

## **Multivariable Casablanca: Vichy Law, Jewish Diversity, and the Moroccan Communist Party**

**Alma Rachel Heckman**

University of California, Santa Cruz

### **I. Introduction**

The future founder of the Moroccan Communist Party was disbarred following the application of Vichy legislation in Morocco in August, 1941.<sup>1</sup> Born in Algeria, Léon René Sultan had legally been a French citizen pursuant to the Crémieux Decree of 1870, which granted French citizenship to most Algerian Jews.<sup>2</sup> Before 1941, he had practiced law in Casablanca with all the advantages of French citizenship. He unsuccessfully petitioned the Protectorate authorities to be allowed to continue his practice and was forced to comply with Vichy's laws by April 1941. Sultan continued these petitions through March 1942, when he wrote that although he "submitted, naturally, to [the Protectorate's] decision," he found it legally unsound.<sup>3</sup> He continued: "Concerning myself, I don't seek to cling desperately to a profession that I have practiced so passionately. But having practiced it so scrupulously and without failing, I was hoping to leave it with less brutality."<sup>4</sup> Sultan acknowledged that he did not meet the requirements to continue practicing law, though noted that he had made an effort but was unable to participate in combat.<sup>5</sup> In the months that followed through the liberation of Morocco pursuant to the Allied invasion of Operation Torch in November 1942, Sultan would advocate on behalf of Jews who, by law if not in practice, were forced to leave their professions, homes and schools. He also provided legal services for political refugees in Morocco interned in forced labor camps. Sultan founded the Moroccan Communist Party (PCM) in 1943, shortly

---

1. The United States Holocaust Museum (USHMM) RG 81/1/4/208. Files of the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco (BNRM) held at the USHMM. Letter addressed to "Monsieur le Bâtonnier de l'Ordre des Avocats de Casablanca," signed "R. Cragnead," referencing the disbaring of Léon René Sultan. Undated.

2. Most, but not all. See Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

3. USHMM RG 81/4/197. Files of the National Library of Morocco (BNRM) held at the USHMM. Letter dated March 30, 1942, Casablanca, from M. L. R. Sultan Avocat au Barreau, Casablanca to: Monsieur le Conseiller du Gouvernement Chérifien, Rabat.

4. *Ibid.*

5. It is likely that Sultan was refused, along with many other North African Jews who volunteered to fight for France in the 1939 campaign.

after Morocco's liberation from Vichy rule. He died in Casablanca in 1945 from wounds sustained after he volunteered to fight for the Free French in Germany. His French citizenship, political engagement during the interwar period and after, and legal advocacy under Vichy serve to frame the Vichy period in Morocco as well as highlight the diversity of Jewish experiences during this time.

As I will demonstrate in what follows, that Sultan was not even Moroccan makes him a simultaneously exceptional and emblematic figure for the diversity of Jewish experiences under Vichy rule. Looking at the period through Sultan allows for a broader regional perspective that acknowledges the porous boundaries of French North Africa, as well as the inconsistencies of Imperial France's policies toward its Jewish subjects, citizens and Ashkenazi refugees before, during and after Vichy. This perspective sheds light on the Vichy betrayal of France's republican universalism and how Jews reconsidered their relationship to France and its historical ideals of "Liberty, Equality, and Freedom" when replaced by "Work, Family, Nation" under the Pétainist Vichy government and its colonial offices.<sup>6</sup> That Léon Sultan based himself in Casablanca (he was admitted to the Casablanca bar in 1929), a paragon of French colonial industrial expansion and a boomtown with increasing numbers of European and rural Moroccan migrants, is also emblematic. Just prior to and under Vichy, Casablanca would receive vast numbers of Ashkenazi refugees, adding to the population of Moroccan Jews (approximately 300,000 strong) and Algerian Jews with French citizenship such as Sultan.<sup>7</sup> It is thus Léon Sultan's Casablanca as much as the man himself that serves to navigate the vast diversity of experiences that make generalization of the period impossible.

Casablanca came under Vichy authority when Nazi forces defeated France in June of 1940, propping up the collaborationist Vichy régime based in France's unoccupied south. Decorated WWI veteran Marshal Philippe Pétain led this régime as well as France's colonial possessions, among them Morocco. The experiences of the Vichy years and the betrayal of France's previous colonial emancipatory promise left the Moroccan Jewish community, particularly the urban, politicized elites of Casablanca, feeling shaken and vulnerable. Vichy experiences motivated many Moroccan Jews to drift away

---

6. See Eric T. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001) for a discussion of the extension of Vichy ideology to France's colonies. Jennings makes the conscious decision not to discuss France's North African holdings, however his analysis of Pétainist policy and local nationalist embrace or disregard for such ideologies makes for a fascinating comparison.

7. For a comprehensive history of Casablanca, see work by André Adam, for example: *Histoire de Casablanca (des origines à 1914)* (Aix-en-Provence: Publication des annales de la faculté des lettres, Éditions Ophrys, 1968).

from France and into the arms of Zionist or nationalist leftist politics. Many others, shocked by Vichy, heralded the return of “true” France after the end of the war, treating Vichy as an aberration rather than a culmination of pre-existing trends in a watershed moment. Although brief, Vichy rule in Morocco accelerated pre-existing political and social schisms among Moroccan Jews as well as between Moroccan Jews and Muslims. For Moroccan Jews, such political trends included French assimilationism, Zionism and Communism. In the interwar period, such ideological options overlapped and Moroccan Jews synthesized political programs to suit their local needs as well as international affiliations. Following WWII, such ideological trajectories would become increasingly incompatible. Thus Léon Sultan’s political activity, in addition to his Algerian background and Casablanca setting, serves as one more thread for navigating the multivariable implications of Vichy in Morocco.

This article focuses on the Vichy era as a critical juncture in the politicization of Moroccan Jews and the formation of the Moroccan Communist Party. This article is structured through the biography, affiliations and activism of Léon René Sultan. First, it surveys the variety of ideologies, including Communism and Zionism, available to Moroccan Jews on the eve of the Second World War. Second, it discusses the Vichy years and anti-Semitic policies that galvanized Moroccan Jewish political participation as well as a brief note on refugee and prisoner populations. Third, it addresses the immediate aftermath of the war on Morocco’s Jewish community and the Moroccan Communist Party as a mode of Jewish participation in Moroccan national liberation. Léon Sultan’s story intersects with each of these themes. This exploration serves to contribute an answer to a question that is historiographically pressing: What does Vichy represent? Forthcoming work from several prominent scholars illuminates the previously understudied nexus of Vichy, colonialism, and WWII.<sup>8</sup> Through the life and activism of Léon René Sultan, I argue that Vichy represents a moment of culmination, crisis and synthesis for Morocco’s diverse Jewish populations, laying the foundations for an increasingly urgent Moroccan Jewish interrogation of the

---

8. See forthcoming work from Susan Gilson Miller, Aomar Boum and Daniel Schroeter, among others. Susan Slyomovics’ *How to Accept German Reparations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014) for a discussion of Vichy and Algeria. Work by Michel Abitbol (*Les Juifs d’Afrique du Nord sous Vichy*. (Paris : G. P. Maisonneuve & Larose, 1983)) and Henri Msalleti (*Les Juifs d’Algérie sous le régime de Vichy, 10 juillet 1940-3 novembre 1943*, (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1999)) made significant inroads on such questions. The Vichy historian Robert Paxton, while expertly detailing Vichy France, devotes little ink to France’s colonial domains in *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972) and in his co-authored book with Michael Marrus *Vichy France and the Jews* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981). See also Gilbert Achcar, *The Arabs and the Holocaust: the Arab-Israeli War of Narratives* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010) and Robert Satloff, *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories of the Holocaust’s Long Reach into Arab Lands* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2007).

community's place in the broader Jewish world, French empire, and finally, Morocco.

