



Towards implementing Multicultural Education Judeo-Moroccan Cultural Heritage as a case Study

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Abstract: Jewish identity and heritage are deeply-rooted in the Moroccan society. For centuries, the Jews have represented an important constituent of this community. Morocco was a haven for Sephardic Jews during times of Christian repression following the great waves of emigration between 1391 and 1492. Judeo-Moroccan diaspora and presence in state-and-society has been either neglected or disregarded as a field of study and, therefore, has been overlooked in the school and university syllabic reforms. Nevertheless, the 2011 Moroccan Constitution preamble displays the fabric of the diverse and renewed Moroccan heritage. As a result, The Jewish history and culture are going to be embedded in the upcoming national school curricula as a first demarcate in the Arab world to “inoculate” Moroccan youth against extremism and anti-Semitism, highlight Morocco's enriched identity, and help nurture future citizens' consciousness of their diverse heritage. This article examines the implications of such assertive action as keystone in Judeo-Moroccan multicultural collective identity. Keywords: Judeo-Moroccan, curriculum, heritage, anti-Semitism, diversity.

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Introduction

The Jews of Morocco represent a remnant of an ancient community that has been living in Morocco since the time of Antiquity and established themselves in North Africa long before the Arab conquest and even before the establishment of the Roman invasion. These long established communities of Jews known as ‘Toshavim’ (indigenous Jews), lived primarily

among the indigenous Amazigh tribes. In the 7th century, the Jewish population of Mauretania (actual Morocco) received as a further accession from Iberian Peninsula those who wished to escape Visigoth legislation¹

Since Mohamed VI's regime as the "Commander of the Faithful", Morocco has pushed for a tolerant Islam that ensures freedom of worship for Jews and Christians. Since then, Morocco has strongly committed to work on the prevention of violent extremism, prejudice and anti-Semitism as part of its core mandate to promote global citizenship, a priority highlighted in the educational *Framework-Law 51-17*, which the Moroccan parliament approved in August 2019 and which is expected to lay the groundwork for the government's "*Strategic Plan/Vision 2015-2030*" for reform of the national education system.

In this context, the Moroccan education system's new guidelines are intended to equip learners with skills, attitudes and behaviors that allow them to assume active roles in facing and resolving global challenges, and to become proactive contributors to a more peaceful, tolerant and secure world.

How does the Moroccan education curriculum contribute to the struggle against racism, xenophobia, discrimination and anti-Semitism? More particularly, are there formulations in the curriculum that acknowledge ethnic and religious minorities and demonstrate a desire to educate students about the perils of anti-Semitism? What are the academic, social and cultural contributions of introducing the Judeo-Moroccan heritage and culture vis-à-vis the relationship between Moroccan Jews and Muslims? These central research questions are going to be addressed throughout this paper.

Material and methods

[1] Objectives of the Study

The *51-17 Framework-Law*, which the Moroccan parliament approved in August 2019, is expected to design a road map for the government's 2015-2030 "strategic plan" of improving the national education system. It aims at promoting school life and strengthening citizenship values and civic behavior. To convert theory into practice, the Moroccan government represented by the Ministry of National Education and Professional training has launched a revamp of Morocco's school curriculum. The lessons will be included starting from next term for 11-year old children in their final year of primary school. According to a communiqué of the supervising ministry, this move aims to "highlight Morocco's diverse identity", according to Fouad Chafiqi, head of academic programs at the ministry.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the perception of Moroccan teachers in public and private sectors regarding the implementation of the teaching of the Moroccan cultural heritage mainly, the Judeo-Moroccan legacy and its impact on society at a larger scale. This implementation is, indeed, going to be met with different attitudes in the Moroccan diaspora in general. All in all, this article is a modest but essential contribution as a stepping stone to the debate that has arisen because of the implementation of the provisions of the framework law 51-17 on the education, teaching, training and scientific research system.

¹ Pasachoff, Naomi. and Robert J. Littman. *Jewish history in 100 nutshells*. Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1995.

