“Disengaging from the Muslim Spirit”
The Alliance Israélite Universelle and Moroccan Jews

PETER DRUCKER

ABSTRACT The project of the French Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU) in Morocco in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—to win social and political equality for Jews through European enlightenment—was intertwined with the French imperial project. Moroccan Jewish women were assigned, as mothers and wives, a special role in the AIU’s efforts: to help Jewish boys and men pursue commercial or professional careers in French-dominated society. The AIU schools set out to win Moroccan Jews away from despised Muslim gender and sexual norms by Europeanizing Jews’ marriage patterns and family forms, combating prostitution, eliminating women’s traditional head coverings, and reining in what the AIU saw as men’s promiscuity and homosexual tendencies. Ultimately, the AIU helped further estrange Moroccan Jews from Muslims but failed to secure Moroccan Jews’ smooth integration into French secular culture. Moroccan Jews in Israel today, faced with persistent discrimination, largely cling to religiously based, conservative gender norms.

KEYWORDS Morocco, Jews, sexuality

In debates over Europe’s relationship with Islam that have intensified since 2001, the history of Jews in the Islamic world occupies a special place. Some scholars, casting doubt on Jews’ enlistment in a “Judeo-Christian” camp against an Islamic camp in a “clash of civilizations,” have emphasized Jews’ integration for over a millennium into Islamic societies, with freedom of worship and a degree of communal self-governance. Other scholars have stressed the “outward signs of subordination” that Jews’ second-class dhimmi (protected non-Muslim) status exposed them to (Schroeter 2002, 88). Since Morocco’s age-old Jewish community was...
North Africa’s largest, both absolutely and relatively, it has been a focus for debates on Muslims as (in the novelist Albert Memmi’s words) Jews’ “brothers and enemies” (quoted in Barbé 2011, 118).

One aspect of Jewish-Muslim relations that has yet to be fully explored is the commonalities and contrasts between their gender and sexual norms. Shared customs included polygamy, segregation of the sexes, early ages of female marriage, and a tolerance for men’s love for youths (Massad 2007, 99–122) that was in contrast to scriptural condemnations in both religions. As one European-educated Moroccan Jew noted in 1894 of Jews and Muslims, “The family is constituted along almost the same lines” (Miller 1996, 250)—one more way that Arabic-speaking Jewry traditionally had more in common with its Muslim neighbors than medieval European Jewry did with Christians (Stillman 1991, 179). At the same time, as Daniel Boyarin (1997, xx) has shown, Jewish rabbinic tradition defined ideal male bodies—“pale, limp, and semiotically unaggressive”—in ways that set Jewish masculinity apart from the masculine ideals of neighboring cultures. Exploring how these similarities and differences evolved with European colonization, capitalist development, migration to Israel, and the rise of Arab nationalism can shed new light on the fraught triangle of Christian/Muslim/Jewish relations.

The Alliance Israélite Universelle and French Empire in Morocco

The spread of French power southward in the nineteenth century began a sea change in the relations between Christians, Jews, and Muslims in North Africa. Particularly with the French conquest of Algeria beginning in the 1830s, the French model of equal citizenship (granted to French Jews in 1791) began to be held out to Jews as an alternative to their second-class dhimmi status. It was a particularly attractive alternative for Jews with the greatest wealth and the most formal, modern education.

The Alliance Israélite Universelle (Universal Jewish Alliance; AIU), founded in France in 1860, took on the Jewish dimension of France’s “civilizing mission” with the aim of leading Jews to social and political equality by way of European education and enlightenment. Its École Normale Israélite Orientale (Eastern Jewish Teacher Training College) in Paris was assigned the task of “initiating young Orientals into the values of the Western world” (Chouraqui 1965, 183). The AIU’s promotion of Jewish interests overlapped with the French imperial project in the Mediterranean: as André Chouraqui, its assistant secretary general after World War II, admitted, its “close, even organic relations with the Quai d’Orsay [the French foreign ministry] were an open secret” (ibid., 58). The AIU’s extensive network of schools enjoyed de facto though not official French protection and, beginning in 1914, French funding; beginning in 1924, AIU teachers were de facto state employees (Katz 2011, 283). Arguably, the AIU schools became “the most influential agents of change within the Jewish communities” (Gottreich and Schroeter 2011, 10).
While the AIU was active in eastern European and Balkan Jewish communities, it made its work in the Islamic world its hallmark. Even AIU leaders whose own backgrounds were North African and who dreamed of restoring the past glory of the Jews of the Islamic world tended to accept that only French power and culture could bring this about. Morocco was one of the countries where the AIU was most active. Its very first school was founded in Tétouan, Morocco, in 1862; eventually it had eighty-three schools in Morocco, more than in the rest of the world combined (Gottreich 2007, 9). The AIU has left some of its most copious and revealing records on Morocco, one of the countries where from the 1860s to the 1950s it was most active in attempting to Europeanize Jews.

Within two or three generations the AIU gave thousands of Moroccan Jews, whose ancestors had lived in North Africa for centuries, a strong French cultural identity. This achievement was due largely to the crash course in Frenchness provided by AIU schools. Mastery of the French language in particular "facilitated economic links with the West, which were so important for upward social mobility" (Rodrigue 1993, 291). Better knowledge of French and English and of accounting and ties to European Jews were assets for Moroccan Jews in trade with Europe. As economic ties to Europe deepened, the wealth of Jewish businesspeople in the ports grew relative to that of their Muslim competitors (Miège 1961, 570, 579). The AIU had a conscious project of expanding the Jewish middle class, of which its modern Jewish schools were a part. Much of its schools' curriculum was "geared to French commercial and business activity after graduation" (Laskier 1983, 74).

