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Part II

Beyond the Saharan Cloak: Uncovering Jewish Identity from Southern Morocco and throughout the Sahara

Janice R. Levi

Abstract

From the end of the medieval period into the early modern era, regional anti-Semitic violence in Northwest Africa forced Jews to convert and/or flee into other lands. A legacy of imposed invisibility, through illegality of Judaism and fear of expressing a Jewish faith identity, was a consequence of intolerance towards Jews. For their own safety, Jewish persons had to conceal their faith identity. In doing so, what appears to be a lack of Jewish presence may simply be a strategic concealment of one's interior faith conviction. This paper explores how Western institutional oversight, by organizations and scholars, continually perpetuates the impression of Jewish absence from these spaces. Further, the paper seeks to challenge a visible lack of Jewish presence in West Africa by analyzing the complexity of conversion and investigating seemingly "invisible" identities. Lastly, the paper examines how the efforts of Jewish persons to become undetectable have contributed to the historical elisions of Jewish presence in West Africa.

"The cemetery of the Jews in Timbuktu is today a simple dune covered in shrubs, without epitaphs. This is the lost domain of some forgotten deaths in history."

— Ismael Diadie Haïdara ¹

When faced with adversity, the expression "fight or flight" is too simple a binary to understand the Jewish response to historical moments of persecution if understood as a physical movement alone. Rather than merely looking at corporeal movement, which often accompanied other responses, one must evaluate how new personas evolved in response to political shifts in order to conceal a Jewish faith identity and how this evolution was a more passive

and often camouflaged attempt to resist the climate and policies intolerant of the Jewish faith. This paper seeks to understand this faith and identity transition, specifically with Jews of Morocco after the Iberian expulsion into the 18th century, and how the history of these Jews is largely overlooked once within or south of the Sahara. First, the paper recognizes the “misdirected” histories that have contributed to the scholastic and cultural concealment of Jewish persons within and south of the Sahara, and additionally how western institutions neglected these southern populations, rendering them invisible. Second, it identifies the complexity of Jewish persons who elected to cloak their identities to avoid persecution and what methodological approaches must be taken to recognize these mechanisms of disguise. Finally, I engage the small body of literature documenting the experiences of Moroccan and Saharan Jews, which will aid in the uncovering of identities and the construction of this history. Thus, I hope to draw attention to this demographic who was motivated to relocate to or remain in Northwest Africa during the metaphorical seesaw of toleration prevalent in this multi-century timeframe.

Misdirected Histories: the Southern Blind and the Saharan Cloak²

The history of Judaism in Morocco is a pivotal site for understanding the migration and presence of Jews in the 15th-18th centuries in Northwest Africa. The treatment of Jews in Morocco considerably shaped the transmission and maintenance of Jewish religion and culture throughout the Sahara and beyond. However, the preservation of Jewish identity was threatened due to the climate of intolerance, which culminated with the official expulsion of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula in the last decade of the 15th century. The heightening of atrocities against Jewish persons continued to fluctuate for the next few centuries into the Inquisition era. This continuation of persecution and prejudice contributed to the recurrent movement south into regions more tolerant of Jewish identity and/or the motivation to reject old and develop new external identities.

The geographical scope of this paper incorporates countries connected to the Sahara Desert, were engaged in trans-Saharan commerce, and/or had links to the Portuguese crown. Similarly,

this area is an important region, as its northern edge is situated just next to the Iberian Peninsula, its coastal cities were territories of the Portuguese empire, and Jewish persons were heavily involved in the trade of the region. We can consider that the influx in the Jewish population was due to both increasing persecution in the Iberian Peninsula and, coincidentally, better commercial opportunities.³ It should be noted, however, in these regions being studied, Jewish persons still maintained restricted freedoms—whether as property of the crown in the territories or under *dhimmi* status with their co-religionists in Morocco, which ultimately led to additional veneers and external identities that did not reflect their interior faith.⁴ The disregard of Jewish communities that existed in such close proximity to the Iberian Peninsula and with established connections to Jewish and Iberian networks is an unfortunate scholarly oversight.⁵