## II. Competing and Complementary Interwar Movements

Léon René Sultan was born in Constantine, Algeria on September 13, 1905; little information is available concerning his life and political activism (or indeed, lack thereof) before he arrived in Casablanca in 1929. His father worked for the local French military establishment, and Léon was the eldest of eight children.<sup>9</sup> It is unclear what form of high school education he pursued, but he graduated from the Faculty of Law at the University of Algiers. In 1926, Sultan publically defended his thesis, *Contribution à l'étude de l'abus des droits (jurisprudence): thèse pour le doctorat en droit* [Contribution to the study of the Abuse of Rights: thesis for a Doctorate in Law], earning him high honors and two essential qualifications: *Diplomé d'Etudes Supérieures de Droit Public* [Diploma in Advanced Studies of Public Law] as well as, and most intriguingly, *Diplomé de Législations Algérienne, Tunisienne et Marocaine et de Droit Musulman* [Diploma in Algerian, Tunisian and Moroccan Law, and Muslim Law].<sup>10</sup> He dedicated his thesis to his grandfather, his parents, his uncle (a Mr. A. Sultan, a lawyer in Constantine) and to his fiancée, Mademoiselle Fortuné Bensidoun who would soon accompany him to Casablanca.<sup>11</sup> Just a few years later, his French citizenship allowed him significant mobility in political movements in Casablanca. While indigenous Moroccan Jews and Muslims were legally prohibited from attending European leftist meetings (a law which was difficult to enforce), Sultan's command of French and Arabic, connections with the local Jewish community and above all his European classification enabled him to propagandize among Moroccan Jews and Muslims in Casablanca.<sup>12</sup> Sultan's propagandizing efforts in Casablanca likely arose from his investment in law, rights, and the universalist ideologies enshrined in interwar Communism as well as French Republicanism. His early intellectual work, in the form of his law thesis, was predicated on a notion of universal human rights and defense of the French Republicanism with enormous implications for Maghribi Jewry.

Sultan's Republicanism had deep roots. The French Revolution of 1789 and the subsequent emancipations of French Jews necessarily informed Jewish

---

9. Albert Ayache, *Le mouvement syndical au Maroc: Tome 1: 1919-1942* (Paris: l'Harmattan, 1982), footnote 4, 178-179.

10. Léon René Sultan, *Contribution à l'étude de l'abus des droits (jurisprudence): thèse pour le doctorat en droit* (Constantine: Imprimerie M. Attali aîné, 1926). While printed in Sultan's hometown of Constantine, his law degree was from the University of Algiers Law Faculty. The cover page indicates Sultan's thesis defense took place on November 17, 1926.

11. Ibid. Mme Sultan would play a prominent role in the Moroccan Communist Party's organization and public profile after her husband's death in 1945.

12. Ayache, *Le mouvement syndical*, 178.

social and political developments in French North Africa. France conquered Algeria as an integral territory in 1830, and extended rule to Tunisia and Morocco as protectorates in 1881 and 1912, respectively. While most Jews in Algeria, including Léon Sultan, would gain French citizenship by virtue of the 1870 Crémieux decree, the decree was subsequently not applied to the protectorates (Tunisia in 1881 and Morocco in 1912). Citizenship, however, was only one facet of the Gallizing *mission civilisatrice* for North African Jews.

Rather than erasing Jewish particularism or Jewish identities, the post-emancipation nineteenth century engendered new discourses and expressions of Jewish identity in France. A prominent example is the Alliance Israélite Universelle, a philanthropic organization founded in Paris 1860 by Alsatian Jewish lawyer Adolphe Crémieux with schools intended to extend a version of the colonial *mission civilisatrice* to so-called “oriental” Jews.<sup>13</sup> Regenerative, “modernizing” rhetoric as interpreted through a European Jewish lens spread worldwide with increased French Jewish concern for their brethren in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire. This resulted in a growing linguistic, cultural, and educational rift between North African Jews and Muslims as North African Jewish children recited the histories of their supposed “ancestors the Gauls.”

While the Alliance vision sought to “civilize” Moroccan Jews and prepare them for citizenship according to French standards, Zionism offered an entirely different vision. Morocco’s first Zionist association, *Sha‘arei Zion*, was founded in 1900 in Mogador (Essaouira) by businessman Moses Lougassy, a Moroccan native who had been living in England.<sup>14</sup> Yet, from 1912 through 1919, *Sha‘arei Zion* was not allowed to distribute propaganda, and the Residency Protectorate officials actively opposed Zionism. Writing to the Resident General in 1919, Yahia Zagury, the protectorate’s head and manager of Moroccan Jewish institutions, adamantly opposed Zionist propaganda.<sup>15</sup> The Alliance promoted educational solutions with the goal of Jewish emancipation and citizenship in the countries where Jews lived, while Zionism called for Jewish migration to build a Jewish state. Given these opposed ideological foundations, it is not surprising that Zagury and the Residence opposed the dissemination of Zionist ideas and activities.

---

13. See work by Aron Rodrigue, Esther Benbassa, Frances Malino and others.

14. See Mohammed Kenbib, *Juifs et Musulmans au Maroc: 1859-1948* (Rabat: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1994); Yaron Tsur, “The Religious Factor in Encounter between Zionism and the Rural Atlas Jews,” in Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira, eds. *Zionism and Religion* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998), 312-329; Daniel Schroeter, “Anglo-Jewry and Essaouira (Mogador), 1860-1900: The Social Implications of Philanthropy,” *Transactions & Miscellanies (Jewish Historical Society of England)* 28 (1981): 60-88.

15. Jamaâ Baida, “La Presse Juive au Maroc entre les deux guerres,” *Hespéris-Tamuda* XXXVII (1999): 171-189, 172.

However, in July 1919, Nahum Sokolow, the head of the Zionist delegation at the Paris Peace Conference, successfully persuaded France to permit Zionist activities in Morocco. The year 1919 marked increased activity on the part of the Fédération Sioniste de France (FSF), and 1926 witnessed the establishment of the pro-Zionist paper *l'Avenir Illustré* in Casablanca.<sup>16</sup> World Zionist Organization (WZO) shekel sales and collections were allowed to continue in Morocco after they had been prohibited in 1912. *L'Avenir Illustré* exhorted Jews to buy shekels that would support the initiatives of the WZO. On the anniversary of the start of shekel payments in 1897, a May 1927 issue proclaimed: "Jews of Morocco! Do your duty! It is by increasing the number of 'shekelists' that world Judaism will truly celebrate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the movement that is the fermenting agent of its renovation."<sup>17</sup>

Many, particularly members of the Moroccan Jewish élite, rejected *L'Avenir Illustré's* message. This opposition gave rise to a paper promoting Moroccan Judaism with an "Allianciste" bent, *l'Union Marocaine*, founded in February 1932.<sup>18</sup> Promoted and distributed through the AIU schools, *l'Union Marocaine* maligned Zionism as a "utopian" ideology and emphasized Moroccan Jewish "evolution." As the first 1932 issue proclaimed: "Evolved, assimilated, one would not have any less love for the patrimony of his ancestors [...]. Assimilation is not abdication, it is an adaptation, respectful of the past, but mindful of the future."<sup>19</sup> However, such ideas were often synthesized in perhaps surprising ways among Moroccan Jews, particularly in such demographic and ideological cauldrons as Casablanca. While more work needs to be done on this matter, Georges Oved's 1984 multi-volume study of the French Left and Moroccan Nationalism asserts the competing and complementary nature of Zionism and other forms of political engagement among Moroccan Jews by asking: "What contradictory hopes inspired young Moroccan Jews who trained, in the spring of 1935, to participate in the Maccabiah Games in Tel Aviv, a veritable Olympic Games of the Jewish world?"<sup>20</sup> The head of Morocco's Maccabiah committee was none other than Léon René Sultan. While his relationship to Zionism is unclear, such involvement in a Zionist sporting event in addition to his Communist activities highlight that the two were not yet mutually exclusive ideologies in interwar Morocco.