Getting jobs in administration or commerce was often a matter of survival for impoverished Jewish families in Morocco, where economic divides among Jews deepened with colonization. While merchants in the northern ports grew more prosperous, Jews in the interior were losing their traditional livelihoods (Miège 1961, 569) as industrial imports from Europe drove traditional Jewish crafts out of the market and reduced many Jews to poverty (Kenbib 1994, 431–33). Many poor Jews migrated to overpopulated urban mellahs (Jewish quarters) (Schroeter 2002, 150), where they "struggled to make ends meet as craftsmen, peddlers, or shopkeepers" and "swelled the ranks of the underclass" (Miller 1996, 235).

The better-off, French or Gallicized Jews who led the AIU were proving the success of their own Europeanization by helping to Europeanize poor Jews in countries like Morocco. A paternalistic relationship developed between this Jewish elite and the majority of Moroccan Jews, often "reluctant partners in an unequal relationship of power" (Schroeter and Chetrit 2006, 172). This relationship compounded existing cultural divisions between the Moroccan Jewish upper and middle classes, who at least in the North often claimed to be Sephardic (of Spanish origin); the mass of Jews, with a Judeo-Arabic culture; and Berber-speaking Jews, who tended to live in poorer or more remote areas. Especially with the establishment of a French protectorate over much of the country in 1912, identification with
France became widespread among Morocco’s Jewish upper crust. In 1928 several educated Moroccan Jews celebrated their escape “under the auspices of France” from their exile “on the fringes of Western civilization,” declaring, “The Jews of Morocco, when they one day join the great French family, will have to be one of its ‘spiritual provinces’” (Serfaty 1969).

By contrast, the French state failed to make any substantial proportion of Moroccan Muslims feel French. In pursuing Jewish civic equality and social progress, the AIU failed to criticize the limits of European-style emancipation. Restrictions on modern education and opportunities for Muslims were in fact to the advantage of the AIU schools’ graduates. Although the AIU school in Marrakech, for example, admitted a very few Muslim students (Gottreich 2007, 74), the modern French schools for Moroccan Muslims were open only to children of the existing Muslim elite (Laskier 1983, 304–5). Since they were not vehicles for upward mobility for poor or middle-class Muslims, they produced few competitors for the AIU’s upwardly mobile alumni.

For the AIU, making Jews more European meant making them less like Muslims. Generally dismissing the possibility that Moroccan Arabic- or Berber-speaking Jews might identify as Arabs or Berbers, AIU officials tended as use “Arab” as a synonym for “Muslim” and an antonym of “Jew.” An inspector of the AIU schools wrote in 1923, “The Arab has a plodding mind [while the] Jew . . . has suddenly taken flight [as] a free man, capable of keeping step with the European.”3 One teacher in 1898 dismissed the idea of teaching in Arabic as “madness,” since the language was not “a vehicle for the conquest of modern civilization” and Arabic speakers would not “control the destinies of humanity.”4 The AIU helped foster a mind-set in which “the European was the savior of the Jew” and the Muslim “the oppressor of the Jew” (Vance 2011, 217–18)—“the antithesis of civilization and progress” (Marglin 2011, 591).

In fact, Morocco was one of the countries where the AIU’s efforts to Europeanize the wider Jewish population—including Jews’ gender and sexual norms—faced some of their most difficult challenges. These were due to the exceptional size and relative poverty of the country’s Jewry and the relatively late arrival and indirect form of French rule. By contrast with Algerian Jews, the great majority of whom were granted French citizenship by the Crémieux decree in 1870, and even Tunisian Jews, a third of whom gained French nationality under French rule (Stillman 1991, 60), Moroccan Jews after the establishment of the protectorate in 1912 were stripped of earlier forms of European protection and relegated to the status of “natives” (Laskier 1983, 39).

In 1913 Hubert Lyautey, the French resident (governor) in Morocco, rejected a plea from the AIU president, Narcisse Leven, to place Moroccan Jews under the extraterritorial jurisdiction of French courts. A 1918 reform placed Jews under the combined jurisdiction of rabbinic and Moroccan courts, depriving the community
of some of its autonomy without granting Jews full equality (Schroeter and Chetrit 2006, 179, 189–90, 193). A French law that in 1920 allowed foreigners in Morocco to apply for French citizenship did not apply to Moroccan Jews (Tahtah n.d. [1995], 153–55). For AIU leaders, combined subjection to Moroccan Muslim officialdom and rabbinic authority was a major obstacle to freeing the mass of Moroccan Jews from their “backwardness.”

AIU teachers’ descriptions of the conditions they observed among poor Moroccan Jews — such as syphilitic sores on teenage pupils and the terrified screams of child brides on their wedding nights — still have the power to shock today. So does their readiness to blame Muslim influence. An official history of the AIU published in 1920 described Jews in the Moroccan city of Meknes as tainted by “defects and vices, contracted by contact with a population that is coarse, ignorant, [and] fanatical” (Marglin 2011, 592). AIU leaders were quick to conclude that all the evils they saw would be swept away by the triumphant advance of French civilization and by the AIU as one of its agencies.

In attempting to rescue poor Jews from their impasse, the AIU worked to link them more closely to French capital and society, to strengthen the French colonial authorities, and to subordinate traditional Moroccan Jewish authorities to secularized French or Gallicized Jewish professionals. While secularization for the AIU meant relegating religion to the private sphere, not eliminating it, and its schools’ curriculum included religious instruction in a liberal form of Judaism, Islam unlike Judaism and Christianity was tacitly viewed as incompatible with secular modernity.

**Emancipating Jewish Women the European Way**

Gender, class, ethnicity, religion, and sexuality intersected in the AIU’s efforts, with women assigned a special role. AIU alumni in Tangier asserted in 1901 that “the progress of women is the sign and the condition of true general progress” (Marglin 2011, 593). The AIU was educating Moroccan Jewish girls to help, as mothers and wives, in Jewish boys’ and men’s pursuit of new commercial, official, or professional careers.