In his article “The Mediterranean and the Expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492,” Henry Kamen suggests that the number of Jews who left Spain was in fact quite small, especially when compared to other sources available.⁶ His argument is based on the attempt to quantify, through tax documentation, the actual number of Jews and persons whom documents record emigration and a later return to Spain.⁷ His geographical focus is largely situated in Iberia and the northern Mediterranean coasts and highlights persons who oscillate between Spain, Portugal, and other southern European countries. The article falls short of critically analyzing the state of Portuguese Jews and their subsequent expulsion, as its impact also affected Iberian refugees who had fled there a few years before. Furthermore, eliding Jewish activity in and emigration to Africa is a weakness, as records indicate that, due to geographical proximity and economic ties to the crown, Jewish persons were already acting on behalf of the crown in the imperial territories.⁸ Thus, Kamen is seemingly interested in tracking the number of Jews who were physically present in Spain in the few years surrounding the 1492 decree. In fact, he argues Jews who left Spain for Portugal merely returned once Judaism became illegal in Portugal.⁹ This migration pattern is simply too limited, as Kamen does not fully acknowledge the extent of migration of Jews (Portuguese and Spanish refugees) to the south, namely in Africa.¹⁰

Just as Kamen did not have a southern gaze, many scholars of Jewish Africa fail to direct their eyes into and past the Sahara. Within the scholarship of Jewish history in North Africa, there are limited texts addressing Jewish involvement in the south, into, and/or beyond the Sahara. Most of these texts discuss the role of Jews as merchants and financiers in trans-Saharan trade but do not address notions of (dual) identities, faith practices, motivations, or the fate of these Jewish persons.¹¹ It should also be noted that categories of periodization and analyses created in the West also lend to the obscuration of Jewish activity leading up to the expulsion and Inquisition. For instance, *convivencia*, a term coined by Spanish scholar Américo Castro in the 20th century, contributes to the neglected gaze of the condition of Jewish persons and is seemingly a scholastic attempt to conceal an undercurrent of instability.¹²

In addition to the “southern blind,” or a geographical cloak, where scholars have failed to look south for Jewish populations, one must consider other Western institutions that similarly directed their gaze away from the south. Daniel Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit point out that the “rural south” was largely, if not fully, ignored by the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU).¹³ The AIU, established in the last half of the nineteenth century, arguably contributed to the “cloaking,” or overlooking (to say the least), of minority Jewish communities in Morocco.¹⁴ Mikhaël Elbaz explained the goal of the AIU was to “emancipate Moroccan Jews by teaching them the narratives of Western civilization.”¹⁵ This furthered the marginalization of small communities whose continuation of faith practices, which were more closely aligned to Mosaic Law and more common pre-expulsion, were increasingly seen as a non-Westernized Judaism.¹⁶ This was undoubtedly one of many steps toward the divide of normativized and “antiquated” communities. Miriam Bodian’s study on the shift in Judaic narrative to provide a “republican” Greco account mirroring the civilization mythology of the West common in post-expulsion communities even further divides the “rural south,” which would seemingly be associated with Bodian’s “biblical Hebrews” to the “civilized” north.¹⁷ As attention was focused on cities with a larger demographic of Jews in Morocco and the Mahgrib more largely, the communities that harbored smaller percentages of Jews quickly fell away from the global/normative gaze, were further ostracized, and consequently forgotten. This lack of attention, led

by the AIU, set a trend in focusing attention to Jewish communities in the north. Schroeter and Chetrit also acknowledge the role of colonialism in creating the divide between the north and “rural south.” The north, whose urban centers were largely affected by Western rule, ideologies, and shifts in religious praxis conflicted with the neglect of colonial officials of the “rural south,” who maintained their practices and system of religious governance.¹⁸ This divide between the “rural south” and urban, or perhaps “westernized,” north became internalized in the treatment of Jews from these regions. Schroeter recognizes a “. . . hierarchy of identities that, from the northern Mediterranean, increasingly placed the Judeo-Arabic tradition of the post-expulsion era lower on the ladder.”¹⁹ Thus, northern Jewish populations adopted an attitude of superiority when it came to the authenticity of their faith as compared to southern communities. These institutional impositions of invisibility through oversight or privilege resulted in the concealment of Jewish persons on the peripheries of the normative landscape.

Donning the Invisibility Cloak: the Dilemma of Conversion and Self-Motivation to Conceal

Concealment of identity is another measure contributing to the lack of knowledge of Jewish populations in Africa south of the Sahara. Self-motivation to hide faith identity was undertaken in order to avoid, hinder, or abate persecution and was a mechanism of protection known to Jews worldwide during times of hostility. In this sense, “fight or flight” merge in a passive strategy to avoid the discriminatory gaze. For the Jews of the Iberian Peninsula, concealment accomplished fight *and* flight simultaneously, as outward conversion undermined the policies constructed to persecute Jews (passive subversion) and thereby allowed them to escape the severe punishments if found to be a Jew. Thus, it is necessary for scholars to recognize the measures Jews took to conceal their faith identity in order to expand our understanding of Jewish Africa.

