslim empowerment. Following the First World War, French officials introduced a number of reforms to appease Algerian Muslims, of whom many had fought for France.¹⁴³ Reforms following World War I, including the 1919 Jonnart Law, allowed the election of Algerian Muslims at the municipal level amongst other reforms. In this period of legislative change, M'zabi Jews filed a petition asking that the Crémieux Decree be expanded to include them, but their appeal fell on deaf ears. The settler population was deeply opposed to the 1919 reforms and in an effort to appease them the colonial government in 1920 established a new law that brought back parts of the old *Code de l'indigénat*. This included allowing, among other things, “Muslims” and “indigènes” to be arrested without charges.

Resentment grew in Algeria over the next decade, with Algerian Muslims sometimes venting their frustration not at the French, but at their Jewish neighbors, a practice condoned and sometimes enabled by the local French authorities. Perhaps the most notorious episode of anti-Jewish violence during this period occurred in August 1934, over the course of several days of rioting that left twenty-five Jews and three Muslims dead in the eastern city of Constantine. The immediate spark for this violence was an exchange of insults between a somewhat inebriated Jewish tailor and several

¹⁴³ Mary Dewhurst Lewis, *The boundaries of the republic: migrant rights and the limits of universalism in France, 1918-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 190.

Muslims preparing for prayer, which snowballed into a multi-day outbreak of violence against Jewish property and persons. The riots would probably not have spread so widely or lasted for so many days had the French authorities not been slow to intervene. The events of Constantine revealed persistent antisemitic tendencies in the French colonial administration. It also indicates some wished to exacerbate tensions between Jews and Muslims in order to consolidate French power.¹⁴⁴

The mayor of Constantine at the time of the attacks, Emile Morinaud, was one of a group of antisemitic settler politicians and clerical leaders who grew increasingly outspoken against Algerian Jews in the 1930s. Included in this group was the mayor of Sidi-bel-Abbès, Lucien Bellat. Bellat removed the names of hundreds of Jews from the electoral lists prior to the election of 1939, which the French minister of the interior later ruled a violation of the law.¹⁴⁵ Bellat and Morinaud represent two kinds of antisemitic settler politicians of this period. Bellat was consistently antisemitic. Morinaud, on the other hand, cultivated Jewish support and won Jewish votes in the 1920s, promising the community support and greater integration. His 1930 denunciation of Constantine's Jews was an abrupt about-face from his earlier position. In the face of the economic crisis of 1930, Jews were again a convenient scapegoat and were unceremoniously abandoned by former political allies. Morinaud, along with many politicians in Algeria, chose to shift his allegiances in order to appeal to Fascist-inclined Algerian voters, such as the veterans of the *Croix de feu*.

¹⁴⁴ For a detailed historical recounting and nuanced analysis of the riots of August 3-5, 1934, in Constantine, see Joshua Cole, "Antisémitisme et situation coloniale pendant l'entre-deux-guerres en Algérie," *Revue d'histoire* 4, no. 108 (2010): 3-23, and "Constantine before the riots of August 1934: civil status, anti-Semitism, and the politics of assimilation in interwar French Algeria," *The Journal of North African Studies* (2012): 1-23; and Abitbol, *The Jews of North Africa during the Second World War*, 19-34.

¹⁴⁵ Abitbol, 22.

These right-wing groups gave voice to fears amongst the European population in Algeria about the rise in Algerian Muslim political agency. Many in Algeria believed Léon Blum's left-wing government was attempting to appease Algerian Muslim leaders at the expense of the settlers. In fact, the few attempts at reform to the colonial system made by the Blum government were half-hearted and would have improved the standing of only a very small number of Algerian Muslims. The most prominent such attempt was the aborted Blum-Viollette proposal of 1936, a bill for the extension of citizenship to about 25,000 Algerian *évolués*, which was completely blocked by colonial representatives in Paris and never even reached the floor of the National Assembly.¹⁴⁶ The failure of Blum-Viollette was widely seen as the death knell of assimilatory colonial attitudes. Maurice Viollette, coauthor of the bill and former governor of Algeria, anticipated the consequences of this failure to recognize Algerian demands in his 1931 book *L'Algérie vivra-t-elle?*: "If France commits the unpardonable offence of not understanding them, they will be drawn, as in Indo-China, into angry nationalism."¹⁴⁷

In these tumultuous decades, the French colonial administration took little notice of the petitions filed by the Jewish community of the M'zab for citizenship in 1932. The legal status of the community remained unclear and irregular and census data from this period indicate little population growth. In fact, official French census records estimate that the Jewish population in the M'zab declined in this period, from 1,400 in 1921 to roughly 1,300 in 1931.¹⁴⁸ While in 1945 and 1946 poverty and drought would slow

¹⁴⁶ *Évolué*, literally "evolved," was a name attributed to an Algerian Muslim who was relatively Gallicized, i.e. who spoke fluent French, was sometimes educated in France, dressed in a European style, and was familiar with French cultural norms. Mary Dewhurst Lewis elaborates the deficiencies of the Blum-Viollette proposal in *The boundaries of the republic*, 211-212.

¹⁴⁷ Cited in Ageron, *Modern Algeria: a history from 1830 to the present*, (London: Hurst and Company, 1989), 81.

¹⁴⁸ Cabot-Briggs and Guede, 9.

population growth, in the 1920s this decline appears the consequence of the local political and social situation, in which the future of the Jewish community was increasingly unsure and economic hardship lowered birth rates.

Local relations between the Muslim majority and Jewish minority in the M'zab changed more dramatically in the 1920s than they had since the arrival of the French in the 1880s. The first stirrings of reform and political change in the Muslim community reached the M'zab when Ibadis first engaged with the renaissance in Arabic culture and Ibādi theology of the early twentieth century. After 1919, Sheikh Abdelhamid Ben Badis's Islamic *Islah* (Reform) movement appealed to the deeply religious Ibadis. Ben Badis was an elite cleric from the religious and conservative city of Constantine who advocated a return to an ascetic version of Islam and opened his first "revived" Islamic school in 1924 as part of a program to foster a revival in Islamic culture and Arabic language.¹⁴⁹ Ibadi leaders from the M'zab joined with Ben Badis in this period, though their efforts at modernization and reform began much earlier as a result of their closer relationships with Ibadi communities in the Levant.

When compared to other interwar Algerian Muslim political leaders, Ben Badis was sympathetic to the Jewish community and worked to maintain good relations with them. He co-founded the *Union des Croyantes Monothéistes* in 1936 alongside Jewish and Catholic leaders from Constantine in an effort to repair the fissures between the communities following the riots of 1934. Ibadi leaders from the M'zab who were involved with the Islamic reformists were similarly sympathetic towards the Jews of the M'zab, particularly as Ibadi religious leaders had a centuries-long history of protecting

¹⁴⁹ Ageron, *Modern Algeria*, 77; Hugh Roberts, "Radical Islamism and the dilemma of Algerian nationalism: The embattled Arians of Algiers," *Third World Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (April 1988): 556-589.

“their” Jews.¹⁵⁰ There was a long history of local Muslim notables protecting the Jewish minority from mob violence. Pessah Shinar suggests that Ben Badis and other sheikhs involved in the *Islah* party were protective of Algerian Jews both before, during, and after World War II because of this tradition; if so, Ibadis who had been operating under a similar practice for centuries would likely act in a similar manner.

Other Algerian political leaders and movements held varying attitudes towards the Jews. Assimilationist Ferhat Abbas maintained a moderate, tolerant position throughout the 1930s and denounced the Vichy abrogation of the Crémieux Decree in 1940, while Communist-influenced Messali Hadj’s *Etoile Nord-Africaine* (ENA) and the later *Parti du Peuple Algérien* (PPA) both argued that Algerian Jews were hostile to the indigenous Arab and Berber populations as a consequence of the Crémieux Decree. During the Vichy period, some PPA members supported Pétain at least in part because of his anti-Jewish policies.¹⁵¹ However, in the 1920s and 1930s, Algerian Muslim political leaders were much more invested in reforming their own communities than discussing the Jewish situation, in the M’zab or elsewhere.

One consequence of the Algerian Muslim political awakening was the weakening of old elite structures that dated from at least the Ottoman period. This included the local elite families who, it was sometimes argued by Hadj and Abbas, supported the colonial disenfranchisement of poorer Muslims. Hadj, Abbas, and their peers presented a new alternative voice and newly elected Algerian officials like Bendjelloul could speak for

¹⁵⁰ Pessah Shinar, “La recherché relative aux rapports Judeo-Musulmans dans le Maghreb contemporain,” in *Les Relations entre Juifs et Musulmans en Afrique du Nord, Abbaye de Sénanque, October 1978* (Paris: CNRS, 1980), 1-31.

¹⁵¹ It is more likely they were swayed by Pétain’s relative disinterest in the Empire and invitation of both Muslim and European Algerian representatives to Paris. Michael Laskier, *North African Jewry in the Twentieth Century: The Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 58.

Algerian Muslims in lieu of the old clerical families. This change in the pre-existing hierarchy weakened old elites at the local level throughout Algeria, elite families who had a tradition of protecting local Jews, or at least intervening in conflicts. At the very least, the possibility of losing an old ally would have produced anxiety in the Jewish population. When coupled with the official oppression of the National Revolution after 1940, it would herald a complete destabilization of Jewish life in southern Algeria.

The changing status quo and the long arm of Vichy

From the armistice with Germany in 1940 until well after the Anglo-American liberation of North Africa in 1942, Vichy colonial authorities aggressively curtailed the rights of Algerian Jews. Vichy officials in Algeria took the initiative in implementing antisemitic policies. Often policies from Algiers preempted similar ones in the metropole, most notoriously the *Statut des juifs*, which contained an article abrogating the 1870 Crémieux Decree on October 7, 1940. The normal flow of legislation regarding Algerian's Jewish population was upended in these years, as Michael Marrus and Robert O. Paxton argue, "it was Vichy that felt pressured by Algiers in Jewish matters, rather than vice versa."¹⁵² For many on the right, the ascendancy of the Vichy regime presented an opportunity to undo the Crémieux Decree.

Many members of Pétain's National Revolution government were trained in the Empire, often in North Africa. Minister of the Interior Marcel Peyrouton, a former high commissioner of Tunisia and Morocco, was a cosignatory to the *Statut des Juifs* and

¹⁵² Michael R. Marrus and Robert O. Paxton, *Vichy France and the Jews* (Stanford University Press, 1995), 194. For a discussion of similar patterns elsewhere in the French Empire, see also, Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-44* (Stanford University Press, 2004).

deeply sympathetic to the settlers of Algeria, of whom many supported Vichy and the opportunity it presented to finally disenfranchise those Algerian Jews benefitting from the Crémieux Decree since 1870. The settlers of Algeria were not alone in their celebration of the mass de-emancipation of Algerian Jewry. Right-wing newspapers in France lauded the act, including the collaborationist *Le Matin* in Paris, which hailed the abrogation as an “historic act” that would remedy the “inequality between Jews and *indigènes*.” The antisemitic *Action Française* wrote presciently that the abrogation was “the preface to a general law establishing a statute for Jews” in France.¹⁵³ The abrogation of the Crémieux Decree in October 1940 had no immediate effect on the Jewish communities of the M’zab as they were already without citizenship rights. Nevertheless, the Vichy era marked an unprecedented level of official surveillance in the southern territories and a new awareness on the part of French officials of the activities of Jews in the M’zab.

In a strange twist of fate, the Jews of the M’zab were much better off than those in the north affected by the Crémieux Decree abrogation. The *Statut des Juifs* mandated that Algerian Jews would remain governed by the civil code once deprived of their citizenship. This was similar to the status of M’zabi Jews. However, their exceptional personal status gave M’zabi Jews the right to have various personal affairs taken care of by their local religious leaders, as was the case for *indigènes* throughout Algeria. After losing their citizenship, the legal status of Algerian Jews disenfranchised by the October 7 decree did not revert to the personal status accorded them before 1870. Algerian Jews

¹⁵³ “Anti-Jewish Papers Hail Rescinding of Cremieux Law,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* 10 (October 1940), doi: <http://www.jta.org/1940/10/10/archive/anti-jewish-papers-hail-rescinding-of-cremieux-law>. The assertion that the Crémieux Decree sowed conflict between Muslims and Jews would reemerge in the debates over the reinstatement of Jewish citizenship after liberation.

did not switch from citizens to *indigènes* accorded a measure of personal status autonomy. Rather, those individuals were doubly disenfranchised, as their lack of a personal status precluded the possibility of organizing local religious governing bodies. The sole exception to the abrogation decree were Jewish veterans of the French army who retained their citizenship. The Vichy government in Algiers authored a second decree four days after the *Statut des Juifs*, on October 11, 1940, which suppressed the 1865 *senatus-consulte* and ensured that Algerian Jews had no mechanism by which to acquire citizenship, forbidding them to apply for citizenship as Jews had done prior to the Crémieux Decree. Save a small number of veterans, Algerian Jews thus had no path to citizenship after October 11, 1940.

In addition to abrogating their citizenship rights, the *Statut des Juifs* banned Algerian Jews from a number of occupations including, but not limited to: the civil service, advertising, insurance, real estate, trade in grain or livestock, trade in antiquities or paintings, lumber, gambling, masonry, locksmiths, teachers, and money changers.¹⁵⁴ The *numerus clausus* laws of 1941 limited the numbers of Jewish doctors and lawyers; this set of quotas also limited the number of Jewish students in universities to 3% of students, and in secondary and elementary schools to 14% (this was later reduced further to 7% in 1942).¹⁵⁵ Jewish bars and drinking establishments were forcibly closed when Jewish business owners were particularly targeted as part of the economic “Aryanization” of Algeria, in which Jewish property was seized by the state and held by state-appointed trustees.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Abitbol, *Jews of North Africa*, 71-72.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

Vichy memoranda described Jewish drinking establishments, pubs and cafés, as particularly dangerous, subversive places that the local French authorities should closely monitor. In January 1942, the office of the governor circulated directions to all of the prefects of the Algerian departments, warning them "...Cafes run by Jews are often frequented by *indigènes*. It is to be feared, under these circumstances, that they only encourage subversive propaganda."¹⁵⁷ In his reply, the Commander of Ouargla, Ghardaïa's neighbor, assured Algiers that "not a single one of the bars is run by a Jew in the *Territoire des Oasis*."¹⁵⁸ This was only partly accurate, as Jews often owned cafés with drinking rooms in the rear, where Ibadis and other Muslims might enjoy a libation out of public sight.¹⁵⁹ The commander's possible deception in his response to Algiers might signal that he maintained a sympathetic outlook towards the Jewish community in the M'zab, but more likely evidences a lack of communication between the Jewish community and French command in Ghardaïa at this time.

Although the abrogation of the Crémieux Decree did not directly affect the legal status of the Jews in Ghardaïa, the state increasingly monitored and restricted Jewish activities after 1941. Increased surveillance of Jewish cafes and bars is one example of this shift and would be a constant of Jewish life in Ghardaïa until 1962. Letters from Algiers to the military commanders in the military territories in Colomb-Bechar, Laghouat, Touggourt, and Ouargla ordered that these policies be carried out consistently throughout Algeria.¹⁶⁰ The commander in Ouargla responded on July 21, "the few Jews

¹⁵⁷ GGA to Monsieur le Prefet du département Alger-Oran-Constantine, "Objet: Statut des juifs. Cafés-Débites de boissons," 13 January 1942. ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁵⁸ Chef de Bataillon Duprez to GGA, "Objet: Statut des juifs. Cafés—debits de boissons," 30 January 1942. ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁵⁹ Briggs and Guède asserted that these arrangements were common in Ghardaïa for decades.

¹⁶⁰ GGA to Le Commandant Militaire du Territoires Colomb-Bechar, Laghat, Touggourt, Ouargla, "Objet: Pourcentage à admettre dans les professions réglementées par la loi portant statut des juifs," 9 July 1941.

living temporarily in Ouargla belong to the Jewish community of Ghardaïa. The professions they hold: merchants, jewelers, do not appear to be amongst those in the professions regulated by the law of 2 June.”¹⁶¹ In October, he sent a list of Jews living in Ouargla to the governor, whose names indicate their M’zabi provenance. These fifteen individuals were: “Albert Amsellek, Mouchy Ben Brahim El Baz, Simon ben Mouchy El Baz, Nedjouma bent Mouchy El Baz, Gamra bent Isaac El Baz, Sliman ben Saoud Sellam, Esther bent Sliman Sellam, Minana bent Sliman Sellam, Simon Balouka, Fortunée bent Jacob Zenou wife of El Baz, Brahim ben Mouchy El Baz, Ben Brahim El Baz, Aziza El Baz, Isaac ben Sliman Sellam, Semba bent Slimane Sellam.”¹⁶² No further action was taken against these individuals, but the recording of their names and places of residence marked one of the earliest such instances of surveillance of the M’zabi Jewish community and mimic similar records of Jewish movement kept throughout Vichy Algeria and France.

Commander Duprez continued to monitor the activities of these Jewish individuals in Ouargla. On October 8, 1941, he sent a letter to the military commander at Ghardaïa concerning what he perceived to be illegal actions on their part, warning that M’zabi Jews living in Ouargla were interfering with legal processes in Ghardaïa. Specifically, that the son of Daoud Balouka Sebban (of Ghardaïa) who was under house arrest in Ouargla had tried to hire a European living in Ouargla to act as his proxy in a

ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁶¹ Duprez to GGA, Direction des Territoires du Sud, “Objet: Pourcentage a admettre dans les professions reglementees par la loi portant statut des juifs,” 21 July 1941. ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁶² Monsieur le Commandant Militaire du Territoire des Oasis à Ouargla to GGA, 8 October 1941. ANOM OASIS 37. The conventional structure of these names evidences M’zabi Jewish adoption of Arabic language naming practices, with “ben” (m.) or “bint/bent” (f.) indicating paternity. The maintenance of these names confirms the continued absence of a regularized personal status (as in the 1882 decree for Muslim Algerians) for M’zabi Jews during the Vichy period.

conflict over trading rights in the *souk* (market) back in Ghardaïa.¹⁶³ Of course, had this individual not been restricted to house arrest in Ouargla, he would have been his own agent in this dispute. The number of Jews from Ghardaïa placed under house arrest was ostensibly small, as in Ouargla.

In August 1941, General Weygand ordered a census of all Jews living in French Algeria. Following their registration with the relevant local authorities, all Jews were to have the letter “J” stamped into their identification documents. This counting of the Algerian Jewish population took months and included all Algerian Jews as well as Jewish prisoners of labor camps and refugees from Europe, and noted their origin accordingly.¹⁶⁴ The *Service des Questions Juives* found that by the time the census officials conducted their work in 1942, the Jewish population of Ghardaïa consisted of 1,636 “French” Jews and six “Moroccan” Jews, out of a total Jewish population of 2,932 in the *Territoire de Ghardaïa*, which included the cities of Djelfa and Laghouat.¹⁶⁵ The classification of the M’zabi Jewish population as “French” is perplexing here, as they were in most official documents called “indigenous” Jews (*indigènes*). In light of later documents that revert to this appellation, we might assume that the “French” designation in the census reflects the presence of non-“indigenous” Jews from the Algerian north in the M’zab.

Throughout the south, French officials applied the full weight of the *Statut des Juifs* and the *numerus clausus* to Jews, both *indigènes* from the M’zab and foreigners. A decree of December 2, 1941, stipulated that all the Jews of the *Territoires du Sud* would

¹⁶³ Duprez to Monsieur le Chef de’ Annexe de Ghardaïa, “Objet: Adjudication du marché de Ghardaïa,” 8 October 1941. ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁶⁴ “General Weygand Orders Census of Jews in Algeria,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* 27 (August 1941), doi: <http://www.jta.org/1941/08/27/archive/general-weygand-orders-census-of-jews-in-algeria>. cen

¹⁶⁵ “Recensement en Algérie des Juifs par nationalité,” *Service des Questions Juives, Territoires du Sud*, 15 June 1942. CDJC LXXXIV-75.

be subject to military tribunals and disciplinary commissions for any infractions.¹⁶⁶ Shortly thereafter, the governor stipulated that “indigenous Jews who are not citizens” would be subject to the disciplinary commissions.¹⁶⁷ Clearly, this meant the Jews of the M’zab. A later communication from Algiers emphasized that “indigenous Algerian Jews from the *territoire civil* or living in this territory who commit a felony, a misdemeanor or an infraction in the *territoire militaire*,” as well as any Tunisian or Moroccan Jews in the same conditions, would answer to the military tribunals and disciplinary commissions and be subject to “vigorous sentencing.”¹⁶⁸

M’zabi and other Algerian Jews not only now shared the same legal status, but were also often in the same physical spaces when Algerian Jews from the north were sent to work camps or placed under house arrest in the Sahara, or, as in Ouargla, when placed under house arrest alongside one another. A letter to Ouargla on September 1, 1941, informed the commander there that sixteen Jews would be sent to the south from Algiers due to suspicion of “illicit” activities in the city.¹⁶⁹ In November, the Secretary General informed the Director of the Department of the Oases that “indigenous Algerian Jews” had been sent further south, to the work camps at Bedeau and at Telergma.¹⁷⁰ The usage of the term *indigènes* here is again confusing, applied this time to formerly emancipated

¹⁶⁶ GGA to Commandant militaire du Territoires des Oasis a Ouargla, “Objet: Statut juridique des juifs indigenes,” 26 January 26 1942. ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁶⁷ GGA to Commandant Militaire du Territoire des Oasis, Alger, 17 December 1941. ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁶⁸ GGA to Monsieur le Commandant militaire du Territoire des Oasis à Ouargla, Algiers, 26 January 1942. ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁶⁹ GGA to Commandant militaire du Territoire des Oasis, “Objet: Affaire DOUIEB et consorts,” 1 September 1941. ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁷⁰ Secrétaire Général du Gouvernement, Charles Etori, to Monsieur le Prefet du Department Alger, “Objet: Allocations militaires, Israélites indigenes incorporés au camp de travailleurs de Bedeau,” 12 November 1941. ANOM OASIS 37.

Algerian Jews from the north, not Jews from the M'zab. No evidence suggests Jews from Ghardaïa were interned at Bedeau or in any other camp.¹⁷¹

Jews from the M'zab knew of the existence of work camps in Algeria and the presence of Jewish prisoners there. In addition to the camps at Bedeau and Telergma, there were camps at Berrouaghia, Bidon V (south of Columb-Béchar), Boghar, Bossuet, Crampas, Djelfa, Djenien-Bou-Rezk, al-Arisha, Fort-Cafarelli, Géryville, Hadjerat M'Guil, Kenadsa, Kersas, Relizane, and Saïda.¹⁷² The nearest camp to Ghardaïa, some three hundred kilometers north at Djelfa, held roughly six hundred, mostly foreign, Jews. At the time of liberation, French sources estimated that 2,185 Jews were interned in Algeria, most of them European Jews seeking shelter there.¹⁷³

Some of the most difficult work to which prisoners were sentenced was the Vichy project of building a trans-Saharan railroad. The Pétain government promoted this project to the public with posters throughout the cities of Algeria that explicitly linked the National Revolution to the earlier colonial project of the Third Republic while also serving to illustrate the new efficiency of the Vichy régime vis-à-vis its predecessor. One such placard advertised,

The trans-Saharan line is the indispensable connection of A.O.F. [Afrique Occidentale Française] to the Mediterranean....The governments of the Third Republic debated it for more than fifty years without making a decision. One meeting of Marshal Pétain's cabinet council was enough to implement the immediate start of the project. Settler remember this!¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Norbert Bel Ange, *Quand Vichy internait ses soldats juifs d'Algérie: Bedeau, sud oranais, 1941-1943* (Paris: Harmattan, 2006).

¹⁷² *Aufbau*, November 15, 1942; cited in Abitbol, *Jews of North Africa during the Second World War*, 97:158.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁷⁴ Vanino 1952: 303, cited in Abitbol, *Jews of North Africa during the Second World War*, 96.

Most of the Jewish internees who worked on the Trans-Saharan were not, in fact, Algerian or North African, but Europeans who had fled to the Maghreb following the Spanish Civil War and the Nazi advance in Central and Eastern Europe. On August 4, 1942, the Governor sent the Prefects of the Algerian departments a list of foreigners who had escaped from work groups stationed in North Africa. They included “Marcak Mordka, Polish Jew, 25 years old, height 1m68, blond hair blue eyes, long face, straight nose,” and “Henri Stoffmacher, German Jew, 32 years old, height 1m70, auburn hair, grey eyes, straight nose,” on a list of nine prisoners.¹⁷⁵

In the south, the local military commanders monitored the presence of any foreigners, who were easily discernible amongst the small, relatively homogeneous populations there. Many Jewish and non-Jewish internees passed by or through Ghardaïa en route to their final destinations under house arrest or imprisonment in the far south, via the main road linking the desert and the coast. One such Jewish prisoner en route to internment at In Salah (Aïn Salah) caught the attention of local, regional, and national authorities after passing through Ghardaïa. In so doing, Elie Douieb brought the full attention of the Vichy authorities in Algiers to the Jewish community in the M’zab. His case generated dozens of memoranda and telegrams in the Algiers offices of the governor and the military.

Algiers issued an arrest warrant for Douieb on June 27, 1941.¹⁷⁶ By July 8 he was in Ouargla, the nearest city to Ghardaïa, two hundred kilometers to the east, halfway between Algiers and his final destination at In-Salah. There he was subjected to a detailed medical examination on July 8, 1941. The presiding Dr. Chollet described

¹⁷⁵ Bringard, le Directeur de la Sécurité Gale to Monsieur le prefet du department Alger, Oran, Constantine, 4 August 1942. ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁷⁶ Captain Oliviera to Commandant Militaire du Territoire des Oasis, 5 July 1941. ANOM OASIS 37.

Douieb as a man of fifty-five years, “without a particularly traumatic past...suffering from vague gastrointestinal trouble that necessitates a particular diet.” After his examination Chollet wrote that Douieb also suffered from night “attacks” of suffocation, which the doctor attributed to his “obesity” and the “very real heat” of the desert. Collet concluded his report remarking on his patient’s “tremendous fatness [adéposité] and a ‘racial’ tendency towards ... gout,” but found “nothing special about this particular subject.”¹⁷⁷ Chollet did not note any reasons Douieb might be reprieved from his forced exile in the Sahara. Thus certified (relatively) healthy, Douieb was then sent onwards to the south.

On October 24, 1941, Governor-general Yves Châtel wrote to the Attorney General that “according to information from a reliable source” a Jewish internee at In-Salah named Elie Douieb had written to his family in Algiers, including his wife, that he had married a young Jewish girl from Ghardaïa. It is unsurprising that Vichy officials would monitor the correspondence of political prisoners. What is remarkable about this incident is Châtel’s reaction to the contents of Douieb’s letters. In his memorandum, Châtel outlined the ways in which this plural marriage to a possibly underage girl violated the personal status laws pertaining to Algerian Jewry, as mandated by the law of October 7, 1940, which, though abrogating the Crémieux Decree, made Algerian Jews subject to French civil law. Châtel mused that if it were not possible to prosecute Douieb for polygamy or adultery, since his first wife had yet to make a formal complaint, it might be possible to prosecute the rabbis in Ghardaïa who participated in the second marriage

¹⁷⁷ Chollet to the Chef d’Annexe de Ouargla, 8 July 1941. ANOM OASIS 37.

ceremony. Châtel concluded by suggesting the Attorney General charge the Jewish authorities involved in this crime and keep him apprised of this affair.¹⁷⁸

Happily for the Jewish clergy of Ghardaïa, Châtel never carried through on the threat. He ordered a Captain Przewdziecki, the principal administrator of the *Commune Indigène du Tidikeit-Hoggar*, to interrogate Douieb and find out more about the situation. Przewdziecki did so and emphatically stated in a letter to the military commander of the oases at Ouargla that during questioning, “the Jew Douieb” told him that not only had he not married a young girl in Ghardaïa, he had never married after the death of his first wife in 1924. Douieb, according to Przewdziecki’s account of his interrogation, claimed to have lived in recent years with another woman out of wedlock in Algiers. Przewdziecki closed his account, “The Jew Douieb formally denied ever having contacted a Jewish marriage in Ghardaïa, a city where he has never lived nor visited.”¹⁷⁹

Soon after Przewdziecki’s interrogation, Douieb managed to escape the camp and fled north with another internee named Amsallak. The latter, Amsallak, was possibly related to a family of Ghardaïa by a similar name (Amsallek) and thus gives credence to Douieb’s prior contact with the M’zabi community. Both were apprehended by December 15, 1941, and separated from each other. The French sent Amsallak to Biskra and Douieb to Djelfa, whence he would continue to the camp at El Golea.¹⁸⁰ The following spring the Governor launched an inquiry to investigate any possible collusion on the part of the French authorities in the south with Douieb. They investigated the commander at Tidikelt, who signed a declaration avowing he had never had any contact

¹⁷⁸ Yves Chatel to Monsieur le Procureur Général pres la Cour d’Appel, 24 October 1941. ANOM 81F/1211.