In keeping with its project of emancipation, the AIU’s goals included Europeanizing Moroccan Jews’ marriage patterns and family forms, combating prostitution, emancipating Moroccan women within the limits of the then existing European norms—for example, by eliminating women’s traditional head coverings—and reining in what it saw as Moroccan Jewish men’s sexual promiscuity and homosexual tendencies. The AIU schools set out to win its pupils to European gender and sexual norms. These norms were shifting in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A strong emphasis on men and women’s separate spheres early in the nineteenth century was giving way to a greater professional scope for women. Yet in contrast with the traditions of rabbinic Judaism, whose
male ideal was one of quiet piety and study, activity and mastery were still seen as characteristically masculine. At the same time sexologists increasingly defined the normal majority as heterosexual and consigned homosexual desire and behavior to a supposedly abnormal minority (Herzog 2011, 31–41, 56–57).

The AIU inspired a significant minority of Moroccan Jewish women to embrace women’s emancipation as defined in Europe. While many Arab nationalist and feminist accounts have described colonization as a process of literal or metaphorical unveiling, prostitution, or even rape of colonized women, many Jewish women linked to the AIU saw colonization as bringing them greater liberty. With capitalist development, nuclear families increasingly became the norm among Jews, particularly as they migrated from small villages, where several families often lived under one roof, to bigger cities, where households were smaller (Tahtah n.d. [1995], 154). AIU-influenced Jews believed that women were “escaping from the state of inferiority that Islamic influence had shut [them] into” and “playing a role more and more similar to that of Western women” (Chouraqui 1965, 238).

AIU alumni in Tangier explained in 1901 that “the exercise of feminine activity” required that Jewish mores be further “disengaged from the Muslim spirit” (Marglin 2011, 595–96). The Islamic world and women’s oppression were often linked in France at the time: the French feminist leader Hubertine Auclert in 1900 called child and polygamous brides “little victims of Arab debauchery” (quoted in Clancy-Smith 1996, 220). The AIU exaggerated differences between Jewish and Muslim women, both traditional and contemporary, the better to make its own female teachers missionaries of European-style emancipation. “It is up to the teacher to destroy the prejudices and outmoded ideas, inherited from the Muslim environment, that seek to keep women in a kind of subaltern function,” AIU leaders wrote as early as 1865. “The Jewish woman [is] better prepared for civilization than the Muslim woman, because she is free and unconfined” (Chouraqui 1965, 446).

Many female AIU teachers took on the role of emancipators with enthusiasm. A career with the AIU was virtually “the only one available to young Jewish women from . . . North Africa who wanted to lead an independent existence.” A teacher even became “a notable in the community” (Rodrique 1990, 74).

Teachers’ prominence brought them into conflict with religious authorities. Besides affirming European Jews’ superiority to the Jews of the Islamic world, the AIU’s version of women’s emancipation provided an ideological basis for reversing the traditional subordination of Jewish educators to rabbis. While some rabbis responded to the AIU in a pragmatic and conciliatory spirit (Stillman n.d. [1995], 123–24), others could be the strongest opponents in Jewish communities of its brand of women’s emancipation. In the Moroccan town of Salé in 1919, for example, an AIU woman teacher was initially buried in the section of the Jewish cemetery reserved for prostitutes (Laskier 1983, 200–201). The AIU often reciprocated this hostility. From founts of authority, rabbis and other Jewish religious authorities
became in the AIU’s accounts—despite its care in showing respect for Judaism as such—sources of superstition and perpetuators of backwardness. One AIU school director even blamed the spread of syphilis among his pupils on the lack of hygiene in traditional Jewish circumcision rites.  

Certainly rabbis were no feminists, although Sephardic rabbis had had the reputation of being more rationalist and open to outside influences than their eastern European counterparts. Whether Sephardic or Ashkenazi, traditional rabbinic Judaism made clear Jewish women’s lesser status by reserving the most exalted commandments, those concerning study of the Talmud, for men (Boyarin 1997, 158). For many of the AIU’s female teachers, European feminism was an attractive alternative. The AIU clearly fostered education among Jewish girls. Its first girls’ school in Tétouan opened in 1866, only four years after its first boys’ school (Miller 1996, 237). In Tunisia in 1955 girls made up 48.8 percent of Jewish schoolchildren, while in 1954 girls were only 26.1 percent of Muslim schoolchildren (Walters 2011, 267–68).

The AIU’s male leaders rarely spoke of equality between men and women, however. The Europeanized Jews that the AIU aimed to produce were clearly gendered: besides being good citizens and members of society, they were always defined as “proper” men and women. On balance, the evidence tends to confirm Jarrod Hayes’s (2000, 276) conclusion that colonization in practice meant the “imposition of a specifically European form of patriarchy, the nuclear family headed by men.” The Europeanization of gender and sexual norms that AIU leaders promoted was a specific one geared to the expansion of the French empire, economy, and culture.

For AIU leaders, contemporary European conceptions of masculinity and femininity were obvious and natural. Thus its “teaching should not make women less feminine”: girls were taught to cook, keep house, clean, and make clothes, with a focus on “moral education and manual tasks” (Chouraqui 1965, 190). One school director said in a speech that the schools would create men who were honest workers and “greedy for progress” and women who would be good housekeepers and “angels in the home.”  

While careers gradually opened up for a few women educated in French as secretaries, pharmacists, and nurses as well as teachers, the AIU argued for girls’ education mainly “because they would become mothers of future generations” (Walters 2011, 271–72). It was woman’s “domestic influence and her natural role as educator” that suited her to preparing “the next generation for a new destiny.” Even female teachers’ role was described in stereotypically feminine ways: one female school director called the classroom “an extension of the home, even a replacement for it,” where children would be transformed “through a pedagogy of love” (Miller 1996, 232, 239).

