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“The Community for Educational Experiments”: The Alliance Israélite Universelle, Gender, and Jewish Education in Casablanca, Morocco 1886-1906

Selene Allain-Kovacs
sallaink@uno.edu

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“The Community for Educational Experiments”
The Alliance Israélite Universelle, Gender, and Jewish Education in Casablanca, Morocco
1886-1906

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
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Sélène Allain-Kovacs

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Abstract

At the end of the nineteenth century, the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU) opened boys' and girls' schools in Casablanca, Morocco, introducing ideas of European-inflected modernity and secular education to the local Jewish community. Letters and reports from the founding directors provide insight into the problems, social and practical, they encountered and reveal the ways in which both Moroccan and European gender norms affected this “educational experiment.”

Keywords: Casablanca, Morocco; Jewish Education; Girls' Education; Alliance Israélite Universelle

Introduction

In 1906, *Alliance Israelite Universelle* (AIU) teacher Vida Benzaquen reflected on her work establishing the organization's first school for girls in Casablanca, Morocco. Writing to the international organization's Central Committee in her 1905-1906 annual report, Benzaquen noted the challenges and limitations of her work, but sought to project optimism nonetheless. "[O]ur influence has not gone very wide," she wrote, "Our former students have not yet become mothers to reform their home according to their morals. The good seed has been spread, let's let time ripen the harvest."¹ Like her counterpart Moïse Nahon, who founded Casablanca's AIU boy's school in 1897, Turkish-born Benzaquen had been educated by the AIU and trained in Paris. In Casablanca, both struggled to introduce ideas of secular education and European-inflected modernity to the Jewish community of the rapidly growing port city, while seeking to respect Moroccan Jewish opinion and traditions. Though their experiences differed in important ways, the two directors acted as cultural intermediaries between the "modern world" and a traditional, multi-faceted religious culture, helping to forge a more unified Jewish community in Morocco's fastest growing city. A comparison of their two experiences and these pioneering "educational experiments" helps to shine a light on the complex Jewish community of Casablanca and reflects problems found in many corners of the world concerning attitudes towards education, gender issues, religious minorities, colonization, modernization, and paternalism.

As representatives of the AIU, founded in Paris in 1860 by French Jewish intellectuals, Benzaquen and Nahon were among some of the early education reformers in Morocco to seek to

¹ Benzaquen, "Rapport Annuel 1905-1906," Box XIV F 25.2, digital archives of the Alliance Israélite Universelle (hereafter cited as AIU archives); AIU primary documents cited in this work are easily accessible through rachelnet.net, with authorization granted by the AIU library.

initiate efforts to “emancipate” and “modernize” North African and Middle Eastern Jews. Indeed, from the time the AIU opened its first school in Tétouan, Morocco in 1862, AIU schools would play a major role in defining “modernization” for the Jews of Morocco. AIU education trained generations of Moroccan Jews to navigate the westernizing societies of the coastal regions and opened different political and economic possibilities for all Jews, even the more “backward” Jews of the interior. The AIU schools helped to set the pace of these transformations, unifying Moroccan Jewish communities despite geographic, cultural, and linguistic barriers. Between 1860 when it began and 1912 when the French protectorate was established, the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* reached thousands of Moroccan Jews, introducing ideas, changing ways of life for some, and widening solidarity.

Nineteenth and early twentieth century Jews were a small, nearly invisible, yet important minority in Morocco. Until the late nineteenth century, their communities had not yet transformed by secularization, industrialization, and capitalism; in other words, the modernization which had been transforming the West, especially since the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. When the AIU decided to bring “enlightenment” to the “backward” Jews of North Africa and the Middle East, it stirred up opposition among the “traditional” elites. The school master became another power-center and as such threatened the authority of the rabbis, the notables, and even that of parents and grandparents. It required a great deal of respect for tradition to navigate the struggle and negotiate the transition, as Benzaquen and Nahon both learned. AIU schoolmasters like Benzaquen and Nahon, the representatives of European powers, found themselves operating in a cultural matrix increasingly determined by Europeans, especially the French who saw the establishment of French language schools as a tool in expanding French influence and economic interests.

Casablanca, as Nahon expressed in the opening sentence of his first annual report, was “the community for educational experiments.” Today the largest city in Morocco, Casablanca was, in the nineteenth century, a small but rapidly growing settlement, reaching 21,000 in 1901, mostly Muslims, but having also some 5,000 Jews and 477 Europeans crowded within its walls.² Most studies of this Jewish population focus on either their subordinate legal status under Arab law, or the “regeneration” they experienced through the French colonial “civilizing mission.” The AIU played an important role in this mission, since it was through AIU education that most Moroccan Jews were introduced to French ideals of secularization and modernization. Maghrebi Jewish scholars of the time wrote extensively on North African Jewish identity, a complicated cultural hybrid which encompassed more than just religion and nationality and was complicated by colonization, anti-Semitism, and international events such as the Dreyfus Affair.³

This thesis thus studies the prelude to and founding of the first *Alliance Israélite Universelle* schools in Casablanca by examining the differing attitudes and experiences of the school directors, as well as the French Vice Consuls’ involvement, to show the social complexities of the AIU’s involvement in Casablanca on the eve of the 1906 French landing. The period of 1886-1906 allows for a study of Moroccan Jewish education, largely untouched by the official colonization of Morocco beginning with the French landing of 1906. Focusing on the community’s struggles and resistance towards the AIU and its “regeneration” efforts, this thesis examines the changing discourse and nuances of the AIU’s involvement, as well as its results and gendered consequences.

² André Adams, *Histoire de Casablanca (des origines à 1914)* (Aix-en-Provence: Annales de la Faculté des Lettres, 1968), 92.

³ Susan Gilson Miller discusses this subject at length in her chapter, “Moïse Nahon and the Invention of the Modern Maghrebi Jew,” in *French Mediterraneans*, ed. Patricia M. E. Lorein and Todd Shepard (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016) 293-319.

Literature Review

The scholarly literature discussing Jews in Morocco is extensive, much of the early work being done in French and focusing on the legal status of Jews in Morocco as inferior to Muslims and therefore possessing fewer civil rights.⁴ Édouard Mouillefarine's 1941 doctoral thesis, "Étude historique sur la condition juridique des Juifs au Maroc," focuses strictly on the Jewish populations of Morocco and their success in maintaining their religious laws and morals within the framework of Moroccan Islamic law.⁵ This focus is echoed in Jessica Marglin's, *Across Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco*, published in 2016.⁶ Cultural studies of Moroccan Jews, such as Haïm Zafrani's *Mille ans de vie juive au Maroc : Histoire et culture, religion et magie*, however, provide a wider lens through which to understand how the population maintained religious culture and social life while navigating the Arab world in which they lived.⁷

Casablanca has been called "a city without memory" because of its chaotic and rapid development into the major economic hub of today, beginning in the nineteenth century.⁸ Works focusing on the history of Casablanca, or more specifically the Jewish communities of Casablanca, are few.⁹ The majority of these works focus on the protectorate and post protectorate

⁴ Two good overviews of Moroccan history are C.R. Pennell's *Morocco since 1830: a history* (New York: New York University Press, 2000) and Susan Gilson Miller's *A History of Modern Morocco* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

⁵ Édouard Mouillefarine, "Étude historique sur la condition juridique des Juifs au Maroc," (PhD diss., Université de Paris, Paris, 1941), AIU archives.

⁶ Jessica Marglin, *Across Legal Lines: Jews and Muslims in Modern Morocco* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

⁷ Haïm Zafrani, *Mille ans de vie juive au Maroc : Histoire et culture, religion et magie* (Paris: G.-P. Maisonneuve & Larose, 1983).

⁸ Susan Ossman, *Picturing Casablanca: Portraits of Power in a Modern City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 21-27.