Converting to the majority faith can be seen as one strategy to hide a faith identity. However, external conversion should be analyzed separately from internal conversion, especially at times of escalated hostility against a specific religious group. Jean and John Comaroff’s study of conversion as a multi-layered process is

especially instructive in regards to Jewish populations in this era of instability.²⁰ The Comaroff's assessment of the limitations of conversion problematizes the methodological approach to accept "converted" identities at face value. This study acknowledges conversion as a fluid and abstract process that is not easily measured, as external variables, including socio-political factors, can and often do influence an identity shift. In addition, Maria Grosz-Ngate's work on the relationship between conversion, identity, and memory concludes that identity is a "process of naming."²¹ She stated, "Identities are therefore the outcome of an interplay between a discursive and a political process, a process that is always ongoing."²² In the case of Jewish persons in Northwest Africa, I would argue that external identity is compatible to this theory, with naming as an attempt to survive and respond to the "political process" that was ever-changing. Because internal identity is difficult to authenticate, record of "conversion" cannot serve as an eliminator of Jewish identity, which is a flaw in Kamen's article, as it assumes converted Jews were no longer Jews and thus were not necessary to tally.²³ Furthermore, this preferential goal implies that after conversion, New Christians could escape the discriminatory eye, which we will see later is not the case. In his essay "The *Converso* Phenomenon and the Issue of Spanish Identity," Kevin Ingram goes as far as to suggest that very few conversions were genuine, as many New Christians or *judeoconversos* continued practicing their Jewish faith in private.²⁴

Maslow's seminal work on human motivation can simplify the behavioral and external changes of these Jewish populations who sought to conceal their faith identity. Maslow suggests that all human behavior is predicated on needs. He places these needs in a hierarchy, with basic physiological needs (such as hunger) topping the metaphorical pyramid. Second is safety. In this category, he acknowledges the cultural, social, and political contributors that affect one's personal safety and how those variables motivate change, action, and behavior.²⁵ Pairing this need for safety at the core is essential in understanding the motivation to "convert." In Maslow's hierarchy, religion is also placed in the category of safety; however, mental stability of one's understanding of the world order is deemphasized over the physical threat. This naturally could be argued, and even Maslow recognizes that the hierarchy is not fixed; yet, it provides a lens through which to understand

the mass conversions taking place in the expulsion era. In other words, “safety” can be interpreted as both physical and spiritual safety. Thus, it can be reasoned that a duality is created between the external/physical to the internal/spiritual self. Rather than seeing a mass population martyring themselves for their faith, an external conversion (identifying as a separate faith) can satisfy the physical need for safety all the while preserving one’s mental or spiritual safety. With Maslow’s theory and placement of ideologies within the safety tier, we must question the extent of the conversion, understanding it as an effect of self-preservation, especially with conversion often being imposed. Thus, external conversion cannot be conclusive evidence of a lack of a Jewish population.

Jews and *Conversos* found the peripheral locations of the empire in Saharan and coastal Africa to exercise greater tolerance for their maintenance of Jewish practices, and a sizable *converso* population is documented in these regions.²⁶ Yet, even with a more tolerant climate, there was still secrecy to the faith, most likely prompted by the yo-yo of protection and persecution that had already been experienced. Therefore, I argue Jews moved to areas with seemingly greater tolerance yet still cloaked their outward identity under a label associated with the majority religion; in other words, they adopted a *better to be safe than to be sorry* attitude to produce a double layer of undetectability. With their new outward identity and perhaps invisibility as ‘Jews’ in Iberian tax documents, they became less detectable. By relying on identities as they are presented in tax records diminishes the overall statistics of Jews who left the Iberian Peninsula.²⁷ Although Jewish persons were undoubtedly a minority, the impact of their emigration is not a question of quantity contained within a single wave. Rather, one must question the impact of these populations and how they potentially influenced the expression of faith identity outside of the Iberian Peninsula for decades, if not centuries, pre and post exile.

During the hostile climate of the Inquisition era, a legacy of imposed invisibility was created due to forced conversions and migration, along with the volatility of *dhimmi* status. Thus, uncovering Jewish presence and emigration requires further digging. Kamen’s analysis of tax documents and migration records is undoubtedly a first step in determining the number of Jews in a given timeframe. However, more in-depth study will reveal

the lengths some Jews took to secure their basic physiological and safety needs. In the examples below, Jews took on new surnames to mask their identity that could easily be recognized by a Jewish cognomen. Thus, the onomastic study of names in and beyond the Sahara is a necessary step in unclocking Jewish identity. Additionally, archaeological evidence in Senegambia presents the dedication to concealing identity. Establishing the need to migrate, due to persecution and trade, we now must look at evidence of concealment.