The AIU was trying to walk a tightrope, seeking to emancipate girls while keeping them “feminine.” Producing women who were merely “angels in the home”
was a conservative approach by contemporary European standards,\textsuperscript{7} and many in the AIU rejected it. Different teachers leaned more to one side or to the other. Some even leaned different ways at different moments: one school director in Iran said in a speech that AIU education would give its female pupils “a fuller understanding of their duties as wives and mothers” and later in the same speech that the AIU would help women claim every profession and office that men could occupy.\textsuperscript{8} One educator said the schools had to “feminize’ courses [for girls] without making them effeminate or watering them down.” Another argued for girls’ sports, saying, “Women need normally developed bodies as much as men do” (Malino 2010, 272).

The AIU’s version of Jewish women’s emancipation included a battle against their traditional head coverings. Jewish women in Islamic countries had covered their heads, much as Muslim women did, although, unlike some Muslim women, not their faces (Gottreich 2007, 80). The Talmud enjoined Jewish women to cover their heads in public, making failure to do so grounds for divorce without return of dowry. The fact that Jewish women were less strictly segregated than Muslim women, however, together with the influence of visiting European Jewish merchants, may have facilitated Jewish women’s giving up traditional head coverings (Stillman 2000, 19). This may have led to the AIU winning this battle relatively easily and emphasizing other issues. In any event, it did not seem to share the obsession with Muslim women’s head coverings that the French colonial authorities in Algeria had, by Frantz Fanon’s (1965, 38) account, or to treat the veil as “a screen onto which were projected images of strangeness and fantasies of danger,” as is often done in France today (Scott 2007, 10).

Nevertheless, many Jewish women’s abandonment of head coverings (or their replacement with European hats) was for the AIU one more proof of its success in Europeanizing Jews. The AIU actively promoted European dress among Jewish girls, who traditionally had worn much the same clothes as Muslim girls; classes for girls even included sewing European clothes for themselves (Land 2011, 247–48). One AIU school inspector in Morocco wrote in 1923: “Those young girls in shorts preparing to run in a public event, what an impressive example! These are the children of those veiled women who, even ten years ago, . . . fled at the sight of any foreigner.”\textsuperscript{9} A female director of an AIU school in Iran celebrated the unveiling of women by government order in 1936 with festivities in the grounds of the AIU school. Her speech described the chador as an “old and archaic custom that has to be attacked head-on to undertake women’s liberation.” She called on Jewish women to take the lead since they, unlike “certain retrograde women,” had “no imagined religious prescription [as a] pretext.”\textsuperscript{10}

Traditionalist Jews by no means shared the AIU’s enthusiasm for bareheaded women. One Syrian rabbi complained of Jewish girls showing their faces, going “to display their beauty before commonfolk and notables alike” and thus getting “an education in sinning.” A Baghdad rabbi bemoaned “those women who have cast off
the yoke of modesty and go about bareheaded for all to see and are not ashamed.” He had no doubt that this, like “all sorts of evil and abomination,” was the fault of the AIU schools (Stillman 1991, 222, 244).

Pernicious or beneficent, the AIU’s influence on Jewish women’s mores was by all accounts greater among the upper and middle classes. One female teacher complained that the Jewish women of Fez “from the ordinary, simple families”— as opposed to “the women from affluent families . . . who have lived for a while in a more advanced culture, thereby adopting more or less Western ideas”—“are, in general, quite backward.”11 The AIU’s difficulties in turning Moroccan Jewish women into modern mothers were compounded by widespread abandonment, permanent or temporary, of poor Jewish wives by husbands leaving inland cities to seek work on the coast or to trade in the remote interior. Divorce was also very common among Marrakech Jews in the 1920s and 1930s, not always at the husbands’ initiative (Gottreich 2007, 81, 68–70, 80).

Jewish men, too, were to be turned into men on the European model. The European “ideals of ‘masculine beauty,’ health, and normalcy” promoted by the AIU involved a rejection of the model of male “timidity and gentleness” traditional in rabbinic Jewish culture (Boyarin 1997, xxi). Western European observers found the Jewish men they encountered in Islamic countries simply deficient in manliness—above all when they failed to meet Muslim violence with violence. An English observer in Morocco reported the “debasement” of a Jewish man meekly submitting to stone throwing and spitting by a Muslim child of six (Lewis 1984, 164–66). Yet in rabbinic tradition such behavior was not seen as demeaning for a Jewish man, whose inner spiritual dignity sustained him in the face of provocation (Boyarin 1997, 34).

**Europeanizing Jewish Sexuality**

Teaching Jews to be Europeanized men and women also meant for the AIU teaching them a “normal,” Europeanized sexuality. This implied a stigmatization of their existing sexuality. The AIU often saw Moroccan Jewish girls and women as sexual victims and set about rescuing them.

One of the AIU’s most common images of Jewish girls was that of the terrified, helpless child bride. Its directors and teachers filed more reports on the fight against child marriage than on any other gender-related issue. The reports are sometimes heartrending. One of them, as late as 1934, said that girls in the area of Demnat in Morocco were married at the age of nine, ten, eleven, or at most twelve to grooms who were twenty-five, thirty-five, or forty and described cries of terror that could be heard late at night from child brides forced to enter the marital bedroom. The reply to this report from the AIU’s secretary in Paris took a reassuringly long view: “This plague of child marriages will ultimately disappear in Demnat as it has disappeared
from all of Morocco’s major urban centers, once the Jews of this region have been in contact for a longer period with French civilization.”

The AIU frequently blamed “the influence of Muslim mores” for child marriages (Chouraqui 1965, 197). It said that Jewish child marriages showed that Jews “have imitated the Arabs [sic], who for a purpose that is hardly praiseworthy, marry off their children at an age when they should still be sitting on school benches” (Stillman 1991, 200). (Married girls, however young, were not admitted as pupils in AIU schools.) The AIU saw its schools as “a decisive factor in the regression of premature marriages” as well as of divorce and polygamy, fighting a relentless battle for the stabilization of the nuclear family (Chouraqui 1965, 197).