[2] Context

This paper analyses the implementation and the implication of integrating the Jewish history, culture and heritage into the Moroccan school curriculum, which is considered as a move that translates the Kingdom's multi-dimensional strategy to promote pluralism and tolerance and combat religious extremism. According to the UNESCO, "Addressing anti-Semitism through education is, therefore, both an immediate security imperative and a long-term educational investment to promote human rights and global citizenship."²

Historically speaking, Arab countries, where Islam is a predominant religion, have relegated Christians and Jews to a lower status as *ahl'l-kitâb* or 'People of the Book', who possessed a holy book (the Bible and Torah), although not the religious book adopted by the "Islam-controlled government". Dhimmis -as the Arabic name implies-is a protected person granted conditional legal status under Islam but they are first and foremost tribute bearers. They had been well documented by such scholars as A. S. Tritton, Antoine Fattal and S. D. Goitein.³

The question of the relations between Muslims and Jews more specifically in the twentieth - Century is a fascinating and complex subject. Morocco "has never erased its Jewish memory," said Zhor Rehilil, curator of Casablanca's Moroccan Jewish Museum -- the only one of its kind in the region.⁴

Jews are still indebted to the Sultan Mohamed V (1929-1961) who once stood against the Vichy regime and refused to apply the Nazi racial laws in his country. The King's famous answer of opposition to the French government still resonates today in the hearts of many Jewish Moroccans: 'There are no Jews in Morocco', he answered back to French officials, 'only Moroccans'⁵. Yet, while the King professed many times his protection of all his citizens and repeated his guarantee that they all live in 'absolute equality and freedom', that he considered Jews like his children (Assaraf 2008: 43, 50, 51, 59).

Morocco was home to the largest Jewish community in the Middle East prior to 1948; today about 4,000 Moroccan Jews remain, with most residing in imperial metropolises such as Casablanca, Fes, Marrakesh and Rabat. Many older Moroccan countryside and city dwellers still recall their former Jewish neighbors' occasions like *Hilulas* with nostalgia *Hilulas*...⁶ However, younger generations are largely unaware of these relationships, and their views of Jews may be influenced by anti-Semitic sentiment that unfortunately exists everywhere. His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco has been a strong supporter of pluralism and diversity; in fact, the country's constitution preamble outlines a commitment to preserve the various cultural and religious influences interwoven into the tapestry of Moroccan history and heritage, including Jewish influences. Yet many younger Moroccans are unaware of the country's rich Jewish heritage.

² UNESCO Conference on « The Power of Education in Preventing Racism and Discrimination: the Case of Anti-Semitism » 2018

³

⁴ The Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca The Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca, the first and until now the only Jewish Museum in the Islamic world was founded in 1997 by the Foundation of Jewish Moroccan Cultural Heritage (FJMCH), an organization created in 1995 to safeguard the disappearing Moroccan Jewish culture and to promote the distinctive characteristics of Moroccan Judaism

⁵ the Sultan firmly rejected the application of the anti-Semitic decrees of Vichy during World War II,

⁶ Following is a list of the major *Hillulot* in Morocco with more than a thousand pilgrims:

- Hillula of Rabbi Amram Ben Diwan in Ouezzane. (5000 pilgrims)
- Hillula Rabbi Haim Pinto in Essaouira (1500 pilgrims).
- Hillula of Rabbi David Ben Baroukh Cohen Azogh in Ouled Berhil, Taroudant. (1200 pilgrims).
- Hillula Rabbi David Moché Oumouchi in Ouarzazate.
- Hillula Rabbi Daniel Hashomer Ashkenazi, Touggana, Marrakesh.
- Hillula Rabbi Hanania Ha-Cohen, Marrakesh.

The Secretary General of the United Nations emphasized on the important role of education in preventing anti-Semitism and identified four priorities:

- First, “to recognize anti-Semitism as a problem to be addressed internationally”;
- Second, “to develop education program that addresses anti-Semitism in a framework of human rights and global citizenship”;
- Third, “to build the capacity of educational systems to address anti-Semitism, conspiracy theories and all other forms of hate speech” ;
- Fourth, an increased investment in social cohesion.