In their study of the Ghardaia Jews of the Sahara who, similarly, preserved many practices due to being outside of the reach of the AIU, authors Briggs and Guède observe “. . .another trait characteristic of Saharan as well as other Jews, the not uncommon practice of changing family names in response to stress of one sort or another.”²⁸ This “stress” indicates the diversity of reasons to initiate the concealment of identity, visible through one’s last name. Changes in cognomens are evident in Abraham Laredo’s inventory of Jewish surnames of Morocco. Laredo documented thousands of families who were present in Morocco across multiple centuries pre and post dating the 1492 expulsion from Spain. Included among the list, with only five persons identified possessing the surname of “Cota,” was a Spanish poet named Rodrigo de Cota. Although not much detail is provided, his registry does indicate that the poet was recorded on the “*liste des juifs secrets*” and seemingly disappeared from the Spanish record at the end of the 15th century. Laredo’s account provides evidence of Cotas in Morocco in the 13th through 15th centuries.²⁹

Malian historian Ismael Diadie Haïdara’s account of Jewish persons trading across the Sahara and specifically in Timbuktu potentially connects and evidences the expanse of the Moroccan Cota’s mobility to communities and persons active south of the Sahara. Haïdara’s study of Jewish presence in Mali argues the cognomens of Cota, Kùhîn, and Abana are modifications of known Jewish family names.³⁰ Haïdara argues Jews arrived in Timbuktu via Morocco due to persecutions in Iberia as well as Jewish involvement in the trans-Saharan trade. Dating the presence of Jews on the *liste des juifs secrets* back to 1497 from Spain, four of the five Cota’s documented by Laredo would corroborate Haïdara’s theory of movement to Morocco prompted by the Inquisition. Per Haïdara, these Jewish families converted to Islam,

as they “had to choose between the sword and the Qur’an.”³¹ This would establish a need to convert based on security of self, and would not necessarily authenticate a *true* or interior conversion. Haïdara indicates that there are a few Jewish cemeteries in the region, a few on the Niger Bend, and some near Timbuktu. However, Haïdara understands that despite these remnants, Jewish history here is mostly unknown, and the remaining vestiges are hardly visible. In describing the cemetery of Timbuktu, Haïdara writes, “The cemetery of the Jews in Timbuktu is today a simple dune covered in shrubs, without epitaphs. This is the lost domain of some forgotten deaths in history.”³² Indeed, this history has been forgotten; just as the cemeteries are cloaked in shrubbery to conceal a once Jewish presence, a change in surnames equally camouflaged that identity. Consequently, it is more difficult to accurately estimate the number of Jews who fled during the period of intolerance in the Iberian Peninsula and whether or not they genuinely converted.

Scholarly focus on Jewish emigrants exiled from Spain remains too narrow when considering the multiple terms that could be analyzed to capture Jewish identity. In addition to surnames, other labels marking a new faith identity should be analyzed. Known labels such as New Christians, *conversos*, and crypto-Jews are commonly associated with a concealed Jewish identity as well as the Portuguese term *lançados*, or the “thrown out ones.” In *The Black Jews of Africa*, Edith Bruder analyzes the role of the *lançado* in the Portuguese empire and the support they received to engage in trade off the West African coastline. These populations, largely made up of exiled Jews and Portuguese criminals, were banished to the imperial territories.³³ Removed due to the climate of the Inquisition, Jews were able to set up successful trading networks, especially through connection with their co-religionists in trans-Saharan Africa, and seemingly practice their faith with more freedom in the African locales. However, their success in the trade and ability to move about was tethered to their faith concealment through the use of labels that did not identify them as Jewish persons and by hiding their religious customs.

In addition to onomastic and labels in the written record, archaeological evidence exists that substantiates the argument of concealment, even in more tolerant spaces. Many *crypto-Jews* from Portugal who had fled the Inquisition went to Senegambia

to seek a more secure home where their religious activities would not be supervised as closely. Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta analyzed numerous Portuguese manuscripts and determined that Jews who openly professed their religion were living in the region during the beginning years of the 17th century.³⁴ However, Mark and da Silva Horta also recognize that, due to fear of the Inquisition, Jews were clandestine in their religious activities, where many remained secret in their faith. The synagogue in Joal was camouflaged as part of a housing complex with a protective corridor linking the synagogue to the home of a local citizen.³⁵ There was also a large presence of Dutch Jews engaging in trade on the Petit Côte with previous relations to the Portuguese Jewry who had fled to Amsterdam. Others, after years of secretly practicing their faith, went to Holland to become “publicly recognized Jews” after participating in various rituals to confirm their adherence to the faith.³⁶ These Dutch merchants utilized their common bond with their Portuguese Jewish brethren to establish strong trade relations and soon inhabited different ports in Senegambia, notably Porto de Ale and Joal.³⁷ Over time, the Jews felt progressively more protected and thus did not shy away from asserting their faith and taking on Hebrew names. Nonetheless, Dutch and Portuguese Jews for a time practiced their faith inconspicuously out of fear of the intolerant religious climate.