Besides reasons of health, hygiene, and morals for enforcing a minimum age of eighteen for marriage, the AIU cited the authority of “our foremost talmudic authorities” (Stillman 1991, 200) — a selective reading, given that at least one passage in the Talmud praises the father who has his children married “soon after sexual maturity” (Boyarin 1997, 48). Jewish religious authorities often opposed interventions against child marriages. The rabbinic court in Casablanca in 1910 told a European Jew who had taken in an eight-year-old Jewish girl who had been afraid to join her new husband that the girl had been married “in proper religious fashion” and that “this sort of marriage took place frequently in Morocco and was completely normal” (Stillman 1991, 201). Moroccan rabbis agreed in 1934 on twelve as a minimum age for girls’ marriage, raising the minimum to fifteen only in 1948 (Laskier 1983, 200–201).

Failing to persuade rabbis to change their rulings, the AIU resorted to civil legislation. This required more systematic bureaucratic administration. The protectorate’s law in Morocco forbidding the marriage of girls under the age of fourteen could not be enforced as long as the girls had no birth certificates or other proof of age, as was often the case. One AIU school director wrote in 1927 that having the inspectors of Jewish institutions in Morocco send a circular on the issue to the country’s rabbis was “a grave error”; the protectorate authorities should simply have bypassed the rabbis and enforced the law themselves. An AIU school director in Iran succeeded (by his account) in putting a stop to child marriages in his community only by threatening to close the school unless it was agreed that no marriage would take place at all without the AIU’s authorization.

AIU spokespeople preferred horror stories about early marriage to addressing the complexity of the custom, in which, for example, actual consummation was often postponed until the brides reached puberty. For the AIU, child marriages were an expression of contempt for women in general. One female teacher, who defined herself as a feminist, explained them as reflections of the “cries of mourning which welcome into the world the young girl, whose only sin is to have been born,” and of a view of marriage as “a convenient way to get rid of” daughters. Another wrote that girls were seen as “useless mouths to feed” — a view that would have made no sense
when women played a major role in household production but became more compelling as craft production declined.

The AIU argued that premature marriage of girls led to domestic slavery for women and that sufficient education of girls before marriage led to female emancipation. The sequel to the story of the eight-year-old bride’s attempted rescue in Casablanca casts some doubt on this conclusion. The girl’s European would-be rescuer met her again years later as a grown woman. She greeted him warmly, suggesting that she harbored no resentment for what he had done. His account gives no sense of whether she felt her marriage was oppressive; early twentieth-century marriage was of course often oppressive to women in many ways. But nothing in his account shows that she was necessarily more confined or more cowed than a European wife would have been (Stillman 1991, 201). Other AIU sources gave a different argument against child marriage: that a Jewish girl who was too young when she had children would not exercise sufficient authority over them. In other words, untrained Jewish women would not adequately perform the role the AIU assigned them of disciplining their sons and ensuring their upward mobility.

The AIU also frequently blamed polygamy and the ease with which men divorced their wives on Islam rather than Judaism, even though these customs were based as solidly on the Torah’s authority as the Quran’s. One teacher admitted, “Even in the most respectable families polygamy is permitted.”

The strongest evidence the AIU had for the urgency of moral uplift among Moroccan Jews was the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). One director of an AIU school reported that of 220 male pupils examined in 1909 in the town of Mogador, about 20 had syphilitic sores, as did 8 of 130 girls, adding that the AIU’s campaign for medical treatment had reduced the numbers to about 10 boys and 4 girls in 1913. The protectorate authorities were the AIU’s allies in its campaign against STDs. Apparently the AIU made no objection to the colonial administration’s decision to set up separate medical services for Jews and Muslims.

The Mogador school director associated STDs, traditionally enough, with prostitution. It, too, was pervasive in the Jewish community. “The nieces of the president of the congregation live from prostitution,” he reported; “two pupils of the girls’ school . . . haunt single men’s rooms.” Interestingly, he blamed particularly the town’s government officials, “almost all of them single,” who easily overcame girls’ scruples. In fact, there were powerful economic and social causes for the prevalence of Jewish prostitution. Many young Jewish working women in Casablanca turned to occasional prostitution to supplement their meager pay (Stillman 1991, 37nn36–37). Many Jewish women in Marrakech were driven to prostitution by their husbands’ desertion or prolonged absence. For whatever reason, by 1912 more than 15 percent of the adult female Jewish population of Marrakech was reported to consist of prostitutes (Gottreich 2007, 80–81).
Jewish religious authorities tended to find a modus vivendi with the practice of prostitution. The chief rabbi of Cairo ruled that Jewish prostitutes' gifts to synagogues could be accepted as long as a prostitute's "contemptible name" was not inscribed on them (Stillman 1991, 220). The AIU, more intransigent, was an enthusiastic campaigner against the practice.

For the modern European girls that the AIU wanted to produce, as for traditionalist Jews, the alternative to prostitution was marriage. There was never any question of a future for Jewish girls other than marriage. (Although one unusually daring AIU school director considered that "free unions are as pure as marriage," he added that it had to be discouraged, because "existing legislation does not sufficiently protect women who are not legally married.")) Moreover, the AIU was nowhere near as firm in opposing arranged marriages as it was in combating early or polygamous ones (Sezgin 2005, 230).