---

16. Zvi Yehuda, "Zionist Activity in Southern Morocco: 1919-1923," *Revue des Études juives*, CXLIV, no. 4 (October-December 1985): 363-368, 364.

17. *L'Avenir Illustré*, 27 May 1927. See also Mohammed Kenbib, *Juifs et Musulmans au Maroc: 1859-1948* (Rabat: Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1994) for a detailed discussion of shekel collection during the interwar period.

18. Baida, "La Presse Juive," 175.

19. *L'Union Marocaine*, 4 février 1932. In Baida, "La Presse Juive," 175.

20. Georges Oved, *La gauche française et le nationalisme marocain, 1905-1955, Tomes 1, 2* (Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 1984), 162.

The Maccabiah Games provided a rare jovial moment in an increasingly tense Jewish world, the European troubles of which Moroccan Jews were acutely aware. In the late 1930s, Moroccan Jewish political activism increased in response to Hitler's coming to power in 1933 as well as the growth of Zionist activity. A Protectorate report from July 1933 stated:

Jews number 270,000 in Morocco; this is a very intelligent and active segment of the population. Its youth suffers; it currently has shown the tendency to join up with a young Muslim party still forming in order to create a Moroccan national party. [...] International events can occur which could facilitate exploitation of these currents and could, in the midst of conflict, become much worse. [...] A tighter connection between the Communities and the Government, effective and precise monitoring is the best way [...] to put an end to the Francophobe propaganda that so often interests the youth, to control, direct and strengthen Jewish loyalty.<sup>21</sup>

Ever concerned by the specters of nationalism and Zionism, Zagury repeatedly petitioned the Protectorate Authorities for more surveillance of Jewish political activities. In December of 1938, Zagury wrote an alarmed letter to the head of protectorate affairs in Casablanca stating that a letter was circulating among Casablancon synagogues urging Jews to boycott products from Germany and Italy.<sup>22</sup> Despite requesting police intervention and increased supervision, Zagury's attempts to circumscribe Jewish efforts of solidarity with their beleaguered brethren in Europe as well as Moroccan nationalists failed. Jews were increasingly politicized in many spheres, and continued to call for the boycott of German and Italian goods.<sup>23</sup>

Behind such boycotts lay a Paris-based organization, the International League Against Anti-Semitism (LICA in French).<sup>24</sup> Sections of LICA had sprung up in every major Moroccan city by 1939. While the ostensible goal of the LICA was combating anti-Semitism in Europe, anti-Semitism was not an

---

21. Centre des Archives Diplomatiques de Nantes (CADN) IMA/250/1. "Note relative sur la population israelite de Casablanca." July 7, 1933. In dossier: "Direction de l'intérieur: Questions Juives," "Communauté juive dossier général 5 février 1864- 4 octobre 1944" V 1. No author information.

22. CADN IMA/250/1, December 14 1938, Casablanca. Report to Monsieur le Contrôleur Civil, Chef de la Région de Casablanca [no name], from L'Inspecteur des Institutions Israélites [Zagury]. Dossier: "Direction de l'intérieur: Questions Juives," "Communauté juive dossier général 5 février 1864- 4 octobre 1944," V 1.

23. CADN IMA/250/1, March 20, 1939. From Mellier [no further information] to Monsieur le Conseiller du Gouvernement Chérifien, Directeur des Affaires Chérifiennes, Rabat. Dossier: "Direction de l'intérieur: Questions Juives" "Communauté juive dossier général 5 février 1864-4 octobre 1944," V 1.

24. See Aomar Boum "Partners against Anti-Semitism: Muslims and Jews respond to Nazism in French North African colonies, 1936-1940," *The Journal of North African Studies* 19, 4 (2014): 554-567.

unknown phenomenon for Moroccan Jews. For example, in Mazagan August 1939, a Protectorate informant reported that “there was a local meeting of LICA at the Employment Office. About ten ‘leaguers’ were there. Rivault, the president, made it known that he had received numerous complaints against Marano, of Italian origin, a naturalized French citizen since 1933, who pronounced nasty statements against Jews at the Café du Commerce.” A certain Mr. Giminez, also present at the meeting corroborated the story and claimed to have overheard the same M. Marano ordering an *apéatif* utter to the waiter: “give me a non-Jewish pernod.”<sup>25</sup> Through LICA, Moroccan Jews were politically active on a local level while simultaneously expressing international solidarity. One report from Meknes in April 1939 emphasizes this—it contains six different examples of leaflets that local “leaguers” distributed around the city, notably in shop windows. Two of them are worth quoting: “All of you who want to live: Boycott products from enemy nations!” and “French Mothers, French Businessmen, Hitlerian, Mussolinian and Japanese products are stained with blood. Boycott them!”<sup>26</sup> Protectorate informants note that such propaganda was most likely distributed by Jewish women.<sup>27</sup>

The LICA was one of many modes of Jewish political engagement in the interwar period. While Moroccan Jews and Muslims were formally prohibited from joining the Moroccan Communist Party (a local branch of the French Communist Party) or other European dominated political parties and labor unions, European leftists were free to attend LICA or other specifically Moroccan Jewish meetings. Anti-Fascism and anti-racism were common causes. A Protectorate informant reported a meeting of the LICA in Rabat in June 1938, at a local cinema. About 200 people were present for the event titled, “The Brotherhood of Races.”<sup>28</sup> The stage was decorated with the Moroccan and French flags.<sup>29</sup> A certain Mr. Romani intoned universalist values before the crowd: “The earth belongs to all men of all colors, religions, and opinions. [...] He preached the sincerity of the Brotherhood [Fraternité] of races, peace and freedom [Liberté]. Mr. Romani evoked the Great War—

25. CADN 1MA/200/319, August 18, 1939, Mazagan. From Le Commissaire Chef de la Sureté Régionale to Monsieur le Sous-Directeur, Chef du Service de la Police Générale à Rabat. “Confidential.”

26. CADN 1MA/200/319, April 29, 1939, Meknes. Unclear destination, from: Chapuis [signed]. Papers given from LICA to a Maurice Levy, local secretary of LICA; Maurice had ordered about 100 copies of these from Paris with to be distributed among local Jewish business owners.