¹⁷⁹ Le Capitaine Przewdziecki a Monsieur le Chef de Bataillon Commandant Militaire du Territoire des Oasis, “Objet: Mariage Juif Douieb,” 22 November 1941. ANOM 81F/1211.

¹⁸⁰ Official Telegram, Armes In Salah to Territoire Oasis Ouargla, 15 December 1941. ANOM OASIS 37.

with Douieb.”¹⁸¹ No record has been found indicating whether or not Douieb survived his second internment at El Golea, or if he reunited with any of his partners or spouses after the war. However unresolved, this account of French involvement in this dubious case of polygamous marriage in a remote part of Algeria demonstrates the obsession of some Vichy officials with monitoring Jewish activities. The involvement of the governor of Algeria himself also suggests a certain fascination with the M’zabi Jewish community on the part of the French government.

In early 1942, the Commander in Ghardaïa sent news to Algiers of a potential conflict between local Muslims and the “indigenous Jews of the military territories,” resulting from Jewish failure to pay debts claimed by Muslim moneylenders. The Director of the Territories suggested that until the matter could be verified and the amount due the Muslim authorities determined, the duly appointed authorities in the affected areas should pay the Muslim authorities “in order to avoid any clash between the agents of the Muslim authorities and the indigenous Jews.”¹⁸² In this instance, maintaining stability and order was the first concern of colonial officials.

These moments of conflict between Jews and Muslims in the M’zab were rare during the Vichy period, as they were throughout Algeria. In this period, most anti-Jewish and antisemitic actions stemmed from the antisemitism of the Vichy regime, not Algerian Muslims who were often equally repressed by the colonial state. For their part, it seems most Algerian Muslims saw in the abrogation of the Crémieux Decree evidence of the disdain the French held towards Algerians generally. As a letter from 29 November 1942, written by a group of Muslim leaders indicated, “It was thought that at

¹⁸¹ GGA to Ouargla, 20 March 1942, and Duprez to GGA, 11 May 1942. ANOM OASIS 37.

¹⁸² GGA to Commandant Militaire du Territoire de Ghardaïa, “Répartition des amendes infligées aus juifs indigenes,” 19 May 1942. ANOM 81F/1211.

the abrogation of the Crémieux Decree, the Muslims would rejoice; but the latter can easily see the dubious worth of a citizenship that the granting authority can take away after seventy years' enjoyment."¹⁸³ For the Jews of Algeria and the M'zab, this period of oppression and surveillance revealed the mercurial attitudes of the French towards their Jewish subjects in Algeria.

Liberation and the non-emancipation of the M'zabi Jews

The November 1942 allied landings in North Africa did not bring a quick restoration of citizenship to Algeria's Jews. This shocked many in Algeria and around the world. Many Vichy-era officials carried over to the new régime, including Maurice Peyrouton, who was named the new governor of Algeria by Admiral Darlan and General Giraud in Algiers. Peyrouton, who served as Minister of the Interior under Pétain, would serve as governor from November 1942 until the belated reinstatement of the Crémieux Decree in October 1943, a long, drawn-out process that involved the lobbying of international Jewish relief organizations and the American government.¹⁸⁴

Jewish individuals in Algiers aided the Allied landings in Operation Torch, and Jews throughout the colony welcomed the news of Vichy's overthrow. In Ghardaïa, the monthly report on the city noted, "The Jewish community welcomed the Allied landing more or less joyfully. [...] When they expressed their feelings they gave the impression of waiting calmly for the results they expect from the Allied intervention."¹⁸⁵ These hopes were foiled, however, when General Giraud announced four months after the

¹⁸³ Ansky, *Les Juifs d'Algérie*, 296-297, quoted in Marrus and Paxton, 194-195.

¹⁸⁴ Wood, "Remembering the Jews of Algeria," 172-174.

¹⁸⁵ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, Direction des Territoires du Sud; Service des Affaires Indigènes et du Personnel Militaire, November 1942. ANOM GGA 9H/23.

Allied landings that all Vichy legislation was null and void *except* the abrogation of the Crémieux Decree. Peyrouton and Giraud argued that a Muslim uprising would happen if the Jews were to be given citizenship.¹⁸⁶ Giraud later wrote of his decision,

I argued then, and I still do now, that North African Jews must not be treated differently from Muslims. They are simply natives practicing a religion different from that of their neighbors, that's all. ... Of course, if these natives, Jews, or Muslims show by their intelligence, their education, their diplomas, by the services they have given that they are worthy of becoming French citizens, I am ready to grant them this citizenship if they give up their personal status.¹⁸⁷

Thus Giraud, Peyrouton, and their government returned to the same sentiments about Jewish eligibility for citizenship made by the Comte de Clermont-Tonnerre in 1790, that “the Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals.” Giraud also deliberately misled his readers or conveniently forgot that the Algerian Jews affected by the abrogation of the Crémieux Decree had not remitted to the personal status, to the legal status of M’zabi Jews. The assumption of Jewish preference for the Jewish personal status over French citizenship in this case revealed more about the author’s prejudices than the reality in Algeria.

American and world Jewish organizations were quick to respond to Giraud’s announcement, fearful that a permanent abrogation of the Crémieux Decree might set a dangerous precedent. The AJDC and prominent Jewish individuals voiced intense concern about this issue to the United States government; however, the Americans were hesitant to intervene in French affairs. An exchange between Baron Edouard de Rothschild and Under-Secretary of State Sumner Welles resulted in Welles’ telling Rothschild that Giraud had assured him he was acting in good faith. Welles, notoriously

¹⁸⁶ Hannah Arendt, “Why the Crémieux Decree was abrogated,” *Contemporary Jewish Record* 6 (1943): 115-123.

¹⁸⁷ Henri Giraud, *Un seul but, la victoire; Alger 1942-1944* (Paris: R. Julliard, 1949), 122-23.

antisemitic, insisted, “The decree is abrogated but in the near future a procedure will be established whereby native Algerian Jews who desire to become citizens may acquire citizenship.”¹⁸⁸ Welles and the American government’s assurances did little to assuage the fears of Algerian Jewry.

The legal arguments about reinstating the Crémieux Decree continued for months. Despite the uncertainty of their future, daily life improved for Jews in Algeria and the M’zab following the removal of the *numerus clausus* laws in March 1942. In his April 1943 report to Algiers, an administrator in Ghardaïa wrote: “The Jews do not hide their satisfaction about the measures taken in their favor, especially the reintegration of functionaries and the abolition of the ‘numerus clausus.’”¹⁸⁹ The administrators filed no reports of Muslim outrage at these developments, contradicting French assumptions about Muslim reactions to Jewish reintegration, at least in the M’zab. Conflicts would soon arise between Jews and Muslims in Ghardaïa and elsewhere, but not until several years later and largely as a result of international and regional tensions resulting from the situation in Mandatory Palestine.

General Charles de Gaulle and his *Comité français de libération nationale* (CFLN) assumed power in Algeria on June 1, 1943, and shortly thereafter De Gaulle appointed General Georges Catroux governor of Algeria. Catroux embarked on a series of reforms of both Jewish and Muslim status including the reinstatement of the Crémieux Decree on October 21, 1943. In late December, De Gaulle announced the passing of the Blum-Viollette proposal, almost a decade after its inception, with the added stipulation

¹⁸⁸ “Baron Rothschild’s Protest Against Abrogation of Cremieux Law Provokes U.S. Reply,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (29 March 1943), doi: <http://www.jta.org/1943/03/29/archive/baron-rothschilds-protest-against-abrogation-of-cremieux-law-provokes-u-s-reply>.

¹⁸⁹ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 15 April-15 May 1943. ANOM GGA 9H/23.

that Algerian Muslims who gained citizenship in this way could also retain their personal Islamic status. Both Ferhat Abbas and Messali Hadj, who demanded greater reform for more Algerians, rejected this offer. De Gaulle and Catroux appointed a commission to draft possible reforms, composed of Algerians ranging from the religious *ulema* to the PPA, but these disparate Algerian parties had difficulty coming to any agreement. Before they finished deliberating, De Gaulle and Catroux announced the Ordinance of March 7, 1944, which was more or less identical to the Blum-Violette proposal. This extended citizenship to a larger number of Muslims than the *évolués* originally included in the first Blum-Viollette proposal. Most critically, this ordinance abolished the *Code de l'indigénat*, creating juridical equality between Muslims and French citizens.

In the flurry of new reforms issued by the Free French government, the Jews of the M'zab found themselves again excluded from citizenship. Neither the reinstated Crémieux Decree nor the March 7 ordinance applied to them. The Director of the Territories of the South explained in a memo circulated within the Office of Muslim Affairs and of the South that, as his predecessors had argued, the Jews of the M'zab were excluded from the 1870 Crémieux Decree because the M'zab was not annexed until 1882. In the case of the March 7 ordinance, Director Lehuraux noted that it applied only to French Muslims, and though this decree left the Jews of the M'zab markedly worse off than their Muslim neighbors, the status quo should be maintained.¹⁹⁰

Yet the status quo had changed, whether or not the French officials in Algiers or Ghardaïa wished to acknowledge it. The Vichy treatment of Jews from the north and south, imprisonment of Jewish political prisoners, and the insecurity of Jewish and Muslim relationships indicated to the Jews of Ghardaïa and the M'zab that their situation

¹⁹⁰ M. Lehuraux, 19 May 1944. ANOM 81F/1212.

was tenuous at best. Soon after liberation, Jews from the M'zab explored the possibilities of leaving Algeria. The first organized migration to Palestine occurred in December 1943. Soon more Jews left Ghardaïa; however, the number of Jews leaving the M'zab for Palestine remained small. Conditions in Palestine during this time were difficult and immigration to the Levant required circumventing the British blockade on Jewish migration to Palestine. An additional factor that encouraged migration was the number of anti-Jewish riots that swept across North Africa between 1943 and 1947.

These attacks started in Tripoli in 1943 and spread from Cairo to Marrakech. There were anti-Jewish in Tripoli and Cairo in 1945, in Oujda and Marrakech, Morocco, in 1946, and across the region in 1947 and 1948. These conflicts stemmed both from local instability following the war and in reaction to the conflict between Zionist and Arab forces in Palestine. The upsetting of old hierarchies of Jewish-Muslim relationships contributed to instability throughout the Maghreb. In Ghardaïa, the military commander assured the governor that the “demonstrations in Tripoli between Muslims and Jews” in December 1945 had no repercussions in the M'zab and the two communities there continued to live at peace.¹⁹¹

Conclusion

Steady waves of Jewish emigration from the M'zab continued after 1945, expedited by American and international relief organizations. The AJDC and World Zionist Organization established relief stations around Algiers as early as 1940, originally to assist European Jews fleeing persecution. The AJDC assistance program in Algiers

¹⁹¹ “Répercussion des événements de Tripolitaine,” Ghardaïa to Laghouat, 3 December 1945. ANOM OASIS 76.

expanded and shifted its focus to aiding local Jewish individuals and communities soon after the war.¹⁹² The goal of these centers was to provide “medical aid, cash relief, clothing, shelter, and educational opportunities.”¹⁹³ This network expanded tremendously as hundreds of Moroccan Jews hoping to immigrate to Palestine fled to Algiers. The AJDC spent nearly \$300,000 in North Africa in 1943, largely dedicated to providing immediate relief for Jewish immigrants and facilitating their travel from Algiers to Marseille and eventually to Palestine.¹⁹⁴ This network was well organized and efficient at moving Jewish immigrants from Algeria to points in Europe, thence onwards to Palestine.

A new French census in 1946 counted 2,699 Jewish individuals in the *Territoire de Ghardaïa*. Following the census, the French administration offered the Jews of the M’zab the option of limited French civil rights, including the possibility of voting in the second college. This would equalize their civil status and legal classification to that of other former *indigènes* and was the first significant change in M’zabi Jewish legal status since the annexation of the south in 1882. Another set of legal reforms brought renewed optimism to the community when, in 1947, a new series of laws reclassified the Sahara: “the special government of the Territories of the South is abolished. These Territories are regarded as *Départements*.”¹⁹⁵ Civil administration replaced the military laws formerly applied to the south and the Sahara was then bound more closely into the economic networks of the north.

¹⁹² Abitbol, *Jews of North Africa*, 92.

¹⁹³ Memo #424 B. Sapir to B.B. Goldman, “Jews in Moslem Lands,” (October 1949). AJDC NY, AR 45/54 2:6.

¹⁹⁴ Letter, Benjamin Heler, Secretary of Zionist Organization of Algeria (9 January 1949). AJDC NY, 45/54 23.

¹⁹⁵ “Note: Le M’Zab,” 1956, 4. ANOM FM 81F/52

That same year, hopeful leaders of the Jewish community from Ghardaïa presented anew a proposal for their emancipation to the French authorities in Algiers. This time, the community also appealed to the newly formed *Fédération des Communautés d'Algérie*, affiliated with the World Jewish Congress, for support in their petition to the French.¹⁹⁶ In this request, as in 1882, 1919, 1932, and only a few years earlier in 1943, the French administration denied the Jews of the M'zab. Colonial officials argued that the transition from *territoire* to *département* did not automatically apply all earlier legislation applying to the Algerian *départements*, specifically the Crémieux Decree. French recalcitrance in 1947, as at every previous opportunity, signaled to many in the M'zab that official antisemitism had not ended with Vichy's demise. Unlike the many Algerian Jews who dismissed Vichy as a fluke, M'zabi Jews experienced and recognized the continuity of antisemitism in French policies from the late nineteenth century into the postwar period.

In the following years, the situation of the Jews in Southern Algeria would come to the center of Jewish relief agency conferences and bulletins, alongside Jews from Morocco and Tunisia, as a massive international effort to assist those Jewish communities in immigration to Israel unfurled in the 1940s and 1950s. Confronted with the presence of successful Zionist emissaries on Algerian soil, French officials in the M'zab and Algiers took notice of Jewish departures. When natural gas and oil fields were discovered in the south in the early 1950s, the French increased their attention on the M'zab and on repairing their relationships with the Jews of the Sahara.

For their part, M'zabi Jews began to explore the possibilities of making *aliyah* with new interest. Despite French attempts at reforming the colonial system in Algeria,

¹⁹⁶ Letter from J. Lazarus to Dr. Schwarzfurt, October 1951. CZA C3\1408-71.

the memory of Vichy-era repression remained. Whatever the reformist agendas in Paris or Algiers, the lives of M'zabi Jews and Muslims remained difficult in the postwar era, marred by environmental disasters and economic woes. Unlike their Muslim neighbors, a new possibility for a better life presented itself to the Jewish community in Ghardaïa in the form of Zionism and immigration to Israel. French officials who now found the Sahara economically useful and hoped to cultivate M'zabis—Jews and Muslims—as allies in the development of the south had to compete with Zionist organizations that actively worked to facilitate and encourage Jewish emigration. This M'zabi Jewish exodus was part of a massive migration of Jews from throughout the Middle East and North Africa to Israel in this period, and spurred by a number of factors outside the control of French colonial administrators.

PART II: 1946-1962

Chapter 4:

Zionism in the Sahara, 1943-1954

From 1948 to 1951, between 500,000 and 700,000 Jews immigrated to Israel from Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. This massive influx doubled the Jewish population of Israel, while during the same time the Palestinian population dropped by a comparably large number of individuals who fled or were forcibly expelled by Jewish forces. The state housed new Jewish immigrants in the abandoned or confiscated homes of Palestinian Arabs, in newly founded Jewish communities, and in transit camps. Ben Gurion had suggested in his “One Million” plan that the government take different approaches to absorbing European and non-European immigrants.¹⁹⁷ While European Jews could expect to spend only a few months in absorption centers, until a suitable home and employment could be found, the so-called “Oriental” Jews of the Middle East and North Africa were often confined to absorption or transit camps (*ma'abarot*) for up to two years.¹⁹⁸ In these three years, the first for which statistics on immigration from the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics are available, 3,811 Jews came to Israel from Algeria. During the same period, 28,264 Moroccan and 13,294 Tunisian Jews migrated to Israel

¹⁹⁷ Dvora HaCohen, *The One Million Plan: David Ben-Gurion's Plan for Mass Immigration in the Years 1942-1945* (Tel Aviv: Defense Ministry, 1994).

¹⁹⁸ Gil Eyal, *The Disenchantment of the Orient: Expertise in Arab Affairs and the Israeli State* (Stanford University Press, 2006), 85.

from North Africa.¹⁹⁹ Amongst the 3,811 Algerian individuals were several hundred Jews from the M'zab who left Ghardaïa and the surrounding Jewish communities.

The deeply religious Jewish community of the M'zab had long believed in a religious and historical connection to the biblical Land of Israel. A number of older Jews in earlier generations traveled to Ottoman and British Palestine to live the last years of their lives in *Eretz Israel*. However, the religiously motivated pull towards the Holy Land had not been historically potent enough to draw significant migration from the M'zab, nor had the conditions of life in Palestine been sufficiently attractive. Three significant changes shifted this reality for the M'zabi Jewish community following the Second World War. First, the economic conditions of life in the Sahara declined following the Second World War. Second, the process of migration was for the first time coordinated by a number of international organizations who actively encouraged Jews to leave North Africa, facilitated the emigration from the M'zab, coordinated transport to Palestine and Israel, and instituted a process of absorption in Israel. Lastly, the French colonial administration made daily life more difficult for M'zabi Jews while continually refusing them full emancipation.

The first two factors reflect larger regional and international shifts experienced by Jewish communities across the Maghreb and Middle East during this period. The post-war decade was one of deep economic and political instability. As conflict between Jewish Zionist, Arab, and British forces in Mandatory Palestine increased, so too did outbreaks of violence between Jews and Muslims occur throughout North Africa. In the Middle East and Maghreb, the waning of European colonial power coupled with growing

¹⁹⁹ Yinon Cohen, "From Haven to Heaven: Changes in Immigration Patterns to Israel," in *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship: German and Israeli Perspectives on Immigration*, ed. Daniel Levy and Yfaat Weiss (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 40.

local nationalist movements to produce deep instability from Baghdad to Casablanca. For Jewish communities across the region, the conflict between Zionists and anti-Zionist forces in Palestine exacerbated already tense relations between Jews and Muslims and frequently Jews who had little or no connection to the Zionist movement were the target of local anti-Zionist groups. Regardless of their personal views, many Jews in the Maghreb were scapegoated and made victims of random acts of violence and organized anti-Zionist derision that mistook all Jews for Zionists and thus morphed from anti-Zionist to anti-Jewish violence.

The French pinpointed the moment when Muslim anti-Zionism or anti-Jewish attacks spawned by the conflict over Palestine reached Algeria, “at the end of 1945 [when] several signs appeared in Algeria.”²⁰⁰ The Governor’s office attributed these first stirrings to the meeting of the Arab League in late 1945. On May 10, 1946, an organized meeting of anti-Zionists took place in Algiers, the first of its kind in Algeria. However, the French officials monitoring such political activity found that these gatherings remained infrequent in Algeria and never sanctioned action against local Jews. Pressed to find a suitable description of the anti-Zionist movement in Algeria, one French official described it as, “in the tone of ‘pianissimo.’” In the same note, the author emphasized the greater presence of Zionists than anti-Zionists in Algeria, particularly in eastern Algeria. The center of Zionist activity in Algeria was Constantine, near the border with Tunisia. In 1946, roughly 40,000 Jews lived in Constantine and it was there that the largest number of Zionist meetings and organizations existed, perhaps, it was suggested, a result of their close proximity to the large Jewish communities of Tunisia, many of whom were

²⁰⁰ GGA to Ministry of the Interior, 2 November 1946. ANOM FM 81F/763.

openly Zionist.²⁰¹ Though much smaller in number, Zionist sentiments also took hold amongst some in the Jewish community Ghardaïa, who were more likely to emigrate than other communities in Algeria.

The behavior of Jews from Ghardaïa, particularly their steady emigration, resembled Jewish communities in Morocco, Tunisia, or even Libya more closely than most other Algerian Jews. Apart from the M'zab, Zionist activity in Algeria never matched that of Morocco or Tunisia, though important members of the local Jewish leadership did express support for Zionism and for Jewish migration to Palestine. Gilbert Nahon, president of the Jewish Fighters of Algeria, sent a telegram to the President of the Provisional Government of the Republic on August 12, 1946, demanding French support for Jewish migration to Palestine. Nahon wrote that France should instead encourage “Jewish departs from French soil or elsewhere to return to their homeland” and argued “French interests in the Near East [coincided] with the rebirth of a Jewish state in Palestine.”²⁰² Nahon did not devote himself to assisting this “rebirth,” and he and the vast majority of Algerian Jews did not demonstrate their Zionism through migration to Palestine. Instead, members of the Algerian Jewish community raised funds for Israel and some young Algerian Jewish volunteered to fight in the 1948 war alongside the Israel Defense Forces.²⁰³

For their part, French officials asserted that Jewish emigration and openness to Zionism would antagonize Muslims in Algeria. In the decades after the Second World War, French colonial officials tried to reassure Algerian Muslims who demanded equality with their French colonizers. On May 7, 1946, France granted citizenship to all

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Telegramme de G. Nahon, 4 Sept 1946. 81F/763.

²⁰³ Laskier, *Israel and Maghreb*, 219.

Algerians as part of the ideological and juridical shift from the French Empire to the French Union. This act included M'zabi Jews, granting the same citizenship accorded Algerian Muslims and all "indigènes." However, this did not match the rights accorded Jewish citizens emancipated by the Crémieux Decree. This stunted citizenship failed to remedy the gross inequality between European and Algerian, only temporarily assuaging some nationalists, but leading ultimately to greater demands for equality and contributing to the eventual outbreak of war against French colonization in November 1954. For many in the M'zabi community, emigration presented an increasingly attractive alternative to their ambiguous legal status in French Algeria.

Surveillance in the south: Contrary French policies and Jewish frustration

A critical justification the French used to explain their non-emancipation of the Jewish population in the south was their claim that elevating Jews to a higher legal standing would antagonize M'zabi Muslims. French strategy aimed at appeasing Muslim Algerians who, they imagined, would support the French if they did not support the civic advancement of M'zabi Jews. This logic failed because Jews in the M'zab were dissatisfied with their continued lack of citizenship and because Muslims in the south were similarly preoccupied with their own self-interests. In 1948, the Jewish community of Ghardaïa and the M'zab again petitioned Governor Naegelen for citizenship, which he refused citing the potential for Muslim revolt following such a change.²⁰⁴ The French attempt to maintain the status quo ultimately frustrated the aspirations of both local Muslims and the local Jewish population.

²⁰⁴ "La petition des Israelites du Mzab pour le statut civil à M. le Gouverneur General Naegelen (1948). ANOM 9CAB/38.

Convoluting and often contrary strategies characterized French colonial policies in the Algerian Sahara after 1943. French treatment of the Jewish population in the M'zab is a particularly useful way of "seeing into" colonial motivations and failures to understand the needs of local Algerians. French officials failed on multiple occasions to appreciate the attraction of Zionism for non-emancipated Algerian Jews. A government-issued report of 1945 found that, "the reactions provoked in the Orient by the Zionist colonization have had, in Algeria, only a feeble echo." These "echoes" resulted, it was further argued, from superficial attempts to distract from more local political and economic problems. Yet in the same letter the Governor acknowledged that "the amplitude of this conflict on a global scale forbids hope that North Africa might rest unscathed."²⁰⁵ Of course, the conflict in Palestine did have repercussions across North Africa, first in Libya and Egypt, then Morocco, and eventually even in the isolated oases of the M'zab. Yet, in the face of local manifestations of the conflict between Zionists and anti-Zionists, French officials throughout this period largely denied that Algerian Jews participated in Zionist activities.

Part of the reason that French officials underestimated the lure of Zionism for Algerian Jews was their failure to distinguish between the diverse populations of Algerian Jews. The Jews of the M'zab who were historically denied citizenship never developed the same deep ties to French society and culture as the emancipated Jews affected by the Crémieux Decree in the north. Rather, to many Jews in the south the option of Palestine as an alternative homeland appealed to them, particularly after the creation of Israel and the fulfillment of what was to many of them both a religious and political hope for a Jewish state. The idea of making *aliyah*, of "going up" to Zion,

²⁰⁵ GGA to M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur, 2 November 1946. ANOM 81F/763.

fulfilled the regular liturgical injunction to return to Zion that Jews repeated in almost every major prayer, on waking in the morning and going to sleep at night, before and after meals, at every major lifecycle event and holiday. French officials on many occasions failed to understand the draw, spiritual, economic, or familial, that pulled individuals and families from the M'zab towards the east. In leaving Algeria, the Jews of the M'zab confounded French officials, who, while expressing concern over this population loss, failed to enact policies that would have halted the Jewish exodus from the south.

French officials did recognize the possible economic consequences of this migration and that the M'zabi Jewish emigration could weaken the local and regional economy, as well as upset the social and political status quo. In the M'zab, French reports expressed fear about losing an important part of the local economic workforce and one that held a near monopoly in the specialized fields of metalwork (blacksmiths, coppersmiths, and goldsmiths).²⁰⁶ However, despite these concerns about the loss of highly skilled artisans, individual French commanders went out of their way to monitor and restrict Jewish trade in gold and other Jewish small businesses during the same time, effectively crippling much of the Jewish economic activity in the M'zab. French concern about Jewish emigration did not seem to alter French policies towards the M'zabi Jewish community, policies that made life for Jews in the M'zab increasingly difficult.

The French also feared the Jewish migration from the M'zab would incite Jewish communities in the region to follow suit. This fear was soon realized, for though the M'zabi Jewish migration was the first colonial officials noticed, similar emigrations from nearby towns followed within a few years. Particularly after 1950, French officials noted

²⁰⁶ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, June 1950). ANOM OASIS 10.

that Jews from Laghouat and Djelfa were liquidating their assets in Algeria and leaving for Algiers, with the ultimate destination of Israel.²⁰⁷ The M'zabi emigration was thus interpreted, accurately, as a destabilizing force affecting Jewish communities throughout southern Algeria. Yet, the French enacted a series of economic policies and police actions against the Jews of the M'zab at the same time that they lamented their emigration. These resembled in some ways the surveillance that began during the Vichy period. One particular series of incidents is worth greater investigation: the French preoccupation with monitoring a long-standing clandestine Jewish trade in gold.