The king has pushed for a tolerant Islam that ensures freedom of worship for Jews and foreign Christians. On September 26th, 2018, he sent a message to the High-Level Round Table on “The Power of Education in Preventing Racism and Discrimination: the Case of Anti-Semitism” held on the sidelines of the 73rd session of the UN General Assembly. In his letter, the king declared that Morocco has remained faithful to an enduring tradition of tolerance, coexistence and reciprocal appreciation and that the history of Moroccan Jews is an eloquent illustration in this regard. According to the king, this long history expresses an “intertwined destiny and a historical continuity – one in which Moroccan Jews have always been considered full-fledged citizens enjoying the same rights as their fellow Muslims”.⁷

Yet, it should be taken for granted into consideration that anti-Semitism reached worrisome levels since it continued to grow high without any sign of possible decline, especially in the MENA regions. Also, the wide scale of negative narratives against Judaism, as well as incidents targeting Jewish communities, continue to gain momentum.

Said Gafaiti, PhD, is a professor of Hebrew and Hebraic Studies at the University of Fes, Saïis. Gafaiti credits anti-Semitism in Morocco to the recurrence of ignorance related to Jewish history and culture coupled with the inability to distinguish between Israel as a state and Judaism as a religion and culture. “Protests against Israeli acts and crimes started by Islamists and socialists play a role in this misunderstanding when they attack Jews [rather than Israel]. Some writers mistake efforts to promote or share Jewish culture for pro-Israel acts.” Gafaiti said. Thus, anti-Semitism discourses and campaigns disseminate racism and anti-Jewish propaganda.

For the king, religious coexistence is tangible in Morocco since mosques, synagogues and churches co-exist alongside one another. “Racism in general — and anti-Semitism in particular — are by no means just a way of thinking. Anti-Semitism is the antithesis of freedom of expression. In his letter addressed to the UN to the High-Level Round Table on “The Power of Education in Preventing Racism and Discrimination”. The king stresses on the role of education in transcending fear of the other and breaking down all forms of prejudice and segregation. “Education has the distinct and crucial power to help transcend fear of the other, reject deliberate confusion and break down prejudices. As a powerful antidote and a salutary weapon, it cements social cohesion, is conducive to equality and is an essential prerequisite for development,” the king’s message said.

In many occasions, the king has stressed on the protection of religious minority groups in Morocco and considers them part and partial of the Moroccan society and a corner stone to the economy. “As Commander of the Faithful and defender of the faith, I am committed to protecting the rights of Muslims and non-Muslims alike”⁸. To this end, Moroccan Jews enjoy

⁷ mapnews.ma 27 September 2018

⁸ His Majesty speech in 2019

the same constitutional & and political rights as their fellow Muslim citizens, and play a key role in the country's economy.

[3] New Horizons for Multicultural Education

The role of multicultural education in creating equal educational opportunities for all students has received increased attention of school practitioners and curriculum developers in recent years. It tries to change the total school environment so that it will reflect the diverse cultures and groups within a society and within the nation's classrooms. Multicultural education is a process because its goals are ideals that teachers and administrators should constantly strive to achieve.

Integrating content about racial, ethnic, and cultural groups into the curriculum helps students understand how knowledge is constructed and how it reflects the experiences, values, and perspectives of its creators. Some studies have shown the beneficial effects of methods like the Contributions Approach. When this approach is used, teachers “insert isolated facts about ethnic and cultural group heroes and heroines into the curriculum without changing the structure of their lesson plans and units. Often when this approach is used, lessons about ethnic minorities are limited primarily to ethnic holidays and celebrations, such as Martin Luther King's Birthday and Cinco de Mayo. The major problem with this approach is that it reinforces the notion, already held by many students, that ethnic minorities are not integral parts [of the society]...”⁹

Multicultural education includes multiethnic materials, lessons, and activities used by teachers in a consistent and sequential way to help students develop positive attitudes toward different racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Existing research such as the one by Phinney & Rotheram, (1987) indicates that children come to school with many negative attitudes toward and misconceptions about different racial and ethnic groups. Research also indicates that lessons, units, and teaching materials that include content about different racial and ethnic groups will help students to be better able to participate in personal, social, and civic actions that are essential for citizens in a democratic pluralistic society.