27. Indeed, women were considered most reliable enforcers of the boycott. CADN 1MA/200/319, April 27, 1939, Meknes. Signed Chapuis (Le Commissaire Chef de la Sureté Régionale) to Monsieur le Sous-Directeur, Chef du Service de la Police Générale, Rabat. Attached to dated letter: “Rapport sur les principes & l’application du boycottage des pays agresseurs Allemagne, Italie, et Japon/ Au profit de la France et des pays démocratiques/ Présenté par Georges Zerapha, au nom de la Commission de Boycottage de la LICA.”

28. CADN 1MA/200/319, Meeting organized by LICA, Rabat, June 28 1938. “Confidentiel: note de renseignements” from “Commissaire divisionnaire Rabat,” signed: Palmade.

29. *Ibid.*

12,000 Jews fought in the French army, he said, and 6,000 paid with their lives on the battle field to defend the land that was so dear to them. Mr. Romani finished by saying that the LICA is persuaded that democrats will combat all forms of racism to bring about Human Brotherhood.” Next came the President of the Rabat section of LICA, a Mr. Beurieux who suggested that “to combat as much as possible Hitler’s regime, there must be a boycott on Moroccan soil against German products. [He] finished his speech by inviting audience members to purchase brochures at the exit, whose proceeds would go to supporting Spanish Republicans.”<sup>30</sup> This episode represents an iconic moment of political confluence for interwar Moroccan Jewry. European leftists, interested in propagandizing among indigenous Moroccans, found an ideologically predisposed audience in the LICA attendees and leadership. The universalist overtones of the discourse went hand in hand with an increasingly anti-Fascist and universalist drive espoused by the PCM and its Metropole leaders, the French Communist Party (PCF). Further, fundraising for the benefit of Spanish Civil War refugees at such events underscores the web of mutual influence, trans-nationalism, demographic shifts and Moroccan Jewish political consciousness in the interwar period. Protectorate informants reported an astonishing number of Communists and Socialists, Algerians and Spaniards in attendance at LICA events. Increasingly, Moroccan Jews themselves were noted leftists and communist supporters. Therefore, it is not surprising that Protectorate authorities had sought to ban, or at least limit, LICA’s expansion by the mid-1930s.

LICA members were also likely to be members of a local leftist group, active primarily in Casablanca and Rabat. The *Jeunesses Socialistes Autonomes* (Autonomous Socialist Youth) were independent from the PCM and other European dominated Moroccan political party. While Moroccan labor issues formed the core of the *Jeunesses Socialistes Autonomes* meetings, Communism and the Spanish Civil War were frequent subjects of discussion. Communists, particularly Spanish Communists, would attend and speak about the virtues of their political platform. Muslims attended as well, and at least one was responsible for selling a newspaper entitled *Révolution* at the conclusion of Rabat meetings, which were noted to be dominated by Moroccan Jews.<sup>31</sup>

With the election of Léon Blum’s Popular Front government in France in 1936, the left grew even stronger in Morocco (and in North Africa as a whole). Léon Sultan had even been part of a team of European Communists

---

30. Ibid.

31. CADN IMA/200/319, January 5 1939, Rabat. Police report on a meeting of the Members of the Groupement des Jeunesses Socialistes Autonomes, held on January 4, 1939 at 9 pm in the basement of Bar Félix.

and members of the *Section française de l'international ouvrière* (SFIO-French Section of the Workers' International) from Morocco to meet with Léon Blum in Paris on the subject of ousting unpopular Resident General Peyrouton.<sup>32</sup> This relaxing of restrictions on the left in North Africa allowed for greater propagandizing activity among indigenous Moroccans—a task to which Léon Sultan set himself assiduously alongside Samuel Benchimol of Casablanca.<sup>33</sup> Sultan wrote for *Clarté* and other leftist publications, distributing them among indigenous quarters of Casablanca and recruiting for the *Jeunesses Communistes*, supported by the PCF in the Metropole.

### III. Vichy Legislation and the Precarious Republican Promise

This leftist aperture was, however, short lived. The Second World War broke out with Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939; France and the United Kingdom swiftly declared war on Germany. In response, France sharply curtailed freedoms of leftist organizations throughout the empire. Even before the fall of France to Germany, Sultan Sidi Mohammed ben Youssef (Future Mohammed V) was compelled by then Resident General Noguès to sign a *dahir* (decree) on September 6, 1939 forcing the disbanding of suspect Communist organizations. As a result, several Communists were also arrested, often sent to the front by October.<sup>34</sup> By June 1940, German soldiers marched through Paris and France was divided into the Nazi occupied north and the unoccupied south. Marshal Philippe Pétain spearheaded the Vichy regime. This would have profound implications for France's colonies. The Third Republic and Léon Blum's "soft colonial" government were vilified and blamed for France's weakness, while Vichy ideology allowed for the unbridled, unapologetic expression of racist, "anti-egalitarian" colonial policy in the name of "Work, Family and Nation."<sup>35</sup>

The first of such Nazi inspired anti-Semitic laws (known as "Jewish Statutes") defined Jews as a racial category among other provisions and were applied in France and its integral territory of Algeria on October 3, 1940. This was quickly followed by the abrogation of the Crémieux Decree on October 7, 1940, stripping Algerian Jews of their French citizenship wherever they resided, be it in Algeria, France, or Morocco (as in the case of Léon Sultan). These laws set the foundation for the expansion of anti-Semitic legislation in the summer of 1941, applying to the protectorates as well as the departments of France, restricting Jewish professional options (especially finance), education

---

32. Ayache, *Le mouvement syndical*, 159.

33. Ayache, *Ibid.*, 221.

34. Ayache, *Ibid.*, 276-277.

35. Jennings, *Vichy in the Tropics*, 2-4; 11-12; 23.

(unless it was in a strictly Jewish setting), business ownership, and residence.<sup>36</sup> While the extent to which the Jewish Statutes were enforced across North Africa is not clear, the current archival and anecdotal evidence indicates an uneven, inconsistent application. Further, different restrictions applied to “foreign Jews” and “indigenous Jews,” and such colonial categories proved to be more porous and fungible in daily application.

Sidi Mohammed Ben Youssef, constrained by the nature of his colonial rapport to Vichy protectorate authorities (and the provisions of the treaty of Fez, March 30, 1912), signed a series of similar decrees on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1941.<sup>37</sup> The articles contained in these decrees specified the professions, living spaces, education and much else that was now forbidden to Moroccan Jews.<sup>38</sup> On paper at least, by November 1941, Moroccan Jews were to have ceased practicing their prohibited professions or else face imprisonment and steep fines. Exemptions were possible, though inconsistently granted, primarily for those who had provided military service and other “historic” service to France.

For example, on November 12, 1941, Raymond Bensimhon, a Jew from Fez, wrote to the protectorate authorities protesting that he should be allowed to maintain his employment. Article 10 of the August 5, 1941 decree stated that exemptions were possible “for those Jews who have rendered unto Morocco exceptional service.”<sup>39</sup> Bensimhon then related his family’s “exceptional” service: his grandfather, Juda Bensimhon, had served as the guide and host for Charles de Foucauld, who came to Fez to study and write his 1888 book “Reconnaissance au Maroc”—Bensimhon disguised de Foucauld as a Rabbi in order to carry out this work.<sup>40</sup> Many historians have noted that de Foucauld’s time in pre-Protectorate Morocco is indicative of the ever-reaching arm of France into North Africa. Bensimhon was ultimately successful in his petition, but his example set a very high bar for others seeking to demonstrate service

---

36. See Sarah Sussman, “Vichy Discrimination Against Jews in North Africa” for a list of these laws, available at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Holocaust Encyclopedia. [<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007311>], accessed 11/30/15.