On January 9, 1946, members of the *Police Economique* seized four kilograms and seven hundred-twenty grams of gold dust, a one hundred twenty-three-gram ingot of gold and twelve gold handcrafted pieces collectively weighing 32 grams from three Jewish merchants of Ghardaïa: Mekha ben Aaron Sellam, Eliaou ben Aaron Sellam, and Samuel Birs. The head of the Economic Police, Robert Uriot, assisted in this operation alongside Inspector Boulanger of Ghardaïa, “Agent Dzib,” and a local informer. This motley crew of official and unofficial agents of the French state arranged a meeting with Samuel Birs at a local hotel, where they arrested him and the Sellams and confiscated the gold. During their interrogation, the brothers Sellam (Mekha and Eliaou) admitted their involvement in this clandestine trade and claimed to have purchased a thousand milligrams of the gold dust from “blacks from Sudan.” During his interrogation, Birs acknowledged his involvement, but only as an intermediary, who charged a fee of sixty-five francs for every gram of gold sold through him. Uriot hoped for a second arrest that same day; however, their ambush was “quickly found out and [their] second trafficker soon disappeared.” The initial ambush still yielded significant rewards, and Uriot

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

informed Algiers “major fortunes had been made solely from the trade in precious metals.”²⁰⁸

French commanders in the south were concerned about the traffic in gold across the southern borders at least as early as December 1945, though they acknowledged that monitoring the vast expanses of the Sahara for periodic caravans and sifting through their goods for a few grams of illicit gold powder or the stray gold bar would be difficult. One aptly named Lt-Colonel Vigourous, after searching for illegal gold in the Oasis, wrote to his superiors that much of the gold originated in Nigeria.²⁰⁹ For his part, the Commander at Ghardaïa denied, in a letter to Algiers on November 17, 1945, that there was any illicit traffic in gold in the M’zab. A subsequent letter from Algiers ordered the command in Ghardaïa to “urgently take all necessary measures of surveillance” and inform the Governor’s office of any facts suggesting a need for further investigation.²¹⁰

After the arrests of the two Sellam brothers and Birs, the commissariat of police in Ghardaïa set up a special surveillance unit to monitor all Jewish trade in jewelry and to continue monitoring Samuel Birs.²¹¹ This surveillance appears to have had little success because the agents of the police and the officers themselves were well known and easily spotted in the small community of Ghardaïa. Indeed, a communication from the commander of Ghardaïa to the Governor’s office in Algiers noted that Uriot’s prior success was due to the simple fact that he “was not known” to the residents of

²⁰⁸ “Rapport Special,” Robert Uriot, 15 January 1945. ANOM OASIS 63.

²⁰⁹ Letter, Lt-Col Vigourous to GGA, 24 January 1946. ANOM OASIS 63.

²¹⁰ GGA to Ghardaïa, 31 January 1946. ANOM OASIS 63.

²¹¹ Commissariat de Police to Laghouat, 18 February 1946. ANOM OASIS 63.

Ghardaïa.²¹² The French continued their surveillance without making a single additional arrest the rest of the year.

By the summer of 1947, increasingly frustrated that they were unable to apprehend the “dishonest” Jewish craftsmen and traders who were trafficking in gold, an emissary of the Finance Ministry drew up a list of jewelers under suspicion: Meklouf Partouche, Aaroum Makla Sellam, Daoud Ben Issac Sellam, Simon Khouana, Michel Khouana, Gharbi Karallou, and Eliaou Sellam (who, it was noted, had been arrested in January 1946). These craftsmen were warned that they should “regularize” their status by filing for permits for their work and trade in gold and paying the appropriate taxes to the French state.²¹³ The Commander of the Territory of Ghardaïa (stationed at Laghouat) concurred with this opinion, writing in August “the regularization, by the jewelers of the M’zab, of their situation with the *Services de la Garantié*, is in my opinion the only measure that will put a stop to the clandestine traffic in gold to Ghardaïa.”²¹⁴

The commander in the city of Ghardaïa, the only French author among these officials with actual personal knowledge of the Jewish community, reported:

...The Jewish jewelers of the M’zab seem to only engage in working the gold, the trade in the metal being in the hands of important Jewish merchants...the gold worked by the jewelers is furnished to them by their clients, in the form of old family jewels, gold purchased in Laghouat, Constantine, or with merchants who have relationships with the Sudan...these artisans work, themselves, with very small quantities of metal at a time, which can be easily hidden, searches at their homes have little chance of finding anything...it is true that the arrival of inspectors or the Principal Inspector of the security service is reported to the South, these employees being known by Jewish merchants who use the code words ‘Rabbin’ or ‘Grand Rabbin’ to inform their peers of their presence by telephone.²¹⁵

²¹² Villard to GGA, 29 February 1946. ANOM OASIS 63.

²¹³ Report of M. Guillot Tantay, 7 March 1947. ANOM OASIS 63.

²¹⁴ Then to GGA, 4 August 1947. ANOM OASIS 63.

²¹⁵ “Commerce de l’or à Ghardaïa,” 1 August 1947. ANOM OASIS 63.

The poorly informed French officials who attempted to thwart the Jewish trade in gold in the south shut down their campaign in late 1947 and 1948. In addition to exposing their poor knowledge on the activities of the M'zab, these French colonial officers in Algiers and elsewhere demonstrated to the M'zabi Jewish community that life in French Algeria had changed dramatically from the pre-war disengaged colonial administration. The new French regime in the south sought to upend the status quo in many ways, introducing and reinforcing colonial monitoring and policing. French focus on the trade in gold was certainly aimed at gaining some economic benefit to the state through confiscation of the actual gold or in imposing and collecting new taxes. All these efforts frustrated Jewish merchants and encouraged Jewish emigration from Ghardaïa.

The “Question Palestinienne” and Muslim-Jewish relations in the M'zab

Beginning in January 1948, French surveillance of the M'zab increasingly noted any effects of the “Question Palestinienne” on the local Jewish and Muslim communities. 1948, the year of the Israeli War for Independence and the Palestinian *Nakba*, was also a turning point for the M'zabi Jewish community. French surveillance increased during this period, concerned with the repercussions of that conflict in the Maghrib and the Sahara. A number of clashes with the local Muslim community also arose, many were local reactions to the events in Palestine as well as the increasing Jewish emigration from the M'zab.

In a letter of January 1948, Commander Then of Ghardaïa noted that while the “Question Palestinienne” had no immediate repercussions in the territory, the Muslims and Jews of the area had very different reactions to the news of partition in November

1947 and the subsequent fighting. While he observed that the “mass of Muslims” had only “lukewarm” reactions to the UN decision on partition in Palestine, he noted that the Jews “feverishly follow the news. They hope that Palestine will return to them one day and that they will be able to regroup there and create a nation in a land that will be their own.”²¹⁶ The summary report for that month noted that some Jews were concerned with the events in Palestine because “many families have relatives in that region,” but nevertheless maintained cordial relations with the Muslims in the M’zab. This report also mentioned that the Jews of Ghardaïa approved of the “conciliatory attitude” of the Haganah in offering peace to “the Arabs.”²¹⁷

The next report noted that the Jewish community followed the events in Palestine without participating actively in the conflict, neither sending funds nor volunteers, in contrast to Jewish communities elsewhere in Algeria. In March, a Jew from Palestine (then living in Algiers) visited Ghardaïa and nearby Djelfa to present information about the Zionist youth movement. While a group of fifty Jewish scouts was organized in Djelfa following his visit, no such organization emerged in Ghardaïa.²¹⁸ These French accounts of Jewish ambivalence in the M’zab about the events in Palestine soon proved inaccurate or shortsighted, as by June 1948, the French commanders in Ghardaïa reported that the Jews, who were closely following the events in Palestine, had collected a sum “evaluated at several million [francs]” to be sent to the Comité Palestinien in Algiers. The same report noted that “incidents” in Oujda, Tripoli, Guerrara, and in Ghardaïa had

²¹⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Then to GGA, 15 January 1948. ANOM OASIS 104.

²¹⁷ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 15 January-20 February 1948. ANOM OASIS 10.

²¹⁸ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 21 February-15 March 1948. ANOM OASIS 10.

resulted in an understandable fear amongst the Jews in the territory.²¹⁹ The “incidents” in Oujda and Tripoli in 1948 were a series of anti-Jewish attacks that left dozens dead and wounded, and resulted in large-scale Jewish emigration from both cities. Without archival evidence from March, April, or May, of that year the specifics of the “incident” in Ghardaïa are unclear, but we might infer from the French grouping of them with the larger pogroms elsewhere that they similarly terrified local Jews.

The issue of Jewish emigration appears from French reports to have divided the Ibadi community. In early 1949, a group of eight Ibadi merchants and landowners organized the *Comptoir commercial du Sud* (CCS), whose mission was to undermine Jewish merchants who supported the immigration to Israel. The actions of this group appear—despite their antagonistic agenda—to have been aimed at maintaining the Jewish community in Ghardaïa. Many in the Ibadi community, according to the French, deemed the CCS’s activities “shameful.” These activities included offering 450,000 francs for a Jewish store, which was worth “a tenth that much,” and requesting a Jewish jeweler take an Ibadi merchant’s son as his apprentice. The French noted in their official report that “this marks a serious step in the evolution of the mozabite [sic] ideology,” ostensibly towards a kind of rapprochement with the Jewish families and individuals receptive to the idea of emigration. Despite these attempts at reconciliation and Jewish integration in the community, six families left Ghardaïa during this same time.²²⁰

The actions of the CCS, some largely symbolic, and the efforts of the French produced calm, and a relative détente between Jews and Muslims developed by July and

²¹⁹ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 15 May-15 June 1948. ANOM OASIS 10.

²²⁰ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, February 1949. ANOM OASIS 10.

August, whatever the earlier ‘incident’ in May.²²¹ The September report observed that both the Jews and Muslims in Ghardaïa appeared less and less interested in following the events in Palestine, the Muslims even “indifferent” towards the Jews in contrast to the strife earlier in that year.²²² The assassination of Count Folke Bernadotte by the Zionist Stern Gang in Jerusalem in September, which had far-reaching and dramatic reactions elsewhere in North Africa (notably in Egypt), did not register in the local report of October. The report from that month described the Jews of Ghardaïa as engaging in “almost no political activity.”²²³

However little the Jews of the M’zab engaged in organized political actions, many demonstrated their support for Zionism or for the idea of a Jewish State with their feet, by choosing to leave French Algeria for Israel. Jewish migration, whether for political or economic reasons, alarmed the French command locally and at the national level. The author of the November monthly report revealed, for the first time, that Jews from the community had been requesting immigration documents since February 2; this information appeared in November’s report because from the fifth to twentieth of October Jewish individuals “of each sex, from 14 to 50 years of age” filed twenty six requests for immigration documents. The author noted further “these Jews sell everything they own, even their jewels, to try to attain the sum” needed for visas and immigration costs.²²⁴ Between the November report and mid-December 1948, a dozen more Jews left Ghardaïa for Israel via Algiers and Marseille.²²⁵

²²¹ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 15 June-15 July 1948, and Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 15 July-15 August 1948. ANOM OASIS 10.

²²² Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 15 August-15 September 1948. ANOM OASIS 10.

²²³ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 16 September-16 October 1948. ANOM OASIS 10.

²²⁴ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 17 October-14 November 1948. ANOM

The French at Ghardaïa expressed difficulty understanding the Jewish interest either in emigration from French territory or immigration to Israel, as noted in the end-of-year report for 1948: “the draw towards the ‘Promised Land’ continues to be a mystery that torments the spirits of many, even among the most evolved [évolués].”²²⁶ Here, the French author confused the religious and the political motivations underpinning the Zionism of M’zabi Jews. Again, French officials were often blind to the religiosity of the Jewish community in the M’zab. They were now similarly blind to the modern, political activities of individuals who worked to promote political Zionism through involvement with Zionist organizations, though this participation sometimes took place openly by individuals with close relationships to the local colonial administration. Brahim Ben Makhoulf Partouche, of the M’zabi Partouche family, was the French-appointed *Chef de la fraction Israélite* of Ghardaïa at this time. He was a representative of the *Haganah* (the predecessor to the Israeli Defense Forces) in Laghouat in September 1948.²²⁷

Both the members of the Jewish community who remained in the M’zab, like Partouche, and those who emigrated demonstrated to the French the attraction of Zionism. Yet, it was the local Muslim community that took steps to encourage the Jews of Ghardaïa to remain, though the CCS never enjoyed full support from the Ibadi population. While the French observed the Jewish community dwindling, they did little to encourage Jews to remain in the M’zab. The actions of a few Ibadi individuals to integrate M’zabi Jews deeper into the local economy were ultimately no match for the

OASIS 10.

²²⁵ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 15 November-12 December 1948.

ANOM OASIS 10.

²²⁶ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 13 December-20 January 1949. ANOM OASIS 10.

²²⁷ “Délégués de la Haganah à Laghouat,” 8 September 1948. ANOM OASIS 101.

attraction of Israel and the efforts of the large international network of relief agencies that began actively funding and facilitating the M'zabi emigration after 1948.

Migration: an international effort

The end of year report of December 1948-January 1949 noted that the “exodus” of thirty families from Ghardaïa since October had taken place under the auspices of the Consistory, within the quota of allocated places for the community of Ghardaïa by the Palestinian Office in Algiers.²²⁸ As this suggests, by this time the French acquiesced to the inevitability of Jewish migration to Israel from Southern Algeria (and to a greater number, of Moroccan Jews via Algeria) and agreed to allow certain international organizations to facilitate the emigration according to assigned quotas. By the time France granted Israel de facto recognition on January 24, 1949, international Zionist organizations including the Jewish Agency worked with the French to further normalize this process of “semi legal aliyah.”²²⁹

The Palestinian Office in Algiers—and other organizations in Algiers, including the Consistory and the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) regional office—promoted the Jewish emigration from Ghardaïa. In February, the monthly colonial report noted that following the armistice between Egypt and Israel “a certain détente” developed between the Jewish and Muslim communities in Ghardaïa, a development they hoped would stem Jewish emigration. However, “propaganda in support of the exodus towards

²²⁸ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, 13 December-20 January 1949. ANOM OASIS 10.

²²⁹ Michael Menachem Laskier and Eliezer Bashan detail this process from the Moroccan perspective in their chapter “Morocco,” in *The Jews of the Middle East and North Africa in Modern Times*, ed. Reeva Spector Simon, Michael Menachem Laskier, and Sara Reguer (NY: Columbia University Press, 2003), see especially 498-499.

Palestine” reappeared soon after, which the French report suggested came from outside the community.²³⁰ Though French officials tacitly allowed some Jewish emigration in conjunction with the Jewish Agency and local Jewish organizations, official correspondence from Southern Algeria indicates they were none too happy about the population loss.

Within the community of international organizations facilitating the immigration to Palestine, there were often disagreements as to the best way to go about recruiting and transporting Jews from the M’zab. At a confidential meeting at their Paris office on October 29, 1948, Hélène Cazès-Benatar of the AJDC noted that “Mossad agents [were] trying to facilitate illegal emigration.” Benatar, a Jewish lawyer from Paris working for an American relief organization in North Africa, disagreed with the tactics of the *Misgeret*, a network of agents working to encourage emigration throughout North Africa and supported by the Jewish Agency. For Benatar and the AJDC, maintaining relative peace for the remaining Jewish communities in the Maghreb was as important as persuading them to move to the newly established State of Israel. She went so far as to claim that any place where Zionist emissaries appeared in North Africa there would be a pogrom.²³¹ The Jewish Agency’s foremost concern, on the other hand, was recruiting Jews to come to Israel to help build the state, regardless of the consequences in the countries from where they arrived.

Despite their squabbles and disagreements, after 1946 international organizations steadily provided extensive support to the Jews of the M’zab who immigrated to Palestine. Foremost among these efforts was that of the AJDC, which shifted a large

²³⁰ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, February 1949. ANOM OASIS 10.

²³¹ Meeting Minutes, Paris, 29 October 1948. AJDC NY 45/54 2:6.

amount of its financial aid to assisting the Jews of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria after the Holocaust in Europe. In 1947, the AJDC's Paris office established a North African department. Two years later, in early 1949, they opened three "transient centers" around Algiers, "to shelter and care for Jews who trek from Morocco to Algiers, from which point they hope to proceed to Marseille and finally to Israel." At these camps, "some 3,000 men, women and children at a time receive food, clothing and physical examinations designed to screen out the sick from the well."²³² Among these three thousand individuals were several hundred from "Tunis and Southern Algeria."²³³

While the AJDC paid for the transit camps in Algiers, the Jewish Agency coordinated and supported the travel from French territory to Israel.²³⁴ Most of the immigrants' time was spent preparing for emigration from Algeria and in transit facilities, where they were subject to medical exams.²³⁵ Members of the AJDC leadership worried openly about the medical condition of Jewish immigrants from southern Algeria. William Schmidt, director of AJDC overseas health activities, wrote to the American Embassy in Tel Aviv that the high prevalence of "trachoma, favus, syphilis, blindness, and the number of the aged and infirm" prevented many Jews seeking emigration to leave AJDC camps in Algiers, resulting in a backlog of around 3000 people in spring 1949. Schmidt noted that southern Algeria was in need of a mobile unit to deal with medical screenings, in particular tests for tuberculosis.²³⁶ One official suggested as early as July 1947 that South Algeria would need its own medical unit.²³⁷

²³² Memo #424, Sapir to Goldman, "Jews in Moslem Lands," 11 October 1949. AJDC NY 45/54 2:6.

²³³ Report (June 30, 1949) 45/54 #23 AJDC NY.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, June 1950. ANOM OASIS 10.

²³⁶ Letter, William Schmidt to Honorable James G. McDonald American Embassy Tel Aviv, 22 April 1949. AJDC NY 45/54 2:11.

²³⁷ Memorandum to Schwarts and Beckelman, 21 July 1947. AJDC NY 45/54 2:11.

In 1948 and 1949, the AJDC organized a large-scale fundraising effort to meet these specific demands and provide assistance to the Jews of Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Officials estimated the agency would need roughly seventy-five million dollars in 1949 to address the needs of “75 percent of the 256,000 Jews in Morocco, 40 percent of the 140,000 Jews in Algeria, 60 percent of the 105,000 Jews in Tunisia and 80 percent of the 130,000 Jews in Iran.”²³⁸ As part of their fundraising strategy, they sent a French photographer, Lillian Tonnaire (later Lillian Tonnaire-Taylor) to document the situation of the Jewish community in Ghardaïa for fundraising purposes. What Tonnaire presented to the AJDC and its supporters in photos published by the organization and used throughout the United States was an impoverished community living in pre-modern conditions.²³⁹



Figure 4.1. "A group of Jewish children stand in one of the crooked, narrow streets in Ghardaia, where 1500 Jews exist in primitive, unhealthy conditions. c. 1949"

²³⁸ Note, 21 November 1948. AJDC NY 45/54 2:6.

²³⁹ Lillian Tonnaire, 1949, The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, Inc. NY_15528, NY_15536, NY_15532, NY_15531, NY_15529, NY_15533, NY_15534. AJDC NY.



Figure 4.2. "A typical Jewish family squat outside their windowless hovel in the mellah. Ghardaia, Algeria. c. 1949"



Figure 4.3. "Young Jewish girl learns to sew in the Algerian town of Ghardaia, where 1500 Jews live in primitive conditions. Ghardaia, Algeria."



Figure 4.4. "An elderly Jewish woman spins yarn in the mellah. Ghardaia, Algeria. c.1949"



Figure 4.5. "A Jewish family sits down to a meal in their one room, windowless hovel in the mellah of Ghardaia, Algeria, c.1949"



Figure 4.6. “Working as a watch maker, this Jewish man ekes out a living in the mellah. Ghardaïa, Algeria. c.1949”



Figure 4.7. “Learning to make mirrors, these young Jewish boys work with a Jewish teacher in the mellah. Ghardaïa, Algeria. c.1949”

These images present a particular image of the M'zabi Jewish community aimed at eliciting sympathy from a Western audience. The depiction of the M'zabi Jews as “primitive” resembles the French colonial reading of this community as “backwards” and incapable of assimilation. However, several individuals, male and female, are presented engaged in work, even happily so. The subjects are portrayed as either industrious, members of families, or pitiful children, all images that might elicit sympathy. The descriptions are accurate insofar as life was very difficult in the M'zab; however, these photos lack context, as the similarly difficult lives of Ibadis living in the same area are never depicted alongside the Jewish community. The description of M'zabi Jewish life offered by Tonnaire is sometimes anachronistic; for instance, “A typical Jewish family squat outside their windowless hovel in the mellah,” despite the fact that French forces had opened the mellah in the late-nineteenth century. In imposing a sometimes-inaccurate Western perspective onto the Jewish community in Ghardaïa, Tonnaire lost sight of some surprising features of these images, including the juxtaposition of one apprentice wearing a fez next to another in a beret in figure 4.7.

Of course, Tonnaire's objective was instrumental: to win sympathy and elicit donations from the Western Jewish communities of the United States and Europe. The particular tropes she employed, of the “primitive” non-European Jew oppressed by a violent Muslim majority, were commonly used to describe Jews throughout the region in this period, both to raise funds for their assistance and to bolster the Zionist mission to establish a safe haven for the beleaguered Jewish communities of the region after 1948.²⁴⁰ Though exaggerations of the reality in the M'zab, these images are useful to interrogate

²⁴⁰ On the rebranding of Israel as the lone safe place for Jews in the Middle East and North Africa after 1948, see *Orientalism and the Jews*, ed. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek Jonathan Penslar (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2005).

how foreign Jews saw the M'zabi community at a time when the actions and support of international organizations like the AJDC determined the future of these individuals and families.

In addition to various international Jewish organizations, many in the Jewish establishment and leadership in Algeria and France supported emigration. In March 1949, the regional report to the governor noted that the Grand Rabbi of Algeria, Rabbi Eisenbeth, visited Djelfa and Laghouat to raise funds towards the creation of an Institute of Hebraic Studies in Algiers. During this same trip, Eisenbeth encouraged Jewish families and individuals in their departures for Palestine, and seventeen Jews departed Laghouat during his passage through the city (through pre-arranged transport). In addition to the encouragement of Eisenbeth and other leaders, Jews in Southern Algeria also heard about the possibilities for economic and social advancement in Israel from already emigrated relatives and friends who sent letters home. French commanders in Ghardaïa intercepted and monitored correspondence to and from the Jewish community. In March 1949 they reported letters describing, in the words of the French commander, “a grand life full of charm in the ‘recovered Promised land.’”²⁴¹ The actual efficacy of these individual motivating factors is difficult to know, but collectively they certainly contributed to the continued emigration of Jews from the M'zab; between March 19 and April 19 of that year an additional fifty-six individuals left the M'zab for Israel.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, March 1949. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁴² Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, April 1949. ANOM OASIS 10.

A shift in French policy

Certainly, not all the news from Israel was positive, and many Jewish leaders in Algeria and abroad cautioned against the rapid emigration. Some in the chain of immigration assistance found their resources insufficient to meet the growing needs of the Jewish exodus from North Africa. In Marseilles, the intermediate point between Algiers and Israel, the consistory of Marseilles received Jewish immigrants and provided them food and lodging. In a letter of 26 November 1948, the president of the consistory, Pédia Cassin, wrote to the president of the Algiers consistory complaining of the condition in which the Jews from North Africa arrived:

...The condition of our coreligionists arriving from North Africa in Marseilles in transit to Palestine is deplorable and highly humiliating. / You know this concerns those who arrive here, clandestinely, without the necessary visas from the Palestinian office. / Here, this office cannot take care of them nor lodge them, the housing found at the last minute is for those who have taken the regular channels. / We have thus an influx of families who, having sold their homes and their belongings before leaving North Africa appear here in near total impecuniosity which transforms them after four or five days at a hotel into "mendicants." Their situation is tragic and hopeless. They can neither leave for Palestine, since they do not meet the required conditions and there is not place on the ships for them. They are without the means or the boats to return to North Africa. / It is most important that you broadcast wherever it is possible, that all those who wish to leave North Africa other than by the regular methods and waiting their turn are condemned to the greatest misery in a city like ours where there is no housing, nor sufficient aid to feed them and no way to send them on towards the "Promised Land." / It is your duty to stop by any means this irregular exodus that engenders great misery.²⁴³

From Marseille Jewish immigrants departed by boat for Bologna, Italy, whence they boarded ships towards Israel.²⁴⁴ While Cassin did not argue outright against migration to Israel, his note offered a more sober view of the migratory process. His plea to Algiers offers a glimpse of a middle position between the enthusiasm for emigration of the AJDC

²⁴³ Letter, Marseille, 26 November 1948. ANOM OASIS 101.

²⁴⁴ "Mouvements d'Israélites vers la Palestine," 18 December 1948. ANOM OASIS 101.

and Jewish Agency and the outright opposition of some in the French Jewish establishment.

Of the influential French Jewish institutions that worked alongside French state officials to encourage the community to stay in Ghardaïa and stem the flow of emigration, the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* (AIU) invested a significant amount of time and money into improving the situation of Jews in North Africa following World War II. In contrast to the AJDC and the Jewish Agency, the AIU believed the situation of the Jews in North Africa could be best served by advocating for greater inclusion in the French empire, and in Southern Algeria, for full emancipation of the M'zabi Jewish community. The AIU advocated for *all* Algerian Jews to remain part of the larger body of French Jewry; as Algeria was part of France, so was Algerian Jewry part of the French people. The AIU's advocacy of Jewish emancipation in the M'zab was the natural continuation of their decades-long struggle to bring "emancipation and moral advancement" to all Jews living in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean.²⁴⁵

The secretary of the AIU, André Chouraqui, visited Ghardaïa on May 13, 1949, meeting the leaders of the community and holding a discussion at the synagogue during which he "promised his coreligionists that he would do his best to win their mass naturalization, by decree."²⁴⁶ The French regional report from the period following Chouraqui's visit noted that the Jews of Ghardaïa appeared less interested in the events in Palestine following his visit and claimed that none had requested migration documents or left the city since. Furthermore, the report asserted, previously encouraging letters from

²⁴⁵ Simon Schwarzfuchs, "The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and French Jewish Leadership vis-à-vis North African Jewry, 1960-1914," in *Organizing Rescue: National Jewish Solidarity in the Modern Period*, ed. Selwyn Ilan Troen and Benjamin Pinkus (London: Frank Cass, 1992), 78.

²⁴⁶ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, May 1949. ANOM OASIS 10.

M'zabi Jews in Israel were now “generally somber,” contributing to the hesitation about migration.²⁴⁷ However, the following report from July contradicted this claim about a decrease in emigration. Two hundred individuals from Ghardaïa left between June and July 1949. This, despite Chouraqui’s visit and the subsequent visit of two emissaries from Algiers who arrived on June 28 and 29 in Ghardaïa in order to solicit funds for the AIU.²⁴⁸ An additional fourteen Jews (“three men, four young women, and seven children”) left Ghardaïa for Palestine in August and September 1949.²⁴⁹

The policies of the AIU at this time were extremely close to those of the French state. The president of the AIU (1943-1976), René Cassin, was also the Vice President of the Council of State from 1944 until 1960. Cassin put emancipating the M'zabi Jews on his list of legislative demands in the early 1950s, largely in order to stem the growing Jewish emigration. The Governor of Algeria wrote Cassin that it would first have to be deduced if the Jews themselves wished for the civil status, which would entail losing their Jewish personal status.²⁵⁰ The commander in Ghardaïa responded that this should not be pursued, because “many of the Jews of the M'zab wish to maintain their personal Jewish status in issues that concern marriage and divorce...[also] in matters of inheritance, many believe that only boys should inherit and not girls.” Additionally, he wrote that “the Mozabites [sic] would not understand an ethnic group they believe inferior, with a standard of life analogous to their own” acquiring the civil status before them.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, June 1949. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁴⁸ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, July 1949. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁴⁹ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, September 1949. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁵⁰ GGA to M. le Commandant de Ghardaïa, 12 January 1951. ANOM OASIS 102.