In March 2021 two conventions were signed by Casablanca –Settat AREF at the headquarters of the Museum of Judaism in Casablanca, for the consecration of the values of tolerance and cohabitation among young people. The first agreement was signed between the regional academy of education and training of Casablanca-Settat and the foundation of the Judeo-Moroccan cultural heritage, and the second between the El Wafaa public junior high school under the provincial direction of Casablanca- Anfa, the Ibn Mimoune high school in Casablanca and the Lyautey high school under the French mission in Morocco.

[4] Judeo Moroccan Relations (the Role of Civil Society)

It is worth mentioning in this article the role of civil society in promoting Judeo-Moroccan relations. The past decade has seen saw a rapid development of associations for the sake of consecrating the values of tolerance and cohabitation between Moroccan Muslims and Jews .A couple of NGOs were established either in Morocco or in the USA. In Morocco there are several associations working to promote Jewish history and culture in Morocco and contribute to the interfaith and inter religious dialogue. One such organization is Association Mimouna. Founded in 2007 at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI). Association Mimouna seeks to

⁹ Multicultural Education: Goals and Dimensions. Center for Multicultural Education. University of Washington. 2021

educate the Moroccan people about Moroccan Jewish culture and encourage harmony between Jews and Muslims. Mimouna members study Hebrew and Jewish history and organize well-attended cultural events.

At a round table event hosted by the U.S. Embassy in Rabat, the President of Mimouna declared that civil society organizations advocate for real change in the region, by building bridges connecting communities and helping Moroccans stay connected to their multi-cultural roots. He added that all Moroccans belong to the same deeply rooted culture throughout the Moroccan dynasties: “We are proud to be good Muslims. We are Arab or Amazigh (Berber) by identity, but we are also Jewish by culture.”¹⁰

Rabbi Gad Bouskila in partnership with Mustapha Ezzrghani created the MIFA in Brooklyn in NYC in order to strengthen relations between the two countries. "The association seeks to promote a "mutual understanding of the history, culture and contemporary society of Morocco and Israel," the association announced in a statement. The association adheres to strengthen the bilateral relations through valorizing Judaism in the cultural plurality of Morocco. Also the aim of the joint bi-national members is to “recall the historical facts which have distinguished Morocco as a pioneer in the consolidation of the values of peace and tolerance and the fight against anti-Semitism” added the founders of MIFA. All in all, there are few others which they "worked closely with the Kingdom of Morocco and the Moroccan Jewish community" on the "groundbreaking" academic reform.

Results and discussion

Based on the results of the data, figure 1.6 shows that the gender variable of my informants reaches equality. 20 males and 20 females were requested to fill in the questionnaire. The necessity to use a gender approach in this study is to avoid being biased and to reach some kind of credibility and gender equality.

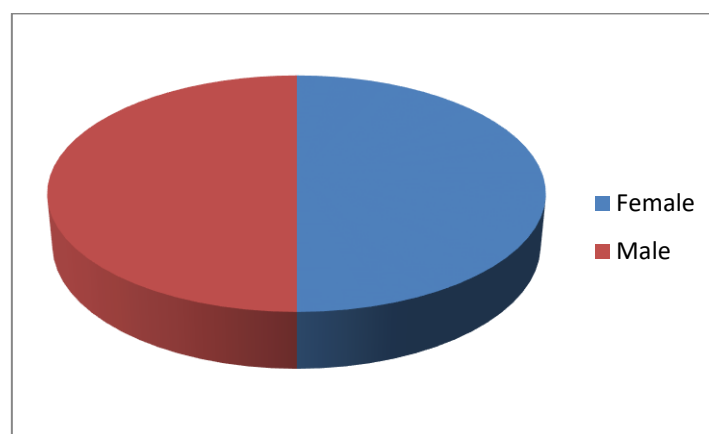


Figure 1: Gender Representation

The age categorization of the participants ranges from 20 years old as a minimum age to 60 years old as the maximum. Data are grouped into four classes. Participants whose age varies between 30 and 39 years old and between 40 and 49 come in the first place with a percentage of 32.5 % each. In the second place come the participants whose age is more than 50 years old