37. See forthcoming work from Aomar Boum and Daniel Schroeter on the question of Sultan Mohammed V, Vichy and the Second World War.

38. USHMM, Files of the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco (BNRM) RG-81.001M.0002.00000017. Decree of August 5, 1941. “Prescrivant le recensement des juifs marocains.” Dahir du 5 Aout 1941 (11 rejev 1360). Accompanied by seal of Sultan Sidi Mohammad Ben Youssef (Mohammed V), signed by Resident General Nogues.

39. USHMM, Files of the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco (BNRM) Rg-81.001M.0001.00000016-17. Date: 12 November, 1941, Fez. To Monsieur le Général Commandant de la Région de Fes, from: Raymond D. Bensimhon, Cabinet Raymond, 121 Bd. Poeymirau [sic!] FES V.N.

40. Ibid.

to the French authorities in Morocco.<sup>41</sup> Most Moroccan Jews had not served France in such a historic fashion.

Léon René Sultan lost his French citizenship pursuant to the abrogation of the Crémieux Decree and was disbarred following subsequent Jewish Statutes. He continued to agitate against protectorate authorities after he was forced to quit his law practice. He wrote numerous letters inquiring about the legal grounds on which Jewish children were removed from French protectorate schools and required to attend institutions that were specifically geared toward Jews. In non-Alliance schools, the Jewish student body was fixed at 10% or less.<sup>42</sup> Jewish students whose fathers had fought for France most often had their petitions to remain in protectorate schools rejected; their fathers' petitions to maintain employment were also rejected. In direct contradiction to the August 5<sup>th</sup> 1941 decree, Jewish orphans of veterans were still not permitted to attend protectorate schools.<sup>43</sup>

Sultan petitioned on behalf of Moroccan Jews and foreign Jews,<sup>44</sup> as well as political prisoners interned in forced labor camps. Eastern European Jews and political prisoners faced a different experience altogether from Moroccan and "foreign" Jews. Forced labor camps located on the Moroccan-Algerian border housed the forced laborers, there to build the French colonial dream of a Trans-Saharan railway. One camp, Berguent (today the town of 'Ain Beni Matthar), contained about 400 exclusively Eastern European

---

41. USHMM, Files of the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco (BNRM) Rg-81.001M.0001.00000019. National Library of Morocco. February 23, 1942, Fez. To Monsieur le Commissaire Résident Général du Maroc, Secretariat Général du Protectorat, Rabat. Signed: Agence Lecat 88 Boulevard Peymirau; .... Galbes, Boulevard Peymirau; .... Centrale, Place Lyautey; Office Commercial Immobilier de Fez, Immeuble de l'Urbaine; Agence Fabiani Frères, 34 Avenue du Maréchal Pétain; .... Bertrand, Avenue du Général Maurial; Agence Immobilière Fassie. Signatures of the representatives of these various agencies in Fez, indicating support for the petition.

42. USHMM, Files of the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco (BNRM) RG-81.001M.0012.379-80. National Library of Morocco, January 8, 1942, Rabat. Report from Direction de L'Instruction Publique. Protectorat de la France au Maroc. Gouvernement Chérifien. Cabinet du Directeur. N. 175: Note sur l'organisation de l'enseignement israélite au Maroc. Signed: R. Ricard, le Directeur de l'Instruction Publique. Copie transmise à Monsieur le Secrétaire Générale du Protectorat, Service de Législation.

43. USHMM, Files of the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco (BNRM) RG-81.001M.0012.559-562. December 13, 1940. To "Mon Général," signed: "Grillet." Key statement: "Par letter no. 1715 C.C. du 13 novembre 1940, M. le Directeur du Cabinet a bien voulu nous faire connaître que le Département consulté sur la portée des exceptions concernant le statut des juifs, estimait qu'une dérogation ne pouvait s'appliquer aux orphelins de guerre. Nous avons l'honneur de vous rendre compte de ce que, d'après des renseignements obtenus par nos camarades de France, certaines mesures ont été cependant envisagées par le Gouvernement en faveur des orphelins de guerre. Nous vous serions, dès lors, très reconnaissante de bien vouloir appuyer de votre haute autorité la transmission de la letter ci-joine à M. le Maréchal Pétain."

44. By "foreign Jews" I mean Jews of primarily European citizenship in Morocco, including Algerian Jews like Léon René Sultan who had been considered "European" for Moroccan Protectorate purposes until the abrogation of the Crémieux decree.

Jews.<sup>45</sup> Approximately 90% of these Jews had been volunteers in the French army according to a Red Cross survey in July 1942.<sup>46</sup> Prisoners worked under harsh conditions either along rail lines or in mines.<sup>47</sup> Approximately 7,000 prisoners, of whom about one-third were Jewish, were sent to labor camps along the northern segment of the illusory Trans-Saharan Railway.<sup>48</sup> During and especially after the liberation of Morocco following the Allied Invasion of Operation Torch in November 1942, Léon René Sultan helped prisoners in these camps in addition to his advocacy of North African Jews and European Jewish refugees, finding legal loopholes in Vichy and pre-existing protectorate codes with a fair degree of success.

#### IV. Post-Vichy Morocco, Nationalism, and American Reception

To this end, Léon Sultan worked with Héléne Cazes Benatar, a trained lawyer and nurse for the Red Cross who was instrumental to refugee aid in Morocco.<sup>49</sup> Born in Tangier to a Moroccan Jewish father and an English mother, at age twenty Benatar moved with her family to Casablanca.<sup>50</sup> After France fell to Germany in 1940, Benatar established the Moroccan Refugee Aid Committee, which was declared illegal by Vichy authorities in 1941 but continued to operate, ultimately in coordination with the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC—an American Jewish philanthropic organization) and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), a Quaker philanthropic organization.<sup>51</sup> With these financial and administrative backers, Benatar and her team toured the Moroccan labor camps and responded to prisoners' needs. After the war, she and her team worked to arrange visas to the Americas for refugees, Jewish and otherwise, as well as employment opportunities. Sultan represented political refugees seeking visas, employment, or liberation

---

45. Abitbol, *Les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord*, 106.

46. Satloff, *Among the Righteous*, 63.

47. Abitbol, *Les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord*, 104-105.

48. Satloff, *Among the Righteous*, 59-60.

49. USHMM Private Collection of Héléne Benatar, taken from the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People Jerusalem (CAHJP) RG-68.115M.0001.53. Curriculum Vitae on Héléne Cazes Benatar's stationary. "Curriculum Vitae de 1939 à 1942." Note on last page of the document: "Traduit 'ne varietur' de l'original en langue anglaise, sous le no. 16498 B. par mois sousigné, Expert National Traducteur-Assermenté. Fait à Paris ce 20 novembre 1967" Signed André Guillou, Expert National Traducteur-Assermenté, Cour de Cassation, Art. R. 37, 3<sup>ème</sup>, Cod. Proc. Pén. 11 Boulevard du Temple, Paris 3<sup>ème</sup>. See forthcoming work from Susan Gilson Miller about Benatar and her work with refugees in Morocco during the Second World War.

50. USHMM Private Collection of Héléne Benatar, taken from the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People Jerusalem (CAHJP) RG-68.115M.0001.41. English language pamphlet advertising Mme Héléne Benatar [sic!] speaking engagement, has photograph of her and brief biography: "Mme. Helene Benatar [sic!]/Hear the woman who defied the pro-Nazi Vichy authorities to save Jewish lives/A unique opportunity to receive a firsthand account of Jewish life in the Moslem world/Learn the story of the flight of tens of thousands of North African Jews to Israel." It is unclear where or when this event took place.