²⁵¹ “Etat Civil des Israélites du M'zab,” 7 February 1951. ANOM OASIS 102.

In a marked departure from earlier reasoning, the lieutenant-commander in Laghouat disagreed with the suggestions from Ghardaïa and declared that “despite the undesirable moral effects that it risks causing amongst the Muslim elements of the population,” he favored extending the civil status to the Jews of the M’zab.²⁵² Following these reports, the Governor demanded an additional assessment of the situation because André Chouraoui and other members of the AIU had assured him that the Jews of the M’zab did indeed wish to become French citizens.²⁵³ A petition of the community in March found that a seventy-five percent majority supported naturalization.²⁵⁴ This was the first incident in which official policy found Jewish emancipation more important than maintaining the status for fear of upsetting the Muslim majority in Ghardaïa.

This sea change in policy attitudes arrived at the same time that local Muslims were trying to control the political actions of the local Jewish population as voting rights for Algerian subjects expanded. While they had not yet achieved full emancipation, the Jews of the M’zab received limited citizenship after the war alongside Algerian Muslims. An ordinance of March 7, 1944, naturalized 60,000 Muslim (men) and gave them voting rights in the first electoral college of Algeria; at the same time all male Muslims and M’zabi Jews, aged twenty-one or older, were given voting rights in the second college.²⁵⁵ These efforts were part of a major ideological shift in French imperial thought after the Second World War, from the outright racism and inequality of the pre-war empire to a more palatable “Overseas France,” the French Union.²⁵⁶

²⁵² “Etat civil des Israélites du M’zab,” 7 April 1951. ANOM OASIS 102.

²⁵³ “Au sujet état civil des Israélites du M’zab,” 14 March 1951. ANOM OASIS 102.

²⁵⁴ “Au sujet Etat-Civil des Israélites du M’zab,” 5 April 1951. ANOM OASIS 102.

²⁵⁵ Weil, 224.

²⁵⁶ Frederick Cooper describes this as “deracialized imperialism,” in *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 173, cited in Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 40.

A later law, of September 20, 1947, “regularized” the status of the *Territoires du Sud*, making them a *département* in their own right, while also extending limited French citizenship to Algerian Muslims and Jews in the south. However, despite all these reforms, the maintenance of the inferior second college voting system meant that Algerian Muslims and M’zabi Jews experienced a limited citizenship and curtailed voting rights. The second college could vote for between two-fifths to one-half of candidates, depending on whether an election was national or local. However, as Todd Shepard points out, after 1948 Governor Naeglen manipulated elections by excluding all Algerian nationalist candidates.²⁵⁷

Consequently, many Algerians boycotted elections, and many in the M’zabi Jewish community abstained from the 1948 elections, refusing to recognize their relegation to the second college in the Algerian Assembly.²⁵⁸ In the same year, representatives of the Parti du Peuple Algérien, the successor party to Messali Hadj’s Étoile Nord-African, arrived in Ghardaïa, which the local French commander observed increased the tension between the Jewish and Muslim communities.²⁵⁹ However, in Ghardaïa, unlike much of Algeria, the M’zabi Islamic reform party, not one of the larger nationalist parties, was the party of choice for the Ibadi majority. In a 1951 election placard the M’zabi Islamic reform party urged the Jews of Ghardaïa not to vote while recognizing their emancipatory ambitions: “The *Israelites* of the M’zab wish to have French citizenship [*Statut Français*] and belong to the first college; the best way for them to reiterate this wish is not to vote in the second!” One motive behind this move was fear over the likelihood of Jewish votes for the rival (French) conservative party. This Ibadi

²⁵⁷ Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 42.

²⁵⁸ “Emigration des Israélites,” 7 June 1950. ANOM OASIS 101.

²⁵⁹ “Tension entre Juifs et Musulmans,” 5 June 1948. ANOM OASIS 76.

attempt to build on Jewish disillusionment with past French slights points to fissures opening between the Jewish and Ibadi communities in the M'zab.²⁶⁰ On the actual day of the elections, members of the wealthy commercial elite, including the Balouka family, locked themselves inside their houses to avoid conflict with either the Ibadi or another group out to coerce Jewish votes.²⁶¹

In addition to avoiding actual violence, boycotting elections was a repeated tactic of the Jewish community when faced with French intransigence about their emancipation. In February 1951, returning to earlier French policies, Governor Naegelen rejected Jewish emancipation in the M'zab on the grounds that such an action would be “inopportune” and would antagonize the Ibadis who “considered [the Jews] to be less politically advanced.” And, despite the earlier community survey that found precisely the opposite results, the French submitted that the Jews “wish to maintain their Mosaic status.”²⁶² Yet, in a report filed two months later, the commander in Ghardaïa acknowledged the Jewish wish for emancipation, despite the “hostile protests on the part of the Muslims of the region.”²⁶³ According to the French report, following this frustrated attempt at achieving emancipation, the *Chef de la fraction israelite* (at that time a member of the Balouka family) urged the community to both boycott the election and to leave for Israel.²⁶⁴

Thus, despite muted overtures inspired by the efforts of French Jews from the AIU and others, the French government made no genuine attempts to emancipate the Jewish minority in the M'zab. Ultimately, they maintained their belief that Jewish

²⁶⁰ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, January 1951. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁶¹ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, February 1951. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, April 1951. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁶⁴ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, June 1951. ANOM OASIS 10.

emancipation would antagonize the Muslim population, despite evidence to the contrary and the growing divide between the two communities regardless of Jewish legal status. The situation of the Jewish minority in the M'zab remained insufficiently compelling to alter French policies or tilt them towards radically upsetting the status quo in the M'zab. Jewish emigration continued and the appeal of exodus spread increasingly into the elites of the Jewish community. In 1950, Sebban Balouka undertook a trip to Israel to “investigate the quality of life and commercial possibilities there.”²⁶⁵ A year later, one of the rabbis, Rabbi Yagoub, led a group from the community out of the M'zab towards Israel.²⁶⁶ The French continued to monitor the correspondence of the Jewish community, noting that the remaining rabbi, Amrane, as well as Sebban Balouka (who was then the French-appointed leader of the community) received a growing number of “brochures of propaganda written in Hebrew from Palestine.”²⁶⁷ As a drought decreased wheat production and increased prices in 1951, many Jews of Ghardaïa sought their future in Israel.

As is often true, the Jewish migration from Algeria to Israel was only sometimes linear. Immigration worked in both directions, particularly after the first rush of migration to Israel in 1948 and 1949. At least by 1952, news of the difficult and expensive life in Israel reached the M'zab via letters from family and friends there who expressed their desire to return to Algeria.²⁶⁸ The process of migration was difficult, with long journeys overland to Algiers followed by boat or plane rides, first to a European port and then on to one of the Israeli port cities, Tel Aviv or Haifa, where new immigrants met

²⁶⁵ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, August 1950. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁶⁶ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, September 1951. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁶⁷ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, October 1951. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁶⁸ Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, April 1952. ANOM OASIS 10.

with long, tedious, and sometimes invasive absorption processes. While international agencies expedited the migration to Israel, they often did so making false promises or exaggerating the possibilities available to newly arrived Jews from the Maghreb, whose options were decidedly less open than immigrants from Europe.²⁶⁹

A 1953 memorandum from the French Consulate in Israel noted “the immigration in Israel of the North Africans was organized by the Jewish Agency without considering the adaptability of those involved, lured by brilliant and vague promises, to the particular conditions of the country where they would arrive. The result of this experience, conducted with ease, is that a considerable number of unhappy wretches find themselves in Israel, particularly in my district.”²⁷⁰ The Consulate in Jerusalem received hundreds of petitions for repatriation to France in 1953 alone, totaling 298, twenty-four from Algerians and the remainder from Moroccans and Tunisians from the French protectorates. The Consul General, attempting to ameliorate the situation while waiting for information about possible repatriation, appealed with little avail “to the directors of the Jewish Agency who showed perfect indifference towards their coreligionists.”²⁷¹

One can glimpse the disdain or indifference of many in the European Jewish elite towards the “Moroccans” (as all North African Jews were sometimes called regardless of origin), even before the emigration from Algeria. A French regional report noted that the French rabbi, Birchess Zerbib, arriving in Ghardaïa after a trip to Palestine, quipped to a French officer about the M’zabi Jews in Palestine, “We do not want any more of these

²⁶⁹ For a detailed examination of the absorption of North African Jewish immigrants in Israel during this time period, see Maurice M. Roumani, *the Jews of Libya: Coexistence, Persecution, Resettlement* (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 2009), especially Chapter 5. For a general examination of the shifts in immigration and absorption policies in Israel, see Devorah Hakohen, *Immigrants in Turmoil: Mass Immigration to Israel and its Repercussions in the 1950s and after*, trans. Gila Brand (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

²⁷⁰ French Consul General, Jerusalem, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 July 1953. ANOM FM 81F/763.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

dirty people who are no more than the pests [*punaises*] of the synagogue in Palestine.”²⁷²

Even without such active discouragement of migration, the fear of the unknown was often significant enough to dissuade many from leaving.

Though hundreds left before 1954, most Jews of Ghardaïa remained in their homes and continued to make their lives in the M’zab. Some even expanded their businesses, including David Cohana, who petitioned the French administration in Ghardaïa for permits to open a bar in February 1951.²⁷³ Others felt increasing animosity from their Muslim neighbors, concerns they expressed to the French authorities. A 1951 report noted the “concerns of some young Jews, who complain of the attitude of Muslims towards them.”²⁷⁴ Although they failed in their efforts to win emancipation and suffered from increasing enmity from their Muslim neighbors and growing economic restrictions from the French, the situation of the Jews in the M’zab, however worse than that of other Algerian Jews, remained somewhat better than other non-emancipated Jews elsewhere in North Africa. The community found itself caught between two powerful choices: remaining in French Algeria, continuing to seek emancipation at some unknown future date, or emigration and the possibility of a better future.

Conclusion: *aliyah* or assimilation

Zionist advocates continued to work diligently to recruit M’zabi Jews for *aliyah*. In the face of the reverse migration back to Algeria from Israel, the Jewish Agency “announced that it would offer repatriation free of charge to immigrants who, having left the State of Israel, declared themselves within three months wishing to return there. It

²⁷² Bulletin de Renseignements, Territoire Militaire de Ghardaïa, March 1950. ANOM OASIS 10.

²⁷³ “Débits de boissons de 1^{ère} catégorie,” 7 March 1951. ANOM OASIS 102.

²⁷⁴ “Memo confidential, 2 October 1951. ANOM OASIS 102.

also pledged its intention to facilitate immigration conditions to Israel, by certain new regulations, particularly those concerning the removal of the age limit and the lowering of the minimum age for each immigrant.”²⁷⁵ Perhaps enticed by these newly loosened requirements, the office of the Governor recorded one hundred Jewish individuals having left Ghardaïa for Israel in 1954.²⁷⁶ Certainly, the promises of the Jewish Agency, sometimes featured in romanticized illustrations of strong, well-fed Jewish pioneers tilling the fertile land of Israel, may have enticed some Jews from the M’zab to make *aliyah*.

Several scholars have argued that disingenuous promises from the Jewish Agency brought Jews away from peaceful existences in North Africa and the Middle East to Israel, where they suffered oppression, exclusion, and conflict from the Ashkenazi elite. Ella Shohat writes that Zionism imposed a “new binarism into the formerly peaceful relationship” between Jewish and Muslim communities throughout the region, characterizing that ideology as the driving force in the Jewish migrations to Israel of the postwar period. However, her assertion that Jews from North Africa were “lured” to Palestine and then to Israel is disingenuous and fails to appreciate the equally strong factors in Algeria that sped their decision to emigrate.²⁷⁷ Within this small community, the motivations for migration or remaining in French Algeria varied, whether individuals chose emigration to escape French economic restrictions or to stay in Algeria and open new businesses. M’zabi Jews participated in political Zionist activities without making *aliyah*, or emigrated for religious reasons that had little to do with the modern Zionist

²⁷⁵ French Consul General, Jerusalem, to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2 July 1953. ANOM FM 81F/763.

²⁷⁶ GGA to Ministry of the Interior, 12 October 1954. ANOM FM 81F/763.

²⁷⁷ Ella Shohat, “Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text* 19/20 (August 1988): 11.

ideology of Theodor Herzl or David Ben Gurion. Religious leaders, business merchants, and others chose their future for a wide variety of reasons, hinging often on practical concerns and the most attractive route available at that particular moment. The choice to leave Algeria reflected the situation there as much as it did the lure of Zionism or Israel.

French attitudes and policies towards the M'zabi Jews evidenced conflicting agendas and beliefs about their future place in French civil society and created instability and uncertainty in the lives of M'zabi Jews. French Jews, including Rene Cassin and André Chouraqui, extolled the promises of assimilation publicly in order to influence French policymakers doubtful about M'zabi Jewish "regeneration," even in the mid-twentieth century. To what extent Cassin or Chouraqui truly believed in the possibility of full assimilation varied; Cassin became increasingly involved with the French government while Chouraqui made *aliyah* himself less than a decade later, in 1958. Whatever their personal beliefs, their lobbying efforts appear to have made little inroads, particularly when faced with the competing argument that M'zabi Jewish equality would antagonize Muslim Algerians. The specter of Muslim anti-Jewish violence served successive colonial regimes well in suppressing calls for reform or demonstrating to Algerian Jews the vulnerability of their situation (as in 1934 Constantine). However, by failing to take real initiative on resolving the legal inferiority of M'zabi Jews, colonial officials alienated a population that they would soon find useful when the French turned again towards the Sahara as the saving grace of the dying French Empire.

Chapter 5:

War and Development in the M'zab, 1954-1958

[France] will mobilize its forces so that the Saharan miracle can be realized. The immense riches of coal, iron, oil, and natural gas in the *Territoires du Sud* will be developed. The metropole will contribute technical knowledge and investment. Algeria will contribute its increasingly skilled laborers and, later, project managers. The development of the desert is the great undertaking of our generation.²⁷⁸

By 1955, the conflict that Algerian nationalists would call the War of Independence or the Algerian Revolution and the French the Algerian War was well underway. The war officially began after the coordinated attacks of the *Front pour la Liberation Nationale* (FLN) on select French military locations on the eve of All Saints' Day, November 1, 1954. While the bulk of the action and violence occurred in the northern coastal regions, residents of the M'zab felt keenly the general instability of the war and the uncertain future of French colonial rule in Algeria. Despite the difficulties of emigration and resettlement in Israel, the threat of violence and fears about their uncertain status in French Algeria incited many Jews to leave Ghardaïa in this period.

Yet the pace of emigration progressed fitfully in the early stages of the war. While FLN boycotts of M'zabi goods and services hurt the local economy, French investment in the development of the Sahara reached unprecedented levels during this period as successive metropolitan governments waged campaigns to exploit the natural

²⁷⁸ French President Guy Mollet speaking to the National Assembly, cited in "Note: La reorganization des Territoires du Sud," 17 April 1956, 3. ANOM FM 81F/52.

resources of the desert. As national interest turned to the Sahara, so too did the Jews of the M'zab catch the eye of French politicians who were seeking to integrate the populations and resources of the Sahara into French Algeria. For the first time since the conquest of the M'zab in 1882, the National Assembly debated how to administer the Sahara and its inhabitants.

The Sahara presented to the French not only the material resources to reinvigorate the economy, but also a new frontier in which they could rescue the colonial mission. With order increasingly difficult to maintain in the north and international and domestic support waning, the French government turned towards the Sahara as a means of extending and consolidating its power; some in the government even mused about the possibility of keeping the Sahara were they to lose the north. In late 1955, the French government in Paris and in Algiers began to discuss a "reorganization" of the *Territoires du Sud* from militarily administered territories to *départements*. This integration of the Sahara into French Algeria would, it was argued, reinforce the unity of French Algeria; the extension of greater control into the Sahara would in turn make it easier to exploit the mineral and fuel deposits there.

For the approximately fifteen hundred Jews still living in the M'zab, the proposed change in jurisdiction and legal classification would also present a novel way of rectifying their problematic situation. To reclassify the *Territoires du Sud* would bring them into juridical equality with the northern *départements* of French Algeria and thus invalidate the earlier logic used to defy Jewish requests for emancipation: that the Crémieux Decree could only be applied to Jews living in the French *départements*. Jewish advocates, including members of the *Alliance Israelite Universelle*, argued that

this change would furnish the M'zabi Jewish population with a clearer path to citizenship.²⁷⁹ Thus, in the midst of the chaos of the autumn and winter of 1954, some Jews in Algeria and abroad imagined that the reorganization of the south prompted by the chaos of rebellion and the promise of oil might hasten the emancipation of the M'zabi Jewish community.

Unfortunately, as in previous decades, many in the French command either argued against or ignored petitions for M'zabi Jewish emancipation in the 1950s. The French recognized the problem of their legal inequality vis-à-vis other Algerian Jews, but fears of antagonizing an increasingly hostile Algerian Muslim population, coupled with French resistance to changing the status quo, produced an intransigent French position on Jewish citizenship in the south. As a consequence of French inaction, Jewish individuals and families from Ghardaïa continued their steady emigration from the M'zab. In the months leading to the November 1954 outbreak of war, dozens of Jews from the M'zab petitioned the government for permits and passports to leave Algeria. The French issued eleven passports to members of the community in October, the same month that a delegate from the Jewish Agency arrived in Ghardaïa to help potential immigrants with making *aliyah*. Including these eleven, France issued thirty-six passports to Jews from Ghardaïa that month.²⁸⁰ Following news of the FLN rebellion, the heads of the Jewish community in the M'zab wrote to the French demanding arms so that they might defend themselves, fearing, as the French reported, that “the nationalist unrest will win the south and the furor of the Muslims will definitively turn against them.”²⁸¹

²⁷⁹ André Chouraqui. “Algeria,” *American Jewish Year Book* (1954): 450-457. American Jewish Committee Archives, doi: http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1956_12_NorthAfrica.pdf.

²⁸⁰ Bulletin de Renseignements, October 1954. ANOM OASIS 17.

²⁸¹ Bulletin de Renseignements, November 1954. ANOM OASIS 17.

In July 1955 the district summary report noted again that the Jews feared reprisals from the local Muslim population and that the Jews in Ghardaïa, “especially the poor, dream only of leaving for Palestine.”²⁸² In September, the month when Jews typically celebrate their most important holidays, the French report mentioned Jewish fears about Muslim violence, yet noted that the “festival of ‘Yom Kippur’ took place in peace.”²⁸³ Despite this, by October the number of passports requested between January and October 1955 was already twice that requested in the entire previous year, with thirty passports issued in the month of October 1955 alone.²⁸⁴ French colonial officials bemoaned the Jewish emigration. From 1955 onward, French reports of Jewish activity in the M’zab took greater notice of how and where Jewish emigrants went. They noted the difference in where various Jewish emigrants went: the poor, to Israel, while those who “had acquired Western culture and a certain wealth,” chose France or coastal Algeria.²⁸⁵

Regional reports and memoranda from the governor’s office often linked Jewish insecurity in the M’zab with the larger instability of Jewish communities across North Africa and the Middle East. In the reports from September and October 1955, the French commander in Ghardaïa noted that the general instability and sense of fear amongst the Jewish population was to a certain extent reflective of the mounting conflict between Egypt and Israel. With some of the leadership of the FLN in Cairo, for the French the linkage between Arab nationalism in Algeria and Egypt was proven and dangerous. At times, French officials in Ghardaïa projected larger diplomatic conflicts onto the local situation, often inaccurately assuming that anti-Jewish violence from Muslims in

²⁸² Bulletin de Renseignements, July 1955. ANOM OASIS 17.

²⁸³ Bulletin de Renseignements, 26 September 1955. ANOM OASIS 17.

²⁸⁴ Bulletin de Renseignements, 28 October 1955. ANOM OASIS 17.

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

Morocco would arrive in the M'zab or recording reports of Jewish insecurity alongside notations about the relative calm in Ghardaïa, producing a confused official record of this period.

Though French reports exaggerate the conflicts between Jews and Muslims in the M'zab, the conflicts between Jews and Muslims in the Levant did contribute to local conflicts between Jewish and Muslim communities. This violence was initially much more threatening for Jewish communities in Tunisia and Morocco than in Algeria. In a 1954 report to the American Jewish Congress, André Chouraqui wrote, "At a time of heated passions, particularly in Morocco and Tunisia, there was profound peace between Arabs and Jews in Algeria." Chouraqui's summary accurately emphasized that the greater problem for Jews living in southern Algeria remained their poverty and lack of legal rights. By 1954, Jewish unemployment in the *Territoires du Sud* reached 45.4 percent, while only 13.4 percent, 18.6 percent, and 27.7 percent in the French *departements* of Algiers, Oran, and Constantine, respectively.²⁸⁶

Events in Algeria and across the region soon challenged the "peace between Arabs and Jews" in the M'zab and across Algeria. While terror did not arrive in the Sahara for several years, the threat of such attacks produced ample fear. For the Jewish population and their Muslim neighbors, the escalating conflict between Egypt and Israel over the Sinai Peninsula and Suez Canal during this same period added another element of tension to local Jewish-Muslim relations throughout the Maghreb. Violence between Jewish and Muslim Algerians in the Sahara would escalate in the coming years, exacerbated by the increasing difficulties of daily life produced by the pressures of war. Demands for higher taxes, ransoms, and "contributions" came from both the French

²⁸⁶ Chouraqui, "Algeria."

colonial administration and Algerian nationalist groups. As the war progressed, these monetary demands would be coupled with actual acts of violence against persons and property in the M'zab, mounting poverty and outbreaks of disease and drought. Caught between the vague emancipatory promises of the French, the possibility of nationalist violence, and the difficulties of life in the desert, some Jewish residents of the M'zab pushed for their emancipation while others elected migration to Israel. The brief flourishing of French investment, material and symbolic, in the Sahara temporarily slowed Jewish emigration until the realities of war and French recalcitrance persuaded many to leave.

The Algerian War and the M'zab: a local and global conflict

The nationalist insurrection of November 1, 1954, was the work of a unified movement still organizing itself. The dominant FLN faced challenges to their authority from rival domestic Algerian factions and tribes as well as international organizations of Algerian émigrés, led by Messali Hadj and others. Thus, the initial period of rebellion was characterized not only by conflict between French colonial and Algerian nationalist forces, but to an even greater extent by internal purges of Muslims deemed collaborators or rivals. Far more Muslims died at the hands of the FLN than Europeans in the first years of the war. Violence and the fear of violence were effective tools for the FLN for both terrorizing the civilian settler population as well as controlling Muslim, and Jewish, Algerians.

Where violent tactics were deemed unnecessary or counterproductive, the FLN instead pressured Algerians for financial assistance. This was the fate of the M'zabis

when in the spring of 1955 the FLN organized a boycott against M'zabi merchants throughout Algeria, accusing the M'zabis of collaborating with the French and undermining the nationalist struggle. This would affect both Ibadi and Jewish M'zabi merchants. While comparatively benign when contrasted with the violent confrontations between the FLN and other political factions, this boycott was nevertheless a painful reminder to the M'zabis (Muslim and Jewish) that they were on the fringes of the Algerian nation, reinforcing their marginalized status within both French Algeria and the nascent government structures of the nationalist movement.

In Ghardaïa, the local French commander reported that the boycott “created among the Mozabite [sic] and israélite [sic] populations...a strong anxiety and real uneasiness.” In the opinion of the French, a “campaign of false news” against the M'zabis being spread throughout the region was more worrying than the actual boycott, as it was exacerbating tensions locally and between the residents of the M'zab and the French colonial government in Algiers. The local Jewish community worried about a rumor that was spreading throughout the country that the boycott was the initiative of a group of rival Jewish merchants. However, according to the French report, most M'zabi Muslims doubted this rumor because “too many mutual interests [linked] Jewish wholesalers and mozabite [sic] retailers.” M'zabis, both Muslim and Jewish, filed a number of complaints accusing the colonial police and administration of failing to protect their commercial interests and expressed to the French surprise and incomprehension about the reasons for the boycott.²⁸⁷

The FLN, for their part, blamed French colonial subterfuge for the boycott and wrote as much in a letter to the leader of the M'zabi *djemaa* (council of elders) in Algiers,

²⁸⁷ Letter Ghardaïa to Laghouat, 22 June 1955, 1. ANOM OASIS 66.

a letter that also encouraged M'zabi merchants to join the nationalist struggle. The FLN accused the French of “pernicious propaganda,” “a maneuver of diversion of the most pure colonial style,” against their “Mozabite [sic] brothers.”²⁸⁸ How far the FLN had come from the accusations only a few decades earlier that the M'zabis were the “Jews of the Desert” and not part of the Algerian Muslim community! A member of the *djemaa* forwarded the letter to the French authorities in Ghardaïa, who observed that after their invitation to join the FLN the *djemaa* felt compelled to cooperate. The French commander noted, “it is not clear if this simple declaration of solidarity with the ‘Algerian cause’ has exempted [them] from financial participation in the fight for this same cause.”²⁸⁹

The Ibadi organization “El Houda” in Constantine (representing the community of M'zabi merchants in residence there) responded to the boycott with an open letter to the Algerian population of the city. In this letter they asserted their Islamic identity and commonality with the Muslims of Algeria:

O Algerian People! Mozabites [sic] constitute a part of the community on which you depend, a group of your own children. They practice the same religion as you, Islam, and express themselves in Arabic, which is also your language. They come from the same race as yours and are like you Algerian Arab Muslims.²⁹⁰

This letter is remarkable in so far as it did not mention Ibadism once, instead associating the M'zabi Muslims with the Islam of “Abdelhamid Benbadis, Bachir Ibrahimi, Tafiche, Bayoud and other reformist Ulemas” of Algeria, all non-Ibadi Islamic leaders of the twentieth century Islamic reform movement in Algeria.²⁹¹ The Ibadi authors also placed

²⁸⁸ FLN, “Boycottage des commercants mozabites,” 1955. ANOM OASIS 66.

²⁸⁹ Ghardaia to Laghouat, 23 June 1955. ANOM OASIS 66.

²⁹⁰ El Houda, 5 July 1955. ANOM OASIS 66.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

themselves in an unusual hierarchy of identity: first, Algerian, then Arab, and finally Muslim. This letter connected the Ibadis both with local Algerian nationalism as well as regional and global Arab nationalist and Islamic movements. However, in appealing to the pan-Islamic and pan-Arab sympathies of their boycotters, the Ibadis excluded Jewish M'zabis. This language marks a critical turning point, as the Muslim majority had long ostracized both Ibadi and Jewish M'zabi merchants, who in turn had for centuries considered themselves part of a separate community. The bonds between M'zabis of different faiths had weakened significantly by this point.