⁹ It is true that more works on this subject, as well as all others covered in this thesis, are written in Arabic, a language which I have no real grasp of. For the purpose of this thesis, all research has been conducted using French and English language secondary sources and almost exclusively French language primary sources.

periods of the twentieth century, though Moroccan historian André Adams' 1968 *Histoire de Casablanca (des origines à 1914)*, discusses two years of the protectorate period. Adams' short but fact-filled history of Casablanca is generally impartial toward colonization, discussing the economic and industrial developments without being celebratory, and treating the Jewish population mainly in its role as intermediaries between European and natives rather than in their culture.¹⁰ Anthropological accounts such as Susan Ossman's *Picturing Casablanca: Portraits of Power in a Modern City* and André Levy's *Return to Casablanca: Jews Muslims, and an Israeli Anthropologist* briefly reference Casablanca's pre-protectorate history, but leave a large historiographical lacuna.¹¹

Works done on the economic importance of Casablanca and its port tend to focus on the French protectorate period (post-1912) and are generally small pieces of a larger work, such as Miguel Suárez Bosa and Leila Maziane's chapter "The Port of Casablanca in the First Stage of the Protectorate" from Bosa's book *Atlantic Ports and the First Globalization c. 1850-1930*.¹² Jean-Louis Cohen and Monique Eleb's architectural history, *Casablanca: Colonial Myths and*

¹⁰ André Adams, *Histoire de Casablanca (des origines à 1914)* (Aix-en-Provence : Annales de la Faculté des Lettres, 1968); archaeologists have found prehistoric traces of human activity on the site of Casablanca, but no settlement is mentioned until the 11th century. This modest village of huts and tents, called Anfa, grew sufficiently for its piratical activities to draw the ire of the Portuguese crown. A punitive expedition razed the offending village in either 1458 or 1459 and Anfa apparently disappeared. Three centuries later, it was reborn as Dar-el-Beida or Casablanca, synonymous names used simultaneously; between 1769 and 1775, Sultan Mohamed ben Abdallah rebuilt it as a bulwark against tribal agitation. Casablanca grew apace as merchant craftsmen and landless peasants moved to the city along with a few Europeans and Jews. From 1857 to 1901 total population went from 8800 to 21000. In 1856-57 there were 250 Jews and in 1900, 5000. In 1858, the European population numbered 60 and the number rose to 477 in 1901; for more information on the pre-protectorate history of Casablanca, see Adams' *Histoire de Casablanca (des origines à 1914)*, cited in this footnote.

¹¹ Ossman, *Picturing Casablanca*; André Levy, *Return to Casablanca: Jews Muslims, and an Israeli Anthropologist* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015); one frequently referenced work on the early protectorate period is Maurice Tanchant de Lunel's *Au pays du paradoxe : Maroc* (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1924), which discusses his experience as a French architect in Morocco.

¹² Miguel Suárez Bosa and Leila Maziane, "The Port of Casablanca in the First Stage of the Protectorate" in *Atlantic Ports and the First Globalization c. 1850-1930*, ed. Miguel Suárez Bosa (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

Architectural Ventures is one of few sources mentioning Anfa, the city with a large white-washed structure, used as a sailor's landmark, which would become known as both Dar el-Beida and Casablanca, both meaning White House, in the seventeenth century and then in the nineteenth century only as Casablanca.¹³

Until the protectorate, education was provided almost exclusively by religious institutions with Christians, Muslims, and Jews educated separately. Muslim children, boys and occasionally girls, attended madrasas for basic understanding of the Qur'an. Dale F. Eickelman discusses Moroccan *madrasas* in a 2007 article, in which he shows the decline of this formerly "essential" institution in Muslim communities following the French protectorate. Additionally, Eickelman asserts that secular subjects such as astronomy, engineering, and mathematics were taught at the Qarawiyin, the mosque-university in Fez, beginning in the latter half of the nineteenth century.¹⁴

The literature on the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* is expansive in French and to a lesser extent in English, though fewer works focus exclusively on Morocco. The English-language authority on the AIU's involvement in Morocco is Michael M. Laskier, whose tome, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco 1862-1962*, is referenced in nearly all subsequent works on the subject of the AIU in Morocco. Laskier details the establishment and expansion of the AIU in Morocco, as well as the ways in which the school administrators, teachers, and alumni helped traditional Jewish communities in Morocco to navigate the political and economic colonization by European powers.¹⁵

¹³ Jean-Louis Cohen and Monique Eleb, *Casablanca: Colonial Myths and Architectural Ventures* (New York: The Monacelli Press, Inc., 2002); Adams, *Histoire de Casablanca (des origines à 1914)*, 68.

¹⁴ Dale F. Eickelman, "Madrasas in Morocco: Their Vanishing Public Role," in *Schooling Islam*, ed. Robert W. Hefner and Muhammad Qasim Zaman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Michael M. Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Jewish Communities of Morocco: 1862-1962* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983).

Though not focused on Morocco, Aron Rodrigue's book, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition*, is a collection of annotated and translated documents from the AIU archives in Paris. These documents focus on the teachers' experiences, giving insight into their struggles and thought processes as they struggled to maintain authority in classrooms and impart not just academic but moral intelligence onto their students. It is important to note that most of these teachers were women, and many of them AIU alumni. Rodrigue's organization of the letters and annotations contextualize the lives of AIU teachers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁶ Another work by Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, performs the same function for the AIU in Turkish communities and places the rise of Zionism within the framework of western Enlightenment. According to Rodrigue, the AIU's mission in Turkey was not only to "civilize" the Jewish communities but, by teaching them French, to acculturate them with European Jewish communities, eventually distancing them from their local communities.¹⁷

Teachers were the main conduit for the AIU's influence in Jewish communities; their opinions and experiences affected the schools as much as AIU policy. Susan Gilson Miller's article, "Moïse Nahon and the Invention of the Modern Maghrebi Jew," discusses the life of Moïse Nahon, an AIU teacher, prominent Jewish intellectual, writer, and founder of the Casablanca boys' school. Nahon, a Tangiers native and AIU educated, was part of a vibrant community of Jewish intellectuals in northern Morocco who questioned what permanent repercussions might come from European influence and discussed its effect on the cultural hybridity of the local Jewish populations between 1895-1912. Miller importantly underlines Nahon's belief that Moroccan Jews had an individual culture, and while they were drawn to

¹⁶ Aron Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries in Transition: The Teachers of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1860-1939* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993).

¹⁷ Aron Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews: The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Politics of Jewish Schooling in Turkey, 1860-1925* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990)

some aspects of European modernity, they did not wish to lose their cultural identity as a result of western modernization. Miller's work focuses on Nahon's experiences in Fez, Tangiers, and Algiers, with brief mention of his time in Casablanca, showing his significant involvement in AIU schooling and the Jewish intellectual spheres of the time.¹⁸ It is in Casablanca, however, we can see how a young Nahon utilized AIU training and early notions of protecting Moroccan Jewish culture to establish a successful school, helping to unify a community which many thought improbable at best.

Miller also usefully introduces a gender analysis into the AIU's work. In a 2016 article "Gender and the Poetics of Emancipation: *The Alliance Israélite Universelle* in Northern Morocco, 1890-1912," Miller looks at the ways in which the AIU facilitated the upward mobility of young Jewish girls in Tangiers through a close reading of the 1930 book *Mazeltob*, a tragic story of a young Jewish girl from Tetouan, and careful historical research. For the AIU, "full participation in civic life meant the banishment of particularism from public space and its containment inside the home," which was facilitated through not only secular and moral education, but also vocational training.¹⁹ Miller emphasizes that, to the AIU, the education of girls was "an essential phase in the grander project of reform," because women were seen both as cultural protectors and agents of change, therefore essential to a slow, overarching, Jewish transformation.²⁰ Marriage, as Miller argues, was the ultimate goal for AIU educated girls, but as many Tangiers graduates of the boys' school emigrated elsewhere, the Tangiers AIU Alumni

¹⁸ Susan Gilson Miller, "Moïse Nahon and the Making of the Modern Maghrebi Jew," in *French Mediterraneans*, ed. Patricia M.E. Lorein and Todd Shepard (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016) 293-320.

¹⁹ Susan G. Miller, "Gender and the Poetics of Emancipation: *The Alliance Israélite Universelle* in Northern Morocco, 1890-1912," in *Franco-Arab Encounters: Studies in Memory of David C. Gordon*, ed. D. C. Gordon, L. C. Brown, and M. Gordon (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1996) 232.

²⁰ Miller, "Gender and the Poetics of Emancipation," 233.

Association created a vocational program to teach a variety of female trades such as typing and sewing. Miller's gendered analysis shows that the AIU girls' schools were expected to produce women who, while playing different roles than men, shared and propagated the same moral values, therefore transforming the whole Jewish community.²¹ This double standard of modernization can be seen when looking at the establishment of Casablanca's AIU schools through a gendered lens.