The AIU was as concerned to turn its male pupils into Europeanized men as it was to turn its female pupils into Europeanized women. Boys' greater relative freedom made this harder to achieve, especially since sex education was not taught in AIU schools. One school director, Isaac Dahan in Meknes, concluded in 1939 that the best vehicle for influencing Jewish boys' sexuality was the Boy Scouts. He counted on the scout leader's influence; with a good one, acting as "a friend and an older brother," a boy would "seldom be prevailed upon to misbehave." The watchwords were enlightenment and above all self-control. It was a great challenge to "guide adolescents at the height of puberty, tormented by this instinct whose power is undeniable." But it was crucial in order to show a boy the way to "his future duties as a man, husband and father." The scout leader had to make clear to the boy that "nature can be held in check" and that he "need not give in to his impulses." It was possible for a boy to subordinate his urges if he organized his life "in a way that avoids any temptation." "In our view, the sexual problem . . . will be decisive for the morality, the happiness and the future of the race." Dahan, while more outspoken than most, was by no means unusual in the AIU in associating enlightenment with greater sexual restraint. The director of a school in Mogador blamed STDs on ignorance and promiscuity, adding that "with a bit of patience and time, we will win out over both these causes." Dahan left no doubt that boys' parents, hobbled by their ignorance and shame, were a major part of the problem. Left to the mercy of their families, boys would be "exposed, defenseless, to countless evils," including STDs: they "endure the ravages of these disorders rather than make a painful confession to their parents or even a doctor." So it was up to the Boy Scouts and the AIU to induce diseased men to seek treatment and, just as important, to train boys to postpone having sex.

Sexual ignorance and the curiosity it fostered had another unfortunate consequence in Dahan's eyes: it led boys into "unnatural vices." This reflected the widespread belief in Europe that, as one French naval doctor put it in 1893, "the
Arab is an inveterate pederast” (Aldrich 2003, 16). The homosexual identities that French and other European colonial officials and visitors projected onto Arabs were evidence of European superiority to many of them. The European vision of an endemic Arab homosexuality reflected the imposition of an emerging European heteronormative view of human sexuality on Islamic cultures whose traditional view of human sexuality did not rest on a “hetero-homo binary” (Massad 2007, 40). Most men and boys who engaged in sex with other males were married or would go on to marry.

The Jews of the Islamic world were not immune either to the temptations of sex between males. One Frenchman commented in 1909, “The Arabic [sic] and Jewish youth of Tunis readily prostitute themselves to foreigners” (Aldrich 2003, 62). As European colonizers attributed homosexuality to a decadent Muslim culture, the region’s Jews increasingly attributed homosexuality among Jews to Muslim influence. One Baghdad rabbi asked rhetorically whether even “the sin of homosexuality, which is found among the other peoples in whose midst we live . . . [had] come into the House of Israel” (Stillman 1991, 243). In this respect the AIU differed little from the rabbis. By claiming that scientific enlightenment was a necessary remedy to homosexuality, Dahan and others in the AIU were only making a variation on a virtually universal condemnation.

The AIU’s Project Frustrated
In the interwar years AIU leaders took credit for impressive accomplishments. They felt that they were successfully Europeanizing Jews throughout the Maghreb. A report to its Central Committee in 1920 declared that many were “astonished by the radical transformation that our institutions have brought about” (Ollivier 1959, 190).

Only after World War II did AIU leaders realize that the assimilation of some North African Jews into the French empire had reflected the position of a minority of Jews as intermediaries between French capital and Muslim labor. Decolonization deprived most Jews of this role, as Muslims rebelled against discrimination and claimed commercial and administrative jobs that had been largely reserved for Christians and Jews. In Morocco Jews began losing ground as early as the 1930s in administrative, white-collar, and commercial jobs — mainly to Europeans, but also to a lesser extent to Muslims (Laskier 1983, 286, 293). The fall of the French Republic in 1940 was a blow to the AIU’s project from which it never fully recovered, as the king of Morocco claimed (at least for public consumption) to be protecting his Jewish subjects from the anti-Semitic Vichy authorities — a striking reversal of roles between Europeans and Muslims as the AIU had conceived them.

The rise of Arab nationalism and the founding of Israel were decisive in frustrating the AIU’s project in Morocco. The denial of French citizenship to Jews and their limited opportunities for upward mobility had put limits on their secularization and helped preserve their communal, religiously defined institutions.
While Morocco’s very disparate Jewish communities increasingly in the twentieth century defined themselves as Moroccan, their distinctively Jewish version of Moroccan identity was “detached from the emerging nation-state.” Having linked Jewish emancipation to French imperial power, the AIU found that its project of emancipation ended up “detaching rather than integrating Jews in society” (Schroeter and Chetrit 2006, 197–98, 173). Especially those Jews who were most secularized, like the emancipated Jews of Tangier, “lived in Morocco, but were not exactly part of it” (Miller 1996, 251–52).

A minority of secularized Moroccan Jews has persisted for decades in resisting their marginalization in independent Morocco, seeking a fully equal place in a modern society. Alongside some prosperous and influential businesspeople, Jews lastingly committed to Morocco have included the radical leftist leader Abraham Serfaty. Serfaty endured seventeen years of imprisonment in Morocco and eight years of exile in France before returning to Morocco in 1999 and dying there in 2010. “I am an Arab Jew, and I am a Jew because I am an Arab and an Arab because I am a Jewish Arab,” he declared (quoted in Lotfi 2010)—in stark contrast to the AIU’s project of Europeanizing Moroccan Jews. He resolved to “raise my voice against the forces that had broken this millennia-old friendship” between Moroccan Jews and Muslims (Serfaty and Daure-Serfaty 1993, 16). While the AIU had worked to link Moroccan Jews to France, Serfaty fought for a fully decolonized, transformed Arab region and “another kind of Morocco” (Rosen 1992, 27) in which Jews would have an equal place.