The extent to which this and other Ibadi pleas to the FLN and local Algerian Muslims were genuine is unclear. According to French reports, some M'zabis believed the boycott was nothing more than an attempt on the part of the nationalist movement to blackmail them for financial support. Incidents of kidnappings for ransom did not give M'zabis confidence in the motives of the FLN and associated nationalists. For instance, a M'zabi merchant in Biskra had his son taken hostage by a group of nationalist “terrorists” who demanded two million francs for his return. Boycotts and kidnappings were but one of the tactics employed to extract support from the local population. The M'zabis were not the sole targets of financial demands for support from the nationalists and these demands did not cease following the boycott. The French reported that the FLN continued to demand financial support from each city and town in Algeria with the warning that those who did not comply would be punished. In Ghardaïa, the local Ibadi Muslim authorities demanded the French arm them individually and that a military detachment be stationed in the town to halt any planned kidnappings or violence targeting

M'zabis. The boycott slowly petered out, but clearly, despite its end, the community in Ghardaïa felt themselves vulnerable to outside attacks.²⁹²

A minority within a minority, the Jews of the M'zab were as ever doubly vulnerable to attack. Their fear of both foreign and local violence separated members of the Jewish community in Ghardaïa from the larger Ibadi and Muslim populations. Leaders of the Jewish community appealed to the French authorities for support and protection, fearful that “certain young mozabites [sic] ... are disposed towards taking revenge on the Jews [sic] of Ghardaïa and seek to create a serious incident of which the Jews would be the victims.” Although the French administrator in Ghardaïa investigated these claims and found that “no element of the mozabites [sic] wishes to take revenge on the Israelites,” he reported that local nationalists continued to hold clandestine meetings and had a noticeable presence in the area, suggesting that the army install an additional police unit and send a military detachment to maintain the (tenuous) peace.²⁹³ For all M'zabis the possibility of nationalist violence was very real, while for Jewish M'zabis the additional threat of localized attacks scapegoating the Jewish community produced a climate much different from the “profound peace” André Chouraqui described in 1954.

Despite the growing ethnic divisions between Jews and other M'zabis, equally troubling for both the Muslim and Jewish populations was an outbreak of malaria that swept through the M'zab in 1953. In Ghardaïa, the insecurity that spread through the Jewish population following the outbreak of war in late 1954 was certainly also a consequence of the worsening quality of life throughout that and the previous year. In 1953 there were two hundred and twenty-one cases of malaria and fifty-seven deaths

²⁹² Ibid., 1.

²⁹³ Ibid., 2.

around Ghardaïa.²⁹⁴ The local commander in Laghouat appointed a “Hygiene Commission” that undertook an examination of the possible sources of the epidemic. In Ghardaïa, they found that the Jewish quarter was particularly unclean and required “sanitization by hermetic sealing of waste pits and the creation of a dedicated seepage pit for used water.”²⁹⁵ The official descriptions of the state of the Jewish quarter painted a picture of an isolated neighborhood in disarray, echoing the images taken by American photographers in the late 1940s.

At the same time that malaria and domestic Algerian conflicts made life in the M’zab ever more difficult, international events also challenged the status quo and complicated Jewish-Muslim relations there and throughout the Maghreb. The March 1955 bulletin reported to Algiers, “the Jewish communities follow attentively the evolution of the international situation, especially the events along the Egypto-Israeli [sic] border.” The French author speculated that the Jews feared local Muslim retaliation, but observed they had not as yet experienced any violence from their non-Jewish neighbors.²⁹⁶ News of the situation in Israel seems to have influenced local feelings of fear and uncertainty. Yet, for all these concerns, in Ghardaïa there were no attacks on Jews in 1955 or 1956. The April 1955 monthly report noted, “The festivities of the Jewish Passover were celebrated with the usual finery and in the greatest calm.”²⁹⁷

However, the calm described by local French reports ignored the increasingly international nature of the conflict over Algeria, and the ways that the war became a symbol around the world for larger global movements, especially decolonization and

²⁹⁴ GGA Territoires du Sud “Epidémie de Paludisme, November 1953. ANOM OASIS 63.

²⁹⁵ “Commission d’hygiène,” 28 October 1953. ANOM OASIS 63.

²⁹⁶ Bulletin de Renseignements, March 1955. ANOM OASIS 17.

²⁹⁷ Bulletin de Renseignements, April 1955. ANOM OASIS 17.

Arab nationalism. In addition to the war in Algeria, the 1956 Suez Crisis highlighted for the French how critical it was that they maintain control over Algeria; for Jews in the M'zab and throughout North Africa, the successful Israeli attack on Egypt resulted in a widespread deterioration in Jewish relations with local Muslim populations. French involvement in the failed attempt to halt Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal discredited the French and nearly destroyed French relations with the United States. French involvement in Egypt also strained an already overtaxed French military.

French support for the Israeli attack on Egypt was a continuation of the friendly relations between the two countries. France promised Israel two hundred tanks and nearly one hundred *Mystère* fighter planes in exchange for Israeli support in routing efforts by the FLN to drum up international support and actual interventions in FLN overseas operations. Israeli intelligence agents alerted the French to at least one ship from Cairo carrying arms for the FLN in Algeria, and may have provided the information that made the French hijack of Ahmed Ben Bella's plane possible.²⁹⁸ French arming of Israel and pursuit of an alliance with Britain against Nasser were both strategies put in play to bolster France in the face of what the government believed was "a question of the West against Islam, a war for civilization."²⁹⁹ French officials saw Nasser's influence spreading into Algeria, in part through the close ties between the FLN leadership and his government in Cairo and also more generally through the growth of an alternative to European power in the Mediterranean. Thus, the Algerian war became not only a

²⁹⁸ Ian Black and Benny Morris, *Israel's Secret Wars: A History of Israel's Intelligence Services* (New York: Grove Press, 1991), 173.

²⁹⁹ Irwin Wall, *France, the United States, and the Algerian War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 35.

struggle for control of Algeria, but also a conflict over the future of the larger spheres of influence across the region.

The former governor of Algeria Jacques Soustelle articulated this vision of the Algerian and French conflict in an editorial in *Foreign Affairs* in October 1956. In this piece Soustelle insisted that Arab and Muslim states were manipulating the situation in Algeria, noting especially the involvement of Cairo in Algerian affairs. He argued that French colonization had to continue, for the good of the world and even for the good of the Algerian people. Soustelle invoked several classic justifications for colonization and against self-determination for the Algerians, for instance, that “there has never been an Algerian state or an Algerian nation” and that the rebellion “did not spring from a deep feeling within the native population...its inspiration, its slogans, its directives and its arms come from abroad.” Additionally, Soustelle cited “the Communist factor” as a powerful influence on the Algerian conflict, concluding, “If the tricolor is lowered in Algeria the red flag will soon fly in Paris.”³⁰⁰ Writing in English for an international audience, Soustelle framed the Algerian conflict as one in which the self-interest and strategic interests of the entire “West” were at stake.

Within this Cold War framework, Israel was for Prime Minister Guy Mollet, Soustelle, and their contemporaries a critical ally. Of Soviet support for Nasser, Soustelle wrote:

The goal is to be able to cut the West from its Middle East oil resources and thus threaten it with economic suffocation. This is what leads Moscow to play the neo-imperialist card of the Arab League against the West and against the state of Israel, a true Western outpost in the heart of the Middle East. For Israel and Algeria to fall into pan-Arab hands would create a solid barrier isolating Europe from Arabia and the west coast of

³⁰⁰ Jacques Soustelle, “France looks at her alliances,” *Foreign Policy* 35, no. 1 (October 1956): 129.

Africa. In geopolitical terms, therefore, Israel and Algeria are two pillars of Western strategy; their fall would involve a general collapse.³⁰¹

In local terms, the official French line that linked Israel and Algeria in a global struggle against Communism and its allies placed the Jewish communities of Algeria and the M'zab in an awkward position vis-à-vis Algerian nationalists. Many Jews throughout Algeria supported the nationalist struggle against French imperialism, while many also wished to maintain French colonial rule. However, for a Jewish community with a larger rate of migration to Israel, their relationship with Israeli communities, the Israeli state, and international Zionist and Jewish relief organizations pitted the M'zabi Jewish community against Algerian nationalists and, sometimes, against their own neighbors.

“The key to the Sahara”: the key to France’s future

The Suez Crisis and the threat to French access to oil resources in the Arabian Peninsula reinforced French determination to secure their energy needs elsewhere. By 1956 the development of oil and natural gas fields in the Sahara was well underway. Early that year, drilling at Hassi Messaoud yielded high quality oil, four hundred miles south of Algiers and less than two hundred miles east of Ghardaïa. Though the oil found in the desert remained tremendously expensive to access and develop, the French public and government celebrated this new potential for economic riches in the desert.³⁰² The oil discovery and development in the northern Sahara was also an economic boon to the local population. Tradesmen, merchants, and local suppliers worked to capitalize on the new clientele of oil, natural gas, and construction companies and workers. The Jewish

³⁰¹ Ibid., 126.

³⁰² Maurice Kamen-Kaye, “Petroleum Development in Algeria,” *Geographical Review* 48, no. 4 (October 1958): 468.

community of Ghardaïa profited from this new industry, especially Jewish merchants who established several general stores for the workers in and around the Hassi Messaoud fields and the smaller natural gas facility near Ghardaïa, including the one depicted below. The discovery and development of oil and other energy resources in the Sahara seemed to slow the instability of the war as the French invested heavily in maintaining and extending their control in the desert (alongside many international corporations).



Figure 5.1 The Sebban family depot at Hassi Messaoud, “Rebbi Amrane,” bearing the name of its proprietor, who had been a rabbi in Aflou before returning to the M’zab. Amrane Sebban owned two similar stores in Ghardaïa and a number of commercial trucks. *Vayikah Amran*, 133.

The French had been anticipating or hoping that oil would be found in the Sahara at least since the *Territoires du Sud* were declared a *département* in September 1947.

The discovery of valuable natural resources in the desert gave hope that the Sahara might provide the mechanism for France's return to her prewar glory. Between July 1951 and November 1952, over seventy-five articles about the importance of the Sahara appeared in the French press in newspapers and journals including *Le Figaro*, *Le Monde*, *Combat*, and *Paris-Press*. The general consensus in the public sphere, across the political spectrum, was that the Sahara was an integral part of French territory, possibly containing unlimited and unexploited riches, and should be integrated into the French economic and political system to a greater degree. Describing the Sahara as an "El Dorado," a "land of adventure," a "promised land," and "Alaska with high temperatures," the diverse authors of these articles evoked a kind of idyllic frontier land ripe for development, and a land that could in turn redeem and rebuild a France still struggling to recover after 1945.³⁰³

Though French accounts of Saharan development were overwhelmingly optimistic, the vast majority of Algerians opposed the consolidation of French rule in the Sahara and extension of French control beyond Algerian borders. The French took little heed of Algerian protests and by 1955 it was obvious that France intended to consolidate French control into the Sahara. It was within this context that the president of the Ibadi *djemaa* in Algiers, Brahim Hadjoute, expressed to governor Jacques Soustelle his and his community's opposition towards attaching the M'zab to the administrative districts of the north. He instead asked that the M'zab be kept part of the eventual Saharan administrative district, "whatever that may be." In his report to Paris, Soustelle emphasized the "importance, notably on the economic plan, of this community that represents the populations of the M'zab in Algiers."³⁰⁴

³⁰³ "Le problème du Sahara dans la presse française de Juillet 1951 à Novembre 1952." ANOM 81F/52.

³⁰⁴ GGA to Paris, 5 August 1955. ANOM 81F/52.

In 1955, with the attention of the metropolitan press and public focused on the Sahara, the governments in Paris and Algiers recommenced a series of investigations into the populations of the Sahara and particularly of the M'zab, whose residents might be cultivated as future allies. As in the earlier deliberations about the emancipation of M'zabi Jews in the 1940s, the Vice President of the Council of State, René Cassin, was again deeply involved in assessing the situation in the M'zab. Alongside André Chouraqui and other delegates of the AIU in Algeria, Cassin reinserted the debate about emancipating M'zabi Jews into the debates surrounding the integration of the Sahara. Soustelle appears to have been particularly friendly with Cassin and Chouraqui. Perhaps persuaded by conversations held during their visits to both Algiers and the M'zab, he noted in a memorandum to Paris that the emigration of Jews from Ghardaïa was of serious concern because it could “be a cause of the depopulation of the M'zab.”³⁰⁵ French authorities appeared to see both Ibadi and Jewish M'zabis as valuable allies.

Cassin had, in fact, maintained a steady amount of pressure on successive governors before Soustelle to address the legal inequality of the M'zabi Jewish community. However, following a 1952 proposal to the Assembly of the French Union, there had been no communication about addressing the question of Jewish emancipation in the M'zab.³⁰⁶ It was only in summer 1954 that the Ministry of the Interior reopened this question, writing to governor Roger Léonard in Algiers to solicit his opinion. Léonard wrote that his opinion had not changed in the past two years, that he maintained his support for “the complete integration of the Jews of southern Algeria in the French community, with the inscription of those interested on the electoral lists of the first

³⁰⁵ GGA to Paris, 26 April 1955. ANOM 81F/52.

³⁰⁶ In 1946 the Fourth Republic replaced the old French Empire (*Empire Française*) with the French Union (*Union Française*), until the Fifth Republic replaced it with the French Community in 1958.

college.” Léonard attached the caveat that if Paris was worried about taking such a “radical” step, it should at least establish a civil status for the Jewish community in the south such as was then being extended to the Muslim populations of the extreme south, as far as El-Golea, three hundred kilometers south of Ghardaïa.³⁰⁷ No action from the Ministry followed. Soustelle succeeded Léonard in January 1955 and his administration immediately reopened the matter. There followed a series of reports and demands between Algiers and the Ministry of the Interior in Paris about the future of the Jewish communities in the M’zab. Soustelle’s administration, as expressed by multiple officials, supported Chouraqui and Cassin’s agenda to extend to the Jewish community full integration into the French community, with the abandonment of their personal status, and inclusion in the primary electoral college.³⁰⁸

Chouraqui and Cassin maintained steady pressure on Soustelle and the Metropolitan government to make the M’zabi Jewish issue a priority in their new policies towards the Sahara. In a six-page note to the Ministry of the Interior and the governor’s office in Algiers, Chouraqui emphasized that the status of the Jews of the M’zab was the result of their 1882 classification as “indigenous Muslims” despite their being Jewish. Despite this obvious error, Chouraqui wrote, “a bill aimed at regularizing the legal situation of the Jews of the M’zab is still sleeping in the files and has achieved nothing positive....It goes without saying that serious inconveniences result from this fact.” Chouraqui asserted that the French Ministry of the Interior was to blame, for despite the “unanimous desire” of all M’zabi Jews for an end to the personal status, since 1951 both he and René Cassin had been met with refusals by French officials who now asserted that

³⁰⁷ GGA to Ministry of the Interior, 1 April 1954. ANOM 81F/1212.

³⁰⁸ GGA (Cuttoli) to Ministry of the Interior, 4 February 1955. ANOM 81F/1212.

not until the territories of the south were fully incorporated into Algeria could this question be addressed. In Chouraqui's estimation, failure to address the M'zabi Jewish question had only hurt the French because their steady emigration "impoverished the south where the Jews played an important commercial role, while at the same time weakening the French presence which [the Jews in Ghardaïa] naturally support."³⁰⁹ In his assertion that the Jews of Ghardaïa would "naturally support" French colonization Chouraqui echoed mid-nineteenth century assertions that the emancipation of Algerian Jews would supply the French with allies in North Africa. However, this argument that had been persuasive a century earlier now failed to convince French officials in Paris.

Three weeks later the legislative oversight office in Algeria issued a critique and response to Chouraqui's claims, but only internally to various officials in Paris. The author, M. Passeron, dismissed Chouraqui's claim that the Crémieux decree should have been extended to the Jews living in the territories of the south once those areas were declared *départements* in September 1947. Passeron reiterated the old argument that the 1882 annexation of the M'zab meant that the 1870 Crémieux Decree could not be applied retroactively and also stressed that the current government "should respect" the jurisprudence of previous administrations. The only solution, to his mind, would be to construct and propose to the French National Assembly a new law pertaining to the legal status of M'zabi Jews.³¹⁰

The director of the southern territories drew up just such a possible bill and wired it to the legislative oversight office of the governor's office on July 15, 1955. The concise bill contained six articles and promised the emancipation of all those classified as

³⁰⁹ Chouraqui, "Note sur la condition des Israélites du M'zab," 26 May 1955. ANOM 81F/1212.

³¹⁰ "Note pour M. le Directeur des Cabinets civil et Militaire, M. le Secrétaire Général du Gouvernement," 17 June 1955. ANOM 81F/1212.

Français israélites (Jews classified under the personal status) in Algeria. However, the law included a proviso that those individuals wishing to maintain their personal status would be able to do so after declaring their intention to the French courts. Soustelle noted that it would be logical to extend to the Jews who opted to maintain their personal status the same laws that had been amended to reform the legal status of Muslim Algerians. He also emphasized that Paris should undertake this measure “with urgency.”³¹¹

Soustelle was the last *Gouverneur Général* in Algeria and his replacement, *Résident Général* Catroux, indicated his interest in pursuing the amelioration of Jewish legal status in the south via a number of communiqués to Paris after his appointment in early 1956. However, Parisian officials concluded their investigations into amending the legal status of Jews in the M’zab around this time. While Catroux favorably summarized Soustelle’s positions and himself advocated addressing the question of M’zabi Jewish status, a handwritten inscription from the recipient at the Ministry of the Interior reads “The Minister does not wish to resume this inquiry for the moment.”³¹² During this whole convoluted process, the wishes of the M’zabi Jews themselves never appear in official documents, only the demands of representatives talking about M’zabi Jews or French debates about jurisdiction in legalese.

Despite the unwillingness of officials in Paris to deal directly with the question of Jewish emancipation in the M’zab, they nevertheless came to address some of the concerns of the community while working towards cultivating the residents of the M’zab as allies in the development of natural gas and oil in the northern Sahara. In April 1956,

³¹¹ GGA to Ministry of the Interior, 23 July 1955. ANOM 81F/1212.

³¹² “Note pour M. le Ministre,” 30 April 1956. ANOM 81F/1212.

the same month that the Interior Ministry suspended their investigation into the situation of the Jews in the M'zab, the French government solicited proposals from a wide range of government officials as to the future reclassification of the Sahara. With missions from the Algerian Assembly already investigating the work of Shell and other international corporations in resource extraction, there was tremendous momentum to set up a system that would expedite French development of the Sahara. While some advocated that the Sahara be made its own autonomous region—as the M'zabi *djemaa* and other Algerians wished—the majority of proposals argued that the interests of the French in the region would be better served by integrating the southern territories into the administrative districts of the northern *départements* while simultaneously affiliating the Algerian Sahara with a larger regional economic zone.

The Director of the *Territoires du Sud*, Casset, wrote in April 1956, “forming the area of the Sahara in a *département* directly attached to the metropole, proclaiming it part of the nation, should...separate the Sahara from the neighboring areas, protect it from Islamic propaganda and affirm its definitively French character.”³¹³ Hence, a formal joining of the Algerian Sahara with the Algerian *départements* would only strengthen French interests there. Again, Casset like so many of his peers presented the conflict over Algeria and the Sahara as one between Islam and the West. Many in the Algerian and Parisian governments invoked the specter of neighboring Islamic states threatening the European colonization along the coast. At a time when the growing conflict between French and Algerians had begun to suggest to many in the metropole that the colony was unsustainable, French officials stressed that the economic riches of the entire Saharan region would fall from French hands if they lost Algeria. As Casset wrote, “wisdom

³¹³ “Note: La reorganization des Territoires du Sud,” 17 April 1956. ANOM FM 81F/52.

orders...that we must convince Parliament and metropolitan public opinion that France will only keep the Sahara if it retains Algeria.”³¹⁴

Despite all the promised wealth that the Sahara might yield, until the exploitation of its mineral, oil, and natural gas resources became more accessible and inexpensive, the administration in Algiers recommended installing a limited administration in the south to provide direction and oversight more locally. In hierarchical terms, this would mean the governor of Algeria would remain the prefect of the new *département* as he had been for the previous territories, to avoid the fees associated with establishing a new prefecture and paying its employees. There would still be under-prefectures in Laghouat and, further south, at Ain-Sefra. Perhaps most critically, the new *Département des Oasis* would be represented at the Algerian Assembly and the Assembly of the French Union. Lastly, a new judicial system would gradually be implemented; however, only at an undeclared future date and until that point local officers and administrators would continue to arbitrate local disputes.³¹⁵

As part of their inquiry into the best means of governing the Sahara, a number of researchers and officials sent detailed reports on the inhabitants of the areas of the new *département*. One of these reports yields an account of how certain French officials viewed the Jewish community in the M^zab at this time.

They have not yet been able to escape the shabby condition that has been theirs for centuries. The Jewish quarter of Ghardaïa appears very dated: tall houses of sometimes two stories, but whose outward appearance does not redeem the interior simplicity; dark alleys where from time to time nauseating puddles stagnate. ... Many women and men have kept their biblical costumes—those women dressed in long shimmering dresses, fat underneath the filthy cloth, with matted hair, coarse brass or silver jewelry around their neck, raising wan children in an insipid atmosphere that the

³¹⁴ Ibid.

³¹⁵ “Projet de Loi: Portant Creation d’un département du Sahara,” April 1956. ANOM 81F/52.

relentless summer heat makes even more unbearable. The men, for their part, are hardly more evolved. They experience the greatest difficulties in finding profitable occupations locally; nevertheless some of them achieve affluence. . . . The French school and the inherent qualities of the Jewish race should enable the Jewish population of Ghardaïa to catch up. The change has begun, but it is usually outside the M'zab that the Jews today look for a better future. Several hundred of them left the M'zab for the Promised Land, once the State of Israel was created. A number are already engaged in business in the centers of the South.³¹⁶

This anonymous description of the Jewish quarter and community in Ghardaïa hewed very close to the late nineteenth and early twentieth descriptions by French travelers and journalists, presenting the Jews of the M'zab as a static community, “biblical” in appearance, lacking hygiene, and rife with sickness. The author contradicts himself in his observations of economic life in the M'zab, citing in the same sentence the difficulty finding employment and the few men who “achieve affluence.” This account is a glimpse of the poverty that still characterized much of the Jewish community; however, it is to a greater extent revealing of the ways that French officials still perceived these Jews and indicative of the thinking that influenced legislators to set aside the question of Jewish equality in the south during this period.

Resident Minister Robert Lacoste issued a directive in April 1957 that called Algeria “the key to the Sahara” and argued that with the oil in Hassi Messaoud France might “retake quite naturally her due place in Europe and in the world.”³¹⁷ Such were the hopes of many in the French government at this time, when the war with the FLN and its army, the ALN, was escalating and international support for French control in Algeria waning. The new statute of 1957 ended the “special regime” of the *Territoires du Sud*, combined the budgets of the north and south into one Algerian budget, and provided

³¹⁶ “L'évolution des populations du M'zab,” *BSI* 20 (22 May 1956). ANOM 81F/1212.

³¹⁷ Tony Smith, “The French Economic Stake in Colonial Algeria,” *French Historical Studies* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1975): 187.

representation for the *Département des Oasis* in the Algerian Assembly.³¹⁸ While these legislative changes gave greater agency to the residents of the south, the utopian ideal of the Sahara as rehabilitator of French colonial prowess and economic power never came to fruition. The domestic and international political crises of the war followed swiftly on the heels of the new Saharan reclassification, stunting development and further threatening the stability of the M'zab.

Conclusion: anti-Jewish violence and Jewish emigration

On August 14, 1957, twenty-four Jewish men, women, and children left the port of Algiers aboard the ship *Sidi Mabrouk* en route to Marseille. They included members of the Sellam, Attia, Zenou, and Agou families, women, men, wives, husbands, and children. French officials in Algeria did not mark their passage from Algeria with any significant notice and there is no record of their individual motivations for leaving. However, life for all Jews in the M'zab became a bit more insecure and certainly more difficult in 1957 when the FLN targeted Jewish goods and merchants in Ghardaïa, Constantine, Aflou, and elsewhere in a new boycott.³¹⁹ Jews were increasingly cast by the FLN as traitors to the nationalist cause, supporters of French colonialism rather than the future Algerian nation. Anger at Algerian Jews manifested itself in a number of violent episodes in that same year: a grenade attack in May on Jewish neighborhoods wounded several Jews and killed one woman in Constantine, while attacks damaged dozens of Jewish homes and shops in Oran in July.³²⁰

³¹⁸ Note: "Réorganisation des Territoires du Sud," 17 April 1956. ANOM 81F/52.

³¹⁹ CZA Jerusalem C3/1414-178.

³²⁰ CZA Jerusalem C3/1414 115, 116, 241.

By October of that year, if not earlier, organized and casual physical attacks by Muslims against Jews began in Ghardaïa. On October 10, militia forces associated with the FLN executed several non-fatal attacks against the Jewish population and property in the M'zab. The local police force and a nearby army unit responded quickly and pushed the FLN forces out of the area in only a few days, according to French reports. In the wake of these events, the local Jewish population expressed to the French “regret for times passed.” A French report noted that some in the community “[believed] they were more tranquil and at ease when they were considered as Jewish mozabites [sic] or mozabite [sic] Jews.”³²¹ That they moved from a sense of inclusion in or tolerance by the M'zabi Ibadi community who brought the first Jewish metalworkers to Ghardaïa in the fourteenth century to alienation and fear of bodily harm, within a matter of decades, speaks volumes of the rapid changes in their quotidian experience and the impact of outside ideologies and conflicts on the local populations.

Attacks on Jews in the northern Sahara continued through 1958. Nearby Laghouat was also home to a significant number of Jewish merchants originally from the M'zab who established households and shops there. One such merchant, Abraham Sebban, was the victim of an improvised bomb thrown at the door of his house on March 31, 1958. Sebban, like his relatives at Hassi Messaoud and in Ghardaïa, had established a relatively lucrative general store in Laghouat. The photographs below, taken from French archives, depict first the doorway of his shop and home, followed by a corridor leading off the entrance. Though taken in black-and-white from the police inquiry, the force of the explosive device used is apparent from the photographs. The French report named no specific perpetrators and attributed the attack to a “rebel exaction,” implying

³²¹ “Conséquence de l'action terroriste au M'zab,” 24 October 1957. ANOM OAIS 102.

FLN involvement.³²² Though no fatalities resulted from this incident, the psychological and economic damage to the Jewish community was surely felt acutely throughout the south.



Figure 5.2 “View of the whole”³²³

³²² Sebban Attack, *Livret Photographique*, 1958, 1. ANOM OASIS 53.

³²³ *Ibid.*



Figure 5.3 “View of the Hallway”³²⁴

The turbulence in Laghouat and Ghardaïa was an extension of the chaos and extreme violence of the larger colonial conflict over Algeria. Less than two months after the attack in Laghouat, on May 13, 1958, a military coup overthrew the government in Algiers. With fears that the instability in Algeria might similarly upset the government in Paris, General Charles De Gaulle emerged from retirement on May 15 and offered his services to the Republic. President René Coty offered De Gaulle the premiership for a trial six-month period, which the National Assembly overwhelmingly approved. De Gaulle tasked legal scholar Michel Debré with the writing of a new constitution for the Fifth Republic, one that the National Assembly ratified on September 28, 1958, establishing a much stronger presidency than in the Fourth Republic. In December elections, De Gaulle won by a landslide in both France and in Algeria.

De Gaulle championed the idea of Algerian self-determination, but also expressed hope that Algeria could remain “associated” with France, as a province or similar

³²⁴ Ibid., 2.

distinction. In September 1958, De Gaulle and his interim government extended citizenship to Muslims in Algeria, elevating their voting rights to the primary electoral college. De Gaulle also implemented the Constantine Plan, aimed at offering Muslim Algerians greater access to education, social services, and labor opportunities, likely in an attempt to weaken the FLN and provide late reforms to appease the local population.

In addition to these reforms to Muslim political status, Debré (a grandson of an Alsatian rabbi) and his co-authors Robert Lecourt and Edmond Michelet drafted legislation to amend the problematic legal status of the Jewish population of the south. This would be the first official draft of legislation to formally emancipate the Jewish community of the M'zab, though its ratification would require several more years of debate and revision. Prior to the introduction of a final bill in the National Assembly in 1960, Jewish advocates from New York, Tel Aviv, Paris, Algiers, and Ghardaïa actively lobbied the new government for Jewish emancipation in the M'zab. In the United States, leaders of the American Jewish Congress met with Vice President Nixon on September 11, 1957, to push the French to amend the status of the Jews of the M'zab, and Nixon gave them a sympathetic audience.³²⁵ This and similar lobbying efforts were successful in bringing international pressure to bear on French officials in Paris and London. However, the emancipation of the Jews of Ghardaïa would arrive too late for most, who would eventually choose migration to Israel over repatriation to France by June 1962.