Peter Drucker also looks critically at the AIU's efforts to "emancipate" Jewish girls from Muslim gender and sexual norms in his article "'Disengaging from the Muslim Spirit': The Alliance Israélite Universelle and Moroccan Jews." Drucker emphasizes that the AIU tried to introduce Moroccan Jewish girls to French gender norms. Girls' schools were founded as early as 1866 when one was opened in Tetouan, four years after the boys' school. Rather than teach the girls strictly for the betterment of the Jewish population, Drucker argues, the AIU wanted to free the girls from gender norms of the Islamic culture in which they lived, therefore serving the French imperial project by training Jewish women to support Jewish men who pursued careers in French-dominated Moroccan society.²²

Jessica Marglin's 2011 article, "Modernizing Moroccan Jews: The AIU Alumni Association in Tangier, 1893-1913," discusses how AIU Alumni assisted the AIU in educating poorer Tangiers Jews. They helped develop the trade workshops which became crucial in the AIU's efforts. These elite Tangiers Jews wanted to modernize "backwards" Jews of smaller

²¹ For more works on the AIU's education of girls and the influence of female AIU educators see Joy A. Land's chapter "Corresponding Women: Female Educators of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in Tunisia, 1882-1914," in *Jewish Culture and Society in North Africa*, ed. Emily Benichou Gottreich and Daniel J. Schroeter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011) 239-256; Esther Benbassa, "L'éducation féminine en Orient: L'école de filles de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle à Galata, Istanbul (1879-1912)," *Histoire, Economie et Société* 4 (1991): 529-559; and Frances Malino, "Prophets in Their Own Land? Mothers and Daughters of the AIU," *Nashim* 3 (2000): 56-73.

²² Peter Drucker, "'Disengaging from the Muslim Spirit': The Alliance Israélite Universelle and Moroccan Jews," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1 (March 2015): 3-23.

communities because they understood and supported the mission of the AIU. Marglin quotes a bulletin of the AIU Alumni Association which states that progress should be measured by the ways Jewish women accepted modernity.²³ Her analysis of AIU alumni in Tangiers provides an excellent lens for examining the establishment and development of the AIU school in Casablanca.

The Alliance Israélite Universelle and Education

The Alliance intends also, even essentially, to give Jewish youth and consequently the whole Jewish population, a moral education more than technical instruction; to train not halfway learned men; men who are tolerant, kind, faithful to their duty as citizens and Jews, devoted to the public good and their brethren, men capable of reconciling the demands of modern life with respect for ancient traditions.

-Instructions générales pour les professeurs, 1903²⁴

The Jewish Intellectuals who founded the AIU were influenced by the emancipation ideology of the French Revolution which had granted Jews full citizenship in 1791. They wished all Jews to make similar gains, but believed that to be “emancipated” Jews needed to be “regenerated.”²⁵ “Regeneration” meant modernization for “backward” societies, particularly in North Africa and the Levant, which had not been touched by the eighteenth century’s Enlightenment or the nineteenth century’s Age of Progress.²⁶

²³ Jessica Marglin, "Modernizing Moroccan Jews: The AIU Alumni Association in Tangier, 1893-1913," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 101, no. 4 (2011): 574-603.

²⁴ Alliance Israélite Universelle, "Instructions générales pour les professeurs," (Paris: Alliance Israélite Universelle, 1903), 95, AIU archives.

²⁵ Drucker, "“Disengaging from the Muslim Spirit,”” 4.

²⁶ Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries*, 7-8.

Many historians emphasize that the AIU did not want to destroy Jewish identity, but enrich it by making it an even more multifaceted cultural hybridity, one which would allow for religious and national pride and create the citizen-Jew.²⁷ The inaugural 1860 *Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle* included an “Appel à tous les Israélites,” or “Call to All Jews,”:

- 1) To work everywhere for the emancipation and moral progress of all Jews;
- 2) To provide effective support for those who suffer because they are Jews;
- 3) To encourage appropriate publications which will bring this result.²⁸

In the regions which the AIU planned to “regenerate,” traditional Jewish education came in three categories: private tutoring, tuition-paid schools (*slās*), and tuition-free schools (*Talmudei-Torah*). Wealthy Jewish boys were taught Hebrew and religious studies in the home by a rabbi. *Slās* were for boys usually between three and thirteen, whose parents paid the rabbi-teachers' salaries. The poor boys attended *Talmudei-Torah* taught by rabbis in community buildings where they mainly learned the Hebrew language, the Torah, and men's religious duties.²⁹ The *Talmudei-Torah* were generally overcrowded, though rarely numbered over 100 boys because it was believed that large groupings of Jewish children would attract the evil eye. For many AIU school directors, this belief later became an obstacle to increasing enrollment in interior towns such as Fez.³⁰

The AIU's stated mission intended to adapt Jews in a changing world, but some traditional rabbis and community leaders resisted secular education anyway. AIU school

²⁷ Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries*, 10-11; see also Michael Laskier's chapter “Background of the Activities of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* in Morocco: The Traditional Jewish Society,” in *The Alliance Israélite Unverselle*, 8-30.

²⁸ Alliance Israélite Universelle, *Bulletin d'Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 2 Janvier 1860, accessed November 28, 2019, <http://www.jpress.nli.org.il/>.

²⁹ Rodrigue, trans., “Y. Cohen to Central Council, Tangier, 3 Decembre 1903,” in *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries*, 114-116; Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 112-113.

³⁰ Rodrigue, trans., “J. Valadji to CC, Fez 1 Septembre 1903,” in *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries*, 113-114; Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 113.

directors and regional committees often had to negotiate with the *junta*, the body of notables who directed the community. Establishing a school necessitated a cooperation between the *junta* and AIU officials to earn support from local populations. Participation by the *junta* mostly quelled local suspicion but did not always ensure smooth cooperation. AIU schools did not replace *Talmuedi-Torah*, however, and some parents sent their children to both traditional schools and AIU schools simultaneously or sequentially.³¹

In 1903 the Central Committee produced the *Instructions générales pour les professeurs*, based on the French curriculum of the *metropole*, as a guidebook for AIU teachers. It expanded upon the 1884 *Instructions* with slight modifications. Instead of a four-year system, the *Instructions générales* expanded coursework to six years. It added compulsory courses such as local geography and history, elementary physical and natural sciences, elementary applied natural sciences, linear drawing, and for the girls, handiwork and sewing. Many of these subjects had already been implemented by school masters, but this change shows the AIU's attempt to expand education once established schools had mastered teaching the French language. It also specified the AIU should not only instruct students in various subjects but also educate them intellectually and morally.³²

A key point in the AIU's *régénération* was its moralizing agenda. For the AIU, subject matter and moral education were complementary, as both taught children to observe and reason.³³ *Morale* was a key component in spreading western notions of civilization and respectability, the attainment of which "would allow Jews to find their place alongside non-Jews

³¹ Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 80-94; Rodrigue, *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries*, 57-58.

³² AIU, "Instructions générales," AIU Archives, 23-28.

³³ AIU, "Instructions générales," AIU Archives, 28-29.

in the secular domain.”³⁴ To create good citizens out of “degenerate” Jews, the AIU teachers had to inculcate moral virtues in children who would become the conduit for communal change. The virtues to be taught included loyalty, love for others, respect, honesty, tolerance, patriotism, hard work, understanding, sacrifice for common good, and a spirit of solidarity.³⁵ Many AIU teachers found this task difficult, complaining to the AIU’s Central Committee of difficulties of teaching fundamentals such as basic manners, understood mainly to mean consideration for others. Along with these complaints, however, the same letters celebrated the progress so desired by the AIU. One teacher from Casablanca wrote in the same letter that it would take generations to moralize “degenerate” Jews and boasted of the progress made in teaching manners and compassion.³⁶

The desired virtues included religious toleration, a subject which divided “traditionalists” from “progressives” within communities. “Traditionalists” were less likely to accept a policy of religious toleration and more likely to make anti-Muslim or anti-Christian comments. The traditionalist view prevailed in places such as Tétouan where Muslim, Jewish, and Christian communities existed in separate physical spheres. But, in Tangier and Casablanca where Jewish and Muslim quarters were more fluid, relations among the communities were friendly. The open-door attendance policy of AIU schools served as a catalyst for the toleration of non-Jews. Catholics were more likely to take advantage of this policy than Muslims, but the fact that they could attend helped to create respect for AIU schools within the Muslim communities.³⁷

Another AIU innovation, which was both a modernizing and moralizing mechanism, was its emphasis on the education of girls. Before the AIU, Moroccan Jewish girls received no formal

³⁴ Miller, “Gender and the Poetics of Emancipation,” 231.