Serfaty wrote explicitly of the transformation of gender relations that the transformation of Morocco would include. There could be no “society founded on the creativity of all its members if women were marginalized from it,” he wrote (Serfaty and Daure-Serfaty 1993, 98). He saw before his death that the Moroccan women’s movement was already “starting to change civil society deeply” (Rosen 1992, 26–27). In the end, he predicted, “women’s liberation [would] overturn the millennia-old blockages of patriarchal societies” (Serfaty and Daure-Serfaty 1993, 81). His vision of Jewish and women’s liberation in a transformed Morocco was rooted in an affirmation of Diaspora, which, in the words of Melanie Kaye-Kantrowitz (2007, 222), “cherishes love across the borders.”

Despite a strong, abiding sense of Moroccan identity, however, the overwhelming majority of Moroccan Jews left the country in the postwar decades, a minority for France, the great majority for Israel. Although there were attempts to encourage Jews to stay in Morocco after independence—the 1956 constitution made them formally equal citizens (Tahtah n.d. [1995], 156)—and emigration was officially restricted until 1961, one wave of Jews after another left the country. Of the between 250,000 and 300,000 Jews who had lived in Morocco at the start of the twentieth century, only 170,000 remained by 1956, 60,000 by 1967, and 22,000 by 1975; only about 5,000 remain today (Laskier 1983, 340–42; Tahtah n.d. [1995],
In hindsight the AIU’s project, in unwilling conjunction with Zionism and the rise of Arab nationalism, had contributed to making most Moroccan Jews aliens in their own country.

While helping to sever Jews from their Moroccan roots, the AIU’s project only effectively Europeanized a minority. Only in France was its project of Europeanization crowned with significant success— and even there only partially. A study of sixty-six Moroccan Jewish men who settled in France (each with a brother who settled in Israel) shows significant upward mobility, with 28 percent of them becoming managers, businessmen, or professionals (compared to 13 percent of their Israeli brothers) and only 4 percent unskilled workers (compared to over a third of the Israeli brothers). Culturally, however, the study tells a different story. In France as in Israel, Moroccan Jews continued to have large families (with six or seven members). Although immigrants to France were among the most Gallicized of Moroccan Jews, not one of the sixty-six brothers in France perceived himself as French. Many were unhappy there: 21 percent had decided to leave, and another 38 percent were considering it (Inbar and Adler 1977, 36, 35, 45, 66, 118–19).

The size of the Moroccan Jewish community in France actually declined in the 1970s and 1980s (Chazny and Simhon n.d.). While the recent sharp increase in Jewish emigration from France is usually attributed to fears of rising anti-Semitism, little information is available about the number of Moroccans among Jewish emigrants or the specific motives they may have.

For the great majority of Moroccan Jews— above all the poorer, less educated, less secular, and less Europeanized— Israel was the destination. In the end almost 270,000 Moroccan Jews settled there.27 Although religious messianism played some part in this mass migration (Boum 2010), one Jew called it in 1958 “an exodus that no one truly desires,” adding, “The people are not fleeing Morocco, but their own misery” (Baïda 2011, 330). His account lends credence to Ella Shohat’s (2006, 337) conclusion that “panic and disorientation, rather than desire for aliyah [immigration to Israel] in the nationalist sense of the word, was the key factor” in the move to Israel by most Jews who came there from the Arab region.

The AIU’s postwar president, René Cassin, hoped wistfully in later years that Maghrebi immigrants to Israel would not “lose the benefit of the initial education that they had received from the AIU” (Chouraqui 1965, vi). The AIU clung to its traditional role as patron of Jews of North African and West Asian origin (known in Israel as Mizrahim). But Israel’s Ashkenazi elite considered these immigrants “poor human material” (Stillman 1991, 167), “passive vessels to be shaped,” in Shohat’s (2006, 217) words, not by the AIU but by “the revivifying spirit of Promethean Zionism.”

The history of Moroccan Jews in Israel is largely one of setbacks for the AIU’s projects of Gallicization and secularization. Concentrated in “development towns” in Israel’s peripheral regions, Moroccan Jews are underrepresented among
professionals. Among Mizrahim generally, a study found them four times as likely as the average Israeli to occupy the lowest income category; of Moroccans specifically, 51 percent were blue-collar in 1961 and 54 percent as late as 1981 (Ben-Rafael and Sharot 1991, 30, 32, 67). Gaps between Mizri and Ashkenazi women, too, have only grown over time (Mizrachi 2013, 15). Moroccans’ relatively low economic status is due mainly not to their cultural characteristics but to the direct and indirect power of Ashkenazi owners and controllers of capital, as the discrimination reported by Moroccans—especially the most highly educated ones—confirmed (Ben-Rafael and Sharot 1991, 42, 214). As a result, recent figures show, the inmates of Israeli prisons are disproportionately of Moroccan origin. Increasing inequality in Israel as a result of neoliberal economic policies since 1985 has reinforced economic disparities between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim (Lehmann and Siebzehner 2006, 147, 8).

Moreover, contrary to the projects of both the AIU and Labor Zionism, many Moroccan Jews in Israel have rebelled against secularization, gender equality, and sexual emancipation. Although the hold of tradition on Moroccan Jews had weakened before their departure, they had never wholly given up their attachment to it (Stillman n.d. [1995], 127). In Morocco, where sharia was the basis of the personal status code adopted in 1959, the Jews continued for decades to be governed by rabbinic courts (Tahtah n.d. [1995], 157). As a result, despite the AIU’s efforts, Moroccan Jews were among the least secularized groups on their arrival in Israel (Ben-Rafael and Sharot 1991, 90).

Some further secularization occurred during the first decades of Moroccan Jewish immigration (ibid., 29), reflected in the 1970s in the brief heyday of the radical left-wing Israeli Black Panthers: hardly a form of secularization that the AIU would have advocated. The Panthers never put down deep roots among Moroccan Israelis, however, and consisted largely of male, macho members of “the lumpen-proletariat of Jerusalem’s slums”: “petty thieves, pimps, and juvenile delinquents” (Bernstein 1984, 133, 135). Their one attempt to use family issues to appeal to their ethnic base was a demand for higher incomes for large households (Frankel 2012, 83, 86).