³²⁵ “Les Leaders de l’AJC confèrent avec le vice-president Nixon,” *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (11 September 1957). AAIU AM Presidence 024d.

Chapter 6:

“The Milk of Liberty” or the Land of Milk and Honey: Citizenship, Emigration, and Absorption, 1958-1962

The French colonial administration in Algeria ultimately yielded to M’zabi petitions and international pressure, replacing the Jewish personal status in the south with the civil status in late 1961. However, unlike the dramatic emancipation of Algerian Jews by the 1870 Crémieux Decree, this legislation simply “regularized” M’zabi Jewish status, without much fanfare or opposition. By this point, the toll of the war in Algeria and the growing forces of decolonization and metropolitan opposition to colonialism made French withdrawal from Algeria practically a *fait accompli*. The belated inclusion of M’zabi Jews in the French polity was far from revolutionary and distant from the heated debates about Jewish emancipation that influenced earlier colonial officials not to extend them citizenship. Yet, there were disputes about M’zabi Jewish citizenship and some French officials dredged up old tropes about Jewish dual loyalty and “regeneration.” In the midst of official legislative discussions and doubts, M’zabi Jews asserted their desire for citizenship and harnessed the lobbying powers of international Jewish organizations as well as French and Algerian Jewish support to win their citizenship.

The slow progress towards Jewish citizenship in the M'zab rapidly accelerated after 1955. After the start of the Algerian War, official discussions about M'zabi Jewish legal status were often mired in bureaucratic minutia, as was the case with one of the first proposed legislative solutions to what was dubbed "The M'zabi Question" in 1956. One suggestion, a repetition of earlier proposals, was simply to apply the earlier laws governing Muslim civil status to the Jewish population. In a note to the Minister of the Interior on February 4, 1956, then Minister of Justice François Mitterrand noted that the application of the laws of 1882 and 1883 to the Jewish population in the M'zab "appeared inopportune," because these laws would submit Jews to the authority of local Muslim judges and mandate certain documents be written in Arabic, "provisions that seem difficult to apply to the Jews." Mitterrand also took exception to the provisions allowing Jews who wished to remain under the personal status.³²⁶ The issue of allowing Jews to elect to remain under the personal status would be one of the most contentious aspects of legislation to regularize the Jewish status in the M'zab and prompt allegations of Jewish dual loyalty reminiscent of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Mitterrand was ignorant of the particularities of the Jews in the M'zab, but he did acknowledge that the civil statuses of both Muslims and Jews were in flux and that solutions presented to this "problem" in the 1920s and 1930s were no longer viable options in the context of the Algerian War. Perhaps most critically, Mitterrand's opposition to Jews maintaining access to their personal status presaged the impending debates about Jewish particularity and individual rights that would accompany the final passage of civil status legislation in 1961. After the ratification of the new constitution and creation of the Fifth Republic in 1958, the Ministry of Algerian Affairs submitted

³²⁶Mitterrand to Interior Ministry, 4 February 1956. ANOM 81F/1227.

another bill to regularize the status of Jews in the south in the summer of 1959. As in 1956, officials in the Prime Minister's office worried whether Jewish individuals should be allowed to maintain their personal status in matters of marriage and divorce. Mitterrand's comments represent a consistent way of thinking about Jews in France, and a continued French suspicion of Jews wishing to retain their particular traditions and legal rights under the personal status, from the debates surrounding emancipation in 1789 to that moment in Algeria.

Simultaneous legislative reforms aimed at reforming Muslim personal and civil affairs informed French proposals seeking a solution to the problem of M'zabi Jewish status. Though some opposed this generalist approach, other French officials suggested that the reforms of Muslim personal affairs be extended to the Jews in the south. An ordinance passed in February 1959 mandated that marriages carried out privately in Muslim courts be documented before civil authorities and recorded in the civil register. The State Secretary from the Prime Minister's office suggested that the same requirement be applied to the Jewish population and that the old rules regulating Jewish personal status in the south be amended quickly in a "modern and liberal" way.³²⁷

The "modern" and "liberal" way to amend the problem of Jewish legal standing in the M'zab was to shift Jewish reliance on rabbinical courts to their secular French counterparts and place M'zabi rabbis into the centralized hierarchy of the consistory. As in earlier debates in Napoleonic France and Third Republic Algeria, loyalty to Jewish traditions and the use of Jewish legal processes were incompatible with citizenship. Todd Shepard writes that the Algerian war and the legislation drafted on M'zabi Jewish status confronted France with "The Jewish Question" yet again, and French officials explored

³²⁷ State Secretary, PM to Algerian Affairs, Paris, 2 October 1959. ANOM 81F/1227.

and tried to resolve the old question of whether or not Jews belonged to the category of “Europeans of Algeria.”³²⁸ Algerian Jews themselves insisted on their Frenchness and rejected the claims of Algerian nationalists that they were “Jewish Algerians.” René Cassin argued publicly that there could only be two groups identified in Algeria: the French and Muslims. These two groups were exclusive of one another, with Jews firmly ensconced in the former.³²⁹ French Jewish advocates and French officials flattened the distinctions between different groups collectively seen as “Muslim,” with one exception: M’zabi Jews who had been part of the “indigène” population for decades were now separated from that population and integrated into their “true” place as Jews, that is to say, as French people.

French officials made clear at negotiations with Algerian nationalists that Jews would be part of the French community, going so far as to erase references to the Jewish minority in documents. The emphasis on constructing rigid boundaries between French and Muslim that determined future nationality during talks about Algerian independence left little room for flexibility. Thus, Algerian Muslims who supported France and hoped for French citizenship and eventual immigration to France had these hopes destroyed when their Muslim identity was seen as incompatible with French nationality. By the same logic, M’zabi Jews long classified as “indigènes” had to now be included into the French people, quickly, and in a way that would emphasize their Frenchness and not their accession to citizenship via their Jewishness.

However, in this set of beliefs about Jewish identity and about the possible space available to Jews in the French nation-state, French officials and French Jewish advocates

³²⁸ Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 167.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 171.

lost sight of the actual differences of the M'zabi Jewish community and the ways that many M'zabi Jewish individuals strongly self-identified as members of a local or global Jewish community while simultaneously petitioning for French citizenship. Some officials on the ground in the Sahara argued loudly for a new solution that would meet the unique needs of this Jewish community. Certain French officials with greater personal experience and knowledge of the M'zab argued, for instance, that the responsibilities of rabbis were quite different than those of Muslim judges, or even imams, as they spanned both legal and religious duties. The special reporter on the M'zabi legislation to the National Assembly, M. Pigeot, argued in May 1961, "the Jewish community is not organized like the Muslim community...what role does a Cadi play in the Jewish community?" Pigeot went on to note that French judges sent to adjudicate Jewish disputes would be "very embarrassed" by their lack of familiarity with Jewish practices in the south.³³⁰

French officials stationed in Ghardaïa were most familiar with the community, especially sub-prefect Charles Kleinknecht and commissioner Jean Moriaz. These two men played important roles in the last years of Jewish life in Ghardaïa, often advocating for Jewish demands to their superiors, and were instrumental in the final evacuation of the Jewish community from the M'zab in an organized airlift in June 1962. While ministers in Paris and colonial politicians in Algiers spoke abstractly about the Jewish community in the M'zab, these two men lived with them and often attended important religious events as honored guests of the community. In his memoirs, Kleinknecht wrote, "on 17 June 1962, I left the M'zab for good...I witnessed the final act in the dispersion of a fascinating community, that of the Jews of the M'zab...who were amongst all the

³³⁰ Pigeot, report 1180, Assemblée Nationale, 12 May 1961. ANOM 81F/1227.

Jewish communities of North Africa the most unique, because, across the centuries, they were able, in their isolation, to maintain their social and religious traditions.”³³¹

What Kleinknecht termed “the final act in the dispersion” of the M’zabi Jewish community marked the departure of less than half of the total population of Jewish individuals originally from the M’zab. A census of Jewish individuals born in the M’zab in September 1961 found that, of 2437 individuals, 1034 lived in Israel while only 978 remained in the M’zab. An additional 164 had moved to France, while 261 lived elsewhere in Algeria.³³² The extension of full citizenship to the M’zabi Jews in this period was thus a belated solution that failed to meet the needs of the hundreds of Jews who had already left French territory. For many M’zabi Jewish immigrants in France, the state and local Jewish institutions also failed to adequately support the absorption needs of the community. Meanwhile, in Israel a much more extensive absorption network was better able to meet the needs of Jewish immigrants from Ghardaïa, though Jews from North Africa met with a number of difficulties. The M’zabi Jewish migration continued well after 1962, when individuals and families moved between Israel and France in response to economic and social difficulties.

M’zabi Jewish citizenship and the international Jewish community

French Jewish leaders and organizations sometimes failed to see or willfully ignored the preference of M’zabi Jews to immigrate to Israel instead of France. Even before their actual departure from Ghardaïa, French Jewish leaders demonstrated a number of misperceptions about the actual wishes of the Jewish community in the M’zab.

³³¹ Kleinknecht. *Les juifs du M’zab*.

³³² Ibid.

This was in part the function of a lack of communication with members of the community, with whom French Jewish organizations had failed to cultivate relationships. This discrepancy between reality and expectation also resulted from over a century of the particular ideologies surrounding Jewish integration and assimilation in France, of which the AIU was an ardent advocate. At this time, the leaders of the AIU were deeply integrated into the French government and their approaches to the problem of M'zabi Jewish legal status evidence their attempts to reconcile official duties with their advocacy for the AIU.

President of the AIU René Cassin, who was concurrently president of the Council of State, visited the Sahara in early 1958 as part of a trip organized by the *Compagnie de Recherches et d'Exploitation de Pétrole au Sahara*. During this five-day tour, Cassin and his colleagues visited Algiers, Hassi Mesaoud, El Goléa, Edjeleh, and spent one night in Ghardaïa. Cassin arrived in Ghardaïa at six o'clock on the evening of Friday, February 28, and left at ten o'clock the following morning. There is no evidence, in French archives or those of the AIU, that he made further visits to the M'zab. Surprisingly, after lobbying on behalf of the Jewish community in Ghardaïa since his appointment as AIU president in 1943, Cassin organized no meeting with the local Jewish community. The lack of direct communication between the AIU and community in Ghardaïa suggests that Cassin and his colleagues were perhaps more concerned with general questions of Jewish treatment in Algeria and, more critically, with the future of French control and power in Algeria and in the M'zab than with the actual wishes of the local Jewish community.

Cassin missed this opportunity to hear firsthand the demands of the community; however, he may well have discussed with the local French command their opinions on

the question of Jewish legal status in the M'zab. Regardless of whether any such conversation took place, French officials in Paris and often in Algiers evidenced great ignorance about the wishes of the Jewish community in Ghardaïa for civil status. In a letter on February 6, 1959, Jacques Soustelle, delegated by the Prime Minister as Minister of the Sahara, wrote to the Prime Minister that before regularizing the civil status of the M'zabi Jews, the Prefect of the Oasis should inquire if the community was “still demonstrating the same willingness to receive the civil status.”³³³ During Soustelle's own tenure as Governor of Algeria, he was well aware of Jewish appeals for civil status in the M'zab, yet urged caution about granting that request a few years later.

In response to these doubts, in May 1960 M'zabi Jews drafted a lengthy plea for civil status that yields one of the richest glimpses into the aspirations of the community and their direct interactions with the governor in Algiers as well as the government in Paris. The *Association culturelle israélite de Ghardaïa* (Jewish association of Ghardaïa) wrote to the Minister of the Sahara of their desire for full inclusion in the French nation, “The Jewish community of the M'zab is today unanimous in demanding the total suppression of the personal status, driven by the conscious will to gain full French citizenship.”³³⁴ The M'zabi authors stressed, “It is not lost on the Jewish community that obligatory military service could be imposed as a consequence of the total *francization*...and [we] accept in advance the task of bearing arms under the French flag.”³³⁵ René Cassin, President of the AIU, received a copy of this letter from the community, to whom they further wrote that they wished to see an article that preserved the privilege of M'zabi Jews to refuse civil status and maintain the Jewish personal status

³³³ Soustelle to PM, 6 February 1959. ANOM 81F/1227.

³³⁴ Letter, Ghardaïa, 30 May 1960, 2. AAIU AM Presidence 028a.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

removed from the current legislative proposal. The *Association* wrote to Cassin, “this provision is counter to the unanimous wish of our community today, to acquire full *francization*.”³³⁶

What exactly the Jewish community in Ghardaïa believed *francization* would entail is never detailed in their correspondence with French officials or AIU representatives. It is surprising that they chose this term instead of the Crémieux-era “regeneration,” or the commonly used “assimilation,” or “integration.” The idea of francization or gallicization had been a concern for Jews in France during the initial emancipation of the Jews in the revolutionary period. Many feared that emancipation and gallicization would inevitably mean “dejudaization” as well.³³⁷ The Jewish community in Ghardaïa was at this time still traditional in their religious practices and it is unlikely that they intended to abandon their Jewish identity to achieve any kind of “francization.”

Memoirs by sub-prefect Kleinknecht, commissioner Moriaz, and Jewish individuals from Ghardaïa attest to the extent to which the community was deeply invested in maintaining their Jewish identities. Individuals maintained the same types of names used by their ancestors, names more often associated with Muslims, like Aisha or Zaineb. Few in the community had officially registered patronyms, surprising as the French demanded all persons classified as “Muslims” in Algeria assume last names by the late 1950s.³³⁸ In official community documents, Jewish months, festivals, and life cycle events marked the year’s passage. Western dress was relatively new to the men and

³³⁶ Association Cultuelle Israélite de Ghardaïa to René Cassin, 7 December 1960. AAIU AM Presidence 028a.

³³⁷ The Abbé Grégoire, a champion of Jewish emancipation admitted that this was one of his objectives. For more on this theme in French Jewish history, see Birnbaum and Katznelson, eds. *Paths of Emancipation*; Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*; Schwarzfuchs, *Napoleon, the Jews, And the Sanhedrin*.

³³⁸ Kleinknecht, *Les Juifs du Mزاب*.

especially to the women. One member of the Sebban family remembered wearing a western shirt and pants for the first time on a pilgrimage to Israel in 1955.³³⁹

Yet, despite these clear markers of difference and their dedication to maintaining a Jewish way of life, leaders of the community in 1960 professed their willingness to adapt their Jewish way of life in order to win the French civil status. From their insistence on erasing the Jewish personal status, it might be inferred that members of the community now agreed with earlier generations of French colonial officials that certain Jewish practices were incompatible with full French citizenship. However, it seems more likely that members of the community still in the M'zab realized the future advantage French civil status would win them in the increasingly likely scenario of Algerian independence and French withdrawal.

Some in the international community believed that the community wished for citizenship simply because it was the surest way to win French protection from Algerian nationalists. Such was the assertion of Max Lapidos, whom the AJDC sent on a fact-finding mission to Ghardaïa in early 1961. Lapidos wrote in his report to New York headquarters:

This picturesque group, living in rather primitive fashion, close to and on friendly terms with their Arab neighbors in the oases of the Sahara, refused at one time to accept French citizenship because they preferred to continue to live in their own inimitable way and to adhere to the Mosaic Law, which permitted them to have more than one wife. What was sauce for their neighbors was sauce for them. Therefore, such Jews were officially considered as “natives.” However, time marched on and things changed with western influence taking its toll and finally they no longer practice the privilege of polygamy.

Lapidos saw “native” behavior typified in polygamy, echoing earlier French sentiments that Jewish participation in this practice was sufficient evidence of

³³⁹ *Sebban, Vayikah Amram*, 180.

their inassimilability and distance from Western culture and civilization. Lapidos stopped short of the kinds of judgments typical of French observers who had linked Muslim and Jewish polygamy to moral degeneracy since the early nineteenth century, in the M'zab and elsewhere.³⁴⁰

Lapidos described the confusing legal standing of the M'zabi Jewish community in the postwar period and noted the idiosyncratic definition of who could and could not be considered "European" in French Algeria.

Now their status is one of confusion. Although all Algerians are now considered as French, so they are also French, but are not included in the category of "Europeans" as are the other Jewish inhabitants of the country. Due to present conditions, this group, located and isolated in what is known as the "Mezab" territory in the deep south, addressed a petition to the French Government requesting that they now be considered French citizens in exactly the same manner as all other Algerian Jews, which means as "Europeans." Thus, if their new status is officially recognized, they will become eligible for whatever measures may be taken to protect the European population generally.³⁴¹

Lapidos and other American Jews recognized the strategic value of French civil status for the M'zabi Jews, as did many in Israel. The AJDC maintained support for Jewish emigration from North Africa during this period, and the network established to assist the larger emigrations from Morocco and Tunisia after independence in 1956 and 1954 also facilitated the emigration from Algeria.

French and Algerian Jews recognized that the fate of this community might have serious repercussions for the broader relationship between France and Jewish communities within her borders. French Jews were deeply invested in the deliberations over granting civil status to Jews from the M'zab because at issue was the fundamental

³⁴⁰ Both Schreier, in *Arabs of the Jewish Faith*, 88, and Lorcin, in *Imperial Identities*, 65, describe this long pattern of condemning Islam and Muslim civilization as degenerate and decadent because of the treatment of women and the practice of polygamy.

³⁴¹ Max Lapidos, "An Algerian Odyssey," May 3, 1961. AJDC NY 55/64#16.

question of Jewish categorization as European or French in Algeria, and how Algerian Jews would be treated in the case of a large-scale exodus from Algeria to France. In December 1960, President De Gaulle refused to meet with AIU leader Jacques Lazarus and a delegation from the Algerian Jewish Social Studies Committee. Instead, a lower level cabinet member met with the committee. The Secretary General of the AIU hypothesized that De Gaulle did not receive the Algerian Jewish delegation in order to avoid any indication of preferential treatment; however, some in the French Jewish community interpreted De Gaulle's refusal to meet with the Jewish delegation as indicative of his lack of support for Algerian Jews.³⁴²

The lack of transparency about the future of Algerian Jews was worrisome to many because the FLN and its governmental body, the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) had maintained for years that Algerian Jews were an inseparable part of the Algerian populace, despite the Crémieux Decree. The GPRA declared to the Algerian Jewish population after its formation at the Congress of Soummam on August 20, 1956, "You, the Jews, you are an integral part of the Algerian people; there is no choice for you to make between France and Algeria but to become effective citizens of your true country."³⁴³ This remained the FLN's position for the next five years and at the initial Evian talks in 1961:

The FLN considers the Jews of Algeria natives, completely Algerian, and it gladly leaves to those individuals the right to choose...at the moment when Algerian sovereignty is recognized, [we] have always estimated that the problem would not exist for the Jews, in the same terms as for the Europeans. Because those of European origin were colonists, who settled

³⁴² Eugène Weill. "Note to Président Cassin," 1 December 1960. AAIU AM Presidence 028a.

³⁴³ "Les Juifs d'Algérie ont-ils un avenir?: Un table ronde avec la participation de Raoul Girardet, Gerard Israel, Pierre Nora, Alain Peyrefitte, Philippe Rossillon, Pierre Stibbe, Emile Touati," *L'Arche* 61 (February 1962): 24.

in a foreign land, while the Jew was a native who had access to Algerian nationality.³⁴⁴

The FLN and the GPRA reasserted the Jewishness of the emancipated Algerian Jewish population precisely at the moment that the latter group wished to reaffirm their assimilation and French citizenship. The divisions between “Muslims” and “Europeans” of Algeria were becoming increasingly important for officials to elaborate and reinforce and most Jews lobbied heavily to remain in the latter, while M’zabi Jews and their allies lobbied for their entry into that category.

As the divisions between “European” and “Muslim” grew ever more calcified, Jews were increasingly caught in the crosshairs. While some Jews joined the French dissident *Organisation de l’Armée Secrète* (OAS) or the FLN, most Jews (as well as most “Europeans” and “Muslims”) were simply civilians caught between two increasingly violent adversaries. *L’Arche*, the largest Jewish monthly in France, published multiple eyewitness accounts of the cruelties Jews faced in Algeria. They described to their French and Algerian audience how one family was given 24 hours to leave their apartment complex by their Muslim neighbors. In another eye-witness account, one woman told reporter René Sussan how her eldest son, “twenty years old, was assassinated last year [1961] by the FLN. Her youngest, 14 years old, was killed the next day by the [French] policemen.”³⁴⁵ Such stories increased in frequency until a ceasefire was declared in early 1961 and talks recommenced.

The French and FLN talks at Evian in 1961 faltered around several issues, including the fate of Algeria’s Jewish populations. For their part, Algerian Jews were adamant that they not be viewed as a part of the Algerian community, but as individual

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ René Sussan, “Les grandes vacances des juifs d’Algérie...” *L’Arche* 66 (July 1962): 16.

citizens of France. Under pressure from Jewish leaders, Louis Joxe, the minister of Algerian Affairs, made sure to edit out any mention of the Jewish “community” from French position papers and be sure that Jews were included as part of the “European” minority.³⁴⁶ The GPRA reaffirmed that they would not consider “150,000 Jewish citizens of the country, considered to be autochthonous” as part of the “European” population. Assurances from French representatives in Algiers that Algeria’s Jews were fully French citizens did not immediately assuage Jewish fears resulting from this declaration.³⁴⁷

In a letter published in *Le Monde* on April 5, 1961, AIU delegate Louis Kahn reiterated that any attempts to re-categorize Algerian Jews as non-French Algerians would replicate the Nazi Nuremberg laws, by setting Jews aside and violating their human rights. Citizenship was an inalienable right of the Jewish population in Algeria. In case of any challenge, Kahn asserted that the Jews of Algeria were French citizens not only because of the 1870 Crémieux Decree, but also according to the 1927 French nationality law that ruled French all persons born on French soil to a French father. Kahn concluded, “The Jews of Algeria, and all those who have drunk the milk of French liberty, will not, it seems to us, accept a self-determination imposed on them.”³⁴⁸

After repeated negotiations and a number of statements on the part of the French government asserting that the Jewish population would be part of the European community, the FLN withdrew their statement on Algerian Jewry. A January 31, 1962, article in *Le Monde* declared that, “The exit of the Jews, over which the talks at Evian-Lugrin seriously stumbled, seems to be on the way towards regulation: after having long

³⁴⁶ Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 172-173. Bernard Tricot, who was an important member of the presidential staff, assisted Joxe in these efforts.

³⁴⁷ Louis Kahn, Algiers, to AIU Paris, 8 February 1961. AAIU AM Présidence 028a.

³⁴⁸ Louis Kahn, “La condition des juifs algériens,” *Le Monde*, 5 April 1961. ANOM 81F/1227.

claimed them as ‘of Algerian lineage,’ the FLN now accepts that they be considered Europeans.”³⁴⁹ The FLN’s shift in policy followed the extension of the civil status to the M’zabi Jewish population and thus, both the legal status and the official relationship between the Jews of Ghardaïa and the Algerian population dramatically shifted in the span of a few months, from “indigènes” and “Muslims” to “Europeans” whose future lay outside an independent Algeria.

Belated equality and emigration

During the period that French officials worked to clarify exactly who was “European” in French Algeria, the problem of the “Muslim” Jews in the M’zab took center stage in legislative debates. To gain a better appreciation of the problem, the government organized several reports on the community and the situation at hand. In summer 1960, the National Assembly appointed a special delegate, M. Pigeot, to write a report on the M’zabi situation, which would be the basis for future legislation.³⁵⁰

Minister of State Robert Lecourt and Minister of Justice Edmond Michelet presented Pigeot’s findings to the Prime Minister on August 4, 1960 as a draft bill, cosigned by Michel Debré. The bill summarized the problem thusly: “the Jews of the former Territories of the South who are French citizens, as are all residents of Algeria, since the promulgation of the law of 7 May 1946, have kept their personal status and have no regular civil status.” The proposal also noted that the Jewish community of the M’zab was “ready to renounce their personal status and acquire the civil status...in the same

³⁴⁹ Phillippe Herreman, “La situation des Européens,” *Le Monde* (31 January 1962): 1.

³⁵⁰ Letter, Tricot, 29 December 1960. AAIU AM Presidence 028a.

conditions as those expected by the aforementioned decree of 24 October 1870,” the Crémieux Decree.³⁵¹

The proposed bill contained thirteen articles detailing the process by which Jews in the south would acquire the civil status and the various ways that they might initiate or postpone this change in their legal standing. Articles of the bill included a demand for a census of the Jewish population in the south and for all Jews in this census to assume surnames chosen by “men of the same family of at least twenty-one years of age.”³⁵² Civil authorities would record all civil acts corresponding to each family according to their surname. Thenceforth, all marriages, births, deaths, and matters of inheritance would be made public to the government in Algeria and France. The use of surnames would be afterwards obligatory for all. This requirement included even those Jewish men who elected, under a provision of this bill, to remain under the personal status. Though French women won the vote in 1944, Algerian women had only been able to vote since 1958. The exclusion of M’zabi Jewish women in this bill was deliberate and meant to “honor” the particular nature of the Jewish community in Ghardaïa, a set of assumptions about the inferior status of women in the M’zab. Men’s choice of surnames and whether or not to opt out in favor of the personal status would equally affect their wives and children under eighteen years of age.³⁵³

The edits supplied by the Prime Minister’s office note that apart from the “administrative territory of the Sahara and especially the M’zab” there were few places

³⁵¹ Projet de loi: relative à la constitution de l’état civil des Français des départements algériens et des départements des Oasis et de la Saoura, qui ont conserve leur statut personnel israélite, et à leur accession au statut civil de droit commun, 4 August 1960, 2. ANOM 81F/1227.

³⁵² Ibid., 3.

³⁵³ Ibid., 4-5.

where this legislation would be applicable.³⁵⁴ The final bill giving Jews of the *Départements des Oasis* accession to the civil status passed on the first reading in the National Assembly on July 11, 1961.³⁵⁵ The bill passed on to the Senate for final ratification included the same thirteen articles following a summary of the problem, which again reiterated that the question of Jewish personal status applied almost uniquely to the M'zabi Jewish community, as other Jews installed in the south arrived as citizens to those territories after the 1870 Crémieux Decree, stating, “essentially, the law will only apply in the M'zab.”

The finalized bill made no mention of the February 1959 ordinance on Muslim accession to the civil status, instead establishing new requirements specific to the M'zabi Jews. Additionally, the National Assembly removed the articles allowing Jews who elected it to remain under the personal status, simplifying the article and aligning it more closely with Article 75 of the Constitution. This meant that the law would automatically apply to all unless they expressly made known to the relevant official their desire to maintain the personal status prior to the date of its implementation.³⁵⁶ The Senate passed the law on July 28, 1961. The swiftness of its passing was remarkable for the many years that any such legislation had been quickly dismissed or mired down by competing ideologies, likely hurried by the importance of the issue of Algerian Jewry at the Evian talks between the French and FLN.

In these final years of the Algerian War a number of legislative bills passed rapidly, while attempts at peace settlements and negotiations failed. As international opinion turned increasingly against French colonization in Algeria, President De Gaulle

³⁵⁴ Amendement, 1. ANOM 81F/1227.

³⁵⁵ Michel Debré, “Projet de loi,” 12 July 1961. ANOM 81F/1227.