³⁵ AIU, “Instructions générales,” AIU Archives, 28-29, 94-95.

³⁶ Rodrigue, trans., “M. Nahon to Central Committee, Casablanca, 18 Octobre 1898,” in *Images of Sephardi and Eastern Jewries*, 74-5.

³⁷ Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 115-116.

education, and were taught at home exclusively. Often, educating girls was considered superfluous and even dangerous.³⁸ The AIU, however, felt that a society was measured by the progress of women. Young Jewish educated girls grew to be good Jewish mothers who would bring up good Jewish citizens.³⁹ Educating girls was therefore a prerequisite to creating a modernized society. The 1901 AIU bulletin, one year after the founding of the girls' school in Casablanca, stated that overall progress could be measured by the progress of women.⁴⁰

Teaching was a vocation open to both male and female AIU alumni. In 1867 the AIU opened in Paris the *Ecole Normale Israélite Orientale* (ENIO) to train its best alumni. The network of AIU schools having grown tremendously, needed teachers. The ENIO would solve this problem as well as open up more job options for AIU graduates. The curriculum was based off of the French normal school model, a four-year program. The location of the ENIO meant that for the first time, AIU students became emerged in French culture. The location also created difficulties in convincing Moroccan families to send their children to Paris, far away from their parents, who were particularly reluctant to send girls to Paris.⁴¹ Both Nahon and Benzaquen were educated at the ENIO, utilizing this Parisian training in their establishment of Casablanca's AIU schools.

Moroccan Jews and Casablanca

Nineteenth century Moroccan Jewish communities could be divided into three subcultures: Castilian Jews, Judeo-Arab, and Judeo-Berber. Spanish-speaking Castilian Jews mostly lived in

³⁸ Rodrigue, *French Jews, Turkish Jews*, 59.

³⁹ AIU, "Instructions générales," AIU Archives, 99-100

⁴⁰ AIU, *Bulletin de l'Association des Anciens Elèves de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle de Tanger*, no 2 (1901), AIU Archives.

⁴¹ Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 109-110; Rodrigue, *Images*, 34-35.

the north and along the coast. They were descended from Spanish Jews, known as Sephards, expelled from Spain in 1492. They retained some European culture and were generally receptive to European ideas. Judeo-Arabs consisted of subgroups: descendants from the Jewish diaspora of 70 CE, when the Romans conquered Jerusalem; 1492 exiles who having located in the interior or along the coast lost their Spanish language or culture; and Judeo-Arabic speaking Jewish Berbers who lived in the interior and along the western coast. There is little information available about the Judeo-Berbers, who mostly lived in the northern mountains, and intermingled with Berber populations.⁴²

Whatever their origins, Jews were relegated to a lesser status as *dhimmīs*, or “protected peoples.” To ensure protection by Muslim rulers, Moroccan Jews paid special taxes, accepted a lesser legal and judicial status, and tolerated the occasional conversion of religious institutions to mosques. They could not serve in the army or police forces and often were on the margins of social life. They did, however, have administrative control of their communal institutions: rabbinical courts and schools were completely run by Jews.⁴³

Anti-Semitism was an issue faced daily by Jews of Casablanca, both by their Muslim rulers but also from some Europeans. Many well-connected Moroccan Jews were a part of the *protégé* system, by which consulates could grant them foreign judicial and financial protection, as well as act as policemen, notaries, and judges in the name of keeping law and order.⁴⁴ This system, founded under the Franco-Moroccan Treaty of 1767, by the late 1800s had become increasingly popular because of the need for commercial agents, mainly Jews, who served as intermediaries

⁴² Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 20-2

⁴³ Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 10-11, 20.

⁴⁴ Katherine V. Walther, “Spreading Empire and Civilization in Morocco, 1878-1906,” in *Sacred Interests: The United States and the Islamic World, 1821-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015) 128; Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, c. 1800-1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011) 206.

between Europeans and Moroccan Muslims.⁴⁵ The Dreyfus Affair (1894-1906) also stirred up uneasiness among Moroccan Jews, as it caused waves of anti-Semitism from Europeans, primarily the French, and raised doubts about Jewish ability to assimilate fully into European culture.⁴⁶ While there was no direct consequence for Moroccan Jews from after the Dreyfus Affair, there was more apprehension towards European, particularly French, influence.

Casablanca's economic importance today is owed to its port. However, it achieved this importance slowly. The Port of Casablanca opened as an official port of entry in 1823, the ceremony presided by Meir Macnin, Consul and Ambassador to all the Christian Nations.⁴⁷ The Anglo-Moroccan trade treaty of 1856 (formally known as the Treaty and Convention on Commerce and Navigation), heavily favored British interests, reduced import duties, fixed maximum export duties, and provided for these benefits to be extended to other trade partners.⁴⁸ The Port of Casablanca was the safest port along the West Coast, but could not accommodate large ships. Moreover, it was impassible during the rainy season. Sultan Mulay Abd el Aziz, determined to alleviate these shortcomings, engaged a French company in 1905 to modernize the port.⁴⁹ The increased European presence in Casablanca at the turn of the twentieth century was largely due to the construction activities at the port. Jews, traditional intermediaries between Europeans and Moroccans, participated in large numbers in the increased economic activity as the harbor attracted both European and Jewish populations.

⁴⁵ Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 20, 39-40.

⁴⁶ Miller, "Moïse Nahon," 295; Sarah Abrevaya Stein, "Dreyfus in the Sahara: Jews, Trans-Saharan Commerce, and Southern Algeria under French Colonial Rule," in *French Mediterraneans* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2016) 274.

⁴⁷ Daniel J. Schroeter, *The Sultan's Jew: Morocco and the Sephardi World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002) 105.

⁴⁸ Pennel, C. R., "Morocco Since 1830: a history," 60; Bosa and Maziane, "The Port of Casablanca," 76.

⁴⁹ Bosa and Maziane, "The Port of Casablanca," 76-78.

A few epidemics and famine affected the Casablanca Jewish community in the early years of their AIU schools. When the founding girls' school director requested supplies before her arrival, she asked for sponges, books on hygiene, and eye cream for infections, anticipating their need.⁵⁰ An isolated fatality due to diphtheria in 1901 caused panic because medication could not be found locally and the AIU sent four vials of serum to quell hysteria.⁵¹ A typhoid epidemic in 1905-1906 caused some 400 deaths – approximately 6-7% of the Jewish population. This epidemic orphaned some students, who had to leave school to support themselves, while others skipped school to care for their ill parents.⁵² Famine occurred more frequently throughout the country and caused interior Jews to relocate to coastal cities, especially Casablanca. These disasters were all dealt with in turn by AIU teachers who helped in what ways they could, teaching hygiene to prevent the spread of illness, providing food when possible, and distributing medication sent by the AIU Central Committee when it was available.

Casablanca Gets an AIU School

“Casablanca was, above others, the community for educational experiments.”

-Moïse Nahon⁵³

The founding of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* school in Casablanca is related in the letters exchanged between two Vice Consuls of France and the AIU Central Committee and in the first annual report sent by the school's founding director, Moïse Nahon. The letters narrate the struggle among the disparate Jewish communities to establish a single committee

⁵⁰ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, October 24, 1900, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

⁵¹ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, October 7, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives; AIU Central Committee to Benzaquen, October 17, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives; Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, October 25, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

⁵² Isaac Pisa, “Rapport Annuel 1905-1906,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁵³ Moïse Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

responsible, among other things, for the founding and funding of a French language school. Nahon's report details the difficulties he and his supporters faced and describe the organization of the school, personnel, schedules, classes, advancement of the AIU moralizing mission, charity work done on behalf of the AIU, and a financial report of the school's first year.