51. *Ibid.*

from the work camps, regardless of their religious background.<sup>52</sup> Sultan also worked with Spanish Communists and Italian anti-Fascists in Morocco such as Henri Ramos, Emile Vierin, as well as French Communists André Leroy and Robert Faure to continue clandestine organization in the form of “Liberation” groups.<sup>53</sup>

Following the Allied liberation of Morocco in November 1942, it took quite a few months for Algerian Jews residing in Morocco, like Léon Sultan, to regain French citizenship and for Moroccan Jews to regain employment, school registration and living quarters. Indeed, when US President Roosevelt met with Resident General Noguès during the Casablanca conference in January of 1943, Noguès conveyed Moroccan and “especially” Algerian Jewish anxieties over citizenship and the repealing of the Vichy laws, to which President Roosevelt replied: “the answer to that was very simple, namely, that there just weren’t going to be any elections, so the Jews need not worry about the privilege of voting.”<sup>54</sup> On the issue of Vichy laws and professional limitations imposed on Jews, President Roosevelt felt that “the number of Jews engaged in the practice of the professions (law, medicine, etc.) should be definitely limited to the percentage that the Jewish population in North Africa bears to the whole of the North African population. [...] To the foregoing, General Noguès agreed generally, stating that at the same time it would be a sad thing for the French to win the war merely to open the way for the Jews to control the professions and the business world of North Africa.”<sup>55</sup> All of these documents were only declassified much later; at the time of the American landing, Moroccan and “foreign” Jews alike fêted the arrival of the Americans with great relief. Indeed, “Roosevelt teas” and a “Roosevelt Club” sprung up in Casablanca encouraging the mingling of the nationalist Moroccan political elite and American officials in the wake of the Casablanca Conference, discussed further below.<sup>56</sup> Abraham Serfaty, a future

---

52. USHMM Private Collection of Hélène Benatar, taken from the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People Jerusalem (CAHJP) RG -68.115M.0004.412- 15. Dossier on “Sultan, L. R. 12 rue Bouskoura-Casablanca.” 413. February 21 1942, Casablanca, letter from Sultan to “Maître Benattar.” 414 February 19, 1942, Casablanca, letter from E. Suraqui Architecte S.P.A.F. Licencié en Droit Expert Assermenté près les tribunaux, Casablanca to “Maître H. Benatar,” 415. February 17, 1942 Casablanca, letter from Léon René Sultan to “Messieurs Suraqui Frère.”

53. Ayache, *Le mouvement syndical*, 301-302.

54. Roosevelt-Noguès Conversation, Jan. 17, 1943, noon, President’s villa. *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943* (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1968), 607.

55. Roosevelt-Noguès Conversation, Jan. 17, 1943, noon, President’s villa. *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943*. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1968, 607.

56. David Stenner, “Did *Amrika* promise Morocco’s independence? The nationalist movement, the Sultan, and the making of the ‘Roosevelt Myth,’” *The Journal of North African Studies* 19, no. 4 (September 2014): 531.

Jewish member of the PCM, would later reminisce how Moroccan Jewish women eagerly courted American Jewish soldiers in these halcyon days of relief.<sup>57</sup>

With no quick action in sight in the name of caution, European Jewish and political refugees languished in forced labor camps until as late as 1945, awaiting visas or employment papers. Many enlisted in service to British or American forces to escape the camps.<sup>58</sup> Letters continued to arrive at Benatar's office from the Jews of Berguent who had fought for France, only to be rewarded with the harshest of conditions.<sup>59</sup> One wrote: "We were all volunteers and served for France, which earned us two years in work camps in the most humiliating of conditions."<sup>60</sup> Legal and philanthropic efforts to defend Moroccan Jews, European Jews, and political refugees of all backgrounds overlapped for a brief catalytic period, exemplified within the wartime advocacy of Léon René Sultan. His party would, in short order, join the movement for Morocco's national liberation.

Moroccan nationalists and Jews alike welcomed the arrival of the Allied forces in November 1942. After an intense bombardment as part of Operation Torch from November 8-11 off the coast of Casablanca, the Allied forces (notably the Americans) defeated the Vichy resistance, which one observer likened to "worse than suicide."<sup>61</sup> The Americans occupied and administered Casablanca (and French Morocco more broadly) through the Vichy officers in place while the war continued through its conclusion in 1945. Soon after the success of Operation Torch, the Allies convened the Casablanca Conference

---

57. See Robert Watson, "Between Liberation(s) and Occupation(s): Reconsidering the Emergence of Maghrebi Jewish Communism, 1942-1945" *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* (September 2014): 381-398.

58. USHMM Private Collection of H el ene Benatar, taken from the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People Jerusalem (CAHJP) RG-68.115M.0005.386-7; RG-68.115M.0006. 480-4; RG-68.115M.0007. 531-2. RG-68.115M.0005.386-7. Letter from Adolf Besmann, G.T.4-Berguent. January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943, Berguent. To Ma tre H el ene Cazes-B enathar [sic!] Rue Pas de Calais Casablanca. Discusses joining the British and American allied forces. RG-68.115M.0006. 480-4 December 15 1942, Letter from "Me. H el ene Cazes-Benatar [sic!], Refugies  trangers 35 Rye Pas de Calais Casablanca to Monsieur le Colonel Pugh Civil Affair Officer Western Tas[k] Force Socony Vacuum Oil Cy [sic] Bldg Casablanca" lists people. RG-68.115M.0007. 531-2. "Note concernant les engages volontaires employes dans les services americains" undated, no to/from information.

59. USHMM Private Collection of H el ene Benatar, taken from the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People Jerusalem (CAHJP) RG-68.115M.0005.386-7. Letter from Adolf Besmann, G.T.4-Berguent. January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1943, Berguent. To Ma tre H el ene Cazes-B enathar [sic!] Rue Pas de Calais Casablanca. Discusses joining the British and American allied forces.

60. Ibid.

61. USHMM American Friends Services Committee Refugee case files-RG-67.008, Box 1, folder 29/36. "American Friends Service Committee/Records Relating to Humanitarian Work in North Africa 1942-1945/Series I Refugee Service/Sub-Series Individuals [1942] Box 1". Letter dated November 22, 1942 from Leslie O. Heath to his wife Helen. Leslie Heath was an officer for the American Friends Service Committee stationed in Casablanca.

from January 14-24, 1943. President Roosevelt of the USA met with UK Prime Minister Winston Churchill, along with Resident General Noguès, Sultan Sidi Mohammed Ben Youssef and the American Generals Patton and Eisenhower. Premier Stalin of the USSR was indisposed due to the battle of Stalingrad, but sent regrets. France's continued possession of Morocco and its North African holdings more broadly was precarious, for, as President Roosevelt said in a White House meeting prior to departure: "General Eisenhower has the right to say to anyone, 'Can you run this Government? Okeh [sic!]; I'll give you a try at it, but I can recall you at any time.'"<sup>62</sup> Indeed, in a pseudo-clandestine meeting between the Sultan's representative, Grand Vizier El Mokri, and Roosevelt's representative Mr. Hopkins, El Mokri conveyed that the Sultan was "worried" about "some de Gaullist or Vichy group" and the continued legitimacy of Resident General Noguès. Further, as US Brigadier General Wilbur's notes record from the conversation, "The Sultan is certain that the war will end in a victory for the US. This victory will be followed by a treaty of peace. When the time arrives to discuss the conditions of peace it is the Sultan's intention to throw himself in the arms of Mr. Roosevelt. [...] The Sultan is certain that all his people both in French and Spanish Morocco will be in agreement and wish to place their future in Mr. Roosevelt's hands."<sup>63</sup>