In any event, the initial trend toward secularization among Moroccan Jews in Israel has since encountered strong resistance, particularly with the rise since the 1980s of the Mizrahi ultra-Orthodox Shas party. Orienting to the Israeli ultra-Orthodox while rebelling against anti-Mizrahi discrimination among them, Shas created a subculture of Israeli “Middle Easterners who wished to stem the erosion of religiosity” (Ben-Rafael and Sharot 1991, 228). It grew rapidly in the 1990s among not only the ultra-Orthodox but also traditionally religious Mizrahim expressing their ethnic identity and embittered residents of “development towns.” Fluctuating around 10 percent of the total vote, Shas wins around 20 percent of the Mizrahi vote and even more among those with the lowest incomes and least education—which
disproportionately includes Moroccans (Lehmann and Siebzehner 2006, 130, 166, 164–65).

Shas does not oppose women’s paid employment as such, since it has promoted the originally Ashkenazi ultra-Orthodox custom of having women work while men study. Nor does it necessarily oppose the women’s education that the AIU so strongly promoted—which has continued to progress among Moroccan Jewish women (Mizrachi 2013, 67–80)—since educated women can be a boon to their husbands’ careers (meaning in this case careers in Shas-controlled government ministries). Shas has, however, fostered a return to traditional sexual segregation and “modesty” in women’s clothing as part of a project of “reconstituting families that had been disorganised by poverty and marginality.” This includes arranged marriages at an early age (today meaning between sixteen and eighteen) and rapidly rising fertility rates (Lehmann and Siebzehner 2006, 141, 71, 79, 89, 104, 139). Although the number of children per Mizrahi woman fell rapidly and substantially in the first decades after immigration (Friedlander et al. 1980, 584–85; Mizrachi 2013, 29–30), strong countertendencies have emerged recently. Shas has encouraged a turnaround, helping in 2002 to pass a bill giving particularly generous family allowances to families with more than four children (Lehmann and Siebzehner 2006, 139).

Conclusion
This history suggests, contrary to the AIU’s assumptions, that neither Jewish nor women’s emancipation nor secularization was necessarily linked to a community of destiny with Europe. Some Jews achieved social and economic equality in some European or European-dominated societies in specific historical conditions. (Algerian Jews, for example, more secularized than Moroccan Jews and today overwhelmingly living in France, followed a distinctive trajectory.) Most Moroccan Jews, in different historical conditions, have not followed a secular path toward social integration or gender equality. Adaptation to French culture provided some opportunities for some Moroccan Jewish women, but in the face of persistent discrimination against Moroccan Jews in Israel, growing numbers of Moroccan Jewish women have turned their backs on the European secular model of emancipation.

Persistent ethnic distinctiveness and religiosity among Moroccan Jews in Israel today can be seen as a continuation of poor Moroccan Jews’ resentment of and resistance to the paternalism of the Gallicized, secularized Jewish elite in Morocco in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The prevalent forms of Moroccan self-assertion in Israel today do not help many Moroccan Jewish women pursue independent professional or political careers. Shas stands in the way of Moroccan women leading independent or adventurous sex lives or of Moroccan women or men pursuing same-sex desires. Yet its ethnically distinctive brand of ultra-Orthodoxy has channeled much of Moroccan Jews’ anger at the condescension
and contempt they have experienced for generations from secularized elites, whether in Morocco, France, or Israel. The politics of religious self-assertion, gender inequality, and sexual conservatism has been all the more attractive, because secularized elites’ promises of equality, whether held out by the AIU or by Labor Zionists, have proved hollow for most Moroccan Jews. At the same time their presence in Israel leaves them still in a largely Muslim region but more estranged from it than ever.

PETER DRUCKER, a fellow of the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam, is editor of the anthology Different Rainbows (2000) on same-sex sexualities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender movements in the global South. His book Warped: Gay Normality and Queer Anti-capitalism is forthcoming. Contact: polias@antenna.nl.

Acknowledgment
Thanks to the librarians of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Paris, especially Rose Levyne, for their help with the research for this article. Thanks to the participants in the Sexual Nationalisms conference in Amsterdam in January 2011, especially Theo van der Meer and Joan W. Scott; to the editors of History Workshop Journal; and to the Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies reviewers for their comments. Thanks as well to Enzo Traverso and Alan Wald for their suggestions and encouragement and to Christopher Beck for his love and support.

Notes
1. For an overview of the customs regulating dhimmi status, see Lewis 1984, 25–55, 164–66.
2. While Boyarin (1997, 23n71) explicitly limits his comments on traditional Jewish rabbinic culture to Ashkenazim, many of his arguments are based on citations from the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud, which were common to the Jews of the Islamic world.
7. Thanks to Mary Anne Case for pointing this out at the Sexual Nationalisms conference.
8. Mme S. Cohen to AIU President, “L’évolution féminine,” Ispahan, February 9, 1936, AIU, Iran I C 03.
10. Cohen, “L’évolution féminine.” The school director’s report on the event, like her speech at it, acclaimed the “great regenerative and renovating genius of His Imperial Majesty”—the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty that would be overthrown by the 1979 revolution.
13. Marriages like this did breach the Talmudic standard of sexual maturity, as well as the Talmud’s insistence on a girl’s right to refuse a match (Boyarin 1997, 65).
15. V. Eshkénazi to AIU President, AAIU, Maroc K 2/11 C 4.02.
17. N. Benchimol, Fez, November 25, 1900, AAIU, France XIV F 25 (quoted in Rodrigue 1993, 83).
18. Révidi to AIU President, AAIU, Maroc III B 18.15.
20. Loubador to AIU President, “Les maladies contagieuses.”
21. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
25. Dahan, “Le scoutisme et le problème sexuel.”
26. Ibid.

References