¹⁰ the President of Mimouna

with a percentage of 20%; whereas participants whose age is between 20 and 29 years old rank in the fourth place with a percentage of 15%. As a result, data retrieved from the questionnaire revealed the predominance of the 30-49 population. The diversity of ages among the population can be a positive point to get a variety of different perceptions that can provide richness in the analysis of this phenomenon.

[7.1] Educational level

The most interesting aspect of the collected data is that the majority belong to the university level. 52.2% are undergraduates whereas 27.5% hold a master degree, and 20% represent participants holding a PhD. These statistics indicate that the population under study belongs to the academic elite. With regard to the teaching sector, 87.5% of the respondents belong to the public one, whereas only 12.5% belong to the private schools.

[7.2] Attitudes and Perceptions

This section of the survey measures the participants' attitudes toward implementing multicultural teaching in Moroccan classrooms in the upcoming academic year. In this section, statements are using four points scale from "Strongly Disagree" =1 to "Strongly Agree" = 4. The first statement deals with the training of Moroccan in-service teachers to teach culturally diverse students as well as to teach the Moroccan cultural heritage. With regard to this question, 22.5% strongly disagree with the statement that they have already received any training, 30% disagree whereas 30% agree and only 17.5% strongly agree.

[7.3] Current Practices

What is striking about the findings of the data is that a considerable number of participants agree that they teach using multicultural materials in their classrooms with a rate of 47.5% agree and 25% strongly agree; while 7.5% strongly disagree and 20% disagree.

Another almost unanimous response that is significant for this study concerns Question 3 on the survey questionnaire which states that "Attitudes of Moroccan teachers can impact students' way of thinking vis-à-vis other cultures". 40% checked the button agree among which and 45% even strongly agree, whereas only 7.5% have a different opinion about this matter.

The finding about question four is quite revealing in several ways. First, 30% agree that multicultural teaching helps change students' negative attitudes and the stereotypes and prejudices they hold against other cultures and educate them into standing up against them, and 62.5% strongly agree with this statement. In other words, participants have a positive attitude about multicultural teaching and perceive its role as important as other means to fight against stereotypes and prejudices. Second, only 2.5% strongly disagree while 5% disagree.

The responses to statement [05] suggest that multicultural teaching helps foster tolerance and coexistence between cultures. The contribution of exchange programs is fundamental. The majority of the respondents agrees or strongly agrees with a total of 95% with the statement, while, 05% of the participants strongly disagree with that statement.

A big number of the respondents agree with a rate of 35%; whereas 37.5% disagree with statement [06] that in-service Moroccan teachers are adequately prepared to teach multicultural students. Yet, only 10% strongly disagree with this statement.

The responses to statement [07] suggest that the majority of the respondents foresee the importance of the programs related to multicultural issues with a total of 67.5% who strongly agree. Also, 25% believe in the contribution of such programs in building mutual respect and tolerance among ethnic and religious minorities. Yet, 7.5% strongly disagree. The participants on the whole demonstrated a favorable reaction towards the need to implement multicultural programs in Moroccan schools.

For statement [08] stating that Moroccan teachers need to learn to teach students with diverse learning styles and cultural and religious backgrounds, 40 participants responded positively. This nearly unanimous response is significant for this study. Only 7.5% did not approve of this statement, whereas a total majority was in favor with a rate of 42.5% stating they agree and 50% strongly agree.

The following table is quite revealing in several ways. It suggests that the Moroccan schools should be constructed to meet the needs of a multicultural population. The findings show that 20% agree and 70% strongly agree. In other words, participants have a positive attitude about multicultural teaching and perceive its role to meet the needs of a diverse society while only 7.5% disagree and 2.5 strongly disagree.