By 1885, seven AIU schools had been opened in Morocco as the AIU penetrated deeper into the interior.⁵⁴ Even the traditionally conservative city of Fez inaugurated its first AIU boys' school in 1885. A girls' school was opened the following year.⁵⁵ Casablanca, though a rapidly growing city whose Jewish population mostly agreed upon the need for an AIU, or at least French language, school, had yet to have a school of its own.⁵⁶ The main obstacle was the lack of socio-religious cohesion within that community, a fact which the AIU noted and saw as a permanent obstacle to opening a school.⁵⁷

Casablanca was home to six synagogues in 1885, all with slight variations in their religious practice and none willing to cede power over religious and civil affairs to another.⁵⁸ This situation began to change on New Year's Eve, 1885, when Vice Consul Craveri, the French vice consul in Casablanca, assisted by the Portuguese and German vice consuls, hosted a meeting of Jewish rabbis and notables. The intervention of European officials resulted in the election of a religious assembly of twelve, two representatives per synagogue, an assembly who would elect a

⁵⁴ "Écoles préparatoires et primaires," Bulletin de l'Alliance Israélite Universelle, semestriel (1897), accessed November 28, 2019, <http://www.jpress.nli.org.il/>.

⁵⁵ Laskier, *The Alliance Israélite Universelle*, 87.

⁵⁶ Letter, French Vice Consul Craveri to Secretary of the Alliance Française in Paris, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

⁵⁷ Nahon, "Rapport Annuel 1897-1898," Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁵⁸ Craveri, "Réunion des Israélites au Vice-Consulat de France à Casablanca, Maroc," Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

rabbi as president to regulate religious and civil affairs and set up an account to aid local indigents.⁵⁹

Quarreling among the Jewish factions continued over which rabbi to elect as leader, but with a religious assembly of sort established, Craveri petitioned for a French language school. On January 10, 1886, he wrote a letter ambiguously addressed to the République Française, asking that it petition the AIU for an Arabic-speaking French teacher for Casablanca.⁶⁰ No teacher was sent. The French Foreign Minister replied in March that his ministry did not have the resources to fund a French language school, but if the community could pay for it, he could probably send an appropriate teacher.⁶¹ Two months later, on May 14, 1886, Craveri wrote the secretary of the Alliance Française to ask the AIU to send a teacher from Tangiers or Tétouan. On that day, the twelve representatives finally settled on a rabbi to be their council's president, unified by Craveri's promise that the AIU would send an Arabic-speaking French teacher.⁶²

The representatives had never unanimously agreed on anything, so that Craveri felt their unification for the sake of founding a French language school would be a strong argument for the AIU act on behalf of the Casablanca Jewish community. Unfortunately, no AIU teacher arrived while Craveri was French Vice Consul to Casablanca, but his efforts did solidify the rabbis' and notables' desire for a French school. He had found the one purpose they could all agree on: a better future for their children.

⁵⁹ Craveri, "Réunion des Israélites au Vice-Consulat de France à Casablanca, Maroc," Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

⁶⁰ Craveri to the République Française, January 10, 1886, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives; while it is unclear exactly whom this letter is intended for it was likely intended for Craveri's superiors within the French consular system

⁶¹ Craveri personal notes, March 26, 1886, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

⁶² Letter, Craveri to the Secretary of the Alliance Française in Paris, May 14, 1886, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

In December 1888, Vice Consul Craveri's successor, Vice Consul Collomb, received a letter from the Jewish community, asking him to petition the AIU Central Committee for a boys' school. The community was willing to provide 1200 francs per year to the school as well as a yearly tuition fee of 200 francs from the students' families. Around sixty paying students were expected, and the AIU could decide how many poor children could be educated for free.⁶³ Collomb forwarded the letter, along with one of his own to the Central Committee in which he bemoaned the fact that without such a school the Jewish children of Casablanca were growing up in "an ignorance painful to see."⁶⁴

A school was finally opened in February 1891 by Monsieur Abudarham,⁶⁵ a former AIU professor.⁶⁶ The school, however, was private and though Abudarham had been an AIU professor it was not an AIU school. Yet, owing to the small AIU subsidy, it could accept some poor children of the "grossest ignorance" who could not afford to pay. Within six months, the school had sixty children, including some Catholic. The pupils were divided into three classes based on age and knowledge: sixteen in the highest class, fourteen in the second level, twenty-two in the lower level. The eight students too young to learn Hebrew letters were not counted as part of any one class.⁶⁷

Classes were taught from 8am-12pm and from 2pm-5pm Sunday through Thursday. The language barrier was the greatest challenge. Abudarham could only teach in French and his students spoke dialects of Spanish, Arabic, and Hebrew, with practically no French language

⁶³ Letter, Members of the Casablanca Jewish Community to Vice Consul Collomb, December 17, 1888, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

⁶⁴ Letter, Collomb to the President of the Central Committee of the AIU, January 23, 1889, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

⁶⁵ Most documents used only reference last names, therefore nearly all persons referenced for the remainder of this thesis will only be done so by their family names.

⁶⁶ Letter, Abudarham to Vice Consul Collomb, July 21, 1891, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives; Nahon, "Rapport Annuel 1897-1898," Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁶⁷ Letter, Abudarham to Vice Consul Collomb, July 21, 1891, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

skills. For the first five months, therefore, he taught French vocabulary. Hebrew lessons were taught by a rabbi. The first class, more advanced, received notions of geography, arithmetic, and French grammar. In only five months, Abudarham wrote to Vice Consul Collomb that the situation was not brilliant, but he expected to succeed in his labor of “civilization and progress.” The support he, the school, and the community had received from the Vice Consul had been a great help.⁶⁸

The school seemed so successful in its first year that the Jewish council asked the Vice Consul to petition the AIU to cover the cost of the director’s salary. Attendance was growing rapidly as the community realized the progress students were making, and soon they would not be able to accept more applications.⁶⁹ Collomb forwarded this letter to the Central Committee, asking them not only to pay the director’s salary, but to transform the school into a formal AIU school. He argued that the school was functioning well, suggesting a long future, but being private made it seem temporary. Folding it into the AIU system would endow it with an aspect of durability and stability. Abudarham, now a self-identified kind of moral authority for the community, supported the request and declared himself ready to accept being a teacher, rather than director, were the school to become an AIU institution.⁷⁰

Unfortunately, the AIU never responded, and for reasons difficult to fully discern, the school was closed in May 1894. Both Vice Consul Collomb and Moïse Nahon, the Moroccan Jewish scholar/professor who would eventually found the first AIU school in Casablanca, blame

⁶⁸ Letter, Abudarham to Vice Consul Collomb, July 21, 1891, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

⁶⁹ Letter, Casablanca Jewish Council to Vice Consul Collomb, April 29, 1891, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

⁷⁰ Letter, Vice Consul Collomb to the President of the AIU Central Committee, May 3, 1892, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

differences which had arisen between Abudarham and the Jewish community.⁷¹ Collomb wrote that Abudarham was totally dependent on the community, “more passionate than reasonable,” who would question the existence of the school for any reason.⁷² In Nahon’s account four years later, he blamed the closure on Abudarham’s allowing “himself [to] be dragged to surrender his independence in the struggles that were tearing this community apart.”⁷³ Nahon does not elaborate on these struggles, but it seems that differences about the role of secular education played a large role in the closing.

In early 1897, the AIU Central Committee sent Monsieur Ribbi, director of the Alliance school in Tangiers, to look for cities most “ripe” for an Alliance school and to make contacts. He visited Casablanca where he made fruitful connections. In his report, Ribbi noted the weakness of religious organization and reported that he had encouraged the administrative council to meet regularly.⁷⁴ The council heeded his advice, probably motivated by the hope of an AIU school which had originally unified them in 1886. Nahon believed they recognized that the lack of religious organization had become the major difficulty in founding and maintaining a school. They recognized that despite the French Vice Consuls’ interventions, and the temporary peace during which Abudarham’s school operated, they had to come together if they wanted a permanent school. As long as they squabbled, the AIU would be reluctant to invest in the community.

This reluctance began to wane in April of 1897 when the Central Committee sent Ribbi to Casablanca to sign an agreement with the administrative council and community notables for

⁷¹ Letter, Vice Consul Collomb to the President of the AIU Central Committee, July 12, 1894, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives; Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

⁷² Letter, Vice Consul Collomb to the President of the AIU Central Committee, July 12, 1894, Box Maroc III E, AIU archives.