³⁵⁶ M. Abel-Durand, “Report,” 19 July 1961. ANOM 81F/1227.

looked for solutions to the problem of French Algeria. On November 16, 1960, De Gaulle called for a referendum in the metropole and Algeria on Algerian independence. In this January 8, 1961 referendum seventy-five percent of the voters voted in favor of self-determination, though in Algeria where the FLN had boycotted the vote, the measure carried only by fifty-five percent.³⁵⁷ Many in the settler population were increasingly frustrated by De Gaulle's attempts towards what they viewed as appeasing the FLN. In April of that year, the OAS attempted a failed coup in Algiers; following this the OAS launched increasingly violent attacks on Algerian civilians and French government targets alike.

At the Evian talks, sovereignty over the Sahara was an even more contentious issue than the future of Algeria's Jewish population. De Gaulle and his negotiators came to Evian fully expecting to retain control over the Sahara and the vast mineral and oil deposits there. When the talks broke down, and after continued OAS bombings throughout Algeria, De Gaulle surrendered future control of the Sahara by September 1961 in a move that shocked his ministers, particularly Michel Debré who had publicly committed to retaining the Sahara for France. In his New Years address for 1962, De Gaulle asserted that "one way or another," France would extricate itself from Algeria.³⁵⁸ After this great concession from De Gaulle, the GPRA agreed to return to talks, and the final agreement was signed at Evian on March 18, 1962, recognizing the formal independence of Algeria.

³⁵⁷ John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005), 179.

³⁵⁸ Alistair Horne, *A Savage War of Peace: Algeria 1954-1962*, 4th ed. (New York: New York Review of Books, 2006), 506.

In the wake of De Gaulle's rapid capitulation on the Sahara, the registration of M'zabi Jewish surnames and conferral of the civil status proceeded apace. However, authorities in the M'zab ran into various problems. Though seemingly no M'zabi Jews opted out of the civil status in favor of retaining the personal status, the choosing and recording of surnames presented a number of difficulties. Several M'zabi Jews refused to choose a surname for their families and consequently had surnames given them by the state, names that they then disputed before French officials. On this point, Algiers asked the Ministry of Algerian Affairs for suggestions as to how to treat and record in official documents individuals who appeared without surnames, as well as how to then force them to choose surnames.³⁵⁹ In his reply, the State Minister in charge of Algerian Affairs suggested that the relevant French officials, when presented with individuals who refused their surnames, "invite them to choose another surname."³⁶⁰ This produced much confusion when members of the same family had their names recorded with various spelling errors or inaccurately. This clerical error affected families and individuals to different degrees, as those who made eventual *aliyah* would give their Hebrew names, while the minority who immigrated to France arrived with confused papers, including some who lacked surnames completely.³⁶¹

Many in the international Jewish community interpreted the 1961 law as a sign of French commitment to equality and to the future of Algeria's Jewish population, regardless of the future of French rule in Algeria. The AJDC office in Algiers reported to Geneva that this law was for Jews in Algeria "a new proof of France's will to leave no

³⁵⁹ DG to State Minister in charge of Algerian Affairs, 20 September 1961. ANOM 81F/1227.

³⁶⁰ State Minister in charge of Algerian Affairs to DG, 21 December 1961. ANOM 81F/1227. This subtle approach did not work for all and French authorities reported many M'zabi Jews arriving in France without any surnames. Shepard, *Invention of Decolonization*, 246.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 245.

stone unturned to help the Algerian Jews in present circumstances and, above all, to avoid any line being drawn between the Jews and the other Europeans residing in this country.”³⁶² However, this amended civil status arrived too late for most in the M’zab. The AJDC report in late 1961 noted “a number of religious leaders and employees of communal institutions have already left the country.”³⁶³

The legal standing of M’zabi Jews regularized and resolved after almost a century of debate, but another “M’zabi Question” now presented itself to the French government and international Jewish relief organizations: how to evacuate what remained of the Jewish community from independent Algeria. An overwhelming number of the community in the M’zab expressed their desire to leave the M’zab rather than stay in an independence Algeria, where the future of Jews and other French citizens seemed uncertain. The French government actively collaborated with the Jewish Agency, AJDC, and a number of French Jewish relief organizations including the *Fonds Sociaux Juif Unifiés*, or United Jewish Welfare Fund (FSJU), to assist the Jewish emigration from Algeria. The final evacuation of the Jewish community from the M’zab is a particularly astonishing example of this cooperation.

Members of the community initiated their final emigration by asking the Israeli government, not the French, for assistance. The Jewish Agency, in turn, sent an emissary to work out the details with the French officials in Algiers and the M’zab and French Jewish organizations including the AIU. There were roughly nine hundred Jews living in the M’zab at this time and the officials involved determined that a mass airlift would be

³⁶² Samuel Levis, “Situation in Algeria,” July 31, 1961. AJDC NY 55/64#16.

³⁶³ “Mr. Jordan’s Report,” (November 21, 1961). AJDC NY 55/64#16.

the most efficient and rapid way to evacuate the Jewish community.³⁶⁴ Michael Laskier describes the events:

Towards the end of June, French planes chartered by the Jewish Agency reached Ghardaïa's military airport. The emigrants were able to take the twelve-kilometer ride to the airport on buses, guarded by military jeeps and a helicopter.³⁶⁵

The planes left Ghardaïa for Algiers and then Marseille. Staggered over the course of fifteen days, this airlift suddenly and dramatically removed the Jewish community from the M'zab.

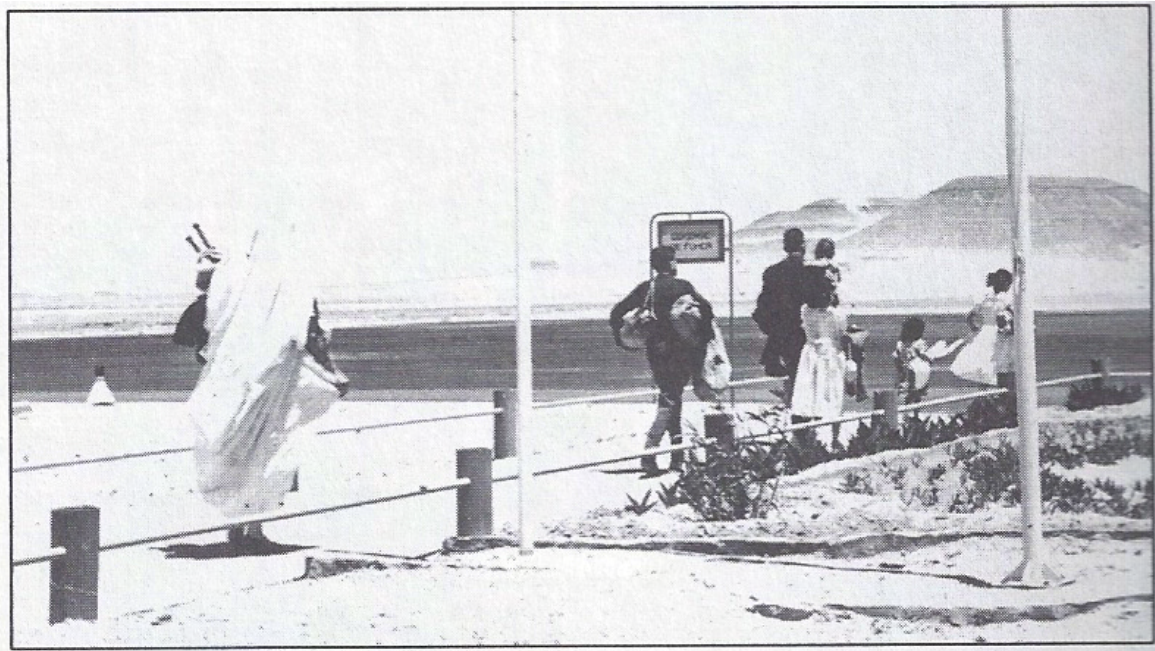


Figure 6.1 “A family headed to the airport for the departure to *Eretz Yisrael*. The woman carries a Sefer Torah in her arms.” Sebban, *Vayikah Amram*, 185.

Individuals and families fled Ghardaïa quickly, able to carry only a few suitcases and family or community artifacts. In the image above, taken from the personal collection of Eliahou Sebban and his family, a Jewish woman clad in traditional clothing carries a Torah scroll towards the awaiting plane, with the hills of the M'zab behind.

³⁶⁴ Kleinknecht, *Les Juifs du M'zab*, Ch. 10.

³⁶⁵ Laskier, *Israel and the Maghreb*, 220-221.

This image powerful displays the tension between the M'zabi Jewish life that had been and the uncertain future in Israel or France and resembles similar images of Jewish emigrations from other parts of the Middle East and North Africa during this period, particularly that of the Yemeni Jews in 1951.³⁶⁶

At the time of their departure from Ghardaïa, the Jewish community possessed “one synagogue, one religious school, one building with three stores, one ritual bath, [and] seven properties in various areas of the city” according to the *Association des Juifs originnaires d'Algérie* (AJOA).³⁶⁷ Before leaving Ghardaïa definitively by July 2, 1962, dozens of young and old men from the community buried various religious scrolls and personal documents in the Jewish cemetery outside town. Jean Moriaz, the French commissioner, accompanied them in this task and himself interred a number of his personal effects, as is depicted in the photograph below. Moriaz enjoyed a friendly relationship with the community, whose members seen here are by this time all wearing European dress and even berets, perhaps marking themselves as citizens of France.

³⁶⁶ For a critical analysis of the Israeli-organized evacuation of Yemeni Jews and its after-effects, see Reuben Aharoni, *Jewish Emigration from the Yemen, 1951-1958: Carpet Without Magic* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2001).

³⁶⁷ Letter AJOA to Secrétaire d'État aux Affaires Algériennes, Paris, 1 July 1962. AIU Fonds Jacques Lazarus Dossier XV. Harvey E. Goldberg also noted these properties in “Tripolitanian Jewish communities: cultural boundaries and hypothesis-testing,” *American Ethnologist* 1, no. 4 (November 1974): 625.



Figure 6.2 M. Jean Moriaz assisting the youth of Ghardaïa in burying sacred scrolls in the local cemetery, 1962.³⁶⁸

M'zabi Jewish acquisition of the common law status expedited their emigration from Algeria and immigration to France and Israel. However, once arrived in their new homelands, M'zabi Jews met with a number of difficulties getting accustomed to their new lives. In Israel a large network of immigrant absorption agencies was accustomed to similar immigrations from Libya, Yemen, Morocco, and Tunisia. In France, the earlier immigrations of Jews from Tunisia and Morocco had also laid the groundwork for the much larger arrival of Algerian Jews in 1962. However, in France the specific absorption of M'zabi Jews proved much more difficult than that of the general Algerian or North African Jewish population.

³⁶⁸ Sebban, *Vayikah Amram*, 185.

Citizens, Refugees: Absorption in France

Even before their arrival in France, French, Israeli, and American officials and advocates worried about the absorption of the Jews from Ghardaïa. An article in *L'Arche* described the community in an unflattering profile, "the more you approach the south, the more the Jews 'self-Islamicize' in some way; there is a certain contamination in their superstitions, rituals, and clothing."³⁶⁹ An AJDC emissary, Abe Karlikow, presciently reported on June 19, 1962, that Israeli officials hoped France would facilitate the migration of certain Jewish Algerians to Israel, "particularly...some 200 Jews from Ghardaïa, the Jews of the Sahara desert, flown from their remote M'Zab region to Marseilles, and whose readjustment in France might prove particularly difficult."³⁷⁰ Now that M'zabi Jews had French citizenship, immigration officials and Jewish organization representatives tasked with facilitating their immigration and assimilation voiced the same concerns French colonial officers had used to refuse them citizenship in Algeria.

Of the one hundred and fifty Jewish individuals from the M'zab who immigrated to France in 1962, most were resettled in Strasbourg, with a few in Marseille, Paris, and various cities along the Mediterranean coast.³⁷¹ Immigration to France was in some ways the ultimate expression of the full citizenship M'zabi Jews had fought for and won in 1961, however the reality of migration and integration in France proved extremely difficult and many ultimately left France for Israel. The M'zabi Jewish absorption in France differed significantly from that of most Algerian Jews, whose arrival and

³⁶⁹ Pierre Boudot, "Du bled à la ville: l'exode intérieur des populations juives d'Algérie," *L'Arche* 63 (April 1962), 36.

³⁷⁰ "Algeria," Abe Karlikow (June 19, 1962), pp.5. AJDC NY 55/64#14.

³⁷¹ "Repatriation" AIU Fonds Jacques Lazarus Dossier XV.

integration were generally celebrated and actively facilitated by French Jewish organizations and French ministries.

The Algerian Jewish immigration to France was a “total” immigration, encompassing all sectors of the population, and massive in size.³⁷² The FSJU observed that Algerian Jews arrived like “a tidal wave in the last weeks and last days” of the summer of 1962.³⁷³ A May 30, 1962, article in *Le Monde* noted that on some convoys from Algeria, “nearly 30% of the passengers were Jewish.”³⁷⁴ By late 1962, while the total *pied-noir* population comprised two percent of the entire French population, the newly arrived Algerian Jews constituted one-third of the French Jewish community.³⁷⁵ By the end of the year, 120,000 Algerian Jews had arrived in France, effectively doubling the Jewish population to 250,000.³⁷⁶ Michel Salomon, editor-in-chief of *L’Arche*, mused of the effects of this massive immigration on the French Jewish community, “We will have to increasingly... ‘Algerianize’ ourselves, in a way.”³⁷⁷

The French Jewish community was much better prepared for the 1962 wave of Algerian immigration than they had been for either of the two earlier immigrations of Jews from North Africa, after Tunisian independence in 1954 and Moroccan independence in 1956. The timing of the Algerian immigration was also fortuitous. Jewish immigrants in the 1960s did not face the same level of French hostility encountered by earlier East European waves of Jewish immigration in the interwar years. Many Jewish immigrants to France prior to World War II were unwelcome at a time

³⁷² Claude Tapia, *Les Juifs sépharades en France* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1986), 283.

³⁷³ “L’intégration communautaire dans l’hexagone,” *L’Arche*, May-June (1972): 53.

³⁷⁴ Henri Fesquet, “Le répli de nombreux israelites du Maghreb modifie la physionomie des communautés juives de la metropole,” *Le Monde* (30 May 1962): 2.

³⁷⁵ René Sussan, “Un florilege algérien: De la Kahena a Robert Cohen,” *L’Arche* 69 (October 1962): 71.

³⁷⁶ Michel Abitbol, “The Integration of North African Jews in France,” *Yale French Studies* 85 (1994): 249.

³⁷⁷ Michel Salomon, “Les 2^{es} journées d’études nord-africaines du F.S.J.U.” *L’Arche* 69 (October 1962): 15.

when France was recovering from the First World War. The 1960s were, in contrast, a time of renewal and expansion for France, the *Trentes Glorieuses*, an economic climate that facilitated the incorporation of the *pieds noirs* into the metropolitan population and economy. Though Jewish Algerians faced initial hurdles to their integration into French society, they were able to create niches for themselves in France much more quickly than previous waves of Jewish immigrants.

In May 1962, only two months before official Algerian independence was declared, the General Congress of the FSJU held a two-day conference to assess the readiness of their programs and ensure their ability to handle the impending arrival of thousands of Algerian Jews.³⁷⁸ The French Jewish community worked diligently to accommodate the new arrivals. The director of the FSJU later described the reception Algerian Jews met with in 1962, “the Jewish welcome [was] exceptionally warm... In each train, in each port, the Jewish community was present, day and night if needed, to welcome the refugees.”³⁷⁹ The French government also invested in the Algerian Jewish absorption, as it was in the future of all *rapatriés*, repatriated French citizens from Algeria. This was a critical distinction between the earlier North African immigration and the Algerian: as French citizens Algerian Jews received a number of benefits from the French government to facilitate their adjustment in France.

In early 1962, *L'Arche* published a discussion between several French Jewish leaders, introducing the Algerian Jewish community to the Jews of metropolitan France. Editor Michel Salomon reflected, “the Jewish community of Algeria seems similar to ours. It is a community of French Jews, more religious without doubt, a community more

³⁷⁸ “L'intégration communautaire dans l'hexagone,” *L'Arche*, May-June (1972) : 53-54.

³⁷⁹ Henri Chemouilli, “Les rapatriés 9 mois après: Survivre à l'exil,” *L'Arche* 74 (March 1963): 43.

homogeneous than the metropole, and so less ‘dejudalized’ it seems to me, but finally it is a ‘province’ of the French Jewish community.”³⁸⁰ Later than year in the same magazine, Jacques Sabbath wrote of the Algerians, “They represent the possibility of a regeneration.”³⁸¹ In this sentiment, both the meaning and historical trajectory of “regeneration” reversed, heralding not a move away from traditional Jewish practice, but a return to Judaism and from the unlikely source of the same North African Jewish community that French Jews fought to “regenerate” as French citizens a century earlier. The romanticized hopes for Algerian integration and reinvigoration of French Jewish communities soon confronted the difficulties of daily life for M’zabi Jews.

Most M’zabi Jews were resettled in Strasbourg and the Bas-Rhin *département*. French officials and French Jewish relief organizations believed that the pre-existing Jewish institutions in the northeast would facilitate the integration of M’zabi Jews into metropolitan life. Though they followed distinct Jewish practices, Jews from southern Algeria could make use of the kosher butchers and grocers, Hebrew schools, and synagogues throughout Strasbourg and its environs, historically home to one of the most vibrant Jewish communities in France. That the pre-existing community was European Ashkenazi Jews whereas the M’zabi Jews came from a completely different Northern African environment did not register in official thinking. The local religious and secular authorities found this community presented a number of difficulties, much more so than the thousand or so other Jews from Algeria who also arrived in Strasbourg in 1962.

André Neher, a professor at the University of Strasbourg, worked diligently to assist the new immigrants and closely monitored the problems with integrating the

³⁸⁰ “Les Juifs d’Algérie . . .,” 27.

³⁸¹ Jacques Sabbath, “Judaïsme nouveau et renouveau du judaïsme,” *L’Arche* 70 (November 1962): 3.

children of these new immigrants into local schools. He shared his concerns with AIU President René Cassin in an August 31, 1962, letter that accompanied two detailed reports summarizing his findings.³⁸² The first, “Problems in the education of Jewish adolescents from Algeria,” enumerated at length the negative consequences of the “moral ravages” and “spiritual stagnation” produced by the massive assimilation of Jews into the European population in Algeria. Neher was sympathetic to the plight of the Jewish refugees in France and acknowledged there existed a certain Jewish “racism” on the part of French Jews towards “their Sephardic brothers.”³⁸³

In his educational study, Neher recommended three solutions to remedy the difficulties of life and education in France. Firstly, immediate action in the last months of the summer vacation to assist these students in reviewing material and preparing them psychologically for the coming year. Secondly, residential schools that would provide students with “a Jewish life with regular rhythm, a kind of spiritual breath.”³⁸⁴ Lastly, Neher recommended that the Jewish adolescents of Strasbourg and the Bas-Rhin be educated exclusively in Jewish schools, the only place where he believed existed “a channel of communication and harmonious exchanges between the Jewish singularity of the student and French culture,” “secular life and Jewish life.” Existing Jewish schools would be expanded with special classes about “catching up and adapting.”³⁸⁵

A second report, twice the length of the first, focused on the “populations from the *départements* of the Algerian south.” According to Neher and his research team, the M’zabi Jewish population presented unique challenges and problems and Neher

³⁸² André Neher to René Cassin, 31 August 1962. AAIU AM Presidence 028a.

³⁸³ André Neher, “Problèmes de la scolarisation des adolescents juifs repliés d’Algérie,” 22 August 1962, 2. AAIU AM Presidence 028a.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

recommended a coordinated national plan to address their specific issues. He likened the M'zabi Jewish immigration to France with that of "comparable populations" to Israel, suggesting that the French learn from the failures and successes of those migrations to Israel. While commending the Jewish Agency on their success in absorbing various populations from the Middle East and North Africa, Neher elaborated possible solutions to the education of children, adolescents, and adults, concluding with a sociological analysis of the religious traditions of the community.³⁸⁶

In his research, Neher and his colleagues tested the intelligence quotient of all the children from the Oasis *départements* and found, "with no exception," that their IQs were inferior to that of other children and below the "normal" levels (which he did not elaborate). A psychologist on his team classified these children as "morons" (*débiles*) and "anormal" from the perspective of their intellectual and mental development. Neher noted that these conclusions were directly contradicted by the reports of French officials from the M'zab who had noted that the general behavior of the children in the south was at least comparable to other children in Algeria, if not superior. To reconcile these disparate assessments, Neher suggested that the tests performed in France reflected simply the Western orientation of the pedagogical methods employed and not the actual intelligence of the children surveyed.³⁸⁷ He went on to voice his personal objections to these findings, "it is absolutely necessary to eliminate the idea that [these children] are children of inferior mental development than other children from Algeria or France." Neher argued that "a few courses in catching up in September or October or the normal education in primary schools" would be totally insufficient to match these children to

³⁸⁶ Andre Neher, "Les problèmes de pédagogie et d'orientation posés par la population repliée des départements du Sud-Algérien," 22 August 1962, 1-2. AAIU AM Presidence 028a.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

their peers, instead suggesting that the pedagogical systems surrounding them be adapted to their particular needs, both in their secular and religious educations.³⁸⁸

Adolescents from Ghardaïa, Neher found, had been poorly educated in Algeria, and wished overwhelmingly to pursue vocational education at the *Organisation Reconstruction Travail* (ORT) schools run by that Jewish organization. To this “problem,” Neher proposed patience and increased testing to monitor their progress and encourage them to continue their hoped-for improvement, which meant moving away from vocational schools into the professions. Neher found assessing the abilities of adult Jewish immigrants from the Algerian south the most disheartening. As is often the case, older immigrants experienced the greatest difficulties adjusting to their new situations and government policies aimed at easing their transition often did just the opposite. Factory work, often suggested to new immigrants, “condemned them to inferior status and a feeling of inability and even of failure,” as few had any prior experience in such working conditions. Neher found one of the greatest obstacles the lack of punctuality amongst the male population who were used to more flexible work schedules and had a different sense of time. Again, the report urged patience and prolonged professional training to address the problems of unemployment while avoiding physical or mental injuries. He made no mention of adult women from the M’zabi community.³⁸⁹

These reports concluded that a vibrant religious life was essential to the mental and physical health of the Jewish community from the Algerian south, “the fundamental element of their social wellbeing.” While the intersection of religion and daily life in the M’zab had been a given, in France such practices had to be cultivated and deliberate.

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 3-4.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 7.

Many of the conditions of resettlement precluded M'zabi Jews from continuing their customary Jewish practices: being housed alone far from family or friends, lacking the sufficient number of Jewish men for a *minyan*, or jobs and schools that did not observe Jewish holidays or Shabbat. Neher called for a census of the community in order to facilitate local gatherings, a liaison service with individuals or families in isolated areas, treating the supply of kosher food products as a basic social service, and the creation of a national plan to equip various institutions to provide these services. As a final note, Neher wrote that the establishment of a Jewish school for the unusually high number of deaf-mute children from the M'zab was absolutely essential.³⁹⁰

Neher's tragic picture of the M'zabi Jewish community in Strasbourg is misleading in some ways, as the majority of Jews from Ghardaïa who came to France were members of the M'zabi Jewish elite and had greater financial means to support themselves than most. Many members of the Balouka family chose emigration from Algeria to France, as did members of the Sellam and Partouche families. Ghardaïa's rabbi, Abraham Elbaz, was able to obtain a posting as rabbi of a small town near Strasbourg. Yet, even these, the most wealthy and well-connected Jews from the M'zab, found life in France difficult. In a 2002 interview, Eliahou Balouka and Richard Sellam, who remained in Strasbourg after their initial arrival in 1962, noted that several of their friends and family members committed suicide soon after their arrival in France, because they "lacked resources, had no housing, and no way to feed their children." Balouka initially settled with his family in Paris, but after visiting his sister in Strasbourg opted to

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 8-9.

move to the northeast because he found the community there “welcoming and very well organized.”³⁹¹

There were also members of the larger Algerian Jewish community who found adjustment to their new lives in France exceedingly difficult. *L'Arche* published a regular feature “Letters from *rapatriés*,” and many immigrants wrote in to air their grievances. One woman complained that the single time she had been able to arrange transportation to the nearest synagogue, it had been closed. Another letter wrote, “In this area, alas, there isn’t a single Jew, we are drowning in the middle of people who don’t share our beliefs. We only know the dates of our holidays thanks to a Jewish calendar that we bought in Paris.”³⁹² On April 23, 1963, the AJOA had an unsuccessful meeting with François Missoffe, the Minister of *Rapatriés*, during which they requested an allowance for Jews who wished to emigrate from France to Israel. Missoffe refused this request, which ran contrary to his purpose assisting French citizens from Algeria in adjusting to their new lives in the metropole.³⁹³

Despite the lack of French governmental support, many M’zabi and some Algerian Jews emigrated from France to Israel. According to *Le Monde*, between ten and fifteen thousand Algerian Jews, including the M’zabi community, immigrated from Algeria and from France to Israel by summer 1962.³⁹⁴ Norman Stillman disputes this, finding in official documents records of only some five thousand Jews originally from Algeria arriving in Israel by the end of 1962. The number of Algerian immigrants paled

³⁹¹ “Interview: Une page d’Histoire en trois actes: 1882, 1948, 1962,” *Revue Rambam: Revue réalisé par le Comité Séfarad de Strasbourg* 3 (September 2002): 22-24.

³⁹² “Lettres des rapatriés,” *L'Arche* 77 (June 1963): 41.

³⁹³ “Repatriation,” 23 April 1963. AIU Fonds Jacques Lazarus Dossier XV.

³⁹⁴ Fesquet, “Le repli de nombreux Israélites du Maghreb modifie la physionomie des communautés juives de la métropole,” *Le Monde* (30 May 1962) : 2.

in comparison with earlier migrations from North Africa and the Middle East: by this time there had been 31,000 Jewish immigrants from Libya, 44,000 from Yemen, 110,000 from Iraq, 50,000 from Egypt, 160,000 from Morocco, and almost 20,000 from Tunisia.³⁹⁵ Regardless of their number, the absorption of Algerian Jews is useful to examine the ways that Israeli officials viewed this community and the motivations underlying Algerian Jews' decisions to immigrate to Israel.

Absorption in Israel

M'zabi Jews who immigrated to Israel, whether directly from Algeria or after an attempt at life in France, usually had an easier adjustment than other Algerian Jews. Of the several thousand Algerian Jews who immigrated to Israel, many left soon after for France, while most M'zabi Jewish immigrants remained. The preference of over ninety-five percent of Algerian Jews for immigration to France presaged the later difficulties many encountered upon attempting immigration and absorption in Israel. Algerian Jews demonstrated their preference for France rather than Israel even prior to 1962. An April 1962 investigation in *Le Monde* asked why Algerian Jews were not immigrating to Israel, as most Moroccan and Tunisian Jews had, but to France. The conclusion of the series deduced vaguely that, "Algerian Jews admired Israel but did not want to live there."³⁹⁶

In an article for *L'Arche* distributed in both France and Algeria, entitled "An Aborted Aliyah," André Scemama interviewed several Algerian Jews in Israel. He heard accounts from one individual that "the people in charge of the Jewish Agency made

³⁹⁵ Stillman, *Jews of Arab Lands*, 156-176.