Table 1. Moroccan Schools Should Meet the Needs of a Multicultural Population

Answer option	Response percent	Response count
Strongly agree	70 %	28
Agree	20 %	08
Disagree	7.5%	03
Strongly disagree	2.5%	01
Answered question	100%	40
Skipped question		00

One major issue raised in this survey was to determine if racism in all its forms negatively affect a child’s self-esteem. What is interesting about the data in this table is that the majority strongly agree with a rate of 60% that exchange programs contribute in overcoming stereotypes and prejudices. Adding to that, 30% agree with this statement. Only 05% strongly disagree or disagree that racism has no direct impact on children’s self-perception and awareness.

Concerning statement12 of the survey, almost half of the respondents agree with a rate of 52.6%. Whereas 5.3%strongly agree that pre-service teachers are adequately prepared to teach multicultural students. Yet, 21.5% disagree as well as 21.5% strongly disagree with this statement. This result suggests that teacher trainees are not adequately prepared to teach multicultural students in Morocco.

To sum up, this study has provided enough empirical evidence to believe that a big number of Moroccan academic practitioners are dedicated to promote values of tolerance, diversity and coexistence in schools and universities. It has been conclusively shown that the role of education in transcending fear of the other and breaking down all forms of prejudice and segregation is of paramount importance. Multicultural education will help nurture “future citizens’ conscious of their diverse heritage” mainly the Hebrew heritage. The academic inclusion of the Jewish heritage is a meaningful act since it recognizes the contribution of the Judeo-Moroccan diaspora in the history and culture of the country.

[8] Conclusion and Future perspectives

This article summarizes the study findings and addresses the research questions set out in the introduction as well as discussions of future research directions at the end of this section. The discussion of findings identifies the original contributions of this study to our understanding of the Judeo-Moroccan relations via the multicultural education venture.

Morocco's Jewish community has been present for two millennia and grew over the centuries, particularly with the arrival of Sephardic Jews escaping torture, Christian repression and forced conversion during the Spanish Inquisition after 1492. For this regard, Morocco is to be the first Arab country to integrate Jewish history and heritage into its school curriculum highlighting the importance of education in the commemoration of Jewish history and in the prevention of anti-Semitism and tragic events such as the holocaust.

This section contains recommendations designed to improve Judeo-Moroccan socio-cultural ties. The presence of the Jewish community in Morocco starts to diminish. Members of the Moroccan Jewish Diaspora as well as they have redoubled their efforts to preserve the vestiges of their long history, through the restoration of synagogues, cemeteries and the tombs. The Moroccan cultural heritage can be taught depending on the localization of students with the idea of unity within the framework of pluralism in the field of practice and cultural action that devote to the concept of citizenship and cultural richness of multiple stripes and the rejection of all forms of ethnic discrimination in collective thought.

The findings of the study reflect a clear pattern indicating that it has become an imperative to integrate a module on teaching multiculturalism in Moroccan schools. Some respondents suggested that teaching different aspects of cultures leads to tolerance so it is beneficial if Moroccan students should be taught cross-cultural communication at high schools

Yet, the respondents mentioned several obstacles; it is difficult to integrate foreigners with our students because they need more time and efforts to learn how to deal with Islamic studies. Also, foreign language teachers might have no or little difficulty to teach multicultural or culturally diverse classes. However, teachers of other subjects need training. To teach a group of students who are culturally diverse requires a number of skills namely knowledge of their language and acquaintance with their cultural backgrounds.

To dare teach multicultural students, teachers need to be first knowledgeable about multiple cultures and the diverse pedagogues to cater for culturally different students. Continuous professional in-service training should be part and partial of preparing Moroccan instructors to teach multi-culturally.

Some respondents suggest that since we are Moroccans who live in a multi-cultural society we have developed ways of thinking and behaving that though we take them for granted are the result of a multicultural mix.

Conclusion

I conclude this study with his majesty speech: “Through this quality education, our children must be taught history, using, to this effect, a wide range of historical sources and narratives and shedding light not only on humanity’s glorious moments but also its darkest hours. Education must help children to embrace openness and human and cultural diversity.”

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