⁷³ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁷⁴ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

the establishment of an AIU boys' school. The school would be funded by the slaughterhouse tax to the amount of 125 pesetas per month. As was the norm in Casablanca, as soon as the agreement was signed, disagreements arose within the junta.⁷⁵

A. Etedique, a member of the junta since its inception, felt that Ribbi, and by extension the AIU, was taking power away from the administrative council. Etedique who had been entrusted with collecting the slaughterhouse tax portion allocated for the school, believed he had the right to withhold it since he objected to the school. His objections were not recorded, however later events suggest that he believed education should be limited to religious and language studies and not include secular subjects such as science and math. This dispute seemed settled when an Algerian, Ben-Elie, took over the collection of the tax, distributing a portion to the poor and keeping back the amount set aside for the future school. Ben-Elie collected these funds and rented a space for the school but, overwhelmed by the difficulties, he left things to wait for the coming Alliance teacher.⁷⁶

The teacher selected as director of the Casablanca school, Moïse Nahon, arrived on October 23, 1897. He immediately met the notables who expressed their pleasure and excitement at seeing “the idea of a school finally embodied, and a professor sent by the Alliance.”⁷⁷ They proclaimed themselves ready to help and elected three delegates to assist in the collection of the taxes. The same day, the rabbis who performed ritual slaughtering, “*schobets*,” met. They agreed that they would not perform the ritual slaughter unless Chriqui, the delegate designated to collect the tax, had given the butcher a receipt. Etedique disliked that arrangement, which removed the tax from his control, and paid a *schobet* to oppose the idea at a meeting so that support for this

⁷⁵ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁷⁶ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁷⁷ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

system wavered. Finally, when Monsieur Fervrier, interim administrator at the French consulate in Casablanca, announced his support of Nahon, Chriqui was able to begin the regular collection.⁷⁸

Nahon encountered one more hurdle: Etedique insisted that he should be the director and he refused to give Nahon the list created by the former junta of the fee schedule for the paying families. He refused to relinquish the list, even after friends and family intervened. In fact, as Nahon reports, his “arrogance just increased.”⁷⁹ Etedique declared open war against the AIU, leaving Nahon no option but to “seize this pretext to give him a good lesson.”⁸⁰ Nahon lodged a formal complaint with the Consulate of Portugal because Etedique was a Portuguese *protégé*, and therefore subject to Portuguese influence. Forced to give in to threats of losing his protected status, Etedique relinquished the list. Casablanca’s first AIU boys’ school was officially opened on November 28, 1897.⁸¹

The school opened with 281 students enrolled, 100 of which paid tuition. Half of the students were Spanish speakers, coming from families who had moved from Tangiers or Tétouan. The other half, natives of Casablanca, Rabat, Marrakesh, and nearby Berber villages spoke an Arab dialect which mixed expressions of Hebrew, Berber, Chaldean (a Neo-Aramaic language), and Spanish, “put together without logic.”⁸² This diverse group was divided according to their age and basic knowledge for the secular courses. For Hebrew courses, however, students were divided not only by their Hebrew level, but by their native languages. The families desired

⁷⁸ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁷⁹ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁸⁰ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁸¹ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁸² Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives; Other sources have not confirmed the presence of Chaldean as a dialect spoken in Morocco at this time, but Nahon clearly lists it in his account of the different language expressions found within the Jewish communities of Casablanca.

this organization which enabled them to see the progress. Moreover, they wanted their children to participate in domestic religious ceremonies. The younger students with no knowledge of Hebrew were taught by a Spanish-speaking rabbi to encourage the learning of a language which Nahon saw as a “useful commodity for the other studies.”⁸³ This arrangement did not immediately satisfy everybody, but overall suited the needs and requests of the community.

There were five classes, four of which had a half day of secular lessons and a half day of Hebrew. The fifth class, made up of five-year-olds, spent the day in Hebrew lessons. With the four secular classes, Nahon worked on French extensively. At the beginning, barely 15 students could read or write any language. Nahon stressed that “one must not forget that nothing is more difficult than the study of the French language.”⁸⁴ Yet, by the end of the first year, all students, even the younger ones could read and write at their age level, had learned their numbers, basic arithmetic, some African geography, and could exchange money between currencies, an indispensable skill for later employment in an international city.⁸⁵ Nahon sums up his work best:

There is a general improvement which more than subjects learnt is the omen for the future; our children are becoming more and more pupils; they are growing accustomed to the school habits which are the very condition of progress: competition, love of good grades, of good class rank, curiosity and the courage to ask questions, never to accept without understanding, taking care of books, respect for schedules, all things whose existence they did not know when they wandered the streets or slept in the rabbinic schools.⁸⁶

Besides his school, Nahon also took charge of the Talmud Torah. A portion of the slaughterhouse tax was to be set aside for a *Talmud Torah* run by local rabbis. In order to collect the total tax subsidy, Nahon agreed to add an annex to his schoolhouse for the *Talmud Torah*. It strictly taught in Hebrew and was attended by impoverished boys whom Nahon describes as

⁸³ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁸⁴ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” B Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁸⁵ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” B Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁸⁶ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

being “driven by hunger from the back country, half-naked, threatened by diseases, and fated to become vagabonds and beggars.”⁸⁷ But, he believed it was the mission of the AIU to care for these children, accustom them to school, take them off the street, prepare them for more formal schooling, and try to give them a semblance of dignity.

Outside of education, Nahon stated that his “path of action...was obvious: to preach conciliation, unity in favor of the suffering classes, opposing the fierce individualism which turns this city of immigrants into a meeting place for antagonistic communities and unbearable leaders.”⁸⁸ Nahon’s charity work was extensive, especially as famine during the winter of 1897-1898 drove some 500 Jews from the interior to Casablanca. Beginning January 1, 1898, Nahon’s school offered free lunches for impoverished students, partially funded by community contributions, feeding approximately 85 students per day. He also worked to clothe poorer boys, many of whom had little-to-no proper clothing. A plea to wealthier students for “half-worn clothes and a little bit of underwear,” as well as community donations, aided in this work, however he was not able to distribute clothing to all in need. Though Nahon expressed that his charity work was sometimes insufficient, he also believed that “[t]his effort to help suffering, which is ignored by most of our brethren, gives us a great deal of satisfaction and surrounds the school in a halo of gratitude.”⁸⁹

Nahon left the school in 1899, replaced first by Monsieur Lévy, and by 1906 the school was in the hands of its new director, Isaac Pisa.⁹⁰ In his annual report for 1905-1906, Pisa boasted 256 students, 98 paying and 158 free. The influx of poor Jews looking for shelter in the

⁸⁷ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁸⁸ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁸⁹ Nahon, “Rapport Annuel 1897-1898,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁹⁰ Miller, “Moïse Nahon,” 299; Benzaquen to Central Committee, October 12, 1900, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives; Isaac Pisa, “Rapport Annuel 1905-1906,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

port city of Casablanca had increased the Jewish population to 6000 by 1905-1906, 1000 more than had been there merely 5 years before despite epidemics such as typhoid. It is perhaps because of this rapid increase in population that Pisa wrote, "I do not believe that in any of your schools there is a school population as diverse as that of Casablanca." Students came from Berber, Arab, and Spanish immigrant families, as well as from the interior and cities such as Tangiers and Tetouan. Pisa believed that the school unified these children, who otherwise may have been kept apart, and equip to "resist the competition of European activity."⁹¹

To assist in this resistance, the school began an apprenticeship program, helped to establish another *Talmud Torah*, and Pisa worked with the local community to set up a club for young Jewish men. Though relatively new and ill-funded, the apprenticeship program for 1905-1906 helped to place six students: one typographer, one pharmacist assistant, two carpenters, and two blacksmiths. To expand basic Jewish education to all boys, Pisa helped to establish an independent organization which would "concentrate all the students scattered in the Mellah" and be funded not only by an AIU subsidy but also a portion of the slaughterhouse tax and generous community contributions.⁹² The social club was a special project for Pisa, as he noted that the lack of entertainment in Casablanca had led to the establishment of numerous social clubs, most of which were not open to Jews. L'Union, as this club was called, was meant as a meeting place, an entertainment space for activities such as balls and concerts, a community library, as well as a source of charity for poor Jews.⁹³

⁹¹ Isaac Pisa, "Rapport Annuel 1905-1906," Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁹² Isaac Pisa, "Rapport Annuel 1905-1906," Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

⁹³ Isaac Pisa, "Rapport Annuel 1905-1906," Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives; This social club still existed and was prominent into the 1930s at least. Family stories of my great-grandfather's daily attendance for bridge games and my grandmother's debut as a cigarette girl for a ball at age 3 show the ways in which l'Union was still a major social fixture to the Jewish communities of Morocco in the mid-1930s.