³⁹⁶ Eugène Mannoni, "D'Algérie en Israël; II—Entre trois patries," *Le Monde* (5 April 1962): 2.

promises to us that were forgotten as soon as we set foot in Israel.”³⁹⁷ Another individual from Orléansville claimed to have received a letter from the Jewish Agency assuring him of a job in an organization comparable to the one where he worked in Algeria. However, when he arrived in Israel, this company “claimed to be completely ignorant of this job offer.” Yet another Algerian Jew told Scemama that, “I wasn’t a Zionist. They came looking for me and attracted me with promises. Being a lawyer I didn’t trust those simple verbal contracts. I asked for a letter that they gave me after consulting with Jerusalem. Here they have treated me with an intolerable offhandedness; no one worries about the arrangements that were made for me...I am suing the Jewish Agency.”³⁹⁸

These anecdotes surely deterred many from making *aliyah* and an uncertain future in Israel, especially with assurances about their repatriation in France. The number of Algerian Zionists had never been significant when compared with Zionist activity in Tunisia or Morocco, and thus Israel presented an attractive alternative to only a small number. The table below illustrates the decline in the Algerian *aliyah* following Algerian independence, from the initial surge to a meager twenty-two immigrants only six months later.

Table 1 Numbers of Algerian Jews making *aliyah* in the six months following the declaration of Algerian independence in 1962.

	Number of Algerian Jews making <i>aliyah</i>
June 1962	735
July 1962	903
August 1962	127
September 1962	54
October 1962	68
November 1962	14
December 1962	22

André Scemama, “Une ‘alyah’ avortée,” *L’Arche* 74 (March 1963): 44.

³⁹⁷ André Scemama, “Une ‘alyah’ avortée,” *L’Arche* 74 (March 1963): 44.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

Of all the previous Jewish emigrations from Libya, Yemen, Iraq, Egypt, Syria, Morocco, and Tunisia, this was the first large-scale Jewish migration from the Middle East and North Africa that did not make *aliyah*.³⁹⁹ Instead, the overwhelming majority of Algerian Jews chose repatriation to France over immigration to Israel. Although this choice has been interpreted as the ultimate fulfillment of the Crémieux Decree and the following decades of Algerian Jewish integration, acculturation and assimilation,⁴⁰⁰ at the time many in the international Jewish community failed to understand the Algerian Jewish choice and read it as a denouncement of Israel and Zionism.

André Chouraqui, the former Assistant Secretary General of the AIU who had made a number of voyages to Algeria in the 1940s and 1950s, was vocally critical of the Algerian Jewish repatriation to France. Chouraqui made *aliyah* to Israel in 1958, where he became an advisor to David Ben Gurion on the integration of Jews from North Africa and the Middle East and, later, Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem under Teddy Kollek. Chouraqui was an ardent Zionist and advocate for the North African Jewish migration to Israel from Morocco and Tunisia earlier in the 1950s. He was incensed by the small numbers of Algerian Jews arriving in Israel and announced as much to Scemama in the aforementioned article on *aliyah* in *L'Arche*.

In a colorfully worded interview, he elaborated twelve ways in which the Algerian Jewish community had “destroyed the hopes that the State of Israel had for it.”

Being in exile, they have not learned the lesson of history and preferred a second exile rather than finding in the State of Israel their permanent home. [...] It seems that material concerns were determining factors for them, and spiritual concerns had no role in their decision. In refusing the Israeli solution, the Algerian Jew consciously engages in the risks of assimilation,

³⁹⁹ Sussman, 162-168, cited in Shepard, 181.

⁴⁰⁰ Notably by a number of Algerian Jewish historians, including Benjamin Stora, *Les trois exils juifs d'Algérie*, and Sarah Taïeb-Carlen.

thus rejecting traditional Jewish culture. The immigrants from Algeria arriving in the nation refuse to go to new regions of settlement ... and prefer to go expand the already immense community in the cities. ... [They] do not have the pioneer spirit. The Jews of Algeria want benefits from Israeli society but do very little to organize themselves and come together to ask for help. The defection of Algerian Jews deprives the State of Israel of a Jewish community that is already integrated into a Western and Muslim society and whose job would have been to reinforce the link between the different communities of Israel who would then have been able to step over the abyss which separates the Sephardim from the Ashkenazim.

Chouraqui's remarks came from his personal experience as an Algerian Jewish immigrant from an earlier period as well as his professional capacity as a government official specifically tasked with recruiting and assisting North African Jewish immigrants in Israel.⁴⁰¹ These comments are also useful in his broader mention of the schism between "Sephardim" and "Ashkenazim."

There were visible signs of Ashkenazi, or European, discrimination by the Jewish elite and government in Israel against so-called "Sephardim," "Mizrahim," or "Oriental" Jews from the Middle East and North Africa. A particularly visible difference in the treatment of these two communities appeared in housing assignments and allocations. On their arrival in Israel in the 1950s and 1960s, the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption settled Algerian immigrants throughout Israel. However, the ministry settled certain groups of Jews in particular areas based on their ethnicity and geographic origins. Immigrants of European origin were usually settled in more desirable locations, including the major cities. Meanwhile, the Jews of the Middle East and North Africa were usually sent to desert settlements, areas near the unstable borders, and to development towns located in strategic areas.

⁴⁰¹ Scemama, "Un aliyah avortée," 43.

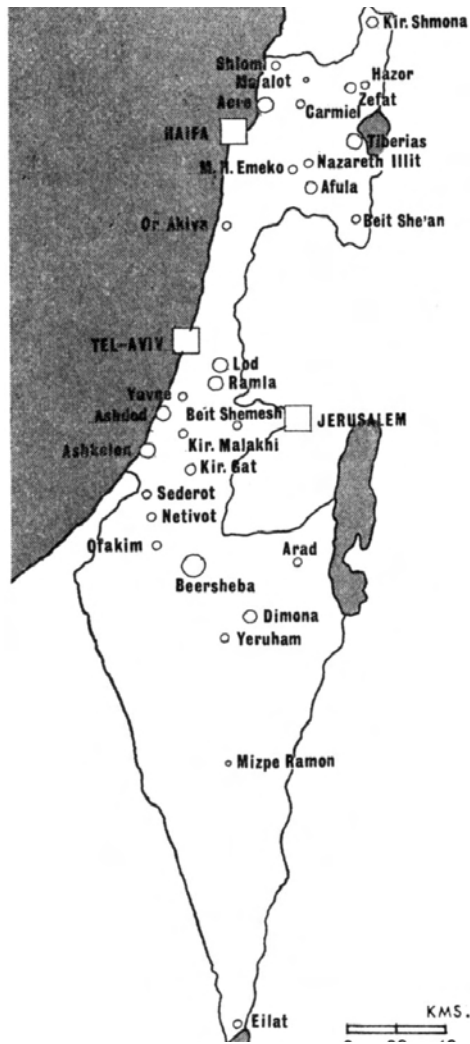


Figure 6.4 Map of Development towns in Israel⁴⁰²

These towns and cities were part of a deliberate national policy established between 1948 and 1964 with the aim of developing new industries and also “solving the problem of settling large numbers of new immigrants, while ensuring at the same time a more even distribution of the population over the whole of the country.”⁴⁰³ The development towns were often clustered near one another, with each town acting as a supplier in a larger regional industry chain. The state often created development towns in high priority areas, that is, near Israel’s borders or in areas with large Arab populations,

⁴⁰² Ash (October 1974), 388.

⁴⁰³ Elisha Efrat, “Industry in Israel’s New Development Towns,” *GeoJournal* 1, no. 4 (1977): 41.

hence the concentration of development towns in the Upper Galilee (Nazareth Illit) and in the Southern Negev desert (Dimona and Eilat). Particular communities, deemed by Israeli officials “better suited” for particular climates and areas, were often settled in the same towns; for example, the population of Dimona and surrounding cities in the Negev was comprised of eighty-four percent North African immigrants before 1967.⁴⁰⁴

The state repeatedly sent M’zabi immigrants to a handful of cities and areas, including Eilat, Dimona, Ashdod, and Nazareth Illit. In the period immediately surrounding the organized airlift of M’zabi Jews from Ghardaïa in June and July 1962, over six hundred Algerian Jews of mostly M’zabi origin arrived in Israel. For many, then, the trip from the M’zab to Algiers or France and then on to Israel occurred with some haste, facilitated as it was by various agencies. These six hundred M’zabi and Algerian Jews arrived aboard one of five ships that made regular trips between Algeria, Marseilles, and Israel: the *Fusah*, the *Istanbul*, the *Palminia*, the *Moldat*, and the *Jerusalem*. Dozens of members of the Partouche, the Sellam, and the Sebban families arrived in Haifa aboard these ships during this short period.⁴⁰⁵ Most were sent on to resettlement in the south, in Dimona and Beersheva, with some families sent to Nazareth (ostensibly Nazareth Illit, not the majority Arab city of Nazareth) and the suburbs of Haifa, including Kiryat Atta, which was also adjacent to a sizeable, historic Arab village, Shefar’am.⁴⁰⁶

M’zabi Jews, then, did not meet André Chouraqui’s criticisms of Algerian Jewry in general. Whether by choice or according to government dictate, these Jews

⁴⁰⁴ Joan Ash, “The Progress of New Towns in Israel,” *The Town Planning Review* 45, no. 4 (October 1974): 392.

⁴⁰⁵ ISA, Record Group 316, files 15502/10-15502/11.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

demonstrated “the pioneer spirit” by settling in remote, often inhospitable areas of Israel that included the Negev desert. M’zabi Jews also fulfilled Chouraqui’s wish that they might be a bridge between European and North Africa or Middle Eastern communities. In the decades after their arrival in Israel, many of the second- and third-generation of immigrants intermarried with Jews from diverse communities, including Ashkenazi families.⁴⁰⁷ In these ways, the M’zabi Jewish *aliyah* resembles those of many other non-European Jewish communities who came to Israel in this period. All faced systemic discrimination, in housing allocations, prolonged stays in *ma’abarot* (transit camps) while European immigrants were given priority in housing, in finding employment, and in other ways large and small.

Conclusion

M’zabi accession to full French citizenship passed the National Assembly with little fanfare in 1961 and what was left of the Jewish community in Ghardaïa enjoyed the benefits of French citizenship in Algeria for only a few months. However, the lobbying efforts of French, Algerian, and international Jewish individuals and organizations, French officials, and the leaders of the community, were successful in producing the circumstances that enabled the final M’zabi emigration in summer 1962. In a short period of four years, M’zabi Jews moved from “indigènes” to “Europeans” with full citizenship rights in Algeria and the metropole. Their rapid acquisition of citizenship reflected the importance to French officials of clearly delineating the boundaries between Algerians, or “Muslims,” and French. Their status as a community of Jewish “indigènes”

⁴⁰⁷ Balouka, Marc. Interviews with author. Jerusalem, Israel, May 2011-January 2013. See also the virtual history of the community compiled by Marc Balouka, doi: www.balouka.net.

had become anachronistic at a time when any mention of Jewishness or a historical Jewish community in Algeria was seen as undermining both Jewish rights and the integrity of the “European” French population. French officials resolved the problem of M’zabi Jewish difference when the issue of Muslim difference became more critical.

Citizenship enabled M’zabi Jews to seize hold of the advantages of repatriation to France, but only a small group chose to do so alongside the vast majority of Algerian Jews. The fears of French officials in Algeria that Zionist propaganda would pull M’zabi Jews away from French influence proved true, though Zionism or politics did not significantly influence M’zabi Jews in their choice to continue on to Israel. Rather, personal considerations, financial prospects, and the logistic assistance of Zionist organizations and representatives encouraged the M’zabi Jews who left Ghardaïa en masse in 1962 to continue on to Israel after arriving in France. For the small group who remained in France, the difficulties of daily life and religious needs determined the decision many of them made to leave France in the following years, not necessarily a Zionist awakening or political rebirth.

Well-meaning French Jews worked to assist M’zabi Jews with the unique set of challenges life in France presented to their absorption. Though M’zabi Jews also met with a number of difficulties upon their arrival in Israel, notably discrimination and poverty, most Jews from Ghardaïa continued the trajectory to Israel followed by their friends and families in the decades since the first *aliyah* in 1943. Thus, M’zabi Jewish history again diverged from the larger narrative of Algerian Jews in 1962. In the M’zabi *aliyah* in that year and earlier, the history of Jews from Ghardaïa dovetails with the larger history of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa in the postwar period. Contained

for a brief period in their history within the borders of French Algeria, in their ultimate emigration from the M'zab to Israel, this Jewish community demonstrated their different priorities and aspirations in comparison with most Algerian Jews.

Chapter 7:

Conclusion: The Ambiguity of Empire

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.*

—William Blake

This project offers a new perspective for the historiography of French Algeria and Jews in North Africa, through the experience of the small and isolated Jewish community of Ghardaïa. Using the lens of the unique historical experience of the M'zabi Jews enables us to “see [the] World[s]” of colonialism and Zionism in Algeria in new and important ways. M'zabi Jewish historical experience was long relegated to a footnote in the larger history of Jews in Algeria. Just as French politicians ignored the irregular legal status applied to these Jews, so too have historians failed to address the non-emancipation of M'zabi Jews and their later migration to Israel at a time when almost all other Algerian Jews immigrated to France. French policies towards M'zabi Jews evidence persistent antisemitism as well as French racism towards “indigènes” and “Muslims” from 1882 until 1962 and after. Colonial authorities claimed M'zabi Jews to be too alien, too “Muslim,” for French citizenship, while also finding fault with their practice of Judaism, relationships with Zionists and Zionist organizations, and lamenting M'zabi immigration to Israel.

The evolving legal status of M'zabi Jews offers a glimpse into a more complicated Jewish relationship with French nationality policies than is often given after French citizenship in 1791, the Crémieux Decree in 1870, or the Vichy abrogation of the Crémieux Decree in 1940 and its reinstatement in 1943. In eighteenth and nineteenth century France, philosophers and politicians constructed definitions of citizenship that addressed the problem of Jewish difference and sought to assimilate Jewish individuals into the body politic. French discourses about Jewish difference persisted in the M'zab throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, when officials argued that M'zabi Jewish practices and identity were incompatible with French citizenship. The contrasts and continuities between nationality policies towards Jews in France and most of Algeria versus those in the M'zab opens up new discursive spaces in the scholarly exploration of French nationality policies and their evolution. Though the Crémieux Decree was successful in emancipating most Algerian Jews, it generated a violent, long-lasting antisemitic backlash in Algeria and France that thwarted later efforts to extend citizenship to M'zabi Jews. French citizenship policies towards Jews in Ghardaïa highlight the limits of French universalism in the colonial context. This is true both when French discourses about M'zabi Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries demonstrated the continued stigmatization of Jewishness in France and French Algeria, and later when French negotiators after 1961 insisted that all Jews be included in the French population while excluding all "Muslims."

French colonial policies contributed to the eventual growth of hostilities between Jews and Muslims in the M'zab and ultimately the Jewish emigration from Ghardaïa; however, these policies significantly improved Jewish daily life. The tearing down of the

actual walls separating the Jewish community in Ghardaïa's *mellah* heralded a significant improvement in the Jewish standard of living in the Sahara, as did the arrival of electricity and the railroad, French schools and hospitals, and greater mobility. However, while the end of the *dhimmi* system and the news of the Crémieux Decree encouraged Jews in Ghardaïa, decades of administrative neglect, surveillance, and prejudice brought many to question the utility of colonialism for the M'zabi Jewish community. To the question of whether or not colonialism was "good" for the Jews, the experience of Jews in the Algerian south complicates the standard assumption that Empire and European influence uniformly improved Jewish life in North Africa or the Middle East. Much historiography takes the Crémieux Decree as definitive proof of the ways that French colonialism assisted Jews in Algeria. The more complicated story of M'zabi Jewish exclusion and eventual emancipation sheds light into the crevices of French attitudes and shifting policies towards Jews, telling us a more complex and nuanced story about Jewishness in French Algeria, colonial treatment of Jews, and the goals of the French in colonizing the Sahara.

From the time of annexation in 1882 to the 1961 "regularization" of their legal status and even after their immigration to France and Israel, French officials and French Jewish organizations considered the M'zabi Jews to be more foreign than other Algerian Jews because of their historical proximity to the Ibadi Muslims of the M'zab. Legal categorization of the M'zabi Jews as either "natives" or even "Muslims" in Algeria are highly unusual and show new ways that the racial hierarchy in Algeria evolved during the colonial period. Much recent historiography has examined the long tension between Islam and the West in the context of French colonialism and decolonization. French

attitudes towards Islam, manifested in anti-Muslim policies in Algeria, also played out in the metropole in restrictive labor policies and, more recently, the debates about the headscarf in public spaces. Algerian Jews are often seen in France as a part of the larger *pied-noir* population, many of whom are opposed to the spread of Muslim cultural practices in France. M'zabi Jewish history complicates these assumptions about the relationships between Muslims and Jews in Algeria and the metropole and is further evidence that the French colonial administration often constructed arbitrary hierarchies of difference throughout the empire.

However, French thinking about Algerian difference did to a certain extent reflect the reality in the M'zab, whose Jewish community was indeed historically and culturally distinct from the rest of the Algerian Jewish population. The study of M'zabi Jewry has been until very recently a lacuna in the historiography of North African Jewry. This project has sought to introduce this difference into our knowledge of what it meant to be a Jew in Algeria and in North Africa. The uniqueness of the M'zabi Jewish community in their religious practice, relationships with Muslim neighbors, customs, and aspirations predated the French conquest of the Sahara and differed in important ways from other Algerian Jews. The different treatment of Algerian Jews and M'zabi Jews reinforced the divide between the two groups from 1882 until the end of French Algeria in 1962, and even afterwards during immigration to and absorption in France and Israel.

French colonial policies towards M'zabi Jews simultaneously claimed M'zabi Jewish difference to be insurmountable while misunderstanding that difference and the reality in the Sahara. This disconnect between French aspirations in the Sahara and the events on the ground grew particularly obvious after 1954, when France placed high

hopes for economic revival in the natural resources of the desert. Only in the final talks with Algerian nationalists did De Gaulle admit (even to the surprise of his closest councilors) that France could not retain the Sahara while losing northern Algeria. French forces in the Sahara, with the notable exception of the local administrators in Ghardaïa, ignored the demands of the Jewish community in Ghardaïa for citizenship for decades. Governors in Algiers and high-ranking ministers in Paris dismissed M'zabi Jewish petitions for emancipation, instead making baseless arguments about Ibadi resentment towards the Jewish community in order to justify their inaction. Sifting through the bureaucratic memoranda regarding M'zabi Jewish citizenship reveals a colonial administration largely unwilling to admit the particularities of the desert and its inhabitants while desperate to retain and develop the Sahara. The instrumental French attitude towards M'zabi Jewish citizenship up until the very moment of withdrawal challenges arguments made about Algerian Jewish experience that focus on the Crémieux Decree as evidence of French benevolence towards Jews and colonial dedication to the *mission civilisatrice*. M'zabi Jews were denied legal equality for decades and French officials went to great lengths to justify their continued exclusion.

The consequence of French obstructionism and recurring antisemitism was the very early beginning of Jewish emigration from the M'zab. The ultimate benefit of French colonialism in the M'zab for the Jews in Ghardaïa was that it made Jewish emigration out of French territory possible. Citizenship availed M'zabi Jews of a way out of the ambiguity of colonial policies, European antisemitism, local Muslim-Jewish conflicts, and the violence of the Algerian War. The interplay between Zionism and colonialism in the M'zab in many ways resembles the same processes for the Jewish

communities of Morocco and Tunisia. After the 1961 emancipation, however, the choice to make *aliyah* as French citizens is historically remarkable when juxtaposed with the larger Algerian Jewish migration to France. M'zabi Jews were among the only Algerian Jews who immigrated to Israel rather than France, and began doing so two decades before 1962. The migratory and absorption experiences of M'zabi Jews in both France and Israel demonstrate how the experience of Jews from Ghardaïa diverged from that of Algerian Jewry in important ways even after 1962. The immigration of M'zabi Jews and their absorption in France was an exceptional migratory experience in the context of the massive *pied-noir* exodus from Algeria. Whereas the arrival of other Algerian Jews has been heralded as the commencement of a process by which French Jewry "rediscovered" itself and Judaism after the Shoah, the absorption of M'zabi Jews presented unusual difficulties that perplexed and discouraged French Jews. The few anthropologists and sociologists who studied the absorption of M'zabi Jews in the northeast of France characterized them as the victims of the loss of French Algeria and powerless before the overwhelming shifts in their historical experience.⁴⁰⁸

This description of M'zabi Jewry, lacking agency and subject to the whims of French bureaucrats and French Jewish charity, loses sight of the real and important ways that Jews from Ghardaïa chose their future, negotiated French legislative and legal processes, and took advantage of French citizenship to control their fates. Most Jews from Ghardaïa who received full citizenship in 1961 used their citizenship as a way out

⁴⁰⁸ See, e.g., Freddy Raphaël, "Les Juifs du Mzab dans l'Est de la France," in *Les relations entre Juifs et Musulmans en Afrique du Nord, XIX-XXe siècles, Actes du colloque international de l'Institut d'histoire des pays d'outre-mer, abbaye de Sénanque, octobre 1978* (Paris, 1980), 197-224; *ibid.*, "Un exil sans royaume: les jeunes juifs du M'Zab en Alsace (1962-1982)," in *Les relations intercommunautaires juives en Méditerranée occidentale, XIIIe-XXe siècles* (Marseille: Centre National de la recherche scientifique, 1982), 258-269 ; *ibid.*, "La mémoire blessée des Juifs du M'Zab," in *Communautés juives des marges sahariennes du Maghreb* (Saint-Denis, France: REEH, 1997), 137-160.

of French territory, not as a means towards repatriation in the metropole. These Jews voted with their feet, as had M'zabi Jews since 1943, electing immigration to Israel over repatriation to France. This migration suggests a new response to the old query "What did Emancipation mean for the Jews?"

Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson have written that emancipation took different paths in various places and time periods, depending on the particular ideologies undergirding the emancipating governments and Jewish responses to their acquisition of citizenship.⁴⁰⁹ The history presented here is an addition to the canon of work on Jewish emancipation and a unique one as M'zabi Jewish emancipation arrived late in the twentieth century, a century after Algerian Jewish emancipation and almost two hundred years after the first European emancipation of French Jews in 1791. By 1961, emancipation meant something very different to the Jews of Ghardaïa, a means to an end, their emigration from Algeria. Whereas emancipation had historically been contingent in France on a rejection of the idea of a Jewish "community" in favor of "individual" French citizens, M'zabi Jews emigrated as a community even after their emancipation. M'zabi Jews offered to French officials promises of future military service and evidenced a well-informed understanding of the duties expected of them as citizens in their petitions to win full citizenship. These arguments, articulately made to French and French Jewish individuals and organizations, hid the actual wishes of many, to use French citizenship as a mechanism to escape the chaos of the Algerian War and a kind of currency towards migration. The contrast between M'zabi and Algerian Jewish responses to emancipation,

⁴⁰⁹ Pierre Birnbaum and Ira Katznelson, eds., *Paths of Emancipation: Jews, States, and Citizenship* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).

between *aliyah* and repatriation, is to a certain extent the product of the different French policies towards each population.

However, Algerian Jews overwhelmingly elected to immigrate to France not only because of their 1870 emancipation, but also because of long-standing and important cultural and economic linkages across the Mediterranean to Jewish communities and non-Jewish trading partners that predated the French conquest in 1830. M'zabi Jews did not have similar connections to Jewish communities in Europe and were most closely associated with neighboring Jewish communities in the Maghreb, in Morocco and especially Tunisia. French annexation in some ways reinforced the isolation of Ghardaïa, legally isolating the Jews of the south even while individuals made use of the new economic possibilities in French Algeria. Thus, though the long exclusion of M'zabi Jews from French citizenship surely heightened the divisions between Ghardaïa and the rest of Algeria, the similarities in Jewish emigration from Algeria to Israel resemble similar migrations from Morocco, Tunisia, and elsewhere in North Africa and the Middle East because of longstanding historical and cultural similarities between these communities that defied borders imposed on the region by European colonial powers.

As much as the M'zabi Jewish immigration was and has been described as unusual or exceptional in Algeria and France, in Israel it was and has been treated as a small part of a much larger process, the immigration and absorption of Jewish communities from the Middle East and North Africa in the decades following the establishment of Israel in 1948. Within this historiography, the M'zabi Jews are one component of a much larger whole of Jewish communities from Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco. Within this larger context, it is Algerian Jews who

immigrated overwhelmingly to France who are the atypical group. Historians of immigration and absorption in Israel have more completely analyzed the experience of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish communities in Israel, detailing the prejudice they met with and the difficulties of forging new lives for themselves. Rather than argue Jews fled their homes because of local confrontations with the Muslim communities of North Africa and the Middle East, historians of Jewish communities in North Africa and the Middle East have begun to stress the ways that other factors contributed to the Jewish emigration from the region, notably the economic pressures of war and decolonization. Droughts, poverty, economic restrictions, and spread of violence from the Algerian War to the M'zab are just a few of the multiple factors that encouraged Jewish emigration. The history of M'zabi Jewish *aliyah* is thus part of the larger movement to complicate the historiography of the North African and Middle Eastern Jewish immigrations to Israel during this period and affirms the complexity of motivations underlying the decision to emigrate.

Narratives about the large migrations of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa to Israel after 1948 have accurately characterized that period as fraught with violent conflicts between the Arab or Muslim majority and the Jewish minority in many areas, particular Iraq and Egypt. However, the dominant argument that this period was marred by tremendous Muslim antisemitism against Jewish minorities who were rescued by Zionists and Israel is a gross oversimplification. Though there were indeed many instances of extreme violence and economic persecution targeting Jews, the large-scale immigration of Jews to Israel during this period is also the result of the idealism and fervor of certain Jewish communities who chose to make *aliyah* for religious, cultural,

and personal reasons. The migration of Jews from Ghardaïa straddles these two narratives, as both the chaos and violence of the Algerian War as well as their own support for Zionism, financial needs, or religious investment in the Jewish homeland inspired M'zabi Jews to leave Algeria for Israel between 1943 and 1962.

Just as the motivating factors in Jewish immigration to Israel from the Maghreb during this period are diverse, so too the absorption experiences of these Jewish immigrants varied once in Israel. While traditional scholarship cast a rosy light on the “in-gathering” of Jews from the Middle East and North Africa, recent historiography challenges the optimistic rendering of early Jewish life in Israel for these non-European Jews. Certainly, many experienced an improvement in their quality of life; however, an equal number found themselves without employment or relegated to menial labor despite their having been trained as lawyers, doctors, and other high-skilled professions in their countries of origin. M'zabi Jews, largely traders and small business owners, were perhaps better able to adapt to their new surroundings. Many, certainly, found employment and subsequent generations intermarried with Ashkenazi families, a fact that has been generally interpreted as an indication of the success of immigrant absorption in Israel.⁴¹⁰

In Israel as in Algeria, the authorities enacted policies based on assumptions about M'zabi Jewish difference. However, these policies of absorption were applied to M'zabi Jewish citizens of Israel whose inclusion in the nation was never questioned. A comparison of the citizenship of M'zabi Jews in Israel and France could further enhance

⁴¹⁰ The rate of intermarriage between Ashkenazi and “Eastern” Jews increased from nine percent in 1957 to twenty-four percent of all marriages by 1985. Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, 1988, cited in Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Stephen Sharot, *Ethnicity, Religion and Class in Israeli Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 31.

this study by providing additional insights into the legacies of colonialism and Zionism for this population. Ultimately, rather than providing a tidy answer to the question of whether or not empire was “good” for the Jews in Algeria, the history of the Jews in Ghardaïa emphasizes the ambiguity of Empire. Though rendering some tangible benefits, the promise of French emancipation was never fully realized for M’zabi Jews in the way that it was perhaps intended, certainly not as it was conceived of centuries earlier or in 1870. The extended debates about whether or not they merited legal equality diminished the promise of French universalism for many M’zabi Jews who left Ghardaïa for an uncertain future in Israel and perhaps even for those who remained in French territory.

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