Under the Cloak: Jewish Presence in Sahara and West Africa after the Iberian Expulsion

Jewish persons in the Iberian Peninsula were considered “property of the king.”³⁸ Although they had certain freedoms, such as legal jurisdiction over Jewish matters, they were protected by the royal administration. Their economic and social fate was similarly tethered to the allowances of the aristocracy.³⁹ Similarly, Jews living under Islamic rule in Northwest Africa were granted *dhimmi* status, garnering protection and certain liberties.⁴⁰ For both, complete freedom and access to the rights and opportunities afforded to citizens of the dominant faith were not granted. However, for a period, Jews lived in seemingly tolerant and peaceful conditions, with anti-Semitic tensions flaring up on occasion. Kamen’s period of analysis is marked by the legal mandate of expulsion; however, the (voluntary) migration of Jews from the Iberian Peninsula

started long before the Spanish edict in 1492. In 1391, there was intense persecution of Jews, which only snowballed into more and more intolerance, ultimately leading to the expulsion mandate at the end of the 15th century.⁴¹ During these one hundred years, Jews continued to be persecuted, and while some converted they did not escape scrutiny.

In 1496, inspired by Spain's edict of 1492, Portugal gave Jewish persons two options: convert via baptism or emigrate.⁴² With the climate in Spain still unfavorable, Jews were once again seeking a safe haven. However, prior to this expulsion, Jews were already living in the imperial territories, including regions of Morocco and Senegambia. There exists record of Portuguese subjects in Safi, Morocco in the early 16th century, where letters on behalf of King Dom Manuel assured Jews living there of safety and protection despite the pogroms and forced conversions occurring on the Iberian Peninsula. A letter dated in 1509 states:

Dom Manuel etc. to whomever my letter shall come: We make it known by this present letter that, having in mind what is necessary for our service and for the welfare and prosperity of the affairs of our city of Safi, it pleases us to grant to the Jews who now live and reside in our city, and who in future will live and reside there, that at no time will we order them to be expelled, nor in any manner will they be expelled from the said city contrary to their will, nor will we order them to become Christian by force or by any other means against their will.⁴³

This letter goes on to explain that should ever an expulsion take place, residents will be given a two-year advanced warning. The purpose for this toleration was to keep peace amongst the largely Jewish merchant class in Safi and to sustain the trade industry.⁴⁴ Kamen indicates that a large number of Jews in Girona (Spain) were affiliated with the textile industry and were granted greater toleration due to production needs.⁴⁵ Coincidentally, Safi was also known for its large Jewish community of textile merchants from Portugal.⁴⁶ However, it is important to note that Kamen argues that many Jews in Portugal returned to Spain after the edict in Portugal in 1496, claiming that some reports state even half of the population returned in some areas.⁴⁷ Yet, when Portugal issued its mandate it is plausible that Jewish refugees originally from Spain migrated with their Portuguese co-religionists to Portuguese

territories, as the edict of Spain had only occurred four years prior, and Spain's volatile culture had not evaporated.

Another motivator to resettle outside of the Iberian Peninsula was the poor treatment of the New Christians, or Jewish converts. After the pogroms of 1391 and approximately four decades before the Edict of Expulsion, the *limpieza de sangre* laws were created, which directly discriminated against New Christians. The 'blood purity' laws insinuated that the blood of the New Christians was contaminated by their Jewish origins. With the belief of inferior blood, Old Christians continued to attack the character of the recently baptized New Christians, implying that their former Jewish status made them disreputable.⁴⁸ Former Jews seemingly could not escape the hostile environment. Their conversion was scrutinized as either disingenuous or false, and they continuously encountered harassment due to their former faith identity. The inferior status assigned to New Christians was detrimental economically, professionally, and socially, with limitations to the benefits and level of success they could access.⁴⁹ Ingram suggests that some stayed and influenced the Erasmian and Humanist movements, but when such ideologies did not stick, many emigrated by the end of the seventeenth century.⁵⁰ Schwartz suggests that the climate was so toxic in the Iberian Peninsula that by 1526 a Jewish presence was essentially non-existent.⁵¹ Thus, New Christians and Jews who had yet to be baptized had little hope of improved conditions if they remained in the Iberian Peninsula. Even with outward conversion, labels of a previous Jewish identity hindered opportunities and provoked persecution; thus, in addition to relocating, one still had to conceal Jewish practices and genealogy to escape prejudice.