Though the AIU boys' school had encountered some resistance in its inception, it had certainly flourished and become a key point in Casablanca's Jewish community by 1906. Resistance to Nahon's establishment of the school had subsided, attendance had increased, and the influence of the AIU had permeated the community enough to establish not only an alumni association but a social club and a second *Talmud Torah*. The AIU had finally been accepted by the Jews of Casablanca and would continue to play an active role in their community for years to come.

One for the Girls

If the first AIU boys' school in Casablanca had a turbulent start, the first girls' school had no smoother a beginning, though for rather different reasons. Vida Benzaquen, the AIU teacher selected in 1900 to establish the girls' school, ran into more practical problems rather than social and religious opposition. A Turkish native, her letters reveal her to have a more limited understanding of the complexities of Casablanca than her counterpart, Nahon, but show her resilience and dedication to the education and moral progress of her students.

She encountered her first issue before her arrival: where to locate the school? The AIU selected the director/founder, but as Nahon's struggles show, the Central Committee left it to the chosen one to find a building, order the supplies, and hire the staff. In early October, Benzaquen, still in Tangiers where she had been teaching, communicated with Monsieur Lévy, who had replaced Nahon at the boys' school. She learnt that he had been looking for a larger building for his school, and would be glad to give her his building if he found a suitable place by the time she was ready to open her school.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, October 12, 1900, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

By mid-October, however, it was clear that Lévy would not find a bigger house before Benzaquen's arrival, scheduled for two weeks later. By chance, as she wrote to the Central Committee on October 24th, she met a Monsieur Toledano from Casablana who had a two-story, nine-room house to rent. The situation seemed under control and she sent a list of needed supplies. This list included usual school items but also things such as bath sponges, cream for eye ailments, and books on personal hygiene and home economics.⁹⁵

Unfortunately, that stroke of luck did not pan out. On October 31st, 1900, she reported that Toledano was selling his house and, panicked, decided to catch an earlier, and less comfortable, boat to expedite the search. Still optimistic, she expressed hope Europeans in Casablana would register their daughters in her school, since they tended to respect AIU institutions. At the same time, unlike Nahon, who used European influence when necessary, she expressed concerns that though Europeans respected AIU schools, "in those cosmopolitan milieus, some attribute a political purpose to the educational work of the Alliance and must be countered especially in this period of problems and distrust against France."⁹⁶ She did not elaborate, but might have meant concerns raised by the Dreyfus Affair. Nahon and Benzaquen approached European influence differently. Nahon knew the AIU was often considered a colonizing, or at least Europeanizing, institution but sought western support anyway when he felt it would benefit the community, whereas Benzaquen wanted to counter these accusations and never seems to have sought help from European consulates.

She arrived in Casablana in early November 1900 and spent her first week searching for a schoolhouse and ordering furniture. She finally found a local: Monsieur Benzaquen, no relation, had a house which though not ideal, would work. Because a government official

⁹⁵ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, October 24, 1900, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

⁹⁶ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, October 31, 1900, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

occupied the second floor, only the ground floor would be available at the start. He was, however, leaving in a few weeks and she would soon have the whole house. The rent was satisfactory, only 125 pesetas, or 100 francs per month. That settled, she went about ordering desks, blackboards, and inkpots and requested a subsidy to pay the bill.⁹⁷

Despite her reservations about the building, Benzaquen was hopeful that the school would be a success. The girls' school, she noted, was "very much desired in this city" and the Casablanca Jewish community had warmly welcomed her. "As soon as the news of my arrival spread, some notables came to welcome me. I have already paid back some of those visits. Everywhere I am greeted warmly and in a friendly fashion."⁹⁸

Thus, it was optimistically that Benzaquen announced at the end of November that parents who had been unable to register their daughters earlier could do so now. Her appeal, she noted, could not have been more successful: registration grew to more than 100 and she had to turn some away because of lack of space and personnel. She believed herself to be personally responsible for the increase in registration, writing in December, "Is it my propaganda which reconciled people that were dubious about education and who were reluctant to send their little girls to school? It explains the number of students who are turning up from every part of town."⁹⁹

Whatever the reason for the large registration, when it opened in the first week of December 1900, the school had 130 students distributed between two rooms and an enclosed courtyard. Benzaquen complained fervently to the Central Committee that registration numbers increased daily, but she could not accept more students until the upstairs renter vacated his floor. He had promised to leave by the end of the current Arab month, a promise she had heard before,

⁹⁷ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee November 11, 1900, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

⁹⁸ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, November 11, 1900, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

⁹⁹ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, December 2, 1900 Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

and was not enthusiastic to hear again. After two weeks, she believed her current organization was not sustainable, as voices carried easily from one school room to another and all her materials had to be borrowed from the boys' school, since her own from the AIU had yet to arrive.¹⁰⁰

Finally, on December 27th, Benzaquen had whole building, though attendance only rose to 158 students in four class levels by the beginning of January 1901. She had a larger space but lacked the money to hire more teachers.¹⁰¹ By late January she had received her supplies from the AIU, but other problems had arisen.¹⁰² A major one was her staffs' lack of training. Her aides knew enough to teach the basics, but she often had to teach their classes to show both teacher and students how to run a classroom. She repeatedly asked the AIU for an assistant director trained in Paris, but to no avail.¹⁰³ She also faced pressure to accept more students, despite the lack of space and staff, as more European parents applied. These applications, though an added stress, pleased her because "despite the anti-Semitic wind which was blowing also in this city, our school has an excellent reputation."¹⁰⁴ She stressed, however, that the school risked "losing the prestige which it has enjoyed thus far if the AIU does not send me a trained teacher."¹⁰⁵

Curriculum for the girls' school included some subjects not found in the boys' school: sewing and music. Both subjects, considered crucial for a young girl's education, show how the AIU hoped to not only prepare girls for home life, but also to find "honorable" employment.¹⁰⁶ Women needed to learn a smattering of basic subjects, but should mainly be trained in traditional

¹⁰⁰ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, December 11, 1900, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹⁰¹ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, January 4, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹⁰² Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, January 29, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹⁰³ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, April 12 1901 Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives; Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, May 27, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives; Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, August 19, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹⁰⁴ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, February 26, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹⁰⁵ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, May 27 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹⁰⁶ Miller, *Gender and the Poetics of Emancipation*, 240.

skills. Sewing was important for a housewife and might enable her to earn extra income; music would enable her to entertain her family. The girls studied sewing 14-16 hours per week with one teacher, Madame Catalina, who taught 33 hours a week.¹⁰⁷ It is revealing of Benzaquen's realism that she did not ask the AIU for money to buy a piano but asked for permission to request a subsidy from the Anglo-Jewish Association, though she did not receive it.¹⁰⁸

Benzaquen's fears that the student population would drop significantly did come true, but not as she expected. Over the summer holidays, parents who did not want to pay school fees during these two months of vacation simply withdrew their daughters.¹⁰⁹ By next term, attendance had dropped by half: from 160 to 80 students. Most troublingly, the first to withdraw his daughter was Aaron Zagury, a notable who had signed the contract by which wealthy locals guaranteed two years of school fees. Benzaquen related this betrayal in August 1901 but the situation was unchanged in January 1902, months after Zagury's death.¹¹⁰ Many parents registered their children again but still refused to pay the fees for the summer vacation.¹¹¹

Was it financial or was it simply the lesser value attached to girls' education? No one says. But, Nahon did not report such a loss of attendance during the summer holidays.¹¹²

Benzaquen was certainly aware of the lesser importance given to her school. As she wrote to the Central Committee, "We must not lose sight that we deal with people who have only one

¹⁰⁷ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, December 18, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹⁰⁸ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, March 11, 1901 Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives; Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, April 18, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹⁰⁹ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, October 16, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹¹⁰ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, August 12, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives; Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, January 9, 1902 Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives; Benzaquen notes in this letter that Zagury was murdered, though does not expand on the circumstances.