France's demonstrated weakness and the ascendant US (particularly with the promises of the Atlantic Charter, discussed below) inflamed aspirations for national independence across the Maghrib. Allal al-Fassi's (the primary figurehead of the Moroccan nationalist movement) *Istiqlal* party (Independence in Arabic) released its Manifesto of Independence in Morocco on January 11, 1944. This manifesto demanded the national independence of Morocco and its territorial integrity under Sultan Sidi Mohammed Ben Youssef (future Roi Mohammed V).<sup>64</sup> The Moroccan Communist Party quickly followed with its own declaration a few years later. The Second World War had weakened France's control over its colonial holdings, allowing nationalist movements to strengthen both organizationally as well as in legitimacy. The United States now dominated global politics, advocating on behalf of decolonization.<sup>65</sup> Future King Hassan II, son of Mohammed V, attended the historic 1943 Casablanca Conference with his father as well as Churchill and

---

62. *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943* (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1968), 513-514.

63. Hopkins-El Mokri Conversation, Jan. 23, 1943, Casablanca. *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943* (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, DC, 1968), 701-703.

64. Miller, *ibid.*, 145.

65. Miller, *ibid.*, 143.

Roosevelt.<sup>66</sup> Even Hassan II claimed that his political awakening occurred in the midst of the waning of French power. French rule and legitimacy was under threat at every level of Moroccan politics and society and national liberation organizations, including, increasingly, the Moroccan Communists. Communists as well as *Istiqlal* and other nationalist groups took seriously the proclamation of the Allies in the Atlantic Charter (August 1941) for “the restoration of their sovereign rights ‘for the peoples deprived of them by violence.’”<sup>67</sup> The Moroccan Communists, under the leadership of an Algerian Jew who had written a doctoral thesis on the abuse of rights pursuant to the Enlightenment values of the French Revolution, began to agitate accordingly.<sup>68</sup>

Léon René Sultan founded the Moroccan Communist Party in 1943 alongside European Communists in Casablanca, the same year as the historic Anfa meeting at which President Roosevelt intimated his support for Moroccan national independence. From the beginning of its involvement in Moroccan politics with the Riffian war of the 1920s, the French Communist Party had advocated against colonialism. When the Vichy government fell, the French Communist Party and its Moroccan branch argued that the most urgent task was to rid the world of fascism. Once this was achieved, the nature and demographics of leftist political organizing in Morocco began to shift alongside tremendous upheaval within Morocco’s Jewish population.

When Moroccan Muslims and Jews attended Communist meetings and were members of the Moroccan branch of the French Communist Party prior to WWII, the leadership as well as the vast majority of the members were European.<sup>69</sup> After Léon René Sultan launched the Moroccan Communist Party as its own independent entity rather than as a branch of the French Communist Party, its composition began to change. After the success of Operation Torch, Sultan enlisted alongside the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Moroccan *tirailleurs* to fight against Germany in 1944. He was ultimately wounded and died at home in Casablanca on June 23, 1945, just two years after the founding

---

66. See Jamaâ Baida, “The American landing in November 1942: a turning point in Morocco’s contemporary history” *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19, no. 4 (September 2014): 518-523 and David Stenner “Did *Amrika* promise Morocco’s independence? The nationalist movement, the Sultan, and the making of the ‘Roosevelt Myth,’” *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19 no. 4 (September 2014): 524-539.

67. In Ayache, *Le mouvement syndical*, 301-302.

68. An internal debate would plague the PCM in the immediate short term between those who advocated for Moroccan Union with France and those who sought Moroccan independence. The latter category prevailed as the party Moroccanized, and historians (as well as archives) place Léon René Sultan on either side at different moments for different reasons.

69. Fouad Benseddik, *Syndicalisme et politique au Maroc: Tome I, 1930-1956* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 1990), 246. See also: Jacob Moneta, *La politique du parti communiste français dans la question coloniale, 1920-1963* (Paris: François Maspero, 1971).

of the PCM.<sup>70</sup> Raphael Benarrosh, a Moroccan Jew born in 1933, attended the Casablanca street procession for Sultan's funeral. Benarrosh worked actively for Morocco's independence within the PCM, and he later served as its lawyer when it was put on trial and banned in 1959. As a boy of ten at the time of Sultan's death, Benarrosh was just beginning to become politically aware. According to Benarrosh, Sultan's funeral was an enormous, public affair, attended by a vast number of Jews.<sup>71</sup> In the following years, many more Moroccan Jewish members of the Communist Party –notably Simon Lévy, Edmond Amran El Maleh and Abraham Serfaty–would reference the Vichy period as one in which they were compelled to question their relationship to France, to the Jewish future in their homeland, and to the nationalist movement.

## V. Conclusion

In the interwar period, Casablanca was the site of extraordinary political ferment as European workers flocked to work on colonial industrial projects. Simultaneously, the Moroccan indigenous population experienced a tremendous demographic upheaval as rural Moroccans, Jews and Muslims alike, streamed to urban centers for employment opportunities. In the immediate pre-war years, other European Jews fleeing fascist regimes arrived in Morocco seeking refuge. The Alliance Israélite Universelle's Gallicizing education initiatives added to Zionism and burgeoning leftist activism, creating a variety of competing and complementary political options available to Moroccan Jews. All of this took place within an increasingly multi-national Jewish population intersecting in the pivotal WWII node of Casablanca. Upon France's fall to Germany in 1940, Communist political refugees, primarily Spaniards and Eastern European Jews, were interned in Maghribi forced labor camps. Anti-Semitic Vichy legislation was applied to France's colonies. Moroccan Jews, on paper if not always in practice, lost their homes, jobs, educational opportunities and rights. Such experiences compromised and challenged Moroccan Jews' adherence to French Republican models of citizenship. Upon liberation in 1942, politicized Moroccan Jews would embrace either Zionism or Communism. Those Jews invested in remaining in Morocco and committed to the national liberation of Morocco from France joined the newly established Moroccan Communist Party. This party was re-established out of the previously banned and European dominated Communist Party of Morocco (Parti communiste du Maroc now became the Parti communiste marocain–the Moroccan Communist Party) by an Algerian Jew, Léon Sultan, who himself had suffered directly pursuant to

---

70. Ayache, *Le mouvement syndical*, 178-179.

71. Interview with Raphael (Ralph) Benarrosh, August 26, 2013, Paris, France.

Vichy laws, out of the ashes of the previously banned Moroccan branch of the French Communist Party. Léon René Sultan's Algerian origins, Casablanca location, legal career, activism, French citizenship, political engagement, and even death in the service of France, all serve to highlight the complexity and diversity of Jewish experiences in Morocco during the Vichy period. Sultan's biography can thus be understood as simultaneously the exception and encapsulation of a period that defies generalization.