For those who emigrated to Morocco and the Sahara, *dhimmi* status was not guaranteed or long-lived. Persecution under Islamic rule pushed Jews further into the interior but also resulted in the same: migration paired with outward conversion. This double strategy, migration and outward conversion, could be seen as the best attempt to avoid unwanted hostility and find a safe haven, as records show that persecution and anti-Semitism extended to the southern edge of the Sahara into West Africa. Most active in advocating against Jews was Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karim al-Maghili, a Muslim scholar whose intolerance of Jews is documented in an exchange between the scholar and the Askia

Muhammad, the ruler of the Songhai Empire at the end of the 15th century. As a response to the anti-Semitic proclamations of al-Maghili in the 1480s, Jews living in Saharan communities (specifically Tamantit and Tlemcen) had to convert, flee, or risk being killed. Al-Maghili incentivized Muslims who had once protected their Jewish counterparts to assist in eliminating non-Muslims.⁵² He ordered Muslims “. . .to rise up and kill the Jews and to enslave their women and children and to destroy their synagogues.”⁵³ The murder of Al-Maghili’s son, which he blamed on the Jews, only worsened the anti-Semitic violence, further exacerbating the Jewish plight. As seen in the *Replies*, al-Maghili compelled the ruler of the Songhai Empire, Askia Muhammad, to eliminate Jews, giving them the option to convert or die.⁵⁴ Per the writings of Leo Africanus from the 16th century, Askia Muhammad created harsh trading measures banning Jews from trading in Timbuktu and ordering their properties to be seized if found.⁵⁵ The reach and extent of the persecution varied in the region, with the *qadi* of Timbuktu, Mahmud b. ‘Umar Aqit, not acquiescing to the demands of al-Maghili.⁵⁶ Despite the persecutions and bans to engage in trade with Jewish persons, it is not conclusive that Jews all together disappeared from these spaces.

With these persecutions and the massacres of communities in Tamantit and Tlemcen in the 15th and early 16th centuries, it is evident that having an outward Jewish identity was life-endangering.⁵⁷ But it also evidences a motivation to flee and conceal one’s faith identity through whatever means necessary. The widespread violence and intolerance of Jews in the Mediterranean world insists that the geographic scope of analysis to locate exiled Jews must be widened. Additionally, due to Jewish motivation to conceal identity for safety and economics, scholars must intensify their gaze in order to identify these Jewish persons.

Conclusion

The history of Jews throughout Northwest Africa and beyond the Sahara has been touched upon by scholars but has yet to be fully explored. The difficulty in charting out this history is largely predicated on the concealment of these Jewish persons who had to secret their identity for fear of their lives. However, institutional oversight also contributes to the cone of silence regarding

this faith population in the Sahara and West Africa. Acknowledging the normative gap between urban and rural spaces in North Africa is one step in uncovering these histories and how southern spaces became the periphery of Jewish North Africa, most closely linked to trade routes throughout the Sahara, and eventually overlooked. Additionally, scholars must no longer subscribe to the myth of the Sahara as an impenetrable wall devoid of interaction and connectivity.⁵⁸ As this paper has evidenced, Jews of the Sahara were active on the northern and southern boundaries of the desert landscape, and policies were implemented to limit their mobility in both spaces. Further, this paper demonstrates the multiple reasons Jews would hide their faith identity.

Although Jews may have elected to convert and flee from persecution, onomastic and archaeological evidence provides key insights into the secretive world of Jewish Sahara along with the lengths Jews went to in order to conceal their faith identity. The metaphorical uncloaking of these identities is a necessary and arguably first step in understanding how the global faith of Judaism found itself in present-day West Africa. Ideas have traded for as long as commodities, and yet there is an assumption through scholarly trends that Judaism did not stretch south of the Sahara, a geographical boundary that was and is quite porous. Rather than ask, “Why *is* there Judaism south of the Sahara?” scholars should ask, “Why *isn't* there Judaism south of the Sahara?” especially since we have seen the expanse of the other Abrahamic faiths (and a multitude of variations and denominations) for centuries as well as the known history of persecution, Jewish mobility, and motivation to hide identities.