¹¹¹ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, January 9, 1902, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹¹² Nahon, "Rapport Annuel 1897-1898," Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

purpose – to marry off their daughter, in other words, get rid of her. This being the case, how can we expect them to make the least sacrifice for their daughters’ education?”¹¹³

Without the summer fees and with low attendance, the school was in grave financial difficulty during the last months of 1901. More signatories were refusing to pay what they had promised to the school and in early November, Benzaquen asked the Central Committee for a subsidy of 25 francs per month.¹¹⁴ Ten days later, Lévy agreed to give her 25 pesetas per month from his share of the slaughterhouse tax.¹¹⁵ With so small a subsidy and so little financial aid from the AIU, Benzaquen, supported by a few fathers, decided to raise fees, increasing the schools’ income by 200 pesetas per year.¹¹⁶ By the end of the first year, the school was not thriving the way Benzaquen predicted in its’ early days, but it was operational.

In the Spring of 1905, however, a letter from Isaac Pinto and Charles Szagury, notables commissioned by the *junta* to examine the AIU schools, claimed that the girls’ school was failing. According to them, most wealthy families had abandoned the school because: 1) its students were not learning much and parents preferred the Spanish schools which emphasized sewing and embroidery; and 2) the school desperately needed “a serious teacher of a certain age who would tend seriously to the teaching.”¹¹⁷ They feared that unless these problems were not remedied within three months, the school would close.¹¹⁸

The school did not close in the three months following the letter, however, and Vida Benzaquen continued to direct the girls’ school. In her annual report for 1905-1906, she stated that in its six years of existence, it had seen six generations of students to pass through its doors.

¹¹³ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, November 3, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹¹⁴ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, November 3, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹¹⁵ AIU Central Committee to Benzaquen, November 12, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹¹⁶ Benzaquen to AIU Central Committee, December 18, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹¹⁷ Pinto and Szagury to AIU Central Committee, May 3, 1905, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹¹⁸ Pinto and Szagury to AIU Central Committee, May 3, 1905, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

Of these nearly 500 students, only about 40 had come regularly. She had not, therefore, been able to establish homogeneous classes. Results, however, for the year end exams of 175 students show that at least 20 had learned well and performed at the same level as students from the boys' school. Additionally, they excelled in sewing and embroidery and could make lingerie, hats, and dresses as well as rugs, cushions, and ornamental objects.¹¹⁹

Though still struggling financially, the school had accumulated a small library and added another local teaching aide. Pisa, however, suggested the library be incorporated into the boys' school library, since many girls already used that larger one.¹²⁰ The local teaching aide, while helpful, left much to be desired. In her 1905-1906 report, Benzaquen noted, "I asked for an assistant, you refused without giving me any reason, and then you complain and are surprised that the girls' school cannot be compared to the boys' school."¹²¹

Nevertheless, Benzaquen seemed hopeful in her report, though in a subdued fashion. She had noticed changes in the tastes of her students, from what they chose to read to what they wore. Though these were "only superficial changes, they show that our students are glimpsing another life than the one of their ghetto."¹²² Though she felt that the girls' school's influence might seem small, she asserted that as her former students became mothers, change would become evident. "The good seed has been spread, let's let time ripen the harvest."¹²³

¹¹⁹ Benzaquen, "Rapport Annuel 1905-1906," Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹²⁰ Benzaquen, "Rapport Annuel 1905-1906," Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives; Isaac Pisa, "Rapport Annuel 1905-1906," Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives.

¹²¹ Benzaquen, "Rapport Annuel 1905-1906," Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹²² Benzaquen, "Rapport Annuel 1905-1906," Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

¹²³ Benzaquen, "Rapport Annuel 1905-1906," Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

Conclusion

This thesis explores the gendered implications of the AIU's educational rhetoric by comparing the establishment of the first AIU boys' and girls' schools in Casablanca. These schools, established at roughly the same time encountered different issues, but ultimately accomplished roughly the same thing: formal, secular, and moral education for the Jewish community of Morocco's fastest growing city. It is when both directors wrote about the "moral question" or "moral situation," however, one can see how they differed ideologically. The boys should show moral progress by their taking education seriously and behaving accordingly. Pisa, in his 1905-1906 report tells how seriously he punished those who mocked their classmates' mothers or sisters, as well as those who had been found in "undesirable locations," though he did not elaborate what those were. Benzaquen, however, saw moral improvement in how the girls dressed and presented themselves. Improving their appearance and replacing slippers with high-heel shoes she considered an outer sign of modernization.

The boys' school director did not discuss their clothing except as concerned the poorer boys, who wore rags and went barefoot. Later, clothes became the identifying distinction between natives and foreigners. When the Jewish population of Casablanca increased between 1886 and 1906, many new Jews were either European or from the interior – the first wearing western clothes; the other their traditional garb, a potential marker of social inferiority. Only 50 of his 300 students had been born in Casablanca, states Pisa in his 1905-1906 report, and he was quite proud to report that at *L'Union*, "the natives dressed in native style were accepted without discussions. Here is an interesting accomplishment due to your former students." This interesting accomplishment shows how the Jewish communities of Casablanca, maybe because of the AIU

schools, adopted modernization and “regeneration” in their own ways. Some dressed and acted in the old way, others adopted western style, each respecting the other.

Modernization brought by the AIU also highlighted the survival of patriarchal attitudes. The differences in treatment of the boys’ and girls’ schools is staggering. The boys’ school received 225 pesetas per month from the slaughter tax, the girls’ school only 25.¹²⁴ Consequently, more non-paying boys were admitted, increasing attendance dramatically. Moreover, as Benzaquen had complained in 1901, girls’ parents wanted to marry them off quickly, sometimes very young. Interestingly enough, the boys’ school encountered a stiff traditionalist resistance, but that type of resistance did not seem to be a major problem for the girls’ school. Despite the value that the AIU claimed to attach to girls’ education, what the girls’ school encountered as a main problem was indifference. When the choice had to be made, the needs of the boys prevailed. Their school should equip them for work while the girls’ school aimed to make them better wives and mothers, indispensable for modernization but to be done, as much as possible, on the cheap.

Both Benzaquen and Pisa asked the AIU for trained assistants, but Benzaquen had none whereas Pisa wanted another. When Benzaquen started the girls’ library, she met with some resistance from the Central Committee, but she developed it, albeit slowly. Girls, therefore, frequented the boys’ library. Combining the libraries might have been a good idea, but Pisa argued it should be done by folding the girls’ into the boys’. The AIU ruled in Pisa’s favor. The very existence of a separate girls’ school was questioned, and Pisa may have seen the fusion of the libraries as a first step to fusing the two schools into one campus. These choices illuminate the different importance attached to the boys’ and girls’ schools. Masculine domination was

¹²⁴ Pisa, “Rapport Annuel 1905-1906,” Box XIV F 25 1-8, AIU archives; AIU Central Committee to Benzaquen, November 12, 1901, Box XIV F 25.2, AIU archives.

accompanied by educating girls to serve the social and moral progress of men. Some of Benzaquen's asides suggest she was aware of the dynamics but chose to improve the prospects of her students within the constraints of reality.

The letters and reports used in this thesis credit the AIU schools with the unification of the Casablanca Jewish community. This information comes directly from the teachers rather than the community, and therefore should be questioned, though there is little doubt that some unification did occur. At the boys' school's inception, Nahon had found it necessary to divide the Hebrew classes by native language because parents requested it. No such request was made for girls' school three years later. Additionally, six years after its founding, Pisa stated no separation exists among the students who sit side-by-side no matter native language, family income, or level of family modernization. The growing European presence and the spreading of Zionism probably also played a role, but it is the schools which clearly displayed a new sense of unity.

Ultimately, the community wanted the schools. Some may have first feared the influence of the AIU and all wanted them as cheap as possible, but all recognized its results. Casablanca's Jewish community held on to their traditions, allowing the AIU education to aid in their navigation of a "modernizing" or "westernizing" world. This was the situation before the French landing of 1906 and the establishment of the French protectorate in 1912. From 1886-1906, the AIU labored to establish schools in Casablanca, which eventually aided in educating and modernizing the local population so effectively that after independence, when Moroccan Jews, fearful of Muslim discrimination, chose to leave, they successfully emigrated and integrated into industrially advanced societies. Many who left were children or grandchildren of AIU graduates, if they themselves were not.

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Vita

Sélène Allain-Kovacs was born in Lafayette, Louisiana but spent much of her childhood living in Washington, D. C. She earned her B.A. in History with minors in Technical Theatre and Global Studies from Northwestern State University of Louisiana in 2018. She continued her study of history at the University of New Orleans, pursuing a M.A. in History with a concentration in International & Global studies and interning at for the City of New Orleans in their Department of International Relations.