

Samuel Sami Everett and Rebekah Vince, eds., *Jewish-Muslim Interactions: Performing Cultures Between North Africa and France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2020), pp. 348.

by *Dario Miccoli*

Jewish-Muslim Interactions, edited by Samuel Sami Everett and Rebekah Vince, explores the performance of cultures between North Africa and France, focusing on a variety of artistic media and genres—from visual art and cinema, to music and theatre—and opting for an interesting interdisciplinary perspective that encompasses anthropology, cultural history, cinema studies, ethnomusicology and art history. Drawing upon the seminal works of scholars such as Ella Shohat, Gil Anidjar, Joëlle Bahloul and others, the book tries to go beyond a rigid division between colonial and postcolonial times, “moving away from narratives of conflict and harmony” (p. 8). By doing so, it discusses a multidimensional “context of influence, engagement [...] and shared tradition between Muslims and Jews” (p. 9), that nowadays is remembered, forgotten or reinvented through songs, movies, graffiti and theatre plays on both shores of the Mediterranean.

The first section, “Accents, Affiliations, and Exchange,” is divided into six chapters that shed light on “points of emphasis and connection between Jews and Muslims navigating the commercial landscape of film, theatre, and music across the Maghrib and France” (p. 13). The first chapter, by Morgan Corriou, focuses on a little-known Tunisian Jewish film-maker, Albert Samama, and his efforts to film the Italo-Turkish war (1911-1913) in Libya, against the background of a burgeoning global film market of which North Africa too was a part. The two following chapters, written by Jonathan Glasser and Christopher Silver, introduce music as a crucial vector of Jewish-Muslim intimacy in colonial North Africa. Whereas Glasser opts for an anthropological approach, Silver relies on archival sources and old records to uncover a forgotten yet very lively North African Jewish musical landscape. Theatre and music are at the core of the fourth chapter by Hadj Miliani and Samuel Sami Everett, who follow the biographical trajectory of the actress Marie Soussan in interwar Algeria as an example of the common linguistic and artistic heritages that Jews and Muslims shared. The chapter by Ruth F. Davis then

analyses Tunisian popular songs as texts where the Jewish past can be retold. The section closes with a chapter by Fanny Gillet, that describes episodes of solidarity between Tunisian and Algerian artists in the late colonial period, identifying how specific artistic concepts—for example abstraction—served to preserve inter-communal relation between Jews and Muslims at a time of increased nationalism.

The second section is dedicated to “Absence, Influence, and Elision,” and looks at how the Jews’ departure from North Africa has been and continues to be narrated and imagined. Elizabeth Perego, in the first chapter, studies Algerian *bandes dessinées* published between 1967 and the 1980s and investigates how Jewish heritage and Jewish-Muslim relations have been omitted in this kind of artistic media. Music is at the core of the following chapter by Cristina Moreno Almeida, that focuses on contemporary Moroccan rap music as a space of national and inter-communal coexistence. In the third chapter, Aomar Boum concentrates on music again, but focusing on what he calls “musical echoes” in twenty-first century Moroccan and Israeli soundscapes. The following contribution, by Vanessa Paloma Elbaz, is instead an analysis of the role of music in portraying Jewish-Muslim interactions in Moroccan movies from the 2000s, like Laila Marrakchi’s *Marock* (2005) or Driss Mrini’s *Aïda* (2015). Jamal Bahmad examines the well-known documentary by Kamal Hachkar *Tinghir-Jérusalem: Les échos du mellah* (2012) and looks at how, in this movies, affect and silence are foundational aspects of remembering Morocco and its Jewish inhabitants. The investigation of Hachkar’s cinematic production continues in the chapter by Miléna Kartowski-Aïach, dedicated to the documentary *Dans tes yeux, je vois mon pays* (2019), about the trip to Morocco of the Israeli singers of Moroccan Jewish ancestry Neta Elkayam and Amit Hai Cohen. The seventh chapter, by Nadia Kiwan, explores the work of the Parisian street artist Combo Culture Kidnapper, and the ways in which it challenges the rise of Antisemitism and Islamophobia in today’s France through the use of transcultural memories and creativity. The eighth and last chapter is a study by Adi Saleem Bharat, in which the author discusses French stand-up comedians—particularly the duo Younes and Bambi—who challenge mainstream understandings of Jewish-Muslim relations as conflictual. The volume ends with a postface by the French writer of Algerian Jewish origin Valérie

Zenatti, where she gives a moving description of the linguistic and affective cartography in which she grew up.

The volume—that also sees the participation of scholars engaged in activism and artistic performance—successfully demonstrates the relevance of the cultural interaction between Jews and Muslims in North Africa and France during colonial times and its reframing and persistence up to today. Whereas other studies have already discussed Jewish-Muslim relations in North Africa and the Francophone worlds, focusing for example on literature and political activism—I am thinking of Ewa Tartakowsky’s *Les juifs et le Maghreb: Fonctions sociales d’une littérature d’exil* (2016), Pierre-Jean Le Foll Luciani’s *Les juifs algériens dans la lutte anticoloniale* (2015), or Ethan Katz’s *The Burdens of Brotherhood: Jews and Muslims from North Africa to France* (2015)—popular culture and fields like music and visual art remain less investigated. *Jewish-Muslim Interactions* shows that these are important aspects worth exploring, also because they allow us to uncover more everyday practices of exchange or elision and retrieve little known actors and sources.

As noted, the volume is dedicated to Jewish-Muslim interaction between (French) North Africa and France. To refer to the former, the editors decided to utilize the term Maghrib instead of Maghreb, since the latter “is a homogenizing neologism with colonial undertones, often synonymous with ‘Arabe’ [Arab] or ‘musulman’ [Muslim]” (p. 5). As a point of comparison, they evoke the Hebrew term Mizrahi, a “monolithic term” that does not allow us to grasp the complexity of the Middle Eastern and North African Jewish worlds. However, it is dubious that the term Mizrahi—that refers to Middle Eastern and North African Jews that migrated to Israel and their descendants—is still as monolithic as it was three or four decades ago: think of the many Israeli artists, activists, and scholars that by now have redefined the meanings of being Mizrahi, without dismissing it in favor of the sometimes equally problematic—and imposed from above—category of Arab Jew. Similarly, even though I understand the need to critically discuss the term Maghreb, perhaps it should not be erased altogether, and we should instead acknowledge that nowadays it is utilized in ways that go beyond its initial colonial undertones. Moreover, while the old/new term Maghrib is linguistically closer to

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the region and its inhabitants, it seems to reflect today's scruples and identity politics more than a shared historical reality.

That said, *Jewish-Muslim Interactions* constitutes a very valuable contribution to the field of North African and Sephardi Studies, and it is to be hoped that more works on aspects such as those investigated by its authors will appear in the future. This way, it will be possible to continue uncovering the historical encounters between Jews and Muslims and their reverberation in a Mediterranean present that is often portrayed as dominated only by interethnic and interreligious tension.

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