### Bibliography

- Abitbol, Michel. *Les Juifs d'Afrique du Nord sous Vichy*. Paris: G. P. Maisonneuve & Larose, 1983.
- Achcar, Gilbert. *The Arabs and the Holocaust: the Arab-Israeli War of Narratives*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010.
- Adam, André. *Histoire de Casablanca (des origines à 1914)*. Aix-en-Provence: Éditions Ophrys, 1968.
- Ayache, Albert. *Le mouvement syndical au Maroc*, Tome 1: 1919-1942. Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 1982.
- Baida, Jamaâ. "The American landing in November 1942: a turning point in Morocco's contemporary history." *The Journal of North African Studies* 19, 4 (2014): 518-523.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "La Presse Juive au Maroc entre les deux guerres." *Hespéris-Tamuda* XXXVII (1999):171-189.
- Boum, Aomar. "Partners against Anti-Semitism: Muslims and Jews respond to Nazism in French North African colonies, 1936-1940." *The Journal of North African Studies*, 19, no. 4: (September 2014): 554-567.
- Jennings, Eric T. *Vichy in the Tropics: Pétain's National Revolution in Madagascar, Guadeloupe, and Indochina, 1940-1944*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.
- Kenbib, Mohammed. *Juifs et Musulmans au Maroc: 1859-1948. Contribution à l'histoire des relations inter-communautaires en terre d'Islam*, Série Thèses et Mémoires, 21. Rabat: Publication de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines, 1994.
- Marrus, Michael. *Vichy France and the Jews*. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1981.
- Msalleti, Henri. *Les Juifs d'Algérie sous le régime de Vichy, 10 juillet 1940-3 novembre 1943*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999.
- Oved, Georges. *La gauche française et le nationalisme marocain, 1905-1955*, 2 Tomes. Paris: Éditions l'Harmattan, 1984.

- Paxton, Robert. *Vichy France: Old Guard and New Order, 1940-1944*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972.
- Satloff, Robert. *Among the Righteous: Lost Stories of the Holocaust's Long Reach into Arab Lands*. New York: Public Affairs, 2007.
- Schroeter, Daniel. "Anglo-Jewry and Essaouira (Mogador), 1860-1900: The Social Implications of Philanthropy." *Transactions & Miscellanies (Jewish Historical Society of England)* 28 (1981): 60-88.
- Slyomovics, Susan. *How to Accept German Reparations*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014.
- Stein, Sarah Abrevaya. *Saharan Jews and the Fate of French Algeria*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014.
- Stenner, David. "Did *Amrika* promise Morocco's independence? The nationalist movement, the Sultan, and the making of the 'Roosevelt Myth.'" *The Journal of North African Studies* 19, 4 (2014): 524-539.
- Sultan, Léon René. *Contribution à l'étude de l'abus des droits (jurisprudence): thèse pour le doctorat en droit*. Constantine: Imprimerie M. Attali aîné, 1926.
- Tsur, Yaron. "The Religious Factor in Encounter between Zionism and the Rural Atlas Jews." In *Zionism and Religion*, eds. Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz and Anita Shapira, 312-329. Hanover: University Press of New England, 1998.
- Watson, Robert. "Between Liberation(s) and Occupation(s): Reconsidering the Emergence of Maghrebi Jewish Communism, 1942-1945." *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* (September 2014): 381-398.
- Zvi Yehuda, "Zionist Activity in Southern Morocco: 1919-1923." *Revue des Études juives* CXLIV, 4 (1985): 363-368.

ملخص: الدار البيضاء والمتغيرات المتعددة: قانون فيشي والتنوع اليهودي،  
والحزب الشيوعي المغربي

عندما هزمت ألمانيا النازية فرنسا سنة 1940 حكم نظام فيشي المتعاون مع النظام المحتل فرنسا وكذلك المستعمرات الفرنسية، وعبر البلاد المغاربية، أظهرت قوانين فيشي العنصرية وكذلك العمل الإجباري للاجئين المشتبه بهم سياسيا خيانة الوعد التحرري الاستعماري الفرنسي. وتم تطبيق هذه القوانين بكيفية غير

متساوية، فكانت التجارب بين مختلف السكان اليهود متنوعة. وتركز هذه المقالة على عهد حكومة فيشي كمنعطف حاسم في تسييس اليهود المغاربة وتشكيل الحزب الشيوعي المغربي، المنظم من خلال السيرة الذاتية، والانتفاءات ونشاط ليون رينيه سلطان (1905-1945)، مؤسس الحزب الشيوعي المغربي في سنة 1943. ومن خلال حياة سلطان ونشاطه، أعتبر أن مرحلة حكومة فيشي تمثل لحظة تنوير ولحظة أزمة وتوليف للسكان اليهودية المتنوعة بالمغرب، وإرساء لأسس التساؤل الملح حول مكانة الجماعة في إطار العالم اليهودي الأوسع والإمبراطورية الفرنسية والمغرب.

الكلمات المفتاحية: فيشي، الحزب الشيوعي المغربي، التوجه الجمهوري، الصهيونية، الاستقلال.

### **Résumé: Multivariable Casablanca: Lois de Vichy, diversité juive et parti communiste**

Pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, la loi de Vichy a confirmé la trahison des promesses républicaines de la France à travers le Maghreb. Ces lois ont été inégalement appliquées et les expériences entre les populations juives défient la généralisation. Cet article met l'accent sur la période de Vichy comme point critique de la politisation des Juifs marocains à travers la biographie et l'activisme de Léon René Sultan (1905-1945), fondateur du Parti communiste marocain en 1943. Vichy représente un moment d'aboutissement, de crise et de synthèse pour les populations juives du Maroc, jetant les bases d'une interrogation de plus en plus pressante relative à la place de la communauté dans l'ensemble du monde juif, l'empire français et le Maroc.

**Mots clés:** Vichy, Parti communiste marocain (PCM), républicanisme, sionisme, indépendance.

### **Abstract: Multivariable Casablanca: Vichy Laws, Jewish Diversity and the Communist Party**

During WWII, Vichy law demonstrated the betrayal of France's republican promises across the Maghrib. These laws were unevenly enforced and experiences among Jewish populations defy generalization. This article focuses on the Vichy era as a critical juncture in the politicization of Moroccan Jewstthrough the biographyand activism of Léon René Sultan (1905-1945), founder of the Moroccan Communist Party in 1943. Vichy represents a

moment of culmination, crisis and synthesis for Morocco's diverse Jewish populations, laying the foundations for an increasingly urgent interrogation of the community's place in the wider Jewish world, French empire, and Morocco.

**Key words:** Vichy, Moroccan Communist Party (PCM), republicanism, zionism, independence.

**Resumen: Casablanca análisis multivariado: Leyes Vichy, Diversidad Judía y Partido Comunista**

Durante la Segunda Guerra Mundial, la ley de Vichy demostró la traición de las promesas republicanas de Francia a través del Magreb. Estas leyes fueron aplicadas de manera desigual y las experiencias entre las poblaciones judías desafían la generalización. Este artículo se centra en la era de Vichy como una coyuntura crítica en la politización de los judíos marroquíes a través de la biografía y activismo de Léon René Sultan (1905-1945), fundador del Partido Comunista Marroquí en 1943. Vichy representa un momento de culminación, crisis y síntesis para la diversidad de las poblaciones judías de Marruecos, sentando las bases para un interrogatorio cada vez más urgente del lugar de la comunidad en el mundo judío en general, el imperio francés y Marruecos.

**Palabras clave:** Vichy, Partido Comunista Marroquí (PCM), republicanismo, sionismo, independencia.