Notes

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(2015) as well as the International Society for the Study of African Jewry's (ISSAJ) conference in Paris, France (2015).

¹ Ismael Diadié Haïdara, *Les Juifs À Tombouctou: Recueil Des Sources Écrites Relatives Au Commerce Juif À Tombouctou Au XIXe Siècle* (Bamako: Editions Donniya, 1999), 51. *My translation.* Original: "Le cimetière des Juifs à Tombouctou est aujourd'hui une simple dune couverte d'arbustes, sans épitaphes. C'est le domaine perdu de quelques morts oubliés de l'Histoire."

² I would like to thank Dr. Ghislaine Lydon (UCLA) who suggested the title "misdirected histories" in discussing the apparent 270-degree arc of vision that largely ignores the south.

³ Kevin Ingram, "The *Converso* Phenomenon and the Issue of Spanish Identity," *Cross-Cultural History and the Domestication of Otherness*, ed. Michal Rozbicki and George O. Ndege (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 29.

⁴ Under Islamic rule, *dhimmi* is a protected status for practitioners of other faiths.

⁵ Jacob Oliel asserts that Jews were already settled in sub-Saharan Africa, and many Jews fled to those regions to seek shelter and a new home amongst their co-religionists. Thus, having a place to take refuge after the expulsion from the north, a community was created in Tindirma (established in 1496), where Jewish graves and structures still exist. See Jacob Oliel, *Les Juifs Au Sahara: Le Touat Au Moyen âge* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 1994), 122.

⁶ Henry Kamen, "The Mediterranean and the Expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492," *Past & Present*, 119, no. 1 (1988). Kamen references a number of works that contributed to the "confident generalization" regarding the number of Jews expelled from Spain.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 34. Kamen highlights the *cabeza de pecho* and the *aljama* tax.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 39. Kamen gives Africa a nod by suggesting a "possible" migration.

¹¹ Most influential texts that provide more detail about these populations include works by Michel Abitbol, John Hunwick, Jacob Oliel and Haim Zafrani.

¹² *Convivencia* is referring to a harmonious coexistence where everyone gets along, in this case practitioners of various faiths. I agree with David Nirenberg who critiques the concept of "convivencia" which he argues was in fact reliant on violent undercurrents and an interplay with repression. See, David Nirenberg, *Communities of violence: persecution of minorities in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). On *convivencia*, Américo Castro, *España en su historia; cristianos, moros y judíos* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada, 1948).

¹³ Daniel J. Schroeter and Joseph Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents: Jews at the Formative Period of Colonial Rule in Morocco," *Jewish Social Studies* 13, no. 1 (2006): 195.

¹⁴ Pierre Cohen, *La presse Juive editee au Maroc: 1870-1963* (Rabat: Edicions & Impressions Bouregreg Communication, 2007), 38-9; Michael M. Laskier, *The*

Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco, 1862-1962 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

¹⁵ Mikaël Elbaz, "L'exil et la demeure," *Présence juive au Maghreb: hommage à Haïm Zafrani*, ed. Haïm Zafrani, Nicole S. Serfaty, and Joseph Tedghi (Saint-Denis: Bouchene, 2004), 112. *My translation*. Original "d'emanciper les Juifs marocains en leur apprenant les récits de la civilisation occidentale."

¹⁶ This is also seen with the Beta Israel of Ethiopia, who were admitted into Israel under the Law of Return. They are seen as both authentically Jewish, based on their biblical obedience, but at the same time non-Jewish, as their practices are not "current" to normativized Judaism.

¹⁷ Miriam Bodian, "Biblical Hebrews and the Rhetoric of Republicanism: Seventeenth-Century Portuguese Jews on the Jewish Community," *AJS Review* 22, no. 2 (1997): 199-221.

¹⁸ Schroeter and Chetrit, "Emancipation and Its Discontents," 172-175.

¹⁹ Daniel J Schroeter, "The Shifting Boundaries of Moroccan Jewish Identities," *Jewish Social Studies* 15, no. 1 (2008): 157.

²⁰ Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

²¹ Maria Grosz-Ngate, "Memory, Power, and Performance in the Construction of Muslim Identity," *Polar: Political Legal Anthropology Review* 25, no. 2 (2002): 5-20.

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

²³ Kamen, "The Mediterranean and the Expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492," 37.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

²⁵ Abraham H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (1943): 370-96; Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).

²⁶ It should also be noted that *converso* and/or *marrano* populations had an impact on the New World. See, Nathan Wachtel, *Mémoires marranes: itinéraires dans le sertão du Nordeste brésilien* (Paris: Seuil, 2011).

²⁷ The *jizya*, or tax on *dhimmis* (non-Muslim, "protected persons") in Islamic lands, also sheds light on how many Jews were taxed and indicates the growth of Jewish persons in the years surrounding the expulsion. However, due to persecutions in North and Saharan Africa, this too cannot be fully relied upon.

²⁸ Lloyd Cabot Briggs and Norina Lami Guède, *No More for Ever: A Saharan Jewish Town. With Appendices on Physical Anthropology, Demography and Social Structure* (Cambridge: The Museum, 1964), 21. See also Sarah A. Stein's recent work, which reexamines Briggs and Guède's seminal study and addresses the marginality of this community. Sarah A. Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2014).

²⁹ Abraham Isaac Laredo, *Les noms des Juifs du Maroc: essai d'onomastique judéo-marocaine* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas (Instituto "B. Arias Montano, 1978), 1059.

³⁰ Haïdara, *Les Juifs À Tombouctou*, 22-44. Cota, written as Kati, Koti, or Cota adopted the last name of *Wākorey* (along with the Abana) and the Kûhîn, also written as Cohen, adopting the surname of *Arma*. The adoption of the surname “Arma” is intriguing but may also be influenced by Moriscos who fought in the Timbuktu region and were known as *arma*, or “sharpshooters.” See Michel Abitbol, *Tombouctou et les Arma de la conquête marocaine du Soudan nigérien en 1591 à l’hégémonie de l’empire peul du Macina en 1833* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve et Larose, 1979). Coincidentally, the present day Jewish community in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana have the surname “Armah” and suggest that they came from Mali in their oral narrative (interview by author, August 2010).

³¹ Haïdara, *Les Juifs À Tombouctou*, 29. *My translation*. Original: “devaient choisir entre l’épée et le Coran.”

³² *Ibid.*, 51. *My translation*. Original: “Le cimetière des Juifs à Tombouctou est aujourd’hui une simple dune couverte d’arbustes, sans épitaphes. C’est le domaine perdu de quelques morts oubliés de l’Histoire.”

³³ Edith Bruder, *The Black Jews of Africa: History, Religion, Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008): 114-118.

³⁴ Peter Mark and José da Silva Horta, “Two Early Seventeenth-Century Sephardic Communities on Senegal’s Petite Côte,” *History in Africa* 31 (2004): 232.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 247-48.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 234-35, 241-242, 245.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 234-244.

³⁸ Daniel Chanan Matt, *Zohar, the Book of Enlightenment* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 15.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

⁴⁰ John Hunwick, *Shar‘a in Songhay: The Replies of Al-Maghīlī to the Questions of Askia Al-Hājj Muhammad* (Oxford: Published for the British Academy by the Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁴¹ Richard Hull, *Jews and Judaism in African History* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009), 87.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 151.

⁴³ Malyn D. D. Newitt, *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415-1670: A Documentary History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 36.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

⁴⁵ Kamen, “The Mediterranean and the Expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492,” 36.

⁴⁶ M. D. D. Newitt, *The Portuguese in West Africa, 1415-1670*, 35-36. Without further investigation into the tax records and family names associated with textile production, it is difficult to know if the two are connected and if any families from Girona ended up in Safi.

⁴⁷ Kamen, “The Mediterranean and the Expulsion of Spanish Jews in 1492,” 42-43.

⁴⁸ Ingram, “The *Converso* Phenomenon,” 15-20.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Ibid., 21-29.

⁵¹ Stuart B. Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 48.

⁵² Hunwick, *Shari'a in Songhay*, 37-38.

⁵³ Ibid., 37.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁵ Leo Africanus, *The History and Description of Africa: And of the Notable Things Therein Contained*, trans. Robert Brown and John Pory (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1896), 1005.

⁵⁶ Charlotte Blum and Humphrey Fisher, "Love for Three Oranges, or, the Askiya's Dilemma: The Askiya, al-Maghili and Timbuktu, c. 1500 A.D.," *The Journal of African History* 34, no. 1 (1993): 73-76. A *qadi* is a judge in Muslim regions who rules by Islamic religious law.

⁵⁷ John O. Hunwick, *Jews of a Saharan oasis: elimination of the Tamantit community* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006), 64.

⁵⁸ For more on the scholarly oversight of Saharan Africa as a space of connection and study, see Ghislaine Lydon, "Saharan oceans and bridges, barriers and divides in Africa's historiographical landscape," *Journal of African History* 56, no. 1 